

socialist worker Review

May 1986

Issue 87

60p

ON MONDAY NIGHT THE THIRTEENTH
OF APRIL 1986 AMERICAN F111
BOMBERS DROPPED TONS OF HIGH
EXPLOSIVES ON THE CIVILIAN
INHABITANTS OF LIBYAN COASTAL
CITIES KILLING AND MAIMING HUNDREDS
THE 2,000 LB CLUSTER BOMBS HAD
BEEN LOADED IN THIS COUNTRY WITH



**Reagan's
terror**

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| | |
|---|-----------|
| NOTES OF THE MONTH | 3 |
| Reagan's terror, Labour after Fulham, employee capitalism, Spain after the NATO referendum, Students | |
| NIGEL HARRIS | 8 |
| The oil crisis | |
| <hr/> | |
| MIDDLE EAST SPECIAL | 9 |
| Following Reagan's terrorist attack on Libya, we run a number of articles looking at different aspects of the conflict | |
| <hr/> | |
| A SOLUTION TO UNEMPLOYMENT? | 14 |
| Rob Hoveman reviews Andrew Glyn's new pamphlet 'A Million Jobs a Year' | |
| LABOUR AND IRELAND | 15 |
| Chris Bambery takes a look at the recent record of the Labour Party on the Irish question | |
| <hr/> | |
| THE GENERAL STRIKE | 16 |
| Donny Gluckstein outlines the key lessons to be learnt from the events that took place 60 years ago | |
| <hr/> | |
| SCHOOLS OF STRUGGLE | 20 |
| Duncan Blackie interviews a leading activist involved in the struggle of school students in South Africa | |
| OBITUARY | 23 |
| Norah Carlin look back on the life of Simone de Beauvoir | |
| PAPER TIGERS | 24 |
| Who owns the media, and what does freedom of the press mean? Clare Fermont explains | |
| OFF THE SHELF | 26 |
| <i>The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky</i> by Lenin is introduced by Frieda Smith | |
| EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISTS | 27 |
| Phil Mellows writes | |
| MARXISM AND CULTURE | 28 |
| Pete Green looks at the film <i>Ran</i> , whilst Julie Waterson and Martin Hewes interview Paul Bower, organiser of Red Wedge | |
| REVIEWS | 31 |
| of books on Nelson Mandela, the Popular Front, abortion and education | |
| LETTERS | 34 |
| Positive discrimination, culture, Red Wedge, Peru | |
| 1936 | 36 |
| Ian Birchall looks back at the Moscow show trials | |

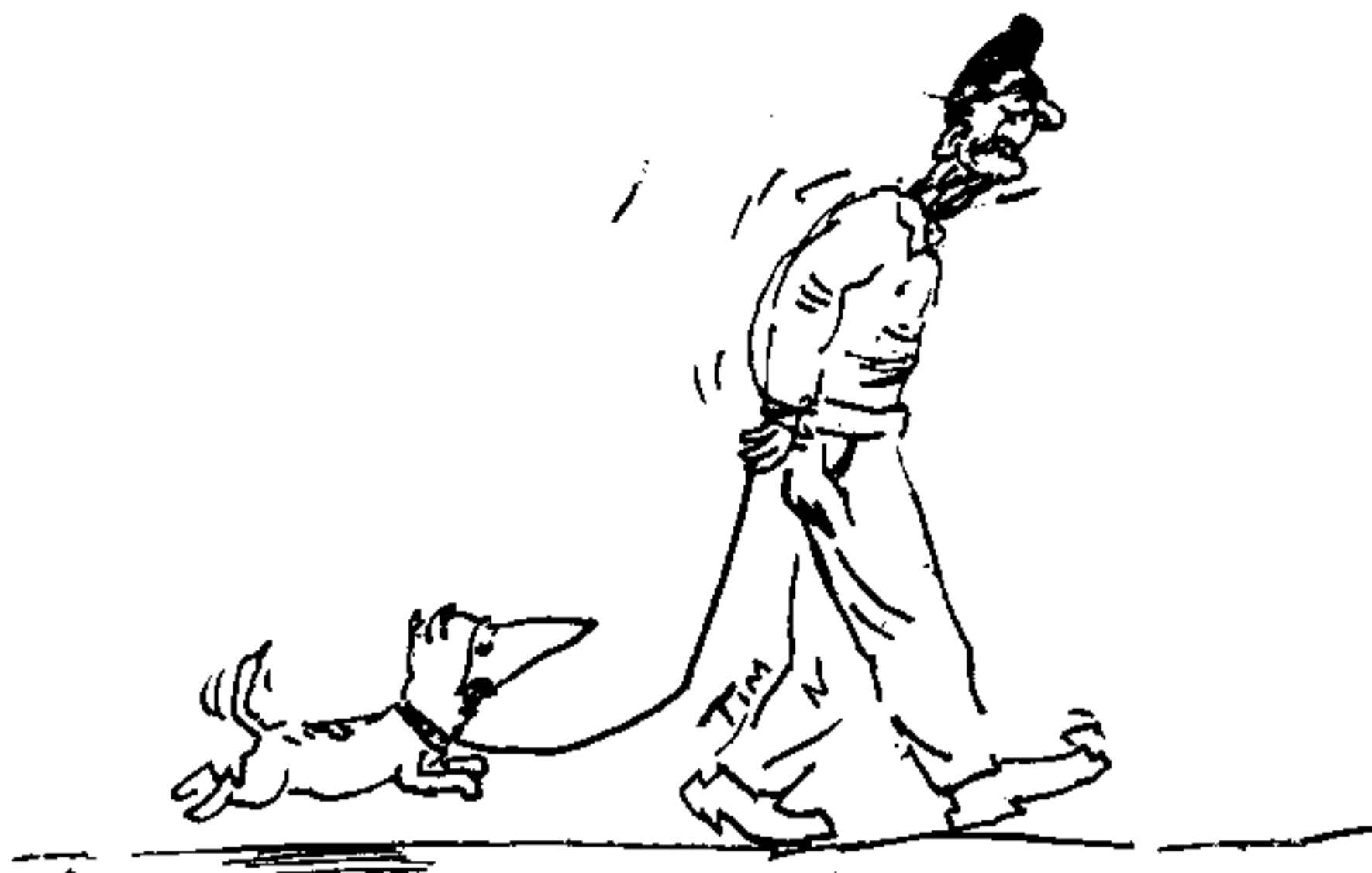
Edited by Lindsey German
Assisted by Jane Basset, Pat Stack, Gareth Jenkins, Andy Zebrowski, Noel Halifax, Dave Beecham, Norah Carlin, Laurence Wong, Rob Ferguson, Bill Thompson, Pete Binns, Simon Terry, Harriet Sherwood, Lindsey Greig, Clare Fermont, Pete Green and Lesley Hoggart

Production and business
Brian McDonald and Pat Stack
Reviews Noel Halifax and Simon Terry

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NOTES of the month

LIBYA RAID

Reagan's terror

SHOCK and disbelief was the initial reaction of millions of people to Reagan's decision to bomb Tripoli and Benghazi last month. These feelings were compounded by the knowledge that the deadly American F-11 bombers were launched from bases in Britain, with full agreement and even enthusiasm from Margaret Thatcher.

Very few outside of the US were prepared to defend Reagan and Thatcher. Britain's European allies didn't even allow American planes to fly over their territory. They unanimously condemned an action which was being planned and executed even as EEC ministers (including Geoffrey Howe) were urging 'restraint'.

Respectable opinion ranging from the *Daily Telegraph* to international legal experts, condemned the action.

Even in Thatcher's cabinet, two of her most trusted ministers, Tebbit and Lawson, were against it.

The reason for their reactions is not hard to see. As *The Financial Times* put it:

'The British government, by its unqualified public support for the US action, has compromised its position in ways which are logically and politically untenable.'

By this they mean two major things. The first is that Reagan's claim to be combatting 'terrorism' is a complete nonsense. The strike will not stop future bombings, and leaves open the question of whether further American aggression will be forthcoming. Anyway it is clear that many of the attacks the Americans complain about do

not originate in Libya at all, but in countries like Syria which the US will not dare attack.

The second and more important concern of the British and European ruling classes is that their interests in the Middle East will be severely damaged by America's actions. At the root of the lengthy Middle East conflict is its dominance in the production of the world's most valued raw material—oil. Europe is highly dependent on Middle East oil (witness the extent of trade with Gaddafi's Libya). The US is not, having its own extensive oilfields in Alaska and Texas.

Hence the extreme anger and worry in Europe that America has done severe damage to the west's relations with the oil producing countries. To quote *The Financial Times* again:

'The Western European nations have been left attempting vainly to straddle that divide. Britain, by its willingness to allow US bases to be used as a vital element in the attack on Libya, will be perceived in much of the Arab world as having swung, at least on this occasion, towards the US view of the region.'

Reagan's action has also dealt a massive blow to the pretence that NATO is a defensive organisation—or indeed to the view that America's NATO partners have any control over the superpower. This is a most serious blow to the European powers' defence policies.

The opposition to the strike on Libya registered in opinion polls and in the demonstrations so far is undoubtedly mainly based on fear of the threat of war and that Reagan's lunacy can escalate an already dangerous situation. There are signs that Thatcher's poodle-like obedience to Reagan will do her a great deal of damage politically.

The beneficiary of this political unpopularity for the Tories will be Kinnock. This is hardly comforting for those who really want to fight US aggression and British involvement in NATO.

Kinnock, both in his parliamentary

speeches and elsewhere has made two things absolutely crystal clear: he will do nothing to challenge the existence of American bases in Britain, and he has no intention of doing anything but follow the line of NATO.

Yet any hope of challenging future attacks by Reagan or any American president lies in questioning the whole basis of the NATO alliance. NATO is there to protect western capitalist interests, and predominantly the interests of the Americans. The talk from Thatcher that the US is somehow self sacrificing in keeping 350,000 troops in western Europe is complete nonsense. The troops are there to protect American business and investment.

And when America perceives it to be in her interests, she will use the bases and the nuclear weapons stored in many of them, not to protect Europe against a 'Russian threat' but to launch aggressive strikes to protect American interests. This was shown only too clearly last month.

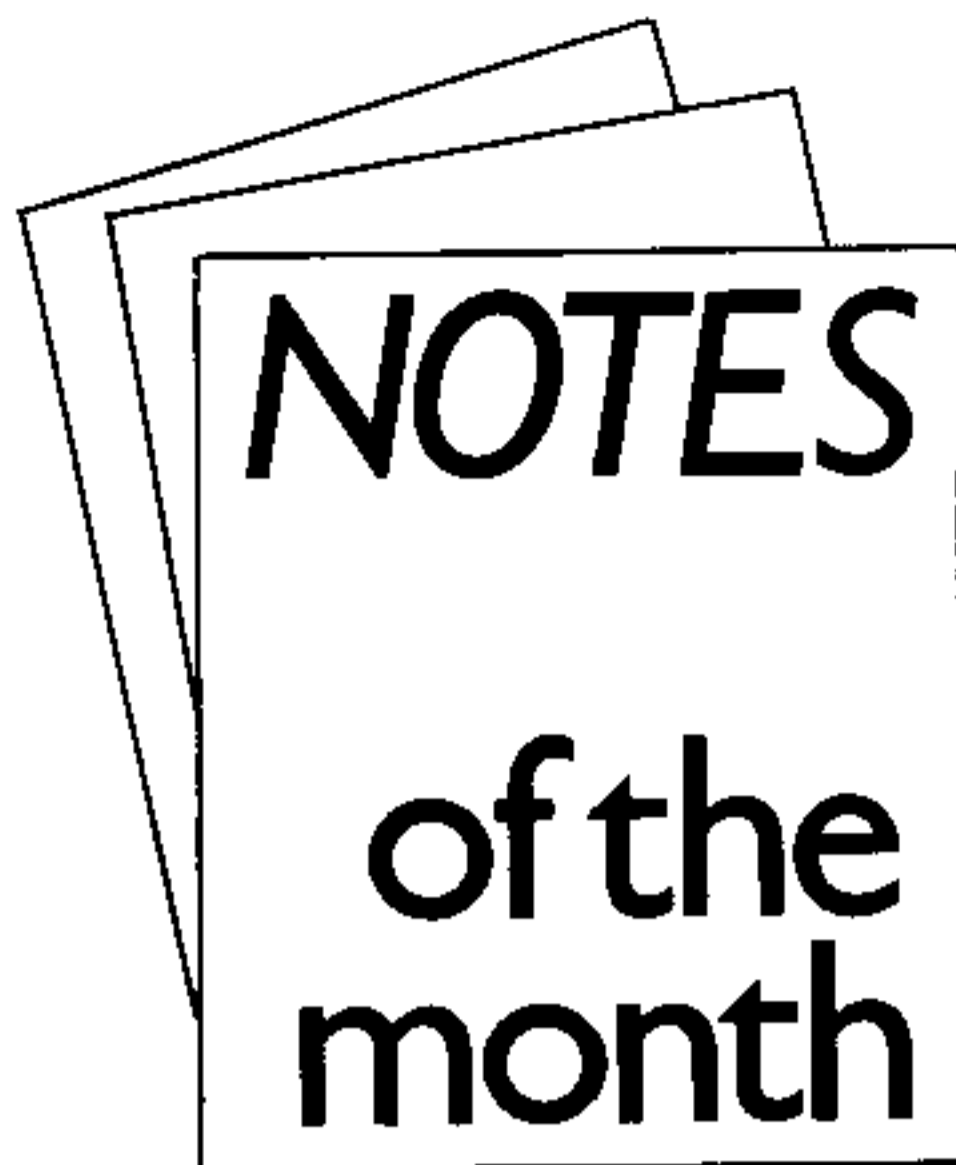
Kinnock attacked the Libyan strike. But is there much guarantee that he would behave any differently if in power?

Healey, Callaghan and Owen have been vocal in their opposition to Thatcher. But they showed no sign of behaving any differently when they were in office in the seventies. Labour may not have quite the same love affair with Reagan as Thatcher does, but could they stop the use of American bases in this way?

All the signs are that they could not. The agreement under which the Americans were able to strike from British bases was made initially by a Labour prime minister, Clement Attlee, in 1951. And as Hugo Young put it in the *Guardian* last month:

'It was never easy to see, once the first request for use of the bases came in, how it could be refused without doing imponderable damage to the Atlantic relationship.'

A vote for Kinnock, therefore, is no guarantee that the whole episode wouldn't be repeated. What socialists must do is to demand now the withdrawal of American bases from Britain, and the withdrawal of Britain from NATO. ■



NOTES

of the month

LABOUR

Right on

THE by-election victory of Labour's Nick Raynsford in Fulham is being hailed as a major breakthrough by the party's leadership.

Not only were the Tories thoroughly beaten, but the Alliance were squeezed into a bad third place.

Yet despite the pleasure that all socialists must feel at this Tory defeat, it is clear that the left has little to celebrate or gain from Raynsford's victory.

Over the last two years and more *SWR* has documented Labour's rightward shift. The growth of the witch hunt, the abandonment of previous principles, the talk of incomes policy, the new realism have all been features of it.

In Nick Raynsford, Labour had a candidate absolutely committed to this shift.

Throughout the campaign leading left wingers such as Tony Benn were kept away from the area, *Militant* were consistently attacked in speeches and press conferences. There was to be no taint of socialism to spoil Labour's chances.

Indeed leading SDP members were complaining after the result that there wasn't much wrong with Raynsford himself, it was just that he wasn't typical of the sort of person that would be elected as Labour MP if Labour were to win the next election.

Such talk is music to the ears of Neil Kinnock. One of the main arguments used by sections of the left in opposing the witch hunt is that it damages Labour electorally.

Kinnock will argue long and loud that Fulham shows that the more you bash *Militant* the better your electoral chances.

All of this puts much of the left in real

difficulty, since they accept the argument that, whatever else, Thatcher must be beaten and a Labour government elected.

The victory at any price argument carries a whole number of dangers. It can silence many critics of the witch hunt, or, worse still, draw them behind the witch hunt. 'I oppose all witch hunts, but *Militant* must be fought politically,' is a formula which has been used by more than one prominent Labour left to justify their participation in the witch hunt.

The second main danger comes in the field of party policy. There is no doubt that Kinnock will push through the idea that it was the new look moderate policies of Labour that led to the Fulham victory. He will claim that a Labour Party that wants to change anti-union legislation is more popular than a Labour Party that wants to scrap such legislation; or that a Labour Party that avoids all talk of nationalisation is going to be more popular than a Labour Party that wishes to nationalise or re-nationalise.

The third main danger of the argument is the danger of coalition, or at the very least an electoral pact, with the SDP.

For those on the left of the party such talk still remains heresy, and even Kinnock and the right refuse to contemplate the idea in public.

Nevertheless the fact remains that even if the Fulham vote was repeated throughout the country (and the Fulham result is being regarded as an untypically good one for Labour) Labour would still not have an overall majority.

If the Alliance were to hold the balance of power the argument that Thatcher must be got rid of can take on a whole new meaning and the push towards a deal can become irresistible.

There can be little doubt that Kinnock will do whatever deal he has to to get into Number Ten.

Indeed the 'albatross' of the SDP could be quite useful for a Labour Party whose policies are becoming more and more similar to their erstwhile opponents.

Despite all the rivalry between Owen and Kinnock, Owen clearly recognises the shift in Labour's politics. In his book *A United Kingdom* he writes:

'All post-war leaders of the Labour Party have attempted to evade the true meaning of the Clause; [Clause IV] another attempt is under way, in 1986, to bury it in a new statement of democratic socialist principles. Neil Kinnock is trying to shift Labour's language towards efficiency, with increased production coming from the redistribution of wealth. This change is to be welcomed if it goes deeper than mere rhetoric.'

Owen of course goes on to argue that Kinnock is a prisoner of the left. Leaving aside such SDP fantasies the message is fairly clear.

Fulham may have serious consequences for a Tory Party deep in trouble and apparently getting into deeper trouble every day. But the most immediate effort will be to accelerate Labour's shift to the right. ■

PROFIT SHARING

Power to the people?

UNDER the headline 'The chance of a revolution', Samuel Brittan explained in the *Financial Times* recently what he sees as the real significance of the Budget.

'Nigel Lawson's main chance of a place in history depends on the fate of the profit sharing incentive, which he foreshadowed in the Budget and which dwarfs everything else in the Budget in importance.'

Lawson has promised a consultative document by the summer on profit sharing. References to 'far-reaching consequences,' or 'a major shift in the whole system of remuneration' now abound in the financial press. What is it that has got Thatcher and Lawson so excited?

The new converts to profit sharing aren't interested in arguments about class collaboration and worker participation. Instead Lawson and Thatcher have found an American economist, Martin Weitzman, who dismisses such items as 'soft-boiled.'

Weitzman has convinced Thatcher and Lawson that profit sharing can be used in quite a different way—as a way of cutting wages.

The basic idea is simple enough—make around 25 percent of employee wages dependent on company performance. If profits fall, so do wages. On this scheme up to a quarter of a company's total wages bill would therefore be flexible, dependent on overall company profitability. From the point of view of the worker it means that the final amount you receive each year depends not on bargaining strength, but on profit levels. Viability reappears under another guise.

Numerous examples from America and Japan are used to back up this argument. In the trucking industry in the USA, for example, wages can vary between 85 percent and 115 percent of the norm, dependent on the amount available from profit sharing.

One of the biggest toy companies in the United States, Fisher Price, pay out 20 percent of pre-tax profits as a profit share bonus each year. This means that for each individual several thousand dollars of wages each year are dependent on profit sharing.

In Japan, Weitzman quotes companies with a 'flexible compensation programme' in which a low basic wage is topped up twice a year with payments with profit share payments which can be equivalent to

anything from two months to eight months basic pay.

The appeal of this to the British government is obvious. The central obsession of the British ruling class has long been the high level of wages as against profits. Successive governments have failed to shift the balance. Thatcher came to power in 1979, after the failure of more than a decade of various types of incomes policy, pledged to drive through a real shift from wages to profits.

She has failed. Wages for those fortunate enough to be employed are ahead of inflation and are continuing to hold up. One of the funnier aspects of the CBI conference was the succession of speeches from the platform demanding wage restraint, all delivered by company chairmen who had agreed rises well above the level of inflation.

Weitzman is being hailed as the new saviour. There is for Thatcher an added attraction in his theories. According to Weitzman, if wages are highly flexible, depending on profit levels in the boom-slump cycle, then companies will not have to make workers redundant. Instead of cutting numbers in a recession, they can simply cut wages.

This of course is naivety taken to the point of imbecility. Clearly if British companies thought they could get away with it they would cut both wages and jobs.

Although Thatcher and Lawson are clear about what they would like to do, the real problem for them is how to carry such proposals. Lawson plans to announce substantial tax concessions for companies and probably also for employees if some sort of scheme is adopted by an individual company. But this won't be enough; their real problem is how to sell the idea of profit sharing more widely.

This is the real meaning of the slogan 'people's capitalism' which Thatcher has used with increasing frequency.

'People's capitalism' and the 'enterprise culture' has really been about the notion that workers need a 'stake in the country'. If people buy their own council houses, own shares in their own and preferably several other companies, they will—according to Thatcherite logic—be that much less likely to go on strike or vote Labour.

It is a specific form of class collaboration. In practice, the main beneficiaries of all this have in fact not been ordinary workers who buy shares, but senior managers. A special set of tax concessions enables selected senior managers to buy large numbers of shares in their own company at reduced prices. The benefits run into hundreds of thousands of pounds. More than 1,000 top companies now have these special schemes for top executives—half that number allow ordinary workers in the company to buy shares.

But the plan has never been to offer these benefits to all workers. The most sophisticated version of 'people's capitalism' is really about creating a core workforce, with highly paid, guaranteed jobs, a stake in the company through employee share

ownership, and preferably high mortgages. The rest of the working class, the argument goes, will suffer lower wages, have less secure jobs, and be increasingly dependent on part time jobs or working for subcontractors.

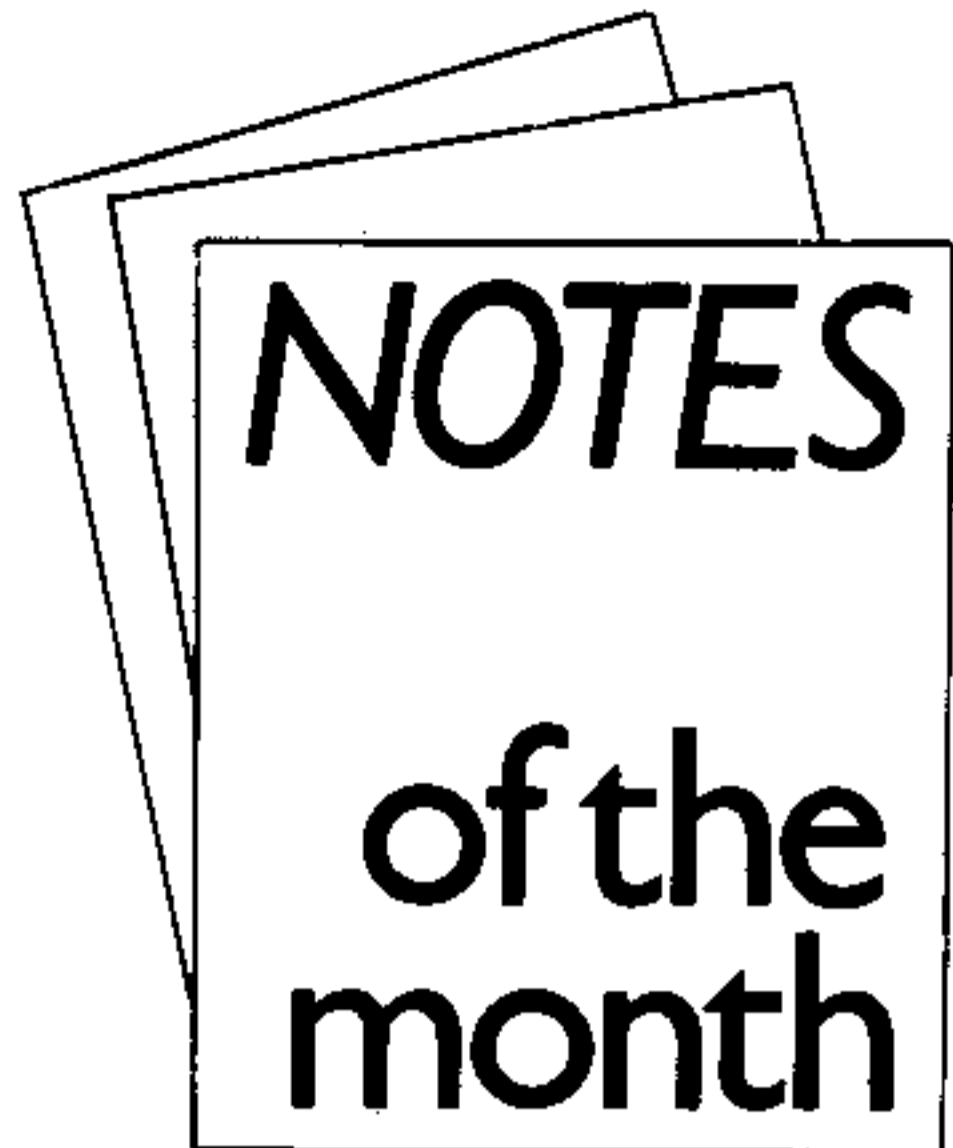
We can expect a great deal of rhetoric about employee share ownership and sharing profits as the Tories try and find a way of advancing their profit share plan.

The likely outcome in the short term is that it will all collapse. There are however two dangers. The first comes from the plans the Alliance has for an incomes policy if there is a coalition government. They are now arguing that an incomes policy could allow wage increases that are profit related. No wages would be cut, but over five years profit sharing, or flexible wages, could be extended over at least some parts of the economy.

One would like to believe that no Labour government could be so criminal as to allow this. In fact one of the few specific measures the last Labour government agreed to in order to gain support from Liberal MPs in the Lib-Lab pact was the introduction of a profit sharing scheme. Michael Foot went to a meeting with the Liberal economic spokesman John Pardoe, determined to resist all such nonsense. The result was the 1978 profit sharing legislation.

This hasn't had much effect, partly because its main concern was 'social harmony' rather than wage cutting. Some 500 companies have taken advantage of the tax concessions available from the 1978 legislation.

Labour's deputy leader, Roy Hattersley, has already accepted much of the ideological argument on employee share



ownership. This he announced recently is 'entirely compatible with the aims of socialism.'

The electricians' union has gone even further. A top firm of London stock brokers have been retained by the EETPU to advise their members on where to invest shares. Announcing this, Eric Hammond explained that he wanted to protect EETPU members from 'unscrupulous salesmen.'

The Thatcherite wing of the Tory Party is to some extent snatching at any passing straw. Lawson's consultative document is unlikely to get very far. But there will be an incomes policy of some sort after the next election, unless Thatcher achieves a third term. No one should underestimate what the TUC and a Labour Government are capable of coming up with—particularly if they are dependent on the votes of David Owen. ■

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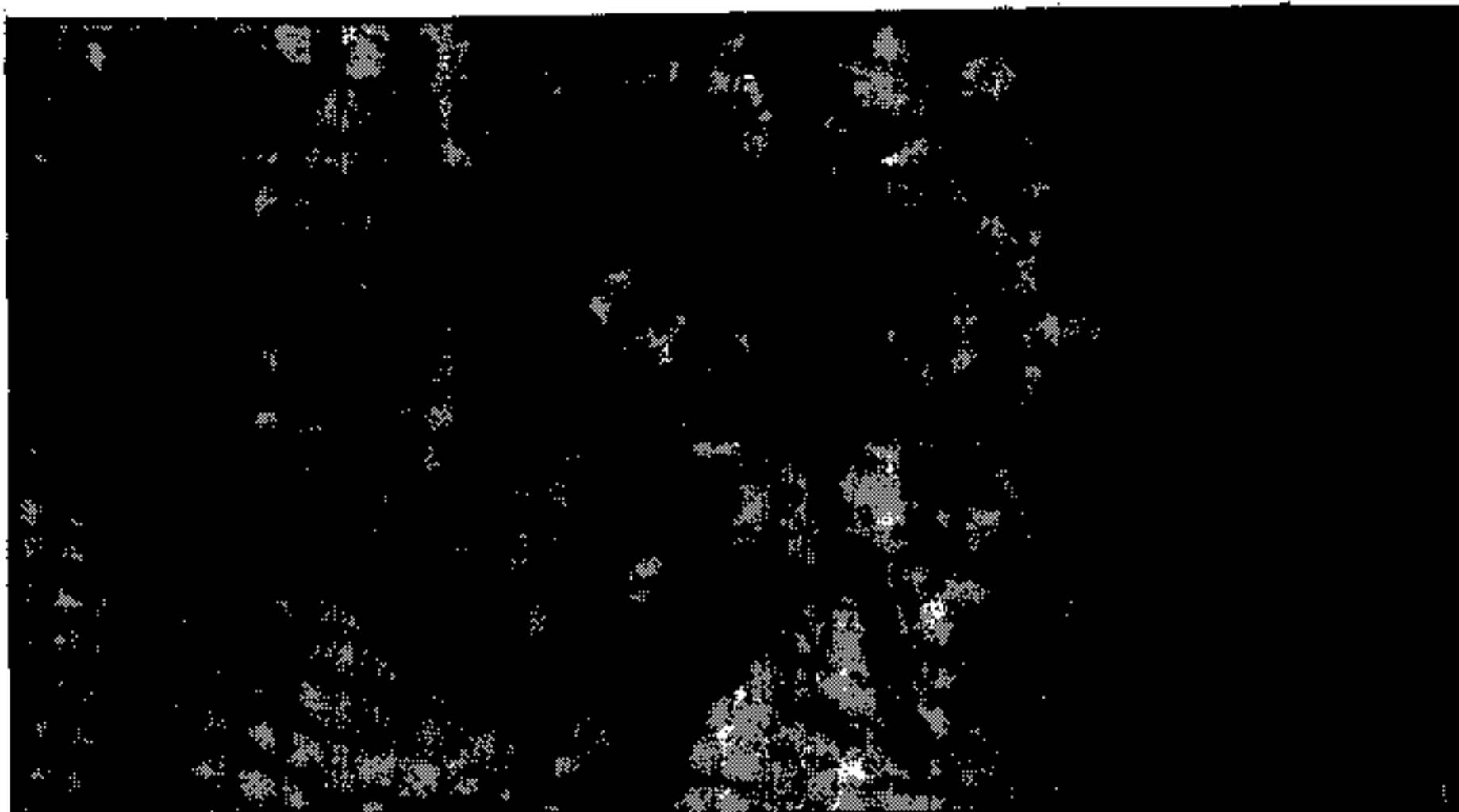
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NOTES

of the month



Spanish police in action

SPAIN

After the referendum

DEFEAT in the NATO referendum in March would seem to have created serious problems for the Spanish left. Nevertheless there are a series of factors which mean this defeat is not as damaging as it first appears.

Seven million people, despite the most blatant manipulation of the mass media by the government (see April *SWR*), voted no. The bulk of this vote, perhaps some 75 percent, can be considered to be on the left of the governing Socialist Party (PSOE) and therefore must include two or three million of the ten million Socialist votes at the last election.

Moreover nobody could argue that the nine million yes votes represented a positive vote in favour of NATO. Many people, despite being opposed to NATO, voted yes because of political loyalty to the PSOE.

Various aspects of the anti-NATO campaign bode well for the future. The left in general has been revitalised by the experience. The level of unity and mobilisation in the weeks before the referendum has not been seen since the highpoint of the anti-Francoist movement in the mid-seventies. And it was the youth who often provided the campaign's backbone, and who seem to have voted no in large numbers.

More importantly the political basis of the peace movement, its anti-imperialism, mass orientation and radicalism will help it sustain itself for some time to come.

The main component of this movement, the National Coordinating Committee of Pacifist Organisations (CEOP), has consistently involved itself in other issues—for instance it actively supported the 24-hour general strike in June last year against the government's proposed cut in pensions.

Most local anti-NATO committees have doubled or trebled their number of activists during the recent weeks of campaigning.

Apart from continuing to call for Spain's withdrawal from NATO, the CEOP now intends to turn its attentions on the American bases. With a renegotiation of Spain's bilateral treaty with the USA scheduled for next year the demand for the removal of this military presence will become more important than ever.

More problematic is the danger of the collapse of much of the left into electoralism. This is most clearly the case with the Communist Party (PCE), whose flagging prestige has been partially revived since their intervention in the referendum campaign.

They now hope to convert the party-sponsored 'Civic Platform for leaving NATO' into some form of left alternative to the PSOE for the general elections next autumn.

The Civic Platform itself is a peculiar hybrid body set up solely for the referendum campaign. Its components range from assorted well-known liberal intellectuals through to pro-Albanian Maoists, the syndicalist faction of the CNT and the shadowy Humanist Party.

What unites most of these groups is their distaste, for one reason or another, for the CEOP. The PCE, the only organisation of any importance in the platform, can only seriously hope to patch up an alliance with a small left wing split from the Socialist Party and an equally tiny right wing split from the Eurocommunists themselves, led by one of their former leaders Ramon Tamames.

If their electoral aspirations are really going to bear fruit, the PCE need to get an agreement with the pro-Soviets and the various left nationalist organisations. Both the pro-Soviet PCPE and the PCE seem prepared to overlook their recent mutual hostility to do such a deal, although it seems unlikely to extend to Catalonia, where the Stalinists are particularly strong.

For the revolutionary left it is a matter of trying to avoid the peace movement falling into the very electoral trap that the PCE wants. The influence of revolutionaries inside the CEOP will undoubtedly help this

task.

However certain better-known independent pacifist activists, especially those around the influential journal *Mientras Tanto*, are already making noises in favour of all-sweeping electoral alliances or some type of 'green' party.

The more radical sections of the left have also been, temporarily at least, strengthened by the campaign, especially in those areas where the no vote triumphed—the Basque Country, Catalonia and the Canary Islands.

In the Basque Country, despite the efforts of not only the PSOE, but also the leadership of the powerful nationalist PNV, there were twice as many no votes as yes.

In Catalonia attempts by the Eurocommunists to set up a local version of the 'Civic Platform' have consistently failed.

Certainly the majority of CEOP activists appear to agree with the revolutionary left that any direct involvement in electoral politics would be disastrous for the peace movement. Instead it's a matter of building on the militancy and anger that already exists and avoiding the dilution of the CEOP's politics.

Such a danger of dilution is threatened by the Eurocommunists, who favour putting the emphasis on pressurizing the government to carry out the conditions which it placed on Spain's NATO membership, rather than continuing to call for complete withdrawal from the western alliance and the removal of US bases.

Some reflection is also needed as to why the yes vote was particularly strong in important working class areas such as the industrial belts of Barcelona and Madrid. This factor cannot be separated from the general demobilisation of workers in recent years and the subsequent collapse of the unions.

Any shift therefore behind the anti-NATO campaign by these sectors cannot be separated from a general reactivation of working class militancy. For this reason it remains essential that the CEOP continues to give support to struggles which go beyond just opposing Spain's membership of NATO. ■

STUDENTS

What's left?

THE National Union of Students Easter conference took place against a background of attacks on student living standards. With the real spending power of a grant cut by 25 percent since 1979, the Fowler Reviews threaten to remove the benefits which enable many students to survive. Massive cuts in student numbers were announced on the second day of the conference. The union is facing serious political challenges. There is the threat of making the no-platform policy illegal and of introducing a 'code of conduct' which could result in the expulsions of political activists.

The present NUS Executive, dominated by the solidly Kinnockite National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) has tailored the anti-cuts campaigns towards simply influencing the May elections and the next general election. In a series of campaigns which have mirrored the style of the GLC—complete with designer T-shirts and Billy Bragg style roadshows—the leadership has sought to direct the anger over grant cuts into an election hype for Labour. The policy centres around the so-called 'student marginals'—constituencies where the student population is large enough to topple the sitting Tory MP.

With the scale of attacks and the failure of the leadership to organise any fight, a growing mood of cynicism has developed in the colleges. The Liberal-led Left Alliance confidently predicted electoral gains from the demoralisation.

But NOLS swept the board for the National Executive with 13 members elected, including three from their left wing, Socialist Students in NOLS (SSIN). One SWP member was elected.

SSIN hailed these results as a great step forward for the left. But they were much more a reflection of dissatisfaction with the leadership rather than commitment to any real fight. SSIN is little more than an electoral machine, which is unable to seriously challenge NOLS openly (it didn't put up candidates against official NOLS ones, and its policies were often indistinguishable from NOLS). Without a base in the colleges, SSIN's electoralism will be incapable of turning the union leftwards.

On paper, this is the most left wing executive for years. But appearances can be deceptive. The real outcome of the conference was a consolidation of the rightward shift in the union over the past two years.

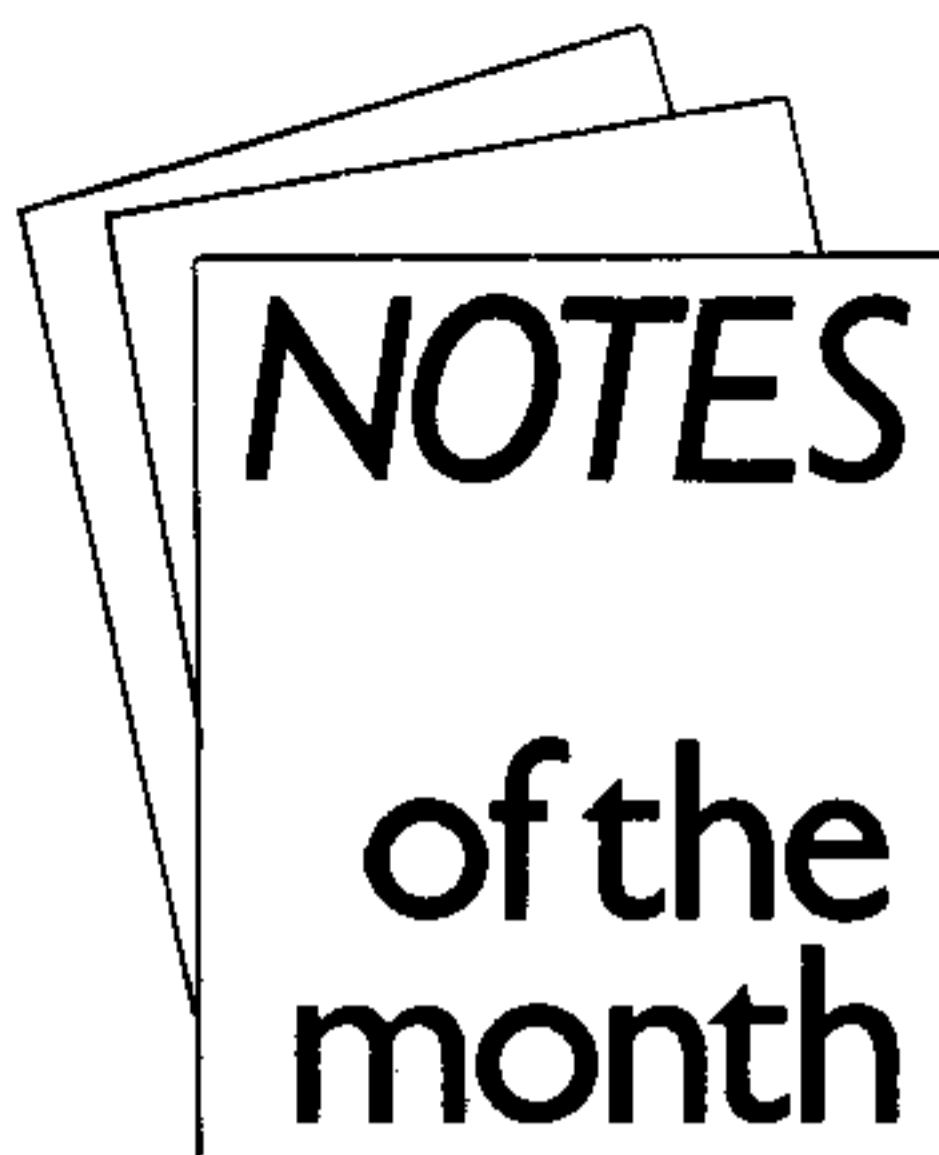
The major attacks students face were not discussed at conference. The politics which were to dominate were those of tokenism and defeat.

Occasionally widespread support could be gained for positions argued for by revolutionaries. This was the case in the debate on women, where Socialist Worker Student Society members called for a fighting campaign on women's rights, rather than empty gestures. They deleted a number of tokenistic clauses which called for every conference to discuss women and for 50 percent of both delegates and executive to be women. Although the motion was supported by NOLS, SSIN and Left Alliance, many of their members broke ranks and voted against these clauses.

This was also true of the most controversial issue at the conference—the question of no-platform for the Union of Jewish Students, which has been moved in a number of colleges.

While every political grouping was united in opposing such bans, the issues raised caused the most bitter argument. The UJS asked for a badge produced by Palestinian students which said 'fight racism—fight Zionism' to be banned as they found it anti-semitic. Steering Committee made a political decision without reference to the conference and banned the badge. Large numbers of delegates continued to wear the badge, but moves to discuss the question of Palestinian rights and Zionism were defeated.

Surprisingly it was not only the right wing who defended Zionism. Sections of the left—in particular SSIN—also argued that Zionism has no necessary connection



to the state of Israel and that it is anti-semitic to imply that Zionism is connected with anti-Arab racism.

But many delegates, nonetheless, questioned the right of the Zionists to denounce as 'anti-semitic' anyone who opposed them or supported the Palestinians.

The inability of the union's leadership to confront this shows the weakness of their Labour dominated politics. Clearly the issue will have to be taken up in the colleges in the months ahead.■

Additional notes from Pete Clark, Andy Durgan, Elane Heffernan and Pat Stack.

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SPEAKERS will include: ★ Tony Cliff ★ Raymond Williams ★ Paul Foot ★ Harry Wicks ★ Chris Harman ★ Monty Johnstone ★ Lindsey German ★ Cynthia Cockburn ★ Nigel Harris ★ Peter Fryer ★ Alex Callinicos ★ John Bevan ★ Duncan Hallas

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Sandinistas bring socialism? ★ Ten years since punk—a forum on the politics of rock

MEETINGS will include: ★ International Women's Rally ★ The Hungarian Uprising—an eyewitness account ★ Cripps, Bevan and Benn—leaders of the Labour left ★ Why are millions starving? ★ The politics of C L R James ★ Japan—the development of company unionism ★ The Moscow Trials: 50th anniversary meeting

COST: £18 for the full week (in advance), £11 for the weekend. Special price for groups booked before 31 May: ten for the price of nine.

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NIGEL HARRIS

End of civilisation as we know it

WHAT is it that wrecked the British budget, caused riots in Delhi, sent the pound down and British inflation up, saved the advanced industrial group of countries some 50 billion dollars a year, bankrupted about 2,000 of the wild-catters in the Texas oilfields, and pushed to the wall Nigeria, Mexico and Venezuela?

What was amazing about the precipitate fall in oil prices was not that the fall took place but that we should all take it for granted that the world could be turned topsy-turvy by what appears as an act of God (Mammon rather than Jehovah).

The oil price decline has another significance. Thirteen years ago, OPEC made its first attempt to recapture some of the lost value of its crude oil. Between 1950 and 1973 when the prices of manufactured goods increased enormously, the price paid for a barrel of oil was held obstinately by the oil companies at under two dollars. When the price was pushed up, world slump was blamed on the oil producers (in fact, slump began much before the increase in oil prices).

Out of the academic woodwork came a host of experts to cry doom: energy was running out, the fragile world was crumbling, we were to be punished for our greed and materialism.

Further out was a nastier version: with finite resources, there was room in civilisation for only a few, a lifeboat's-worth, so most of the Third World must be prevented from developing (or trying to climb on board).

There were those on the left who produced the mirror image of the gloom merchants. They rejoiced that at last capitalism was getting its come-uppance, and without anyone having to lift a finger. In the declarations of OPEC they heard the trumpets of the legions of the Third World sounding the triumph of liberation.

At last OPEC had proved capitalism could be beaten—by forming a cartel and fixing the price of raw material exports high, any poor country could begin to shift resources away from the rich countries.

The fact that the representatives of the poor were in no way anti-capitalist, that they included the King of Saudi Arabia, the Shah of Iran, the Emir of Kuwait, did not affect the argument. The monarchs were the unconscious instruments of a wider purpose. They could not behave but in a manner to speed the emancipation of the Third World.

What a change there is now. The King of Saudi Arabia and the Emir of Kuwait plead with Mrs Thatcher to stop scooping the OPEC market by letting prices fall. Sheikh

Yamani appeals to Mexico's president to do the same. With a price that has fallen from 1979's 34 dollars per barrel (and 40 dollars for Nigeria's Bonny Light crude) to fifteen in February, Venezuela bravely urges it be fixed at \$17.25.

Algeria, Iran and Libya, the radicals mind you, offer a scheme to cut production in order to hold the price at \$16; but what OPEC sacrifices by self-control, Britain, Mexico, the US and Russia will claw back by picking up the vacated demand.

Nigeria, leap-frogging from one coup to another in the attempt to escape the axe, and Iraq, burning money in its unwinnable war, both insist that within OPEC they should have a bigger share.



Sheikh Yamani

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf sheikhs, weary with the squabbling, and controlling the largest supply, yet with the lowest demand for ready cash, hint that they will flood the world with crude to bankrupt the British and the Mexicans, taking the price down to \$10.

At that price only the Saudis and the Gulf States could cover their costs, so not only would they push out the British, they would break OPEC. It is a Samson in the temple trick.

The price hovered nervously about \$15 on the Rotterdam spot market not because of the British and the Mexicans. Nor because there has been any conspiracy of the industrial powers. They no more control the price of oil than anyone else. The decline is there because of the slump, the downturn in the United States economy that has pulled down much of the rest of the world.

Almost all commodity prices—and interest rates—have fallen. And oil has not by any means fallen furthest. Look at the performance of sugar. That sank well

below the costs of production, producing starvation in the sugar island of Negros in the Philippines.

The OPEC price increase in the seventies not only vastly increased exploration—so making profitable the high cost oil of the North Sea and Alaska—but it produced a drive to more economical use. Consumption in the West has fallen by 11 percent since 1979. Thus, to the effect of economies has come slump, and the world is now dogged by considerable overcapacity.

Far from raw materials running out and energy coming to an end, oil is now in hopeless over-supply leading to the shutting down of marginal wells and the suspension of exploration. There was no physical shortage nor could governments manipulate it. It was the market that produced both the scarcity and the glut.

However, the triumph of the market over reformist ambitions is little consolation to those most victimised. The British can get by. But Mexico and Nigeria are being squeezed.

At \$27 per barrel, Mexico earned up to \$17 billion from the export of crude and its derivatives. The decline in the price has halved the country's estimated revenue this year, so that it can no longer meet the interest payments on its \$100 billion debt to foreign banks and governments.

Thus, on top of the collapse of 1982, a new one is now threatened. Mexicans have been squeezed for four years—wages have been cut by nearly a half for those with jobs (the Mexican peso is now worth a twelfth of its dollar value of 1982).

In February the government was obliged to cut \$8.68 off the barrel price of its exports just to keep its markets. The decline in revenue forces more cuts in imports and generalised domestic deflation—a slump on top of a slump.

The price decline has demolished what was left of the myth of OPEC. It was fostered in the West as an explanation of the slump of 1973-4 (and to a lesser extent, that of 1980-1). It was never very plausible since, important though oil is, its pricing cannot determine the global system at all.

Nor was OPEC decisive. For in the late seventies over half the world's output was controlled by just three powers, two of them not in OPEC—the Soviet Union, United States and Saudi Arabia.

But the myth of OPEC did sterling service in providing a scapegoat to deflect attention from the inherent nature of capitalism. The myth can now be retired from duty. Watch out for the next 'explanation' of difficulties. ■

CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

We look at the background to the present crisis, with articles on the west's interests; US foreign policy after Vietnam; a background to Libya and Gadaffi; and a chronology of events in the region.

THE US bombing of Libya is not an isolated event. Even in the recent past, the US has intervened directly in both Iran and Lebanon, as well as repeatedly through the military operations of Israel. The Middle East has been a focus for imperialist interests throughout the twentieth century, due above all to the location there of a major chunk of the world's oil.

Oil is of course of great importance to the west, and therefore the character of the regimes in the Middle East is of crucial importance too. Yet there is a definite split among the imperialist ruling classes about the wisdom of Reagan's methods of dealing with opposition to imperialism in the area. The collapse in the oil price is seen as a boost to the economies of oil-importing countries, but the idea that it is universally seen as a green light to massive political military intervention in the area is a misleading one.

In fact, the falling oil price is perceived in British ruling class circles as having highly undesirable political effects in the Middle East. Those effects are related to the tremendous changes which took place in the 1970s as a result of the success of OPEC in raising the oil price and gaining more control over the exploitation of oil resources.

The Middle East is estimated to contain over half the world's proven oil reserves and a quarter of its natural gas. Of course oil reserves are discovered and developed according to capitalist logic, so that proportion isn't fixed or finite. But on any estimate, the resources there are massive.

The growth of oil production on a large scale came only after the Second World War, but then it was rapid. By 1965, the region had overtaken the US as the world's largest producing region. The biggest uninterrupted boom in capitalism's history demanded huge energy inputs, and the cheapest source was crude oil.

The majority of the regimes in the area were deeply conservative and dominated by western imperialism. But there were challenges to this: the Mossadeq regime in Iran in the early fifties tried to change the terms on which its oil resources were exploited (British Petroleum started life as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company) only to be ousted in a coup organised by Britain and the US which put the Shah in power.

The rise of Nasser in Egypt, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the inspiration that gave to Arab nationalism prompted the British and French military intervention in 1956. In that case the boot was on the other foot, with the Americans 'betraying' their fellow imperialists.

Divisions among the thieves gave some opportunities for the victims to improve their situation, but it was the increasing



Protesters demonstrate against the US bombing

dependence of the west on Middle Eastern oil that lay at the root of OPEC's ability to raise prices and later take control of the production of oil in the area (though not its refining and marketing).

The price increases of the seventies increased oil revenue to the OPEC states many times over. Income per barrel to the producing countries was twenty times higher in 1980 than it had been in 1970. In 1932, total Saudi Arabian government income was \$2.4 million, mainly derived from a tax on pilgrims to Mecca. By 1982, Saudi income from oil was more than £75 billion. In Libya in 1971 the average income of the population per head was £15.

The increase in oil revenue held out the prospect of 'development' to these countries, whether they were ruled by conservative emirs or kings or by self-styled 'revolutionary' regimes, as in Libya or Iraq. In fact the oil wealth has had profound effects, but its main one has been to bind these states even more firmly into the world market.

In the less populated countries, like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, living standards for the mass of the indigenous population have risen very substantially. Education and health provisions have improved enormously, while the bulk of manual labour is carried out by immigrant labour, from Egypt, Turkey or the Indian subcontinent.

In Libya (and Nigeria) the oil economy has acted like a magnet pulling workers off the land, where they were poor and underemployed, into the cities. In Libya, the oil wealth has been sufficient so far to provide jobs and higher living standards, but this is

heavily dependent on imports, not only of technology but of food. The agricultural sector has declined, and apart from oil there is little productive capacity in the economy which could independently compete on the world market.

Much the same story is true everywhere: the oil revenue has not brought 'national economic development'. What it has brought is vast quantities of western technology and consumer goods, huge construction projects, plans for steel plants and chemical plants at a time of world overproduction, and massive quantities of armaments.

In Iran, the corruption and repression of the Shah's regime, where the oil wealth benefitted only a narrow layer of the population, gave rise to a revolution. In Egypt, where the oil revenue is comparatively small and the world crisis has already bitten, there have been several mass uprisings. Even in Saudi Arabia there have been rumblings. What terrifies many western capitalists is the effect of falling oil revenues on the already shaky regimes in the area, and even on the apparently solid ones.

The impact of the falling oil price on government revenues in the area has already been dramatic: Saudi Arabia's revenue this year is expected to be only one-sixth of the 1981 total. The Gulf States are experiencing a cut of up to 40 percent in their purchasing power, leading to big cuts in their immigrant workforces and probably restrictions on the amounts these workers are allowed to send home. Oil exports from Libya, Iran and Iraq are all set to fall in value by between a third and a

half this year.

As the *Financial Times* noted:

'The unhappiness that corrective economic measures will cause among the small indigenous populations of the Gulf, unless it provokes damaging tensions within the ruling families, cannot be compared to the risks posed by reductions in living standards in larger urban societies... The worst case is Egypt. It faces alarming balance of payments problems and will be forced either to reduce food imports or cut subsidies. The government rightly fears the political consequences.'

It is against this background that the open split within NATO over the US action in Libya must be seen. The same *Financial Times* article speculates that the US, which supplies Egypt with \$2.3 billion a year in aid, is worried that President Mubarak is likely to be ousted by revolt on the streets, and is disappointed at his refusal to cooperate with military action against Gadaffi. Apparently the US is looking favourably at his defence minister, who they believe is more likely to crack down at home and be willing to join in when the US wants to zap some 'enemy of civilisation'.

This sounds as if the US has learned nothing from Iran or the Philippines and is getting ready to install replicas of the Shah and Marcos wherever it can. It is this approach which is making the European members of NATO very uneasy about the direction of US policy in the Middle East (and Central America).

The split is based partly on distinct economic interests and partly on disagreement about tactics. The band of thieves has common interests as well as divergent ones: they each want to get the lion's share of the loot, but they also disagree about how to make sure that it doesn't disappear altogether.

It is not merely a question of whether a state is more or less dependent on Arab oil. Even though the US and Britain are oil producers, they still need oil from the Middle East, and they will need it more in future. Even though there is a formal import embargo on Libyan goods in the US, American imports of Libyan oil rose substantially last year.

Western Europe is more vulnerable to an oil embargo than Britain or the US, but with the current state of OPEC such a thing is hardly likely. If that was the only factor in the way of European support for Reagan it would not be decisive.

Trading links between Western Europe and the Middle East are strong as export sales have risen in the effort to offset necessary oil imports. But that consideration applies equally to the UK government which backed Reagan but had previously joined with other EEC countries in refusing to impose economic sanctions against Libya.

All the ruling classes of the imperialist countries are aware that the oil situation has weakened OPEC dramatically—something they all welcome. But beyond that they disagree.

The Americans see it as an opportunity to do several things: to assert its global military and political dominance against any challenge, from Libya or elsewhere, possibly paving the way for a military operation by Israel against Syria; to use Thatcher to serve notice on its European allies to fall into line; and to use jingoism to divert the attention of the American working class from continuing unemployment and crisis at home.

The response of Thatcher is another chapter in the saga of the increasingly clear split within the British ruling class about whether to be the junior partner of US capitalism or the junior partner of West German/European capitalism. The Westland affair, the General Motors/Land Rover affair, the debate over Britain's membership of the European Monetary System are all recent examples. In this case, the 'Americans' won, although Thatcher quickly conceded some ground to the 'Europeans'.

As far as the other European ruling classes are concerned they see the situation in the Middle East as requiring a different strategy, easing the favoured pro-western regimes in the area through the problems caused by the oil price fall. They see the American attack as making precisely those regimes more vulnerable to challenge from

below, while strengthening those regimes which are—rhetorically at least—anti-imperialist. No doubt they also see an opportunity to make profits at the expense of US capital.

The disagreement between the US and Europe over the Middle East isn't new. For some time the Europeans have been arguing for a limited Palestinian state as the best means of protecting regimes like Jordan's and Egypt's and thereby securing western interests. Elements of the American ruling class also favour some progress on the Palestinian issue, while Thatcher has joined in with the Europeans in recognising a role for the PLO. The dominant faction in the US, in contrast, sees western interests as best served by an aggressive Israel, armed to the teeth and able to withstand any military challenge in the area.

For all of them, American, British, German or French, the main enemy in the Middle East is the working class. Where they differ is how best to ensure that their wealth and power remains unthreatened by that working class. What Reagan has just done is to demonstrate to workers everywhere how brutal capitalism is in protecting its wealth and power. In that sense, he has done revolutionaries and anti-imperialists a favour. ■

Sue Cockerill

MIDDLE EAST

No more Vietnams?

REAGAN'S moves against Libya are another episode in the long and bloody history of American imperialism.

The Reagan government has supported regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala which have massacred tens of thousands of people in the last five years. Through the CIA it has organised and financed (regardless of Congress votes) the Contra forces seeking to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. It backed the South African invasion of Angola in 1982 and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the same year.

In the most blatant act of intervention since Vietnam it invaded the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada in 1983 and imposed a suitably amenable government.

Those actions had nothing to do with fighting terrorism, defending democracy, or even preventing Soviet expansionism. They had everything to do with the defence of the global interests of United States capital.

That does not mean that American banks or multinationals necessarily have to have vital economic interests in a particular country for the US Sixth Fleet to arrive offshore.

As one Reagan adviser said in 1980, 'El Salvador itself doesn't really matter. We have to establish credibility because we're in very serious trouble [elsewhere].' Or as Henry Kissinger put it:

'If we cannot manage Central America, it will be impossible to convince threatened nations in the Persian Gulf and in other places that we know how to manage the global equilibrium.'

The same logic lay behind the Vietnam war. Many American companies reaped lucrative rewards from military contracts as a result. But they had little interest in the rice-fields of Indochina. What was at stake was the 'credibility' of US military power, and their ability to defend their numerous client regimes anywhere in the world.

All American presidents, regardless of whether they were Democrat or Republican, have pursued the same goals. Kennedy, for example, launched the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, took the world to the brink of war in the Cuban missile crisis, and first sent combat troops into Vietnam.

But the humiliating defeat in Vietnam was a traumatic experience. The defeat was inflicted by the resistance of the peasants and guerrillas of South Vietnam, but it was accompanied by unprecedented opposition from the anti-war movement within the USA. The American ruling class became deeply split over the issue, and has been reluctant to send US troops into battle ever since.

The central question raised by the attack on Libya is whether Reagan has finally

achieved what one *Financial Times* columnist described as his 'long-cherished ambition of weaning the nation away from its debilitating "Vietnam syndrome"—as manifested by a reluctance to use force around the world'.

The shift of American policy in the wake of Vietnam had two critical dimensions. The first was the move towards detente with Russia and closer trading links between the Western Alliance and Eastern Europe (as well as the rapprochement with China). This was primarily a response to the economic strains imposed by massive military spending on the US economy (the benefits of trade went mostly to European countries especially West Germany).

The Vietnam war had exposed the contradiction at the heart of the permanent arms economy which had sustained the long boom of western capitalism after 1945. Whilst American military spending propped up the world economy as a whole, its rivals in Europe and Japan were able to grow more rapidly.

The US share of world industrial production fell from 60 percent in 1946 to less than a quarter in 1970. The decline in the relative competitive strength of US capitalism was expressed in its deteriorating trade balance and a collapse of the dollar in the early 1970s.

But the sharp fall in the proportion of US production devoted to the military in the 1970s did not solve this problem, and added to the pressures of the crisis on large sectors of manufacturing industry. That lay at the root of the renewed escalation of the arms race which began in 1979 under Carter, even before Reagan's election on a programme of massive military spending.

The second dimension of post-Vietnam strategy was the reliance on regional strongmen, notably Israel and Iran in the Middle East, to act as surrogates for American intervention. That was combined with an attempt to defuse popular resistance in critical areas by pressure for 'democratic reforms', and economic aid.

The 'reformist' option (echoing Kennedy's 'Alliance for Progress' in Latin America in the 1960s) was doomed to failure. The US had no choice but to support dictators like Marcos and Pinochet who had no intention of liberalising their regimes.

The reliance on regional strongmen received a devastating blow with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran. Combined with the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan it precipitated the 'Second Cold War'. But the most serious fears of the US ruling class had nothing to do with Russia as such.

In March 1979 the magazine *Business Week* published a special issue on 'The Decline of American Power'. Their stress was on the Middle East again, considered vital to the profits of US oil companies, and containing two thirds of the world's oil reserves:

'The military retreat' they argued, 'which began with the US defeat in a place [Vietnam] that held no natural



Vietnam: Reagan-style law and order

resources or markets now threatens to undermine the nation's ability to protect the vital oil supply and the energy base of the global economy.'

They went on to urge a 'reassertion of US influence around the world' in order to preserve 'the way of life built since World War Two'.

It was to carry out that task that Reagan was elected president at the end of 1980.

In 1981 Reagan was able to push his proposals for a 9 percent a year increase in real terms for the defence budget, through Congress with little opposition. The American ruling class united once more behind the need for a more assertive foreign policy.

The arms race was aimed at putting enormous economic pressure on the overstretched Russian economy (barely half the size of the American). Reagan's advisers talked chillingly of achieving nuclear superiority and making a nuclear war 'winable'. But much of the arms budget was devoted to conventional forces. Thus the Rapid Deployment Force was conceived as capable of intervening in any 'trouble-spot' in the Middle East or Africa.

Yet there has been a huge gulf between Reagan's bellicose rhetoric, and the extreme caution with which those forces have been used. The death of 250 marines in Beirut led to the hasty withdrawal of American forces in 1984 after their ineffectual operation in the Lebanon. Grenada was the softest target imaginable.

Central to the 'Reagan doctrine' has been the continuing reliance on non-American forces to do the job by proxy. Israel, though liable to get out of hand, has been left to watch Lebanon and Syria. The Contras, despite repeated failure, are still expected to bring down the Sandinistas.

As *Time* magazine summarised the US rules of engagement:

'American boys should not be seen

dying on the nightly news. Wars should be over in three days or less, or before Congress invokes the War Powers Act (supposed to prevent any president declaring war without a vote). Victory must be assured in advance and the American public must be all for it from the outset.'

We need to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of American imperialism. The United States remains the most powerful industrial and military country in the world. Its multinationals and banks have assets worth over a thousand billion dollars in the rest of the world. To protect those assets the US maintains its nuclear arsenal, and a network of military bases stretching from Britain through Turkey to the Philippines.

But that does not mean that it can simply dictate the course of world events, or even guarantee the security of its most favoured proteges.

The American economy was jet-propelled upwards out of slump by arms spending in 1983-4. But it is now facing similar contradictions to those which emerged in the course of the Vietnam war. Imports have flooded into the American market. The budget deficit has soared despite all Reagan's attempts to cut welfare spending. Most critically the overseas debts built up by the state and private capital are turning it into a 'net debtor nation' (which means the outflow of interest payments and profits from the USA is about to exceed the inflow from US assets abroad for the first time since the First World War).

At the same time economic crisis is making many parts of the world politically unstable. The United States may have successfully extricated itself from its commitments to Marcos in the Philippines and Baby Doc Duvalier in Haiti. But the collapse of those regimes in the face of popular upheaval is a warning of what could happen to other American-backed dictators in Pakistan, South Korea and elsewhere.

In this situation the divisions within the American ruling class have re-emerged. A fierce debate is once more taking place over the scale of military spending. The administration is still having trouble winning support for increased aid to the Contras. The bombing of Libya was welcomed by Congress but there is a lot of evidence that it was opposed within the White House by both Weinberger, the Secretary of Defence and Crowe, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Indeed the very choice of Libya is a sign of the constraints on US policy. As *Newsweek* wrote after the first confrontation in the Gulf of Sirte:

'The administration has long recognised that Syria and Iran are even more deeply involved with terrorism than Gaddafi is. The Abu Nidal group, for instance, could be traced more directly to Syria than to Libya. But Syria and Iran are difficult, well-armed targets, and the State Department regards

Syrian President Hafez Assad as the essential mediator in Lebanon.'

They might also have said that Syria is far more closely linked to Russia than Libya, and that a direct attack there would have forced some sort of Russian response.

The military risks of an attack on Libya were negligible. But the political consequences may yet rebound on Reagan. The incident has provoked another serious split in the Western Alliance (see Sue Cockerill's article), and threatens to fuel nationalist feeling and the Moslem fundamentalist currents in Egypt and the Gulf states.

According to the *Financial Times* on 26 March some US officials were 'hoping that a dazzling display of US firepower will help to rescue Mr Reagan's defence budget,

currently in serious difficulty on Capitol Hill.'

That may be the case. But it is unlikely that the Libyan bombing will succeed in shifting attitudes substantially towards US intervention in Nicaragua. The Contras will probably get more money. But the resistance to committing US troops remains strong.

In other words Reagan has not fully overcome the Vietnam syndrome. The Libyan bombing certainly marks a more aggressive posture in US foreign policy. It has made the world a more dangerous place. But it will not settle the arguments within the US ruling class—and it will not remove the fundamental obstacles to their management of the 'global equilibrium'. ■
Pete Green

MIDDLE EAST

'The third way'

THE characterisation of Libya's Colonel Gaddafi as a 'mad dog' by the United States is nothing more than a justification for military aggression. Far from being mad, Gaddafi has as rational a plan for dealing with his patch of the anarchic world capitalist economy as the leader of any other state.

Libya became independent in 1951 under King Idris, a British puppet. It had been an Italian colony for 30 years until World War Two when the British took it over for nine years. At the time the only industry was gathering esparto grass to make paper and picking up the scrap metal that still lay strewn on the wartime battlefields.

Libya became an oil exporter in 1961. This transformed the Libyan economy and led to the accelerated industrialisation of the coastal towns of Tripoli and Benghazi. By 1968 Libya was the world's fourth largest oil producer. By 1978 it had a working class numbering over 300,000.

Muammar Gaddafi was born in 1942. As a student he was heavily involved in anti-imperialist politics around issues like French nuclear tests in the Sahara and the Algerian struggle for independence. He joined the Benghazi Military Academy and conspired with other young officers in the Free Unionists Officers' Movement to get rid of the King.

The Six Day Arab/Israeli War of 1967 was a major shock to the monarchy. It led to anti-American and anti-British demonstrations by students and workers and strikes by dockers and oil workers. However, it was only well after the workers' movement had been put down that the young officers staged their coup on 1 September 1969. Gaddafi, a 27-year-old colonel, became the leading figure after the almost bloodless seizure of power. The movement was modelled on and inspired by the radical Arab nationalism of the Free Officers who had installed Nasser into

power in Egypt in 1952.

Gaddafi's nationalism was aimed at independence from the west. Within a few months he had kicked out the British from their bases at Al Adem and the Americans from Wheelus, as well as 30,000 Italians whose property was seized. Foreign banks and companies were nationalised or given to Libyans.

His radical nationalism was not merely based on rhetoric. Before the oil crisis of 1973 he had already made inroads into the power of the multinationals. When the coup took place, Libya was already supplying a quarter of West Europe's oil.

The Suez Canal had been closed since the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. Libya's proximity to Europe made its oil cheaper. Gaddafi's first prime minister was Dr Suleiman Mughrabi, who had been imprisoned in 1967 for organising in the oil workers' strike. Gaddafi played off 21 oil companies against each other, and negotiated oil sales with the USSR. He forced price rises in one company after another by stopping production.

The big oil companies failed in their attempt to force Gaddafi to back down. The world boom ensured that the oil producing states were becoming more important. Gaddafi himself was the leading figure in urging the quadrupling of oil prices which occurred in 1973-74.

The oil revenues enabled Gaddafi to embark on several welfare and modernisation measures. Roads, schools and hospitals were built and a literacy campaign begun. The minimum wage was doubled.

On the basis of Islamic principles, churches and nightclubs were shut, alcohol was banned, and Islamic missionaries were sent to other African countries.

The other side of Gaddafi's nationalism was Pan-Arabism—the belief that all Arabs should unite together in one nation. Advances were made towards Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria and especially Egypt.

This Pan-Arabism was symbolised by

the much-publicised Green March on Egypt in 1973 which was aimed at embarrassing President Sadat, who had taken over from Nasser in 1970.

Gaddafi's moves in this direction, then and later, have all proved abortive, and he has since been involved in subverting other Arab regimes. He has established himself as the most vociferous anti-western and anti-Zionist Arab leader providing arms, funding and training facilities to the PLO.

Two days after the 14 April American bombing raids, Gaddafi announced, 'We are inciting popular revolution all over the world.' This has meant support for organisations such as the IRA and ANC. It is even rumoured that certain tiny left groups in this country have received funds from Libya. But sometimes reasons of state have dictated fluctuations in this support. When relations with Britain improved in the mid-seventies, support for the IRA dwindled.

In the past, Gaddafi has not only attacked the west but the eastern bloc as well. But Reagan's policy of crushing any radical nationalism has meant there have been 'incidents' since 1981. In 1983 he imposed a trade embargo. This has meant growing trade with the eastern bloc and the signing of the Red Sea Pact with two of the USSR's allies, Ethiopia and South Yemen in 1981.

Gaddafi's reputation as a revolutionary is not simply based on his foreign policy. The 1969 coup installed a twelve man Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) which ruled as a military junta. Gaddafi soon moved against some of the other RCC officers identifying them with Egypt's President Sadat who was seen as watering down the radicalism of Nasser.

Gaddafi launched his own 'Cultural Revolution' in 1973 to defeat them and their supporters. This was really just a highly publicised crackdown on corruption accompanied by an 'Arming of the People' (which meant his student supporters.)

Two thousand people's committees were set up and several company and state bureaucrats were replaced.

The 'Cultural Revolution' collapsed when the Green March flopped a few months later, but different forms of people's committees were to be set up in future years. They have revolutionary sounding names but are aimed at maintaining Gaddafi in power and ensuring the efficiency of Libyan capitalism.

The two attempted coup attempts against Gaddafi last year date back to the growing opposition to him since 1975.

In January 1976 at least ten Benghazi students were killed by police. Gaddafi dealt with this opposition by again adopting his 'popular committees' strategy. This time he called them Basic Peoples' Congresses. They were based on what he called 'direct democracy' which was explained in his famous *Green Book* first published in 1975.

Gaddafi states that representative democracy is a fraud all over the world. The new system of Basic Peoples' Congresses, which was born at the Declaration of the Estab-

lishment of the Peoples' Authority in March 1977, would replace it. The Libyan Arab Republic now became the Socialist Peoples' Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (or State of the Masses).

The RCC was also formally abolished. It was claimed that, 'For the first time in history, rulers have handed over power to the people.'

This was all supposedly in line with Gaddafi's 'Third Universal Theory' which, the *Green Book* explains, is a 'Third Way' between capitalism and communism.

In fact this so-called Third Way is concerned with the same thing as the First and Second Ways are—capital accumulation. Workers therefore have to be squeezed and productivity increased. Gaddafi aptly developed this theme with the 'producers' revolution—yet another revolution, announced in 1978. It was carried out by a 'march on the factories' where the revolutionary committees formally took over 58 companies in two months. The owners were compensated.

Finally, in 1979 Gaddafi converted the committees into the Revolutionary Committee Movement. They changed from being largely agitprop groupings to become organs of enforcement. They took on police and judicial powers. These committees exist in factories, offices and schools. The most prestigious ones are in the universities and city districts, and most importantly of all in the army. This enables Gaddafi to head off any incipient opposition in the military.

At the head of these committees are managers and top bureaucrats. They also deal with Gaddafi's opponents among the 50,000 Libyans living abroad. Nine murders of such people were committed in 1980.

But these measures have not prevented Libya's growing economic problems. The quadrupling of oil prices in 1974 had encouraged grandiose plans for industrialisation and diversification. The decreasing demand for oil in the eighties has meant that many of these projects have been stillborn.

Libyan oil revenues slumped from \$22 billion in 1980 to \$8 billion in 1985. This year they are expected to be around \$6 billion. There is a shortage of food and consumer products, and the welfare measures that have been built up under Gaddafi are under threat. Today over 90 percent of Libya's income still comes from oil.

Libya has a private sector. Ironically, American oil companies retain important areas of control. But the 'partnership' brought in by Gaddafi's 'direct democracy' means that most of Libyan industry is effectively made up of workers co-ops controlled by the state.

Of course, since there has been no workers' revolution and workers' control, it is no kind of socialist country. But when a country of 3.5 million people is attacked by the United States with the support of the British government, that is enough reason for socialists to defend Libya. ■

Andy Zebrowski

Middle East chronology

1947 United Nations votes to partition Palestine.

1948/49 State of Israel proclaimed. Israeli army campaign of terror forces 750,000 Palestinians to flee to neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Jordan and Syria where they are given refugee status.

1951 Libyan independence from Italy.

1951 Mossadeq forms government in Iran and nationalises the Anglo-Iranian oil company.

1952 Free Officers Coup in Egypt. Nasser comes to power and heads the pan-Arabist movement.

1953 Britain and America back coup against Mossadeq's nationalist government in Iran. Shah installed.

1954 British troops expelled from Egypt by Nasser. Rise of Arab nationalism.

1955 Tunisian independence from France.

1956 Nasser nationalises Suez Canal.

Israel, France and Britain invade Egypt, and then retreat giving victory for Nasser and Arab nationalism.

1958 Formation of United Arab Republic (UAR) between Syria and Egypt on basis of pan-Arabism.

1958 Al Fateh formed (Palestinian National Liberation Movement).

1958 Free Officers Coup led by Colonel Abdel Karim Kassem in Iraq overthrows British-supported monarch Faisal II.

1958 General strike and civil war in Lebanon. US troops invade and support Maronite Christians led by Chamoun.

1959 Political crisis in Iraq with Communist Party on verge of taking power. They back off on instructions from Moscow.

1961 UAR splits.

1961-2 Mass opposition movement with strikes in Iran successfully repressed.

1962 Algerian independence after six year armed struggle led by FLN against France.

1963 Kassem overthrown by coup organised by Ba'ath (national socialist) party in Iraq.

1964 PLO formed.

1965 Military coup in Algeria led by Boumedienne.

1965 First Palestinian raids against Israel.

1967 Six day war between Israel and Arab states of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Israel triples in size occupying rest of Palestine, Egyptian Sinai and Syrian Golan.

1968 Saddam Hussein and Ba'ath party take sole power in Iraq.

1968 Palestinians hold off major Israeli attack at Krameh, Jordan.

1969 Gaddafi leads Free Officers Coup in Libya.

1969 Officers coup in Sudan.

1970 'Black September'. King Hussein's troops attack and kill thousands of Palestinians in uprising in Jordan.

1970 Death of Nasser in Egypt. Sadat takes over.



1971-3 Mass student and workers opposition in Egypt successfully suppressed.

1972 Palestinians attack Israeli athletes at Munich Olympics.

1973 October war between Egypt and Syria against Israel. Limited war fought by Sadat for diplomatic gains.

1973 OPEC and Seven Sisters (biggest oil companies) quadruple oil prices.

1973 Sadat re-opens Egypt to western capitalism.

1974 Turkey invades Cyprus.

1975 Lebanese civil war begins.

1976 Syria invades Lebanon to crush Palestinians.

1977 Bread riots in Egypt.

1977 Iranian mass opposition begins.

1977 Sadat goes to Jerusalem.

1978 Iranian revolution begins.

1978 Israel invades South Lebanon.

1978 Signing of Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt.

1978 General strike in Tunisia.

1979 Peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.

1979 Shah of Iran overthrown by Islamic revolution.

1980 Iran-Iraq war begins.

1980 Military take over backed by US in Turkey.

1980 Carter's helicopters crash in Iran and fail to free US Embassy hostages.

1981 Israel invades South Lebanon.

1981 Sadat of Egypt assassinated.

1982 Israel invades Lebanon. Beirut bombed. Hundreds of Palestinians massacred in Sabrah and Chatila refugee camps by Falange (Christian fascists) as Israeli troops watch. Bashir Gemayel assassinated and Amin Gemayel becomes president of Lebanon.

1983 US troops killed in Lebanon and US withdraw.

1984 Bread riots in Tunisia and Morocco.

1984 Numeiri overthrown by mass movement in Sudan.

1986 Police revolt in Egypt.

1986 US bomb Libya.

Job creation?

A NEW pamphlet written by the economist Andrew Glyn is being heralded by some on the left as the way forward for the next Labour government.

A Million Jobs a Year is, according to Glyn, a pamphlet whose purpose 'is to contribute towards shifting discussion in the Labour Party...to asking precisely what policies will enable full employment to be secured'.

The pamphlet has an introduction by Tony Benn, it is sponsored by the Campaign group of MPs, and its author also wrote one of *Militant's* principal pamphlets on economics in which he makes a sustained attack on the Alternative Economic Strategy.

It therefore summarises some important ideas which will be put forward by the Labour left in the coming months.

To eliminate unemployment, according to Glyn, the next Labour government would have to create a million jobs a year over a five year period of office. This could be done through massive reflation, plus a major extension of state control of the economy.

Widespread state control would be needed to overcome various problems that reflation by itself would encounter. These include the probability of a serious flight of capital; difficulties in borrowing the necessary funds for expansion; inflation; a growing balance of payments deficit; and the possibility of private investors failing to invest sufficiently and in the right areas.

Glyn leaves it open how far state control would have to be extended. The Labour Party's Clause Four, and the nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies, are both up for discussion. He makes it clear, however, that he believes the greater the state control and nationalisation, the more likely the success of the expansionist strategy.

At the very least, City institutions must be taken over; exchange, price and import controls must be imposed; and investment 'concentrated where import substitution was the priority'. Without such measures, Glyn warns, a future Labour government would be forced to retreat, as they have in the past, and as Mitterrand's government has in France.

If these controls are to be effective, it is probable that 'greater powers for the workforce' would be required. And any likely resistance from the state machine itself would have to be overcome by 'the highest degree of active support and commitment' from Labour's supporters.

Glyn's arguments have been either ignored or treated with contempt by the Labour leadership. It is ironic, therefore, that the framework of Glyn's arguments is the same reformist framework that per-

vades almost every section of the Labour Party.

The pamphlet points out that the Tories will not reflate the economy because they do not believe that it would guarantee the restoration of the profitability of British industry, and because reducing unemployment might tip the balance of class forces away from the bosses. (This isn't quite the way Glyn puts it. He tends to avoid the language of class struggle and conflict.) Glyn omits to provide, however, any kind of serious analysis—much less a Marxist one—of the causes of the economic crisis which has produced the massive decline in profits and with it the massive rise in unemployment.

'The strategy would still depend on the recovery of world trade and the world economy'

He therefore says nothing about why successive Labour and Tory governments have abandoned Keynesian-style reflation even if they successfully used it in the past. One is left with the strong impression that Britain's economic problems are merely a product of the unpatriotic nature and general beastliness of the bosses towards British workers.

Glyn goes on to extol the virtues of 'competitiveness'. He condemns it 'out of hand' when it is achieved 'through paying miserable wages and enforcing appalling working conditions', but claims that it can significantly improve the lot of the working class. These illusions about 'nice' and 'nasty' exploitation are widespread on the Labour left. But it is precisely capitalist exploitation and competition that has created the present international economic crisis.

Nowhere does Glyn argue that the working class will have to smash the state, take power into its own hands and begin to plan the economy to meet need rather than profit. In effect he is arguing for a form of state capitalist society, albeit with workers' participation. Great Britain Ltd would be an economy in which unpatriotic employers will have been sent packing, in which we will have to be 'competitive' and maybe accept a 'socialist' incomes policy, but where we can be mobilised behind a 'genuine' national interest, and thereby secure full employment.

Even in their own terms Glyn's arguments are unsatisfactory. He fails to confront the fact that his solution to mass unemployment requires a massive rise in the rate of profitability of British industry. This could only be achieved by a massive rise in the rate of exploitation of the working class. What's more, he actually claims that 'measures are possible which would allow a Labour government to proceed [to full employment] on its own'.

However, even with measures to cut the living standards of British workers through import controls, import substitution and an incomes policy, the strategy would still depend on the recovery of world trade and the world economy. Glyn has even argued against import controls in the past on the grounds that they would lead to a decline in world trade. He certainly provides no argument as to why the world economy is likely to recover rather than stagnate or collapse.

Marxists recognise that the defeat of capitalism requires the victory of the international working class. But Glyn's arguments boil down to the advocacy of class collaboration rather than class struggle. They imply the division of the working class, not its unity. This is most clearly seen in the argument for import controls and import substitution, which will attack the position of foreign workers as much as they do their British counterparts.

Finally, Glyn provides no serious analysis of the kind of resistance the measures he puts forward would face from the capitalist state machine—nor what the working class would have to do to overcome them. Tackled about this in a recent debate, he admitted he had perhaps not followed the argument through to its logical conclusion, but that it was necessary to construct some kind of 'consensus'.

But this consensus would presumably be among left reformists, who—one assumes—would not be ready to accept the ultimate need for armed insurrection of the working class!

Not only does the double-think necessary for this 'consensus' require revolutionaries to break from the principle of always telling the truth to the working class, it also has the nasty habit of confusing its practitioners. This can be seen both in the arguments of the pamphlet, and in the flirtation with 'socialist' incomes policy from people like *Militant* supporter Terry Fields arising out of the experience of running Liverpool City Council.

As socialist propaganda, this pamphlet is a wasted opportunity. Instead of arguing against reformist, Labourist and even nationalist ideas, Glyn accommodates to them. His perspective must also be seen in the context of his pursuit of economics within a respectable, academic framework, and his long term involvement in the Labour Party. Revolutionary socialists should beware of both. ■

Rob Hoveman

A Million Jobs a Year
Andrew Glyn
Verso

The sorry saga goes on

NEIL KINNOCK and all but a dozen or so Labour MPs have rushed to support Thatcher's Anglo-Irish Agreement.

That may come as little surprise to many. In the years after a Labour government sent in the troops to Northern Ireland in 1969, the party has operated a common policy on the question with the Tories.

Labour's record is truly appalling. It runs through rushing in the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act, withdrawing special status for political prisoners, dishing out extra seats to the Unionists and Michael Foot's dispatching of Don Concannon to taunt Bobby Sands on his deathbed with the fact that Labour would not support the demands of the hunger strike.

This was all now supposed to lie in the past. Last month Ken Livingstone stated that 'the traditional Labour Party view is eroding'.

Labour MPs voted against renewing the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Livingstone and Clare Short, who is on Kinnock's front bench, shared platforms with Sinn Fein.

Writing in *Labour Weekly* after the Anglo-Irish Agreement, shadow minister Stuart Bell said Labour stood today for ending the Unionist veto on scrapping partition, ending supergrass trials, strip searches of women republican prisoners, and Orange marches through Catholic areas and for a Bill of Rights.

He ended by saying that Labour backed the Agreement because 'a bridge is being built across which Labour can cross—towards Irish unity'.

This all sounds fine on paper. Yet in reality little has changed.

Kinnock's party is for Irish unity 'by consensus'. The simple truth is that such consensus is a million miles away. It is a form of words which reflects one major difference with the Tories.

Put simply, Labour wants deeper links with the Dublin government and the Catholic middle class SDLP.

It means nothing in terms of ending either partition or the discrimination, poverty and repression which grips Northern Ireland.

Kinnock 'absolutely' supports Thatcher's present stance. He sees Northern Ireland as a security problem. Number one enemy is the IRA.

At the last Labour conference Ireland was the subject of a short debate. A motion calling for troops out was heavily defeated.

Only 14 Labour MPs voted against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

But since then the voice of those in the Labour Party opposed to Britain's presence has been rather muted.

In January Ken Livingstone visited Derry at Sinn Fein's invitation. There he

publicly apologised for Labour's record.

Despite his realignment with Kinnock, Livingstone has not dropped his backing of 'troops out now'. But unfortunately it is not central to his platform. He could campaign in the Fulham by-election alongside the likes of Denis Healey without raising Ireland at a time when it was headline news.

What of those resisting Kinnock's pull who opposed the Agreement? *Militant's* two MPs voted against it.

But while opposing sectarianism, one of them, Dave Nellist, blamed the Provisionals for deepening sectarian divisions. He explained, 'Marxists oppose the Provos because through their actions "a Lebanon" would be created in Ireland including pogroms, refugee camps on the border and military right wing governments most likely in two new, even more sectarian states.'

'Kinnock "absolutely" supports Thatcher's stance. He sees Northern Ireland as a security problem.'

This argument centres on two fallacies.

Firstly the Provisionals cannot be blamed for creating or deepening sectarian divisions.

They came into existence after the RUC attacked civil rights marches and besieged Catholic areas, and Loyalist mobs burnt down Catholic streets. The British army had already gunned down Catholic protesters before the Provos fired a shot.

Secondly, *Militant's* apocalyptic vision of future events leaves out the crucial factors why full-scale civil war has not erupted in Northern Ireland.

The first is the continuing resistance of the Catholic working class. The second is that when the 'troubles' were at their height in 1971 and 1972, that resistance began to connect with the concerns of the working class in the South.

Militant, by concentrating fire on the Provos and by refusing to call for troops out now, fail to challenge the dominant ideas among workers in Britain and the North.

Their argument is that workers in Northern Ireland can unite through the construction of a Labour Party, and if trade unions organise round jobs and wages.

This ignores the central features of Northern Irish society—the presence of the security forces, partition and systematic discrimination.

The one example regularly offered by *Militant* is the 'Better Life for All Campaign' which was launched in 1976. This is described as a 'rank and file' backlash against the 'sectarian paramilitaries'.

The truth is that it was a campaign run by trade union officials. It combined calls for decent jobs, wages and housing with a bitter denunciation of sectarian violence. It failed to mention the presence of the army, the RUC or the battery of repressive measures.

After a round of opening rallies it simply petered away precisely because it failed to address itself to the realities of Northern Ireland.

On a less serious plane the once firm supporters of 'troops out' within the Labour Party, *Socialist Organiser*, have announced 'plain troops out tomorrow means civil war'. Gone is any talk of socialism.

Instead:

'The problem is to find a democratic framework which...allows for reconciliation and the development of normal class politics in Ireland.'

'That framework can only be a federated united Ireland—in which the minority areas [ie the Protestants] will have autonomy—combined with the closest links between Ireland and Britain acceptable to the Irish majority.'

Both *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* reject the Anglo-Irish Agreement not because it will strengthen the ruling class's effort to police the Northern crisis but because it will antagonise the Protestant population.

The tragedy is that in Northern Ireland the tradition of socialism has been one of concentrating on bread and butter issues in order to attract votes and members, combined with silence on the fundamental issues of sectarianism, partition and the British presence.

So the minority of workers attracted to what passed for socialism in Belfast were not armed with ideas with which to wage war on the predominant beliefs. In that situation sectarianism re-emerged.

Our criticism of the Provos is not that they oppose the sectarian state and the British army but that they do not link the national question to those issues facing the majority of Irish workers in the South. That means they cannot mobilise the Southern working class and cannot make inroads among Protestant workers.

Our criticism of *Militant* and others of that ilk is that they mirror this separation of economic issues from the national question.

The demand for 'troops out now' addresses itself to the heart of all this. It points the blame where it centrally lies—with the British ruling class.

Of course we will not win it tomorrow.

But amidst the current rise of sectarianism among Loyalists in the North, and the debates on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, it must be shouted from the roof tops.

The tragedy is that the cry is being muzzled within the Labour Party. ■

Chris Bambery

THE GENERAL STRIKE

Sixty years ago this month, the General Strike shook Britain. Donny Gluckstein analyses some of its lessons

IN MAY 1926 three and a half million workers were involved in the biggest single dispute in British history. This event gives the lie to all those who today say that workers cannot stand up against the bosses or the government. It shows that trade unionists can overcome sectional divisions and unite to fight for another group of workers. In 1926 it was the miners who were under attack facing massive cuts in pay and longer hours. The strikers stayed rock solid to the end and millions more were straining to join the fray. The elaborate preparations of the government, the deployment of the army, the strike-breaking 'Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies' were as nothing before this massive show of solidarity.

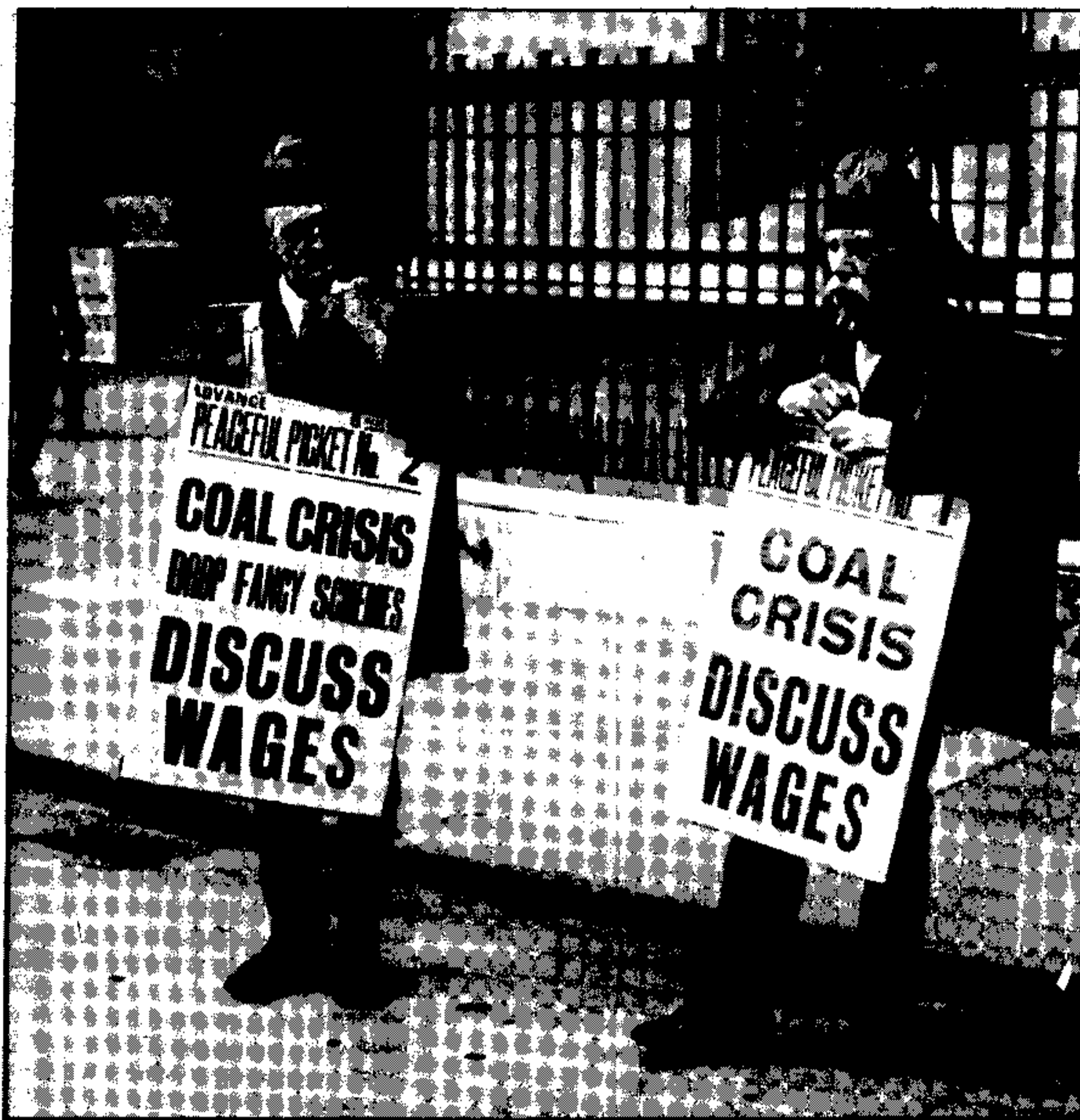
But the general strike has another and more bitter lesson. It ended in utter defeat when after nine days the TUC General Council called the strike off without any gains. The resulting disillusionment of trade unionists led to years of retreat and weakness in the labour movement. Apart from the miners, who were absent, the decision of the General Council to sell out was *unanimous*. Notorious right-wingers like Jimmy Thomas of the NUR had joined with the far left officials—people like George Hicks and Alf Purcell—in this unparalleled act of betrayal. Even A J Cook, miners' secretary and the most leftwing union leader of the day, was soon to drop his criticisms of the General Council in the interests of official unity.

So the general strike gives the lie to another common illusion of today: that changes at the top, the election of left union leaders or MPs, can overcome conservative influence in the labour movement. The left officials had indeed made some militant speeches in the months before the strike. In July 1925 they caught the government off guard, forcing it to concede a subsidy to mining which staved off conflict until May 1926. This event was known as 'Red Friday'. But behind the rhetoric the hope of both left and right was to bluff the government into further concessions by raising the spectre of a general strike. They hoped never to have to act on their threat. But this ploy failed, and when a fight became inevitable all the leaders adopted a common approach—its keynote was to keep the rank and file passive.

First, the General Council decided that each union should organise its own individual campaign. This created obstacles to unity across the class at local level. Secondly, workers were to be called out in separate waves, and industries were picked on the most arbitrary basis. Electricity and gas workers were asked to produce light, but not power—a technically impossible task. Transport workers were included, but other important industries were held in reserve. In Glasgow—a shipbuilding and engineering centre—this led to the ridiculous situation of trade unionists being instructed to go to work and having to use scab transport to do so (this was true of engineers and shipyard workers, who were not called out until the last day of the strike).

Once launched in this fashion the general strike settled into being a demonstration of bureaucratic methods on the grand scale. Confusion among the strikers was deliberately fostered. This suited the designs of the trade union bureaucracy—a group which occupies a special place in capitalist society. The union official is essentially a mediator between workers and employers. To maintain their position at the head of the unions the General Council felt compelled to defend the Miners Federation which alone comprised one fifth of all union members in 1926. To have done nothing would either have led to a spontaneous solidarity strike outside their control or the crushing defeat of the labour movement. But once launched the officials wanted to do everything to minimise the strike's effect. They did not want to overthrow the system. Far from it. Their aim was to defend workers' interests *within* capitalist society, not challenge the basis of that society.

THE ending of the strike showed that the TUC General Council feared success even more than it feared defeat. Better the capitalist devil it knew than the workers' revolution it did not. And these were indeed the choices it faced. For once the government made it plain that all its resources—economic and military—would be thrown behind the coalowners, the road to victory led over the corpse of the capitalist state. This prospect terrified the officials. Every edition



of its daily newspaper carried declarations from the General Council that it did not challenge the constitution.

While the calling out of workers was haphazard, its efforts to avoid offending the state were thorough and detailed. Picketing was *not* to be effective. Strikers were instructed to be 'steady and quiet'. Fear of an active rank and file led union officials to propose such useful pursuits as smiling, gardening and country walks. Policemen were not to be treated as strike-breakers. Indeed football matches were to be organised with them. War medals were to be worn and church services attended. Many reports reached the TUC telling how strikers and police 'worked in complete harmony', how there was 'a very pleasant relationship' and so on. Pickets presented police chiefs with silver platters in gratitude. Later *Police Review* spoke in warm tones of the defeated working class.

Local organisation of the strike did not exceed TUC guidelines. Many trades councils formed themselves into 'councils of action'. But despite later claims, these were not prototype Russian soviets. They were dominated by officials and acted as a transmission belt for union instruc-

tions. Even the Workers Defence Corps, which might have become a challenge to state strike-breaking, were designed to prevent clashes with the police and keep picketing under disciplined bureaucratic control.

There was *no* organised force within the labour movement which criticised the General Council's conduct of the strike. And so there was no opportunity to resist the criminal surrender when it came.

This fact must be explained, for the treacherous behaviour of the trade union bureaucracy could easily have been predicted. It flowed directly from the bureaucracy's position between the classes. So why did the Marxist left, as represented by the newly formed Communist Party, not act in a revolutionary way and challenge the officials either by word or deed? By all appearances it should have done so. Founded in 1920 the party was inspired by the Russian revolution of 1917. Lenin had taken a direct part in shaping the young CP. In 1925 Trotsky had issued a book warning the Communist Party directly of the dangers posed by the union bureaucracy. Yet the party was deaf to this advice.

The CP's failure must be seen in context. It made some dramatic improvements on previous left wing organisations. These had been of two kinds. The British Socialist Party had called itself Marxist but believed in preaching socialism, not intervening in practice. The Socialist Labour Party formed the other strand of British revolutionary politics. It was a syndicalist organisation which believed revolution would grow out of ever more powerful trade unions and economic strikes. The SLP regarded politics as a waste of time—trade unionism came first.

Both traditions shared one thing in common. They rejected revolutionary political leadership in trade union struggles. The BSP sat on the sidelines in the great industrial battles that shook Britain between 1910 and 1920. The SLP immersed itself in such struggles, particularly the engineering shop stewards' movement in the First World War. But though its members led industrial action they entirely overlooked the key issue of the time—the imperialist war. J T Murphy, a key SLP figure, wrote a pamphlet advocating Soviet-type organisation in 1917 and yet made no mention of the political issues raised by the war at that time.

The Communist Party drew its membership from the BSP and SLP. It was free from the rotten reformist tradition that saw parliament as the arena for socialist change. It attempted, for the first time in British history, to give a Marxist leadership in the union movement. The CP created an effective agitational weapon in its newspaper, *The Workers' Weekly*, and organised its members in the workplace through dozens of factory branches.

HOWEVER the question of revolutionary intervention in trade unions is not a simple one. This became clear after Black Friday—15 April 1921. On that day promises of official backing for the miners were suddenly withdrawn by senior union leaders. A three month lockout ended in defeat for the Miners Federation and opened the door to a serious attack on all workers. Soon trade union membership was plummeting downwards.

In these circumstances the CP issued calls like 'Back to the Unions' and 'Stop the Retreat'. But how could these slogans be acted upon? A rank and file movement based on independent shop stewards' bodies was no longer possible, since stewards had been victimised out of factories. So two paths remained. One was to concentrate on building strength at the top of the movement. This could be done by capturing official positions for the left and influencing the current leaders. The restoration of shopfloor confidence was secondary to this. The other path was to rebuild the movement from the bottom up.

The arguments took shape in 1922. One group in the CP was for 'more power to the TUC General Council'. Its supporters said: 'The struggle must be waged under the banner of the General Council of the TUC. We want no...puny

blowing off of individual trade union pop-guns against the mighty cannon of capitalism... All trade unionists must insist on the General Council...taking charge of the struggle.'

The counter-argument rested on two points: 'Elect new leaders by all means, but will anyone kindly calculate the number of years necessary for a formal ballot box removal of the reactionary trade union bureaucracy?' 'The reactionary leaders...will have to be removed by a fight directly against them rather than through formal removal via the ballot box.' The most telling argument against faith in left union leaders was put by Palme Dutt in October 1922: 'The trade unions are by their nature separatist: only a political party can be the combining force... Unless that party develops, the working class movement will continue to drift in sectionalism and confusion.'

Unfortunately, the supporters of 'more power to the General Council' won the debate. The false policy of 1926 followed as a result. But illusions in left bureaucrats was visible even earlier when, in 1924, the CP created the Minority Movement.

The Minority Movement began life in the South Wales mining industry. In the mines workers were members of one union—the Miners Federation. Union branches, or lodges as they are known, corresponded to individual workplaces. This meant that rank and file struggle was in general channelled through the Miners Federation apparatus. On this basis a fine tradition of militancy had grown up in South Wales around what was known as the Unofficial Reform Committee.

The shop stewards movement in engineering had depended on a high level of rank and file independence and activity to exist. When the industry contracted after the war and leading stewards were victimised following the 1922 lockout, the movement disappeared entirely. In the difficult conditions after Black Friday, 1921, the miners' Unofficial Reform Committee was the only remaining model of militant trade union activism. It survived when all else failed, because it had deep roots among militants and continued to work under the protective umbrella of union lodges. However there were dangers. Militants could channel rank and file grievances through the official machine, but a channel can work in two directions. The risk always existed that the official machine would come to dominate the rank and file. Many good militants who took lodge and regional positions to fight for the rank and file became little different from the conservative officials they replaced. Only a strong party discipline could prevent this happening.

AS long as the problems of intervening in trade unions were realised, the South Wales example could be invaluable in rebuilding the general trade union movement from the bottom up. The CP did not have this clear understanding. In 1924 Minority Movements were set up in a variety of industries

outside mining. But they lacked that industry's workplace orientation. The South Wales miners had exploited the division between left and right in the union bureaucracy. They had won the backing of leftwing officials like Cook for rallying the activists. This had allowed the miners' Minority Movement to get off the ground and raise rank and file confidence. But elsewhere the Minority Movements operated in reverse. The activists were encouraged to support the left officials, not the other way round!

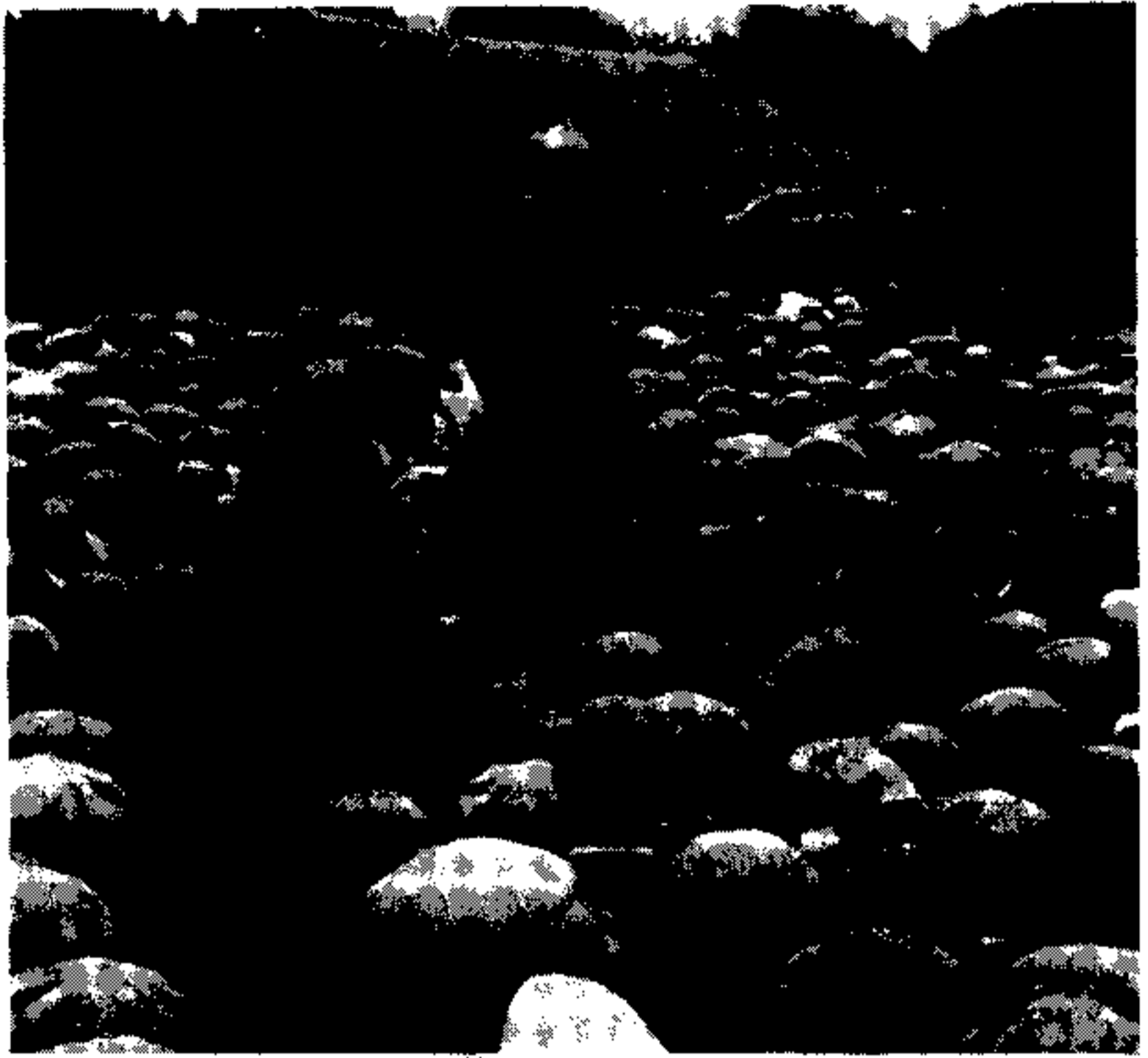
This was clear at national level. The annual Minority Movement conferences were always held one week before the TUC Congress and were occupied with organising resolutions to be taken up at that assembly. The major part of the National Minority Movement's work consisted of winning official posts.

These mistakes could have been corrected. The CP was not acting on its own. As part of the Communist International it was within a world revolutionary movement. But after the death of Lenin in 1924, Stalin fought a faction fight in which he ousted Trotsky from international influence. Trotsky's writings on Britain showed he fully understood the menace of the union bureaucrats, but he was ignored. Not only were the mistakes left uncorrected, Stalin's policy strongly encouraged the CP's own trend towards tailing left bureaucrats. At the end of 1924 a joint committee of Russian and British union officials was established to work for international trade union unity at the bureaucratic level. Henceforth there would be no turning back from the line of uncritical support of the General Council leftwingers.

In 1926 the CP entered the general strike with the slogan 'All Power to the General Council'. It argued for Councils of Action 'to see that all the decisions of the General Council and union executives were carried out'. Communist Party members took leading roles in such bodies, and many were arrested. But none of them suggested that the General Council's approach to the general strike should be defied. The CP was as astounded as anybody by the collapse of the TUC left in the arms of the rightwing.

It is pointless to speculate about what might have happened if the CP had adopted a different course. It had just 6,000 members and could not be expected to easily overcome the control of the bureaucracy. But one thing is certain. If the vanguard of the working class had been prepared for treachery, it would not have suffered the stunning blow which knocked it off course for years to come. Revolutionaries cannot guarantee victory in every battle, but they can provide the politics which enable workers to learn from their experience, even if this is one of defeat.

THE general strike happened 60 years ago, yet there are many parallels with today's situation. We too are suffering ruling class attacks in which the union bureaucracy plays a key role in holding back action. Again there are rightwing leaders at work like



Hammond and Laird. The result of their work is plain to see. We also have left officials, ranging from Todd to Knapp and Scargill. There are clear differences between left and right, as a comparison between the 1984/5 miners' strike and the News International dispute shows.

Yet there are those who forget the lessons of the general strike, who think that the conservative influence of the bureaucracy can be ended by electing left officials. Of course the splits between left and rightwing union officials are significant. But the *fundamental* fact which overrides all differences between bureaucrats is that they belong to a conservative social stratum. This makes the differences between left and right *secondary*.

The gap between the rank and file and the officials is always greater than the divisions amongst the officials. For this reason, in their struggles against capitalism, workers have to fight against the conservative influence of the union bureaucracy as well as their own bosses. It may well be that workers will be able to settle accounts with the officials only after they have overthrown the system.

For nine days in May 1926 the British working class showed that it had the power to rule society. The calamitous end to the general strike confirmed Trotsky's view that the chief obstacle to their power was the bureaucracy:

'If there were not a bureaucracy of the trade unions, then the police, the army, the courts, the lords, the monarchy would appear before the proletarian masses as nothing but pitiful ridiculous playthings. The bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British imperialism. It is by means of this bureaucracy that the bourgeoisie exists.'

This analysis is developed in a new book by Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein, Marxism and Trade Union Struggle: the General Strike of 1926, published by Bookmarks.

Schools of struggle

JUNE SEES the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising.

This year's anniversary is to be celebrated in style, with a three day general strike.

As in any great revolt, the youth have been to the fore of the struggle in South Africa over the last two years. And the school students, as in 1976, play a leading role.

Duncan Blackie interviewed one of the leading school student organisers from Cape Town about the lifting of the schools boycott and the role that students can play in the struggle for a workers' state in South Africa

She is also a member of the Students of Young Azania, which is affiliated to the Cape Action League.

COULD you explain to us first how education works under apartheid?

EDUCATION is the way in which a society maintains the status quo. It is a way in which ideas and values are passed onto a younger generation.

The role of education in South Africa is to pass on the capitalist, racist, sexist values that the system perpetuates.

With the development of capitalism and apartheid, in order to ensure the foundation of the system, which is a cheap labour force, it is necessary to keep young black working class people subservient.

Through education they have got to train black youth especially. (When I use the term black I mean so-called coloureds, so-called Indian and so-called whatever else they have.)

And with these different races they have different education departments. I don't have the exact figures here now, but every white child gets many times more spent on them than every Indian child and every African and coloured child.

But we realise that that's only a tactic to divide all the black people in South Africa, all the education we get as black students is gutter.

And when we say we are going to boycott gutter, racist education, we are not asking for *equal* education, or for *better* education, we are asking for *different* education, an alternative educational system, which obviously means a different society, a socialist society.

PREVIOUSLY students have revolted against having to learn Afrikaans. What sort of things are you expected to learn at school?

IN 1976 the students came out in Soweto in protest at being taught through the medium of Afrikaans, when their own

language is Xhosa. But now in lots of black areas Afrikaans is a language which the people actually talk.

Lots of the things we learn, the education we get, is irrelevant.

Like I would know all about what is going on in Britain and about Shakespeare and about things which are completely irrelevant to where I live. I'm not saying that there is no place in education for people like Shakespeare or Chaucer, who made a significant contribution to the English language, but what I am saying is that we are basically getting imperialist education.

And subjects like history and geography are distorted a lot.

In black schools, there are no facilities, you have over 40 students in a classroom, you have dilapidated desks and broken windows, you don't have biology labs or that kind of thing.

WHAT role can students play in the fight against apartheid and capitalism in South Africa?

BECAUSE we are fighting an economic system of exploitation, it is obvious that students can never bring about the fundamental change we are talking about.

But because of the way apartheid and capitalism have developed in South Africa, the role of the student has been very important.

Our schools are our site of struggle, they are our battle grounds. That is why we would always insist that it is necessary to keep our base at school in terms of student struggle.

We don't believe in the slogan 'freedom now, education later'. We believe that 'education is through liberation and liberation is through education.'

When we organise students, our main task is to build socialist youth and to expose the inequalities and the values of the education that we get. In so doing we will be preparing students for an alternative education. We are actually laying a foundation to prepare them for a new society.

We see our constituency as being in the black students in the high schools in particular.

We organise at a tertiary level as well. But, in South Africa, a very small percentage of black students go to university and the people who go to university are basically people who are going into professions: teachers, lawyers, to form a black middle class.

Now I'm not saying that a black middle class has no potential to be part of a revolutionary movement. There are individuals who commit class suicide. But the vast majority of black students are at high



Black demonstrators at a recent funeral school. In student struggle in South Africa this is where things have always started.

WHAT sort of organisations do the school students have?

THERE are different student organisations. There is the Congress of South African Students, COSAS, which is an affiliate of the UDF, which adheres to the Freedom Charter.

There is the Azanian Students Organisation, AZASO, which is also a UDF affiliate and organises the universities and colleges.

There is AZASM, the Azanian Students' Movement, which is the student wing of AZAPO, the Black Consciousness grouping.

And there is SOYA, the Students Of Young Azania, affiliated to the Cape Action League.

The Congress of South African Students is banned by the authorities, but obviously it still exists as far as we are concerned.

There are important differences between these organisations. COSAS and AZASO believe in a national democratic struggle. In other words they believe we are fighting against apartheid, and once we have got rid of apartheid and we have got a bourgeois democracy, we will then fight capitalism.

Because they believe in this two stage theory, they are able to form alliances with organisations like NUSAS, the National Union of South African Students, which organise the sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie.

AZASM has said they will never form an alliance with NUSAS, because they see the Black Consciousness struggle in a framework.

In SOYA we believe that our main task is to build socialist youth, and because of that we will build small, but we will build cadres who will go out and work and recruit and fight for socialism.

We will not have thousands of students walking around with the red SOYA banner, we would rather have two or three people who understand our aims and objectives.

So the role SOYA plays and the way we see the struggle is very different to the way other student organisations see the struggle.

COULD you give us an example of how, say in your organisation or in COSAS, the organisation is run?

AN example is the forums that coordinated the boycott.

The boycott in the Western Cape was initiated by the Interschool Coordinating Committee, consisting of about 30 high schools in the Western Cape.

This was a forum based on non-sectarianism. In other words we believe that despite our differences we needed to fight together. We march separately but we strike together.

After that, people felt we needed to organise the tertiary institutions as well. So the ICC developed into the Western Cape Student Action Committee WECSAC.

In WECSAC we had representatives from the different black student organisation as well as students from the Students Representative Committees.

SOYA at that stage was, and still is, a very small student organisation. It is only now beginning to branch out nationally.

THIS time round, there is a much stronger organised working class involved in fairly major battles. Does this make the students' struggle more successful than was the case in 1976?

IN comparison with 1976, the struggles that are going on now have definitely advanced, because students have learned from history.

In 1976 people came out on the streets and marched. And then in 1980, you had a situation, particularly in the Western Cape, where people organised programmes and students started to realise that we are fighting inferior, capitalist education.

In 1984/1985 the struggles have become more intense on the streets—street battles with the police and that kind of thing.

Students are now beginning not only to say they want new windows and better text books. They are actually beginning to challenge the content of education.

And by challenging the content of education people were actually directly seeing the role education plays in the capitalist society.

Because of the past heroic struggles and because of the lessons we have learned from those years, the prospects of building strong student unity are better.

At the same time, today there are more tensions within the student movement because of people aligning themselves to particular political ideologies.

Whereas, in 1980, you had a Committee of 81, of all students in the Western Cape,

one finds now that it's increasingly difficult to do that because the students can't remain in one forum because of political differences.

DO you think the boycott last year was successful?

IT MADE lots of gains in terms of SRCs being formed at schools in different areas. Students from different schools got together.

In September, when the schools were closed, there were about 60 rallies in the Western Cape, each attended by about a thousand people in different areas.

There was a period of heightened mass political activity in the Western Cape in particular, where parents were saying, 'We need to control the schools,' which is a very big step in the direction of socialism. Parents and workers are saying, 'We must control the factories, we must control the mines, we must control the farms—we must control the country.'

But, as the boycott went on and on, youth were beginning to believe it was possible to make the country ungovernable and that they held freedom in their hands. Youth were beginning to believe that *they* were in the vanguard of the struggle.

Out of a school of a thousand you found about 150 coming to meetings and activities. The other 850 were on the roads and weren't part of the struggle.

There's no point in waging a battle if your soldiers are not there and you have ten generals.

SOYA supported the boycott throughout. But at the beginning of this year we supported the return to formal classes undersigned by 150-odd organisations in the Western Cape.

WHILE the boycott is off how can students put pressure on the school authorities?

I CAN give you the example of my particular school. One demand was that we want to implement alternative education, for just one period a day, or per week. Everybody had to be a part of a club or a society in the school. But now that's used differently.

Now students have one period a week where time is set aside.

This particular schools is quite organised but that isn't the general pattern, so it is going to be a long process of building up that kind of organisation.

THE Soweto Parents Crisis Committee is quite a new body. Does the UDF have political control over the national organisation and over most of the local organisations?

I DON'T think that would be a correct assessment. In South Africa, because of the history and the geography of certain areas, different tendencies are predominant in different areas.

It is definitely not the case in the Western Cape, where there is a particular tradition

of struggle. These organisations, like SOYA, play quite a leading role and influence the entire mass movement.

You find in the Eastern Cape, which has a tradition of Congress struggle, things are slightly different. COSAS is very strong and has been doing marvellous work in organising students. But even in the Eastern Cape there are also other groupings as well.

People must get it clear that the Congress is not the only movement. In every area, even though they are small, the left is there. The left wing in the Congress as well as other independent groupings

A LOT of the right wing were arguing for calling off the boycott as well. Is there an element of concerned middle class parents that just want their kids to go to school?

I AGREE with you that there are lots of conservative parents, not only middle class parents, working parents as well, because working parents believe that they can educate themselves out of poverty. I think that's an international myth.

When we explain *why* the boycott has a limited role, we explain it in a particular context. The context is that the black working class is going to lead us to liberation.

One doesn't explain it in terms of, 'Oh yes, we have got to get back to school because of our own self interest', but because we see it in terms of the broader working class movement.

COULD you tell us what made you into a socialist?

IT IS a very difficult question to answer. I still need to read of lots of Marx and Trotsky, but I think that basically lots of the things that I learned about struggle, about socialism, came about through struggle. And through being part of organisations and forums.

I was involved in a number of organisations which are part of the Congress movement, and the Unity movement. But I was studying history at the same time.

I think history is one of our most vital weapons. When you study history you see it is much more than apartheid, it is a tree which we have got to uproot, which is capitalism.

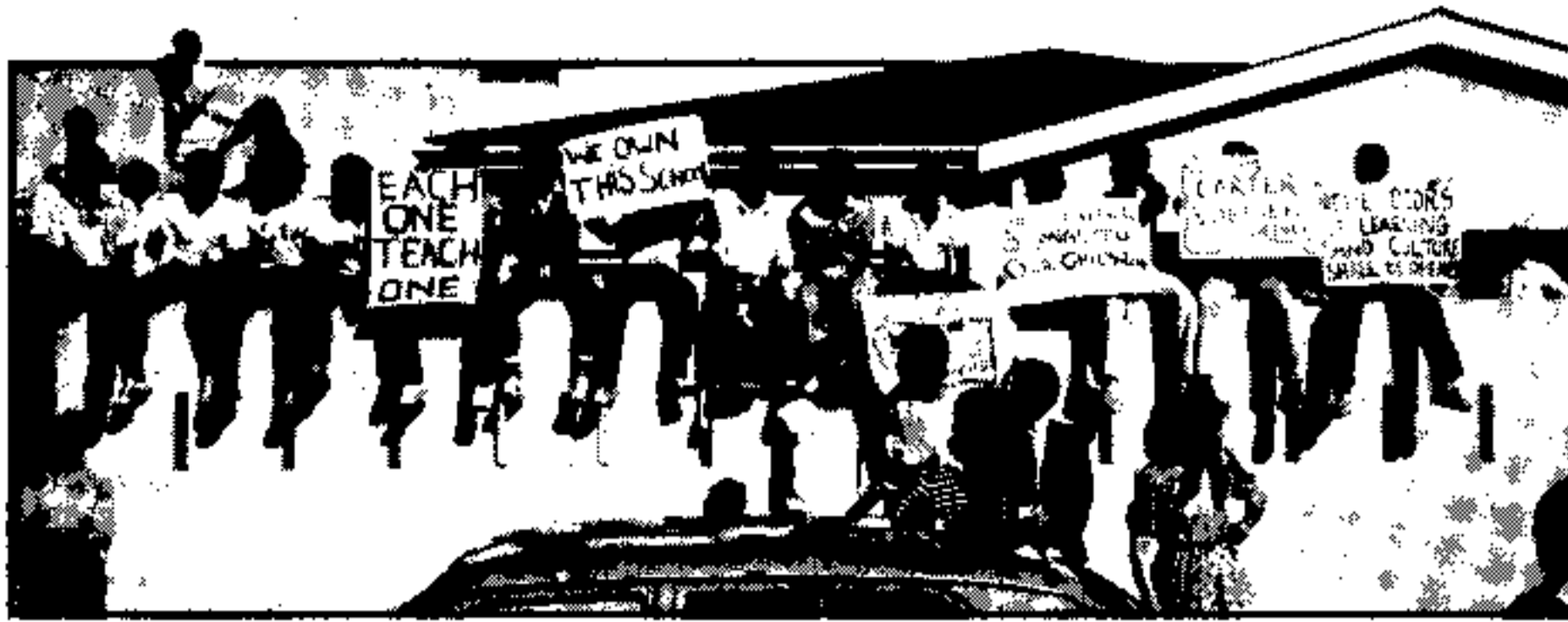
If you live in South Africa, because of the heightened struggle, street battles, because of all the things that are happening all the time, it becomes very clear even as a young person that working people can and should control their own destinies.

In education, when the army comes into the schools and insists on exams, it becomes very obvious. What right do they have?

It's obvious that it is the right of working people to control those things. It only leads you to one thing and that is socialism.

But the reason I mentioned the study of history being vital is because you can see struggle, but you can still see it in terms of a black/white thing.

It's when you study history and grapple



with ideas *at the same time* as you see these struggles going on that you actually realise that we are fighting against capitalism and for socialism.

SUPPOSE the UDF/ANC came to power—what sort of society do you think they would start to build?

WHETHER Botha has a pink face, a black face, or whatever colour face, capitalism would continue.

We would still have ghettos. We would still have the black working class being exploited. We would still have a capitalist society.

HOW do you think socialists in South Africa can take on the task of building a different pole of attraction to the ANC/UDF?

AS I explained earlier on, the way we organise is different. I think our strength will always lie in the base, with the amount of work we do. That is the important thing.

COULD you tell us about the things that school students have done to politicise workers in a more direct sense?

ONE thing we have done was to link up with workers in Gugeletu (a suburb of Cape Town) who are from the so-called homelands and who live in hostels.

The Cape Action League (CAL) helped build the Plessey workers' union, which is now going to affiliate to the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

One criticism of CAL has been that it's too based in the community or whatever and that we aren't busy building unions. But I think that people need to realise the unions don't just come out of the ground, structures don't just arise.

A lot of groundwork has to be done and it's through doing those kinds of things that you build up a strong base in the areas, in factories, in schools. That is the only way we can really do it.

THERE are people in the unions, the workerists, that agree with you that the road to victory lies through the struggles of the black working class. They argue that by fighting in the unions it is possible to cut away the ground from the populists.

But do you think there is a difficulty in just having strong trade union organisation, and that you need something else?

IT'S vital that we build a strong trade union movement. The factory, the mine

and farm are where the means of production lie and that is where we have got to take control.

But a worker doesn't sleep and eat in the factory or the mine. Therefore it's very necessary to organise the working class in the community as well, and it's important that unions take up a political position.

Personally I would disagree with a position like FOSATU where people feel that the struggle can be won just through building an independent trade union movement. One has to build a structure that encompasses the community as well.

We are not just interested in building cadres and recruiting. It is a matter of building cadres and our branches at the *same time as* influencing a mass movement.

And because in South Africa things are so hot, you have to make it red hot, and at the same time build cadres.

It's quite a difficult process. But look at Trotsky. He was busy leading armies and at the same time he was writing volumes.

For example at one firm they have over 1,000 workers in the hostels and over three quarters of them are illiterate.

Now, because SOYA has a branch in Gugeletu, we are going to start a literacy programme with those workers.

It would be a way in which we actually build the student-worker alliance.

And when one teaches these exploited black workers the alphabet, 'A' would not stand for apple because they don't have apples. It would stand for Azania. 'C' would stand for capitalism not cat.

IN South Africa the main beneficiary of the latest rise in struggle seems to be the UDF/ANC.

Do you think that it is the case—that it is difficult for the left in South Africa just now?

IT IS difficult for the left to emerge because of the attractiveness of the populist movement.

It is much easier for a working woman who got off a train where she was forced to sit in a certain compartment on her way home from the factory to say, 'Oh, it's because I'm a coloured person.'

And when she sees on the poster as she is walking home, 'The UDF unites and apartheid divides', the arguments are much easier for her to understand than class arguments.

But I won't say that the Congress movement has been the main beneficiary of what has been happening.

The question of resources is an important question.

Say we need to bring out a pamphlet [leaflet] which is vital to influence the whole mass movement and we don't have money. We finally cook up money from somewhere and bring the pamphlet out.

But before that the Congress movement has flooded the area with pamphlets. ■

Soweto: The huge black township near Johannesburg that erupted in 1976. 600 people died in the state terror that followed.

ANC, Congress movement, African National Congress: The most influential national liberation movement. Illegal. They see the struggle against apartheid, not capitalism, as paramount. This has led them to negotiate with, among others, 'liberal' white businessmen.

UDF, United Democratic Front: Broad, legal anti-apartheid organisation, dominated by the politics of the ANC.

COSAS, Congress of South African Students: The student wing of the ANC. Banned by the government.

AZASO, Azanian Students Organisation: Affiliate of the UDF organising in tertiary colleges.

CAL, Cape Action League: Left wing rival to the ANC and UDF, based mainly, though not exclusively, in the Western Cape.

SOYA, Students of Young Azania: Youth organisation affiliated to CAL.

Unity Movement: Long-standing left wing organisation, many of its activists went into CAL.

AZAPO, Azanian Peoples Organisation: The main Black Consciousness (BC) grouping. Unlike the ANC, they reject the involvement of anti-racist whites in the struggle.

AZASM, Azanian Students Movement: Student wing of AZAPO.

NUSAS, National Union of South African Students: Mainly white, tertiary students' organisation. Recently had talks with the ANC.

ICC, Interschool Coordinating Committee: represents students at high schools in the Western Cape.

WECSAC, Western Cape Students Action Committee: As ICC, but also organising tertiary colleges.

SRCs, Students Representative Committees: Student bodies that represent all the students at a particular school.

Committee of 81: Organised Western Cape students in struggle of 1980.

SPCC, Soweto Parents Crisis Committee: Recently formed body that called the conference to end the 1985 schools boycott after consultations with the ANC.

FOSATU, Federation of South African Trade Unions: One of the main components of the newly-formed 'super-federation'. Identified as the 'workerists' who emphasise strong, industrial unions, as contrasted to the 'populist' unions more closely identified with the ANC.

AZANIA: The African name for South Africa.

The modest pioneer

SIMONE de Beauvoir, who died in April, is now best known as the author of *The Second Sex*, which was published in 1949. It is still regarded as a central statement of modern feminism.

There has been much debate about *The Second Sex* and its influence: de Beauvoir has been accused both of arguing that women's biology is the primary factor determining their place in society, and of calling upon women to free themselves from femininity and become like men.

To de Beauvoir herself, the position of women was above all shaped by history.

'What I concluded', she wrote later, 'was that these dissimilarities [between men and women] are of a cultural and not of a natural order... I never cherished any idea of changing women's condition; it depends on the future of labour in the world; it will change significantly only at the price of a revolution in production.' (*Force of Circumstance*)

Yet with the rise of the women's liberation movement from the late 1960s, De Beauvoir drifted away from this near-Marxist position, and began to describe it as an 'error' that she had once supposed women's liberation to be linked with socialism. To understand why she came close to Marxism, then moved away from it, it is necessary to see *The Second Sex* in the broader context of her life, political activity and intellectual development.

Born in 1908 into a bourgeois family with monarchist and anti-semitic leanings, Simone de Beauvoir began to react against this background in her teens. It was through study, and above all through the study of philosophy, that she found a sense of personal freedom.

She was a brilliant student, who at the age of only 21 came second in the national competitive examination in philosophy—second to Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom she soon formed a lifelong relationship. She later wrote of their early years together:

'We had no external limitations, no overriding authority, no imposed pattern of existence. We created our own links with the world, and freedom was the very essence of our existence...'

Living life on this seemingly higher plane of philosophy and creativity, their ideas were much concerned with individual freedom, with the relationship between choice and circumstances, with qualities such as authenticity and magnanimity.

Looking back on the anti-fascist demonstrations of 1936, de Beauvoir remembered that, 'I was such a stranger to all practical political activities that it never occurred to me that I might join them.' She and Sartre had decided that 'though the proletarian struggle was of concern to us, it

was even so not *our* struggle.' (*The Prime of Life*)

Both began to see the necessity for political activity during the Second World War. They decided to take part in the Resistance movement: their first organisation (set up before Russia and the Communist Party supported the war) was called 'Socialism and liberty'. By the end of the war both were committed socialists expecting a revolutionary transformation of society and ready to enter into a closer relationship with the Communist Party, though both hesitated to join it.

Unfortunately, the conduct of the French Communist Party in the late 1940s only widened the gulf. The party's fanatical defence of Stalinism, its mechanical insistence on the 'party line' in all things including culture, and its sectarian sniping covering up its capitulation to nationalist politics, led on to direct attacks on Sartre, de Beauvoir and their circle. Like its Cold War opponents, the Communist Party denounced the group—who shortly after the war had come to be known as Existentialists—as decadent and reactionary.

'The horror my class inspires in me has been brought to a white heat by the Algerian war'

Describing the reaction of the Communist Party to *The Second Sex* in 1949, de Beauvoir wrote:

'Our relations with the Communists couldn't have been worse; all the same my thesis owed so much to Marxism and showed it in such a favourable light that I did at least expect some impartiality from them! Marie-Louise Barron, in *Les Lettres Francaises*, confined herself to remarking that *The Second Sex* would at least give the factory girls at Billancourt a good giggle... *Action* devoted an anonymous and unintelligible article to me, delightfully decorated with the photograph of a woman held fast in the passionate embraces of an ape.'

The revolutionary left was at the time too small and fragmented to be an alternative attraction. For de Beauvoir and Sartre, political involvement continued to be a matter of individual commitment at some remove from the class struggle.

Both were, again, active in the movement against the Algerian war in the 1950s and early 1960s. Completing the third volume of her autobiography in 1963, de



Simone de Beauvoir

Beauvoir wrote that 'the horror my class inspires in me has been brought to white heat by the Algerian War.'

'But,' she continued,

'the consequence of my attitude is that I live in what approaches isolation; my objective condition cuts me off from the proletariat, and the way in which I experience it subjectively makes me an enemy of the middle classes.' (*Force of Circumstance*)

De Beauvoir repeatedly insisted that, in both philosophy and politics, it was Sartre who had the ideas and she who helped him develop them. She was too modest—*The Second Sex* shows her originality and independence. It may have had more impact in the long run than any of Sartre's works.

Yet it also shows—especially when taken in conjunction with her autobiography—that her thought occupies a very similar position to Sartre's. Able to recognise the importance of class struggle and the value of historical materialism in explaining the world, she was unable to develop any closer to Marxism because the Marxism of the epoch in which she lived—dominated by Stalinism in the 1940s, and pulled in the direction of bourgeois feminism in the late 1970s—was a deterrent rather than an encouragement to her joining any serious political organisation.

Simone de Beauvoir was, nevertheless, a great writer and a pioneer of modern women's liberation. The pity is that she was not a revolutionary socialist as well. ■
Norah Carlin

Paper tigers

Ownership of the press is a question that has come very much to the fore of late. The dictatorial and brutish behaviour of the likes of Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell, and the editorial control they have, shocks many. Murdoch's recent offer to the print unions of the old *Times* printing presses to publish a labour movement daily also raises many arguments. *Clare Fermont* takes a look at the history of press ownership in this country and also the current situation.

ON 4 March 1887, William Randolph Hearst stalked into the offices of his father's ailing *San Francisco Examiner* and announced that he intended to 'startle, amaze and stupefy the world'.

He succeeded. Over the next 50 years his new-style newspapers made and destroyed reputations, exposed corruption, bought politicians; they even declared a war. Within a few years of becoming a proprietor, Hearst turned his papers into vehicles through which he could run successfully for Congress and even put himself forward for president.

On 4 March 1986 we were supposed to be startled, amazed (and stupefied?) by the launching of the *Today* newspaper. So exactly 99 years later it is clear that we are still stuck with that species of self-glorifying press baron in the ugly shape of men-like Maxwell and Shah.

The media cannot, however, be understood simply through the individual psychological inadequacies of the rich.

The type of ownership, the political outlook, the range of publications, the content, style and circulation, have all changed with economic and political development. But there is one thing that has not changed. Despite all the mythology, there is not, nor has there ever been, a free press.

Since the development of printing there have always been laws to stop the wrong people publishing unwanted facts or views.

These have been modified over the years so that restrictions on free speech are reasonably well camouflaged. The Official Secrets Act, the various libel laws, and distributors' liability usually suffice.

The main theory about our 'free press' is that anyone who does not find their views expressed has the right to start their own paper. Eddie Shah likes this theory. He has used it to claim that his union-smashing exercise will broaden that freedom by making publishing 'cheap'.

A quick glance at the roll call of banks, multinationals and corporations that had to want to back his exercise to the tune of £22 million shows this is hardly a freedom open to the rest of us.

Excepting the small political parties and groups which produce for a limited audience, with internal sponsorship to cover losses, and largely from outside the system, 'the press' is owned and controlled by rich families and huge corporations and is used unremittingly to serve their interests.

This is not the story journalism experts like to tell. For them the press became free in the middle of the last century when the taxes on published material were abolished and the growth of newspaper profits through advertising rescued the press from economic dependence on the state and political parties.

In fact, that period saw the introduction of a new system of press censorship more effective than anything before. Market forces succeeded where legal repression had failed.

It is also conveniently forgotten that advertising played no part in the remarkable growth of the radical press during the late 18th century and early 19th century. The first weapon used against these was the law of seditious and blasphemous libel which was defined so broadly that it could stop anything.

When this was found ineffective the government relied increasingly upon the so-called 'taxes on knowledge'—a stamp duty on all newspapers and advertisements, and a tax on paper.

This restricted readership by forcing up the price of newspapers, and limited ownership to the wealthy. The latter was reinforced by the state security system which made publishers register their papers and place financial bonds of £200-£300 with the authorities.

The radical press led an 'unstamped press' campaign which, by 1836, had a readership of over two million. The government responded with harsh repression and the underground press capitulated. This, along with the development of more sophisticated machinery, meant that larger and larger amounts of capital were required to set up and run a paper.

After the repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge' a new local daily press came into being without the working class movement being able to establish a single local daily of its own.

A new generation of popular national papers—such as the *People* (1881), *Daily Graphic* (1890), *Daily Mail* (1896), *Daily Express* (1900) and *Daily Mirror* (1903)—emerged which were mostly on the right, and, in some cases, on the extreme right.

The full impact of the transformation of printing is shown by comparing the establishment costs of papers before and after the industrialisation of the press. The total cost of establishing the *Northern Star*, a national weekly paper, on a profitable basis in 1837 was less than £1,000. It broke even with a circulation of about 6,200 copies.

In contrast, the *Sunday Express*, launched in 1918, had over £2 million spent on it before it broke even, with a circulation of over 250,000. Thus while a subscription in northern towns was enough in the 1830s, it required the resources of an international conglomerate controlled by Beaverbrook to do the same thing nearly a century later.

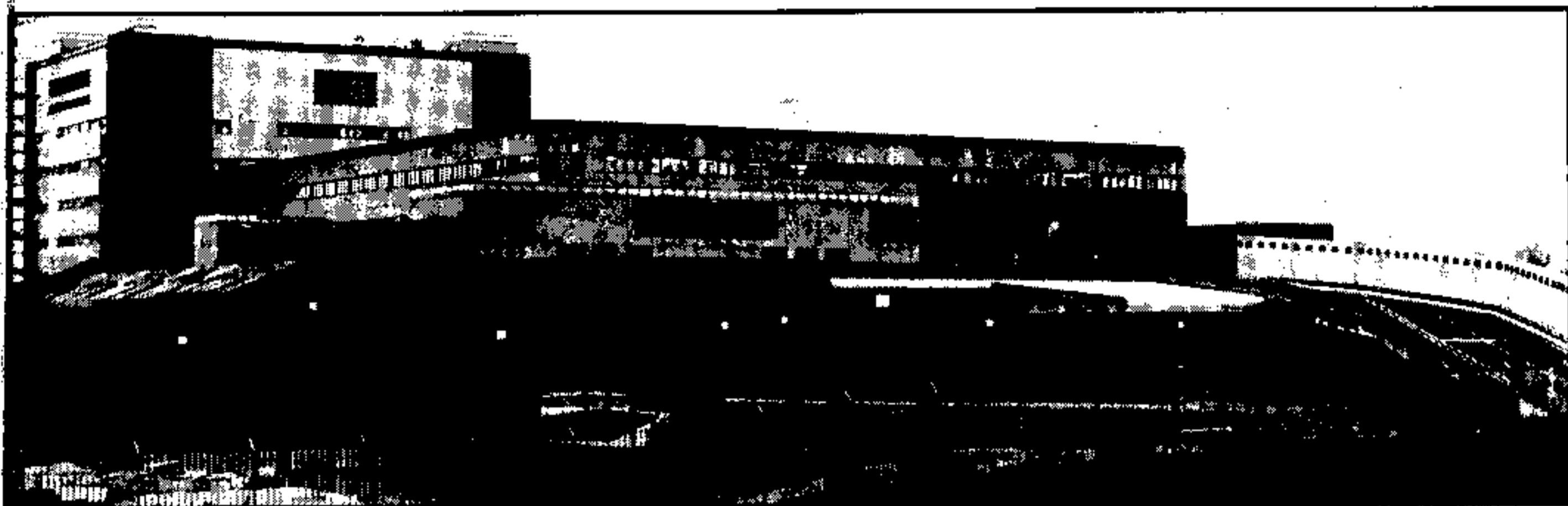
This enormous increase in capital investment obviously made it much harder for the less than wealthy to break into mass publishing.

Ownership of the media is now more contracted and more connected with other commercial interests than ever before. It is a trend Shah has done nothing to stop—he has merely helped the big boys to bigger profits. And big profits they already have, contrary to what they would have us believe.

The *Sun* made Murdoch a measly £40 million last year. Reuters, after flotation, made its major shareholders, the newspapers, tens of millions over night. Any titles that do go through a sticky patch are more than well compensated for, or looked after by, other publications in the group.

By 1984, Maxwell, Murdoch and Matthews controlled between them 83 percent of national Sunday circulation and 75 percent of national daily circulation. The regional chains, increasingly the sub-





Murdoch's Wapping plant

subsidiaries of groups owning the nationals, also consolidated their position by launching new titles and buying or closing down rivals. By 1975 less than a fifth of towns had competing weekly papers under separate ownership.

This concentration has become increasingly linked to core segments of industry and commerce. Between 1969 and 1984, six multinationals—Reed, Trafalgar House, Lonrho, Pergamon, Pearson and News International—bought more than 200 newspapers and magazines with a total circulation of over 44 million.

As a consequence a large part of the press has become directly financially linked to worldwide interests in banking, oil, transport, mining, insurance, construction, engineering and communications.

Owning these papers is not just a question of direct profit. Working in a political environment in which government decisions can affect their interests, ownership of newspapers opens political doors and makes them a force to be listened to.

The domination of big business is reinforced by the high degree of concentration that has developed within the media as a whole. Just under half of commercial TV programmes, over half of rented video films, paperback and record sales, over three-quarters of women's magazines and cinemas, and over nine tenths of national newspapers are controlled by the five leading companies in each sector. Many of these companies are linked by cross-ownership, and all have major interests in other sectors of production.

The fate of left wing papers has to be understood against this background. By the time the resources of organised labour had increased, so too had costs and it was not until 1912 that newspapers financed and controlled from within the working class made their first appearance in national daily journalism—long after the others were well established.

The brief career of one such radical paper shows the problems. The *Daily Citizen*, launched in 1912, reached a circulation of 250,000 at its peak within two years. Although it was within 50,000 of the *Daily Express* circulation, and had more working class readers than any other daily, it closed after only three years through bankruptcy.

So even if funds could be raised to launch

a paper, advertising had become the deciding factor and advertisers (who increasingly had interests in establishment papers) became the *de facto* licensing authority rather than the state.

In short, one of four things happened to national radical papers that failed to meet the requirements of advertisers. They either closed down, accommodated politically to the right and went up-market, stayed with a very small audience with manageable losses, or accepted an alternative source of institutional patronage with dampened politics.

The most obvious example of this de-radicalisation was the transformation of the left-wing *Daily Herald* into the *Sun*.

Another factor which increased this process was the circulation war which started in the late 1920s. Apart from the ridiculous sight of teams of canvassers roaming the countryside offering anything from silk stockings to kettles in exchange for a subscription, the publishers were continually under pressure to give more space to material with universal appeal (ie appeal to the lowest common denominator). Political coverage was downgraded, 'human interest', amusements and sport were promoted.

It developed so that now it is things like bingo which dominate the popular press including the one remaining paper which supports the Labour Party—the *Daily Mirror*.

Throughout the 50s and 60s the *Mirror* shifted rightwards in an attempt to maximise sales. By 1963, one third of its readers opposed the Labour Party as its management tried to court the young, women, and the new, richer, middle class. As Cecil King, the chairman of the Mirror Group, explained quite honestly in 1967:

'Today newspaper circulations are vast assemblies of people of all social classes and all varieties of political view. A controller who tried to campaign for causes profoundly distasteful, even to large minorities of his readers, would...put his business at risk.'

Maxwell has crudely added the finishing touches to this philosophy and the product is now an ugly reflection of a Maxwell-Kinnock political outlook—lots about sacking workers and nothing about socialism.

For all publications run from within the

system there is, of course, no such thing as editorial freedom. The owners appoint who they want and if that doesn't suffice, they find someone else (even Evans under Murdoch on *The Times* found that out). And, as Rothermere showed in the 1930s with his front page support for the fascists, and Maxwell and Co show now, nothing can stop proprietors intervening.

The nationality of the owner or conglomerate is irrelevant to this and to styles of management. All papers are subject to the same economic pressures. All print workers and any journalistic freedom in this country are under attack. The extent of the attack and its success depend on the financial state of the group and the level of organisation and confidence amongst the workers, not on the passport of the owner.

Murdoch showed his disdain for nationality last year when he gave up his Australian passport for an American one in order to buy six US television channels—a snip at \$1.5 billion.

The situation post-Shah and Wapping will not change. Business backs union-busters and profit-makers—not lefties. Clive Thornton's leftish *News on Sunday* has yet to find the £6 million it needs despite the fact that it will use new technology (but with traditional unions). It has already been given the thumbs down from advertisers.

The 'reduced costs opening new doors' argument (popular with some on the left) is false on another front. Responsibility for the increased costs of newspapers lies not with print workers' wages, but with the competition between the different owners which led to a quadrupling of the size of national newspapers since the war with all the consequent increased costs. The savings from new technology are mainly confined to a small section of production workers who account for a tiny fraction of overall costs.

With the state curtailing what you can say, and the multinationals owning more and more of the means of saying nothing at all, it is clear that the overwhelming proportion of information, culture, news and opinion that we are bombarded with every day is owned and controlled by a tiny powerful minority. Their every interest is in direct contradiction with the interests of the rest of us. ■

Seduced by parliament



The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky Lenin 45p

'BOLSHEVISM has indicated the right road of escape from the horrors of war and imperialism, Bolshevism can serve as a model of tactics for all.'

So Lenin wrote in *The Renegade Kautsky*, after a year of workers' power in Russia.

But for the complete triumph of socialism, it was vital that successful revolutions spread across Europe and the world. The proletariat in Russia had a lesson to teach everyone, and in particular the workers of Germany.

The Renegade Kautsky was Lenin's reply to a book written in 1918 by the German theoretician Karl Kautsky. Kautsky's book openly attacked the Bolsheviks and the whole notion that in the creation of socialism, the bourgeois state must be wiped aside, and the workers establish their own rule over the bourgeoisie.

For Kautsky advocated that only parliamentary democracy was capable of producing a harmonious, egalitarian society. He branded the Bolsheviks an authoritarian, anti-democratic sect.

When the fate of the Russian revolution

lay in the hands of the German proletariat, Kautsky's attacks on the Bolsheviks showed his great treachery and betrayal of the working classes.

Kautsky had once been hailed as the 'Pope of Marxism'. He was not only the leading theoretician of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), but was once seen as an international authority on Marx. For a period right up until the First World War, Kautsky was viewed with enormous respect by many, including Lenin.

But it was with the outbreak of the war that these illusions in Kautsky as a Marxist were first shattered. For the same man who in 1912 argued that revolutionaries could take advantage of an imperialist war, capitulated in 1914 by taking a pacifist line, which resulted in the SPD voting for war credits in the German Reichstag (parliament), and ultimately siding with the ruling class in calling for defence of the fatherland.

Kautsky emphasises in his book *The Class Struggle* that workers have to seize political power through parliament, for parliament is 'the most powerful, political

level that can be utilised to raise the proletariat out of its economic, social and moral degradation.'

Lenin puts forward clear arguments against such a parliamentary road in his reply to Kautsky.

One of Lenin's central arguments is on the question of democracy. Democracy can mean all things to all people. Reagan can invade Latin American countries in the name of democracy, Kinnock attacks socialists in its name. But for revolutionary socialists it has a clear class basis. Capitalist democracy is an instrument that is used by the ruling class to deceive and coerce those who they exploit and oppress. It beguiles the working class into believing that they have a say, however limited, in the running of society.

At the heart of capitalist democracy lies the bourgeois state. The role of the state in all societies is to maintain the rule of one class over another. Under capitalism we can see how the state achieves this in a number of ways. We can see the true role of the state when the police and troops are sent in to break strikes.

The state will use force and violence to maintain its suppression of the working classes. But then the state has its veil of democracy to attempt to cover up its real intentions. Parliament plays just such a role.

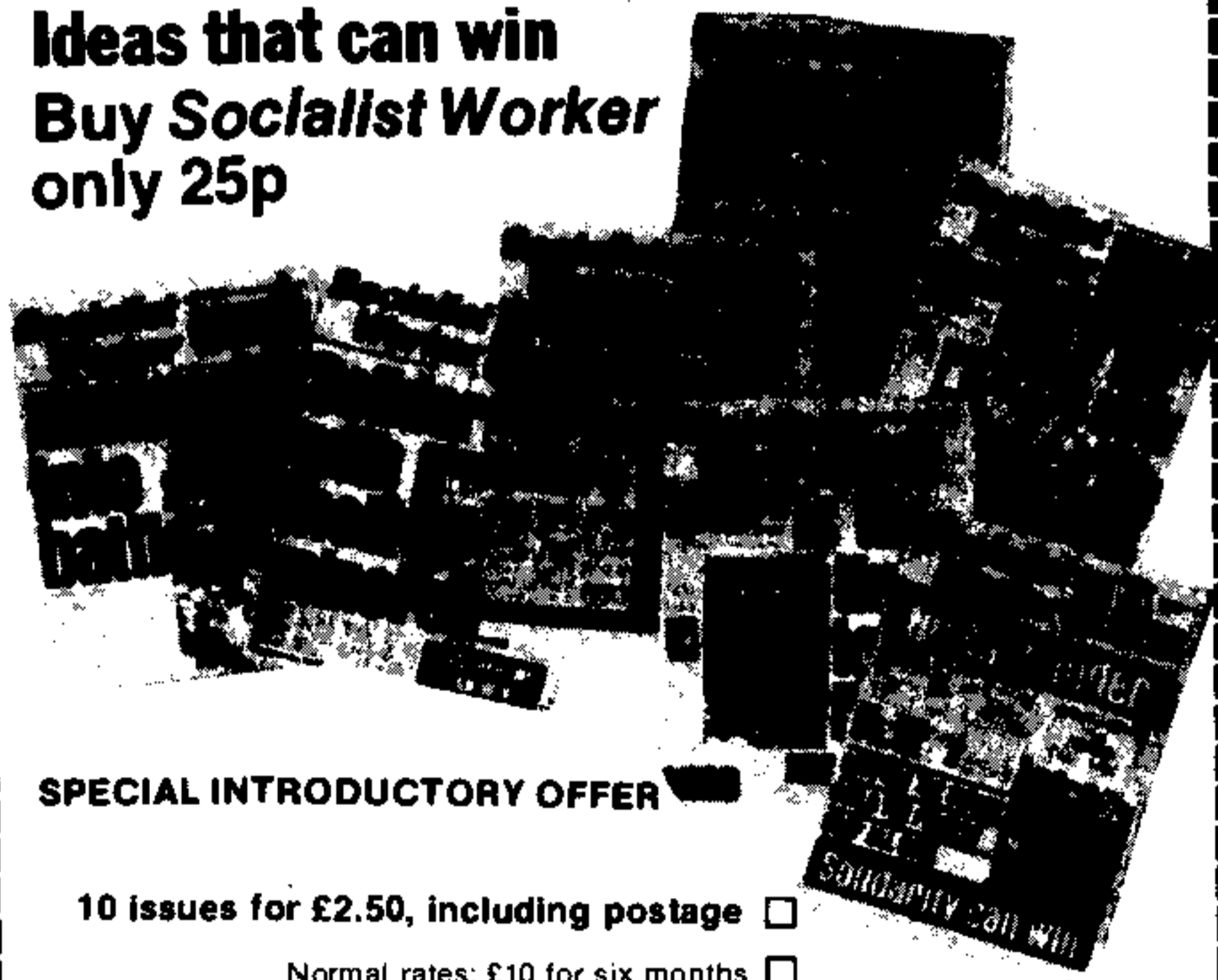
As Lenin points out, there are thousands of obstacles that prevent the working class actively participating in parliament. According to Lenin:

'The bourgeois parliaments are instruments alien to them [the working class], instruments of the oppression of the proletarians by the bourgeoisie, institutions of a hostile class, of the exploiting minority.'

Yet it is this same instrument of the ruling class that Kautsky and many others see as the key to transforming society. Kautsky argues that 'the transition (to socialism) might take place peacefully ie democratically.' For Kautsky, this change is simple. Once a majority is ensured, and as the workers are the majority, then a government will be elected and the minority (the bourgeoisie), confronted with this overwhelming opposition, will step down.

For Lenin this argument cut against all that Marx and revolutionary socialism had taught. Firstly, on a mass scale, ideas do not change without struggle. But also, it is not simply a question of majorities and minorities, but of the oppressed and oppressors, the exploited and exploiters. To pose capitalism as a system of majority and minority, and to talk of parliament as a vehicle of change, fails totally to understand the fundamental nature of capitalism

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and the state.

Lenin argues against simply pandering to capitalist democracy, but that the role of revolutionaries is to expose it as the sham that it is. The capitalist class will use the full might of the state to maintain their rule.

When deception fails, it is to the armed forces and to violence that they turn. For workers this means that they must meet violence with violence and they must be prepared in the art of insurrection if they are not to be defeated.

But Kautsky adds that violence could be necessary if the bourgeoisie try to overthrow a democratically-elected government.

This argument is fatal. For the workers will have been deceived into believing that there is a peaceful method of changing society. Workers must be prepared for struggle, one cannot simply say that all you have to do is elect us and we'll do it for you and then cry 'help' when threatened.

'The only way that socialism can begin to be created is for the workers to smash the bourgeois state. Lenin says this again and again, and quotes from Marx and Engels in reply to Kautsky. Once one understands the nature of the capitalist state with its police and troops, its instruments of deception and coercion, then the only conclusion can be that the state would have to be 'razed to the ground'. To quote Lenin:

'The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a new one which, in the words of Engels, is "no longer a state in the proper sense of the word".'

Kautsky's argument is based on utilising bourgeois democracy. He will argue to defend this not only from attacks by the capitalist classes, but from the workers too. For Kautsky never saw the soviet system in Russia as a means of workers running society for themselves. He saw the soviets as combat organisations, workers organised to fight off attacks on their conditions but never as a replacement for parliament.

It is again a question of class democracy. For Lenin the soviets were the highest form of democracy, for they enabled workers to participate in the running of the society at all levels with complete accountability to them.

But the fact is that once workers have taken power, it is highly likely that the old ruling class will try to overturn it by force. The task of the new society will be to ensure the dictatorship of the proletariat. As Lenin put it:

'The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws.'

It is exactly this problem of how to maintain workers' power against threats from the old ruling class that many socialists in Britain today ignore. Yet history demonstrates time and again that Lenin's arguments against Kautsky are entirely relevant today. ■

Frieda Smith

Key lessons

NOBODY ever learned much in our class at school. It all seemed so pointless, like glorified *Trivial Pursuits*.

Geography was about faraway places that exported bananas and jute (never did find out what that was). Nothing to do with us. History had all happened a long time ago and had now stopped. Nothing was going to change any more.

We were taught as if the world was a distant object we spied on for facts. It was knowledge for its own sake.

Education for socialists is different. For socialists knowledge is not hard, useless facts but a flexible weaponry. Geography is about us, the international working class, and how we are fighting. History is about now, because we rip it from the text-books and put it to work for us in our struggles.

'Education for Socialists' is also the title of a new series of booklets produced by the Socialist Workers Party. They are designed to be used by SWP branches in their education groups for newer members to help kick off a discussion.

The first in the series is called *Marxism and the Modern World*, and it's all about geography and history.

It deals with five related topics, reprinting articles from *Socialist Worker*, *Socialist Review* and *International Socialism*, and opens with Mike Haynes on 'Imperialism'.

Drawing on Nikolai Bukharin's classic analysis, Haynes explains exactly what we mean by imperialism and how it helps us to understand the world today.

The longest contribution is on state capitalism. Peter Binns takes Marx's definition of capitalism and proceeds to demolish the myth that Russia is, in any sense, socialist. He explains why the revolution went wrong and how the Russian economy 'is like one big factory'.

The theory of state capitalism is essential for anyone who's been told to go back to Russia, and it's vital in arguments with serious socialists who've been misled by 'the great lie'.

Chris Harman takes up the theme in 'Imperialism: East and West', which deals with the question of whether there is such a thing as Russian imperialism. Originally written in 1980, the article sets the scene in which the clash between the two major world powers would later lead to the invasions of Afghanistan and Grenada.

Our attitude to national liberation movements is something that often crops up, and John Molyneux does the theoretical groundwork for what should be an interesting discussion in 'National oppression and national liberation movements'. He argues that, though we should give unconditional support to all genuine struggles against imperialist ruling

classes, we must be ready with hard criticism of those movements.

Finally, Chris Bambery gives a lucid account of the real way forward for those struggles in his article on 'Permanent Revolution'. More than ever, he says, we need Trotsky's insight that only the working class can change the world.



The ideas contained in these five short pieces have largely been developed by socialists since Marx in response to the needs of a changing world. Yet we can still say that they're at the heart of Marxist theory, true to the principle that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class. There are times when every socialist finds it difficult to hold on to such a principle. Education is the key to making that grasp firm.

With each of the SWP's new education packs costing just 25p, there's no excuse for anyone ducking class. They are weapons in the struggle, so use them, and remember—a little learning can be a dangerous thing. ■

Phil Mellows

Marxism and the Modern World
SWP 25p

A world of chaos

RAN IS the latest film by 75 year old film director Akira Kurosawa, perhaps best known in this country for his Japanese 'western' *The Seven Samurai*. It shows that Kurosawa has lost none of his technical skills or imaginative power.

The old warlord, Hidetora, decides in the opening scene to divide his conquests up among his three sons whom he expects to remain united. His youngest son condemns Hidetora's stupidity in forgetting the cut-throat (literally) atmosphere in which the sons have been reared. He is banished for his ingratitude.

The other two sons soon proceed to find their father an insufferable nuisance, slaughter his retainers and plot against each other for supremacy.

Lord Hidetora, emerging from the burning tower in which all his followers have died, stumbles madly across the land he had ruled. He is accompanied only by his 'fool', the jester who mocks his fate. The landscape is deserted (the peasants have all fled). For the first time he begins to see the natural beauty of the land he has ruled so blindly.

Ran is a long, extremely violent film with scenes of mass murder and decapitation, whose only sympathetic characters are ineffectual victims of the carnage. Why should socialists bother to see it?

There are two reasons. One is that *Ran* is an adaptation into a Japanese setting (The Age of Civil Strife of the 16th Century) of one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, *King Lear*.

The other is that the film is superbly conceived and executed. The succession of poetic images in *King Lear* becomes in the film a series of stunning visual images.

Unable to rely on the weather to produce a storm of sufficient intensity to match Shakespeare's famous scene, Kurosawa gives us instead a 'storming' of the tower as the setting for Hidetora's descent into madness.

For many critics the film succeeds because Shakespeare was dealing with universal truths—the insatiable lust for power by those who have once had a taste of it, or the susceptibility of old men to flattery. Even the *Guardian's* Derek Malcolm could talk of Kurosawa's handling of 'eternal verities'.

That is all so much nonsense. Shakespeare's *Lear* reflected the disintegration of medieval England in the preceding century, as the feudal ruling class tore itself apart in the Wars of the Roses, and the rise of the market and trade undermined the traditional social order.

It is a world in which certainties of an order which changed only imperceptibly over centuries have disappeared, and in

which age no longer means wisdom but a blindness to the new. It is a world of flux in which, 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; They kill us for their sport.' (The quote is from the play, but a similar line is screamed by the fool in the film.)

The play's recurrent images of blindness and sight, madness and sanity, express a world 'turned upside down', in which appearances deceive as they no longer correspond to reality.

Marx would use the same imagery to describe the emergence of a new bourgeois order in which the true relations of production are concealed by the world of buying and selling.

Kurosawa's adaptation of the play (as with his equally brilliant version of *Macbeth* in *Throne of Blood*) can work only because of the close parallels between the England of the 16th century and the 'Age of Civil Strife' in Japan at the same period. He makes one necessary change. Lear's daughters become sons, because no Japanese warlord would, it seems, ever have left his possessions to women.

But a woman, the villainous Lady Kaede, is central to the film. As a young girl she had witnessed the slaughter of her own family by Hidetora, before being married to one of his sons.

She humiliates and then seduces her husband's brother and murderer. Yet, as she says, the alternative is her own complete exclusion from power, despite being stronger and more able than any of the men.

Lady Kaede's 'evil' is perfectly explic-

able by her situation.

If both *King Lear* itself and *Ran* can have such a powerful impact today it is because we too are living in an age of 'civil strife' and chaos (the original title for the film). We are witnessing the decay of capitalism, as Shakespeare witnessed the decay of feudalism.

Ran is not an entirely satisfactory film. The battlescenes are too long and gory for my taste. Personally I prefer Kurosawa at his more personal and less spectacular, in films such as *Ikiru* (Living) and *Derzu Uzala*.

Those films focussed on individuals struggling, fighting back against a hostile, uncomprehending world. In *Ran* the characters are all like the insect crushed by Lady Kaede like 'flies to wanton boys'. We are left unmoved by their fate.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* ended with the re-establishment of order. Kurosawa offers us no such comfort.

In a recent interview with Arena, the BBC arts programme, Kurosawa said,

'Well I expressed my opinion about human society in *Ran*. Human beings have been stupidly repeating the same mistakes since the beginning of history... The question arises: what does human evolution and development mean to us? Perhaps development in society means simply the development of arms for Armageddon?'

Kurosawa is not a Marxist. He is an honest witness but not an advocate of revolutionary change. He can imagine the world's destruction. He cannot imagine a world in which we control our own destiny.

Yet his own struggle over forty years to shape and transmit his vision of the world is an example to us. Kurosawa is one of the great film directors of the 20th century. ■

Pete Green



Hidetora—the Japanese Lear

Driving a wedge?

The recent Red Wedge tour was very successful, but provoked controversy among socialists.

Martin Hewes from the Redskins and Julie Waterson went along to the Labour Party headquarters to interview Paul Bower, Red Wedge's 30 year old national co-ordinator. He has been with Red Wedge since moving from Sheffield to London last September.

HOW successful do you think Red Wedge has been since its formation over a year ago in reaching young people with new ideas?

IN terms of the tour that we've done and the people who've written in, I think politically we've had an effect, people want to know more. Eight and a half thousand people have written in who have been either motivated, inspired or just plain curious.

The bottom line of how successful our first tour was is that we raised political issues and got some people talking about politics on some kind of level. People who normally wouldn't have been exposed to any form of political debate at all.

A lot of people are very alienated from politics or don't have any idea that they can change anything—whether parliamentary change or through revolutionary politics. So I think we've succeeded in that—in bringing politics from the edge of people's lives into the centre.

But obviously you can't overestimate it. There's nobody sitting around in Red Wedge slapping each other on the back saying, 'We've changed Thatcherite apathy in young people, and now they're all raving reds'.

DO you think you've changed what people's perception of politics is?

I THINK we might have inspired quite a few young people, we might have made politics look more exciting.

People have got to be motivated by politics, they've got to think it's not only possible but exciting.

It's my belief that in this modern world you've got to inspire people's emotions first and appeal to their intellect second.

I think historically great socialist movements first and foremost have sprung out of a desire to change things. The political analysis and the tactics for doing that generally come second.

Red Wedge is an appeal to the hearts and the emotions and then it's an appeal to the intellect. Then we'd hope that people would take a hold of that emotion and then go and get involved in the issues and in self-education.

Some people don't like Red Wedge on the left and on the right. Because they see politics as 'their territory' and they don't want any of the trivialisation of politics.

DON'T you think that stems from what your definition of 'politics' is? There can be a dislike of the left towards Red Wedge but isn't that because there's a difference in your political perception of how you're trying to direct people—towards the Labour Party, towards what's seen as quite uncritical support for Neil Kinnock?

WE have our ears burnt by the right and the left of the Labour Party.

The recent cabaret tour it was specifically critical of not only Neil Kinnock but the whole Labour leadership. We had MPs having babies in the audience.

I don't think we are uncritical of Neil Kinnock. From a pragmatic point of view we want to see the return of a Labour government because we don't think that anybody can afford another term of Thatcherism.

We don't think another term of Thatcherism will revolutionise people. I'm terrified it would help fascism both in terms of the National Front and the British Movement and in terms of the neo-fascists on the right of the Tory Party.

It's not uncritical support for the Labour Party. We want people not only to vote Labour but to get involved in the labour movement. We also work with the trade unions.

There's many people in Red Wedge who are very critical of the Labour Party—me for one, although I am a member while most people aren't. But there's also people like Robert Wyatt and Simon Booth, both of whom are members of the Communist Party.

On the left at the moment there's this absurd Kinnock obsession. For men and women who are meant to believe that politics are not the work of great men, I find this astonishing.

WHAT do you feel about the fact that at the moment the leadership of the Labour Party are saying that 'we don't want socialists in this party'?

THERE are two issues. One is Militant and the second is the constitution.

The issue of how you organise in the Labour Party—constitutionally—should also apply to the rightwing, although unfortunately it never has.

Look at the spurious reasons they used for expelling the people in Birmingham for their support for black sections. Look at the people they've expelled from London Labour Briefing. My attitude, and I think the vast majority of people in Red Wedge would support this, is that I'm in principle opposed to all expulsions for ideological reasons. However expulsions for abuse of the constitution is another matter.

I think there's certain sections of the



MARXISM & CULTURE

Labour Party which aren't socialist. Never have been and never will be because of the very foundations of the party were being about getting representation in parliament. There's always going to be a state of war and they are always going to want to steer the Labour Party away from socialism.

I think socialists should stay and fight that rather than leave the Labour Party.

ON that basis would it not follow you should also, as a socialist, support other socialists who are fighting?

YOU mean why didn't Red Wedge come out fully in support of Militant?

NOT only that, but also Liverpool Council.

I THINK the attitude towards Liverpool Council is that we didn't want to get involved in something we didn't understand.

When we went up to Liverpool we invited Derek Hatton to the comedy tour and he didn't turn up. Terry Fields did turn up.

But I don't like people acting as prima donnas, whether it's Hatton or Callaghan.

We did honour our commitment to play Liverpool in the main tour. We did so in March.

WE believe that Liverpool Council, and its leaders, are being attacked from the rightwing for being socialists and fighting the Tories. We think there is an overall move to the right inside the Labour Party to prepare for the next general election.

I SEE what you mean but it was the acts who decided what to do and a lot of people didn't like Militant's attitude to the black community and the 31,000 redundancies.

On the executive committee of 16 there's three people who have a direct involvement in the Labour Party and the rest are acts and managers. They decide.

The acts did feel that they didn't think we should come out wholeheartedly and support Liverpool Council and give support to the actions of the council which were dictated inside Militant at that time.

BUT isn't it true that in rightwing controlled councils the decisions are made in the same way—by the District Labour Party?

THEY would do. And by the same token

we wouldn't come out and support them either.

There are certain things that we would come out and support wholeheartedly, and damn the consequences.

THAT'S the difference isn't it? A nice, friendly rightwing Labour council wouldn't be attacked by Neil Kinnock. But when it's socialists taking a position to stand up and fight, as they did in Liverpool, you get Kinnock attacking them.

WHAT about the 31,000 people who got redundancy notices. Didn't that bother you?

OF course we disagree with some of the tactics as we've outlined in *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review*.

BUT that in a nutshell is why Red Wedge didn't do a Defend Militant or Defend Liverpool Council gig. And that was coming from the acts.

IT seems that you oppose expulsions in theory, but in practice you do something different by your attitude towards Militant.

YOU'D be better asking the acts.

Red Wedge is an artists' initiative. It's an organisation which wants to use culture and the media to spread socialist ideas in a more accessible way. Specifically to young people, using the language of youth.

The acts' attachment to the Labour Party—with the exception of Billy Bragg who's a member—is a practical one.

The acts are Red Wedge. I'm not.

RED Wedge does reach young people but it takes place in the background of the witch hunt of Militant and the existence of a Labour Party youth section. Red Wedge does look to be a cynical manoeuvre by Kinnock to stab Militant's control of the LPYS.

RED Wedge does oppose now, and will and would oppose, any attempt to disband the LPYS. Although the vast majority of people in Red Wedge probably think that Militant's control of the LPYS is not a healthy one. I personally oppose Militant because I think many of their policies are reactionary.

There will always be the risk in Red Wedge, particularly from the right inside the Labour party who see everything in terms of electioneering, that they want us to be pop stars for Labour. That's not the intention. It's never going to be like that.

There are some people on the right who would want it to be like that, who want us to be a replacement for the LPYS. But having met far too many good people involved in the LPYS, some Militant some not, we would have no part of that. It would be counter-productive.

The size of the left-wing youth movements inside Britain is pathetic. The LPYS, the Communist Party youth, compared to say, Italy, it's distressing.

We won't go along with some sort of organisational trick to undermine Militant's influence in the LPYS. You've got

to oppose people on ideas and not organisation.

RED Wedge originated from the miners' strike. So what is your position on disputes now, say, the print workers?

WE'VE already raised money for them. Billy Bragg has been down on the picket line. I've not yet. We're supportive.

But we've got no lines drawn in Red Wedge. If we did that people would fall away.

RED Wedge is not specific enough. To say you want the election of a Labour government is not enough because you can't envisage what people are going to be supporting when the time comes.

WE'RE socialists first and Labour supporters second.

But we are unique because we have an association with a political party. Even if it's an intentionally loose association. And it's the loosest association the Labour Party has ever allowed. Normally it's controlled from the word go.

KINNOCK has a reason for doing that. He knows the gigs attract youth and you're encouraging them to vote Labour.

I JOINED the Labour Party out of a desire to see injustice righted. It's corny I know but I think that's what many people in Red Wedge are like. They've joined because of personal experience and by practical considerations.

ONE thing about Britain is that it does offer a fairly healthy music scene. You do have a relative diversity and also you tend to get a lot of people in the music scene taking a left stand, and that's quite important. But Red Wedge looks to be a move to the right.

I CAN see why you might think that and you might have a point.

But my first hand experience is of people who aren't rightwing. I don't see it as a move to the right.

You say a 'move to the right', you have to be more specific. Red Wedge starts off with an admission of failure of the rest of the left's inability to communicate with young people.

That's a debate amongst socialists.

BUT sometimes our ideas do have a resonance with young people, depending on the objective circumstances.

I THINK the Redskins do have a unique role to play because they're on the left of the Labour Party after Rock Against Racism. You're the exception rather than the rule.

But do you think you change anything by standing outside a factory selling papers—especially since less and less people are either at work or on strike they have no experience of mass action.

Youth are literate in sound and vision. It's a different way of receiving information.

Although the SWP's paper has always looked snappier, it's still about strikes and struggle.

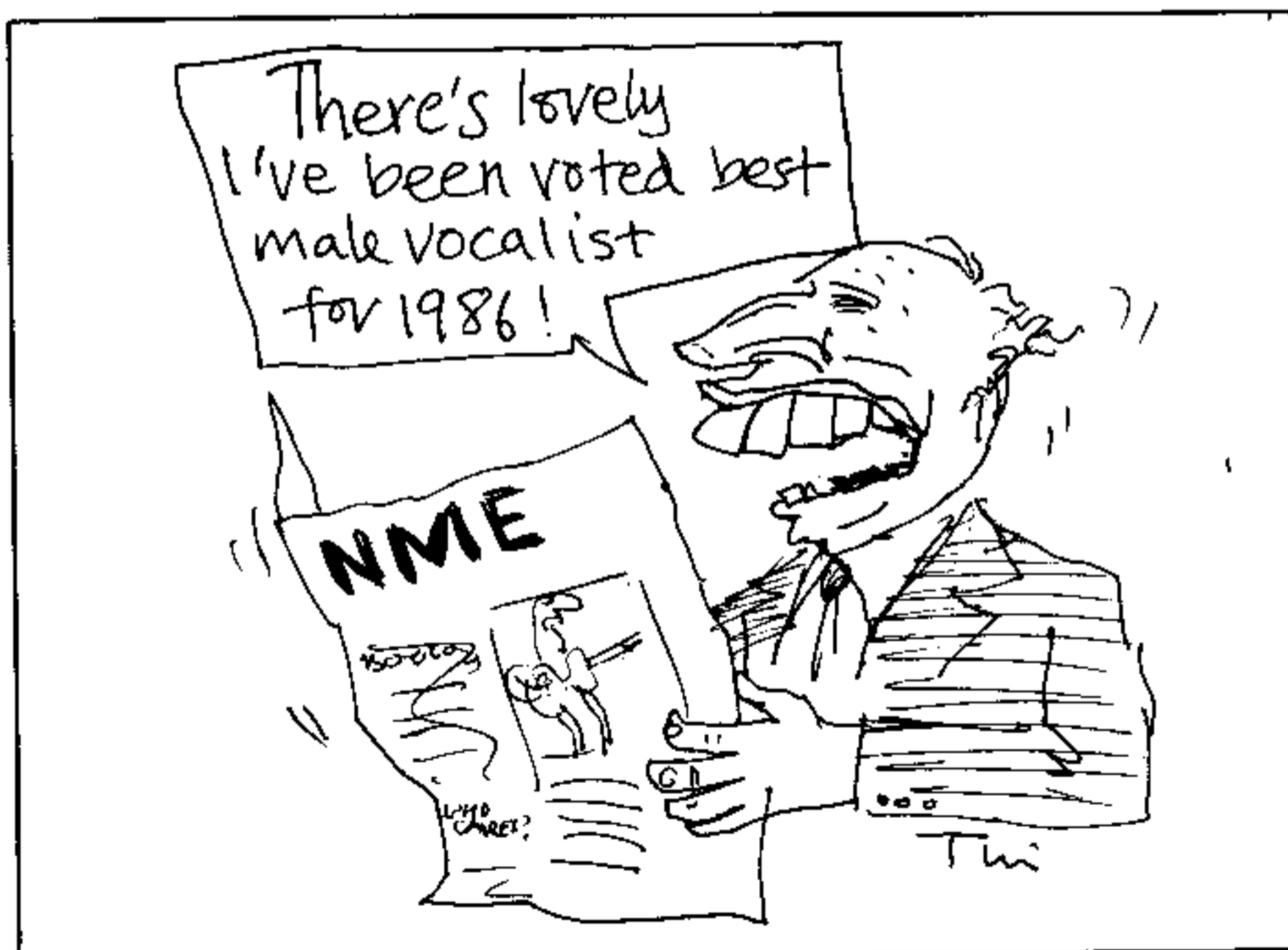
YOU say Red Wedge is about inspiring people's emotions and then injecting ideas, but people's emotions are at their highest when they're fighting.

I'D agree. But what are you as revolutionaries going to do about those people who are no longer in a position where they can strike? What about the kids who are leaving school this year?

It's difficult to inspire people about strikes who have never worked before.

The revolutionary left is still making judgements about a world that no longer exists, that of mass organised labour. That's different from saying that the working class has lost its power—I don't believe they have.

I don't deny class exists. But we need to look for new methods of getting across the message that the working class can change the world. ■



The left disarmed

Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front
Ed Jim Fyrth
Lawrence and Wishart £5.95

THE Popular Front is usually associated with the year 1936. Yet its roots lie in the working class defeats of the preceding years—and overwhelmingly in the rise of fascism in Germany three years earlier.

This massive working class defeat led the Communist Parties away from their shunning of other workers parties into an understanding that a broader front against fascism had to be formed.

But it led them into alliances with all sorts of parties who had an interest in opposing fascism, but little or no interest in working class struggle. It led them to class collaboration.

The Popular Front was launched at the seventh congress of the Comintern in 1935 by the Bulgarian Dimitrov.

The strategy was attractive for millions of workers stunned by the rise of fascism and fearful of the prospect of war. 1936 was to see the strategy put into action.

In Spain and France the election of Popular Front governments raised the expectations of workers.

Workers in Spain struck on a massive scale. Poor labourers seized the land. When in July 1936 Franco and the rightwing military rose up, workers in the major cities and in much of the countryside fought back, commencing the Civil War and a far-reaching revolutionary movement.

In France, workers occupied their factories in the summer of 1936.

In both countries, the Popular Front government—and those like the Communist Parties who backed them—did little to further these struggles.

In Spain as workers seized arms from local barracks and fought on the streets, the government told its supporters that first there had been no military rising, and second to act only constitutionally. They were only forced to fight through pressure from below and the threat of annihilation from Franco.

In France the CP argued for workers occupying their factories to place their faith in change from above. Leon Blum, the new president of the republic, granted reforms but refused to meet the demands of French workers.

The Popular Front strategy, far from defeating fascism, presided over its consolidation. Far from building the confidence and organisation of workers it led to further defeats.

Yet the theory of the Popular Front has undergone a resurrection. This book is a further attempt by the British Communist



Communist women's militia, Valencia 1936

Party to justify a period in its history which by any standards was an abysmal failure.

Their analysis depends on attacks upon the CPs previous strategy—that of the Third Period, when the CPs cut themselves off from workers of other socialist parties in sectarian isolation. Reformist workers, so the theory went, were objectively as bad as fascists. Instead of uniting to defeat fascism, the CPs remained aloof.

The book's interpretation of this period is not wrong as far as it goes. Where it does go drastically wrong is to suggest that the Popular Front was the only possible alternative to complete sectarianism. Leading from this it ignores or denigrates the alternative put at the time by Trotsky. In some of his finest writings he warned of the danger of German Communists allowing the growth of fascism through refusing to

unite with other workers' parties. He called for a united front, to join workers in action to defeat fascism.

After the rise of Hitler, Trotsky warned of both the danger of fascism, and the Popular Front.

The united front, as proposed by Trotsky was based on the understanding that the workers' fight against fascism needed to turn into a struggle against the capitalist system. In such a struggle workers could not subordinate their interests to those of other classes. To do so would only lead to defeat.

In order to defend the record of the Popular Front, the CP is forced to attack Trotsky's writings. Indeed the whole collection, although it takes many side-swipes at pro-Stalinists, contains a number of attacks on the Trotskyist analysis.

Monty Johnstone's essay attacks Trotsky for being unrealistic in his aims of workers' revolution.

'If the workers' organisations had in reality tried to seize power in this way [that is in the way Trotsky advocated—LG], they might well have enjoyed (temporary) success in the industrial towns, but at the cost of alienating the wider support at home and abroad.'

But what did not alienating wider support mean? It meant in Spain subordinating the needs of Spanish workers to the needs of Stalin's foreign policy and in particular his wish for alliances with the bourgeois governments in Britain and France. That meant doing nothing which would alienate those governments, such as workers taking over factories and arming themselves. It meant fighting a conventional war against Franco and delaying any talk of revolution until the Franco war was won. The tactic was devastating. As Trotsky predicted, the poor workers and peasants would not fight indefinitely for a Spain where property remained in the hands of the landlords and the industrialists. Their dreams of revolution were brutally crushed by supporters of the government—most zealously by the CP. Once the revolution was destroyed, the defeat of the left in the war and the triumph of fascism were assured.

To Stalin and the Communist Parties the main aim became the crushing of any revolutionary movement. The Popular Front marked the way the CPs were to view revolutionary movements in the forties, as was to be seen in Greece after the war.

Today the CP would like to resurrect the Popular Front as a means of defeating 'Thatcherism'. If the first Popular Front resulted in tragedy for millions of workers in the 30s and 40s, attempts to resurrect it today by the minute British CP have all the elements of farce.

Nonetheless the experience shows that far from it showing a path to victory, the Popular Front was the means by which a generation was disarmed and led to defeat. ■

Lindsey German

Symbol of resistance

Nelson Mandela
Mary Benson
Penguin

THE DENIAL of even the most elementary forms of human dignity, the brutality with which the South African state crushes resistance and the persecution, often arbitrary, dished out to non-whites generally and the few whites who have supported the struggle for freedom, are all vividly conveyed in this book.

Take the example of Brian Fucher, a widely respected lawyer who defended Mandela at his treason trial in 1963, and who died of cancer in 1975 while serving a life sentence. After his funeral the authorities demanded that his ashes be returned to jail.

Nelson Mandela emerges from this biography as a man of enormous stature, the very personification of resistance to injustice. His unquenchable optimism and determination are shown in extracts from speeches and letters.

The starting point for any assessment of Mandela is unreserved applause for the heroism and dedication of the man.

The book however brings to light some political problems, though more by default than design, as Benson's aim is anything but a critique of the politics of Mandela and the African National Congress.

The fundamental issue facing anyone fighting for freedom in South Africa is how will liberation be achieved, who will lead it and who will benefit from it? Throughout his political career Mandela has demonstrated both his courage in the face of repression and his remarkable reasonableness within the parameters of bourgeois democracy.

Mandela is a great admirer of parliamentary democracy, equal opportunity and a supporter of the British style of government. At each turn in the struggle before his imprisonment he wanted to negotiate, seeing the mass campaigns and later the military struggle as a means to bring pressure on the white government to talk.

Of course the ANC has changed politically in the course of its development and has recently responded to the rising tide of black working class resistance. Mandela himself has moved from anti-communism in the late 40's to defending the Communist Party as an honourable fighter against apartheid. But he has only moved so far. At his treason trial he said:

'The CP sought to emphasise class distinctions, whilst the ANC seeks to

harmonise them. This is a vital distinction.'

When Mandela talks of his belief in socialism he refers to the 'socialism' of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania or Kaunda in Zambia—not the idea of the self-activity of the working class.

Although written in 1985, the book takes no account of mass strikes. Benson's politics do not lead in that direction.

In spite of its shortcomings the book is worth a read just for inspiring a gut hatred of the South African regime. Also by showing that in spite of the most vicious repression resistance burns on, the book is valuable and inspiring.■

Mike Fitzgerald

The liberation of leisure

Cheap Amusements
Cathy Peiss
Temple University Press

THE WORKING class, and working class women in particular, are frequently portrayed as culturally barren, their leisure activities being copied and simplified from those of the more creative middle class.

This fascinating book shows the nonsense of this idea, recording the leisure activities of women in New York during the period around the turn of the century. It shows women's view of themselves changing as immigrant communities became 'Americanised' and young women were increasingly drawn into the labour force.

The women's lives are seen as much as possible through their own eyes, or those of contemporary middle class reformers, although these tend to impose their own moral judgements. One comments of shop girls at Macy's store: 'There was enough indecent talk to ruin any girl in her teens who might be put at work on that floor.'

The women themselves, however, appear to have had little time for such concerns, being more interested in finding a 'good time'.

Again and again Peiss records the manic enthusiasm with which they approached dancing, dress, drink and all the greater social and sexual freedoms allowed by their relative economic independence.

Such freedom usually lasted just for the few years between the dominance of parents and that of a husband.

Peiss closes lamenting that the women's desire for 'self-determined pleasure, sexuality, and autonomy' was driven to simply linking self-fulfilment and consumerism. She puts forward the

demand for women's leisure as a feminist demand.

This seems limiting as the drive of the book has been to show that women's diverse and creative cultural expression has at all stages been regulated by their economic circumstances: that as pastimes become popular they become commercialised. That in the end the demand for the liberation of leisure is linked to liberation from capitalism.■

Ken Olende

The best birthday present

Fifty years of the UAW—From Sit-Downs to Concessions
John Anderson
ISO Publications £1.75

IF YOU are an active trade unionist, been on strike in the past ten years or ever worry about how you will be able to lead a struggle in your workplace you should read John Anderson's short pamphlet.

Before I read it I knew the American Communist Party had the most awful Stalinist politics but thought they were hot-shot trade union organisers in the legendary CIO organising drives of the 1930s. Bullshit! When you read this eye witness account of the strikes, sit-downs, mass pickets—everything we are fighting against now was going on then.

It was the rank and file that made the union in the teeth of the left bureaucrats and CP careerists. New realism? At the height of the factory occupations (1936-7) this is what John Anderson describes:

'Reuther, it seems, used the CP to get votes and influence in the UAW—and used the Socialist Party to gain 'respectability'. John L Lewis used the CP in a similar manner—hired them as organisers and then turned on them. The CP's own politics during this period and through the war made it easier to isolate the left when the trade union bureaucrats initiated the post-war witch hunts.'

During the General Motors sit-downs the strikers were given no guidance from the 'leadership'. They were even ordered by officials to evacuate plants so the strikers wouldn't be there when their officials rushed in the compromises and sell-outs.

As soon as the strikes were over the splits in the UAW broke open.

All of this could have made this pamphlet depressing. But every page of John Anderson's writing is an argument for the revolutionary socialist alternative to sell-outs and self-inflicted defeats.

John Anderson is 80 years old on 12 May. Let's give him the only and best birthday present we can—read this pamphlet, build the revolutionary socialist alternative to Neil Kinnock here and now. ■
Sherrl Yanowitz

Culture crisis

Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration 1969-1984
 Ira Shor
 RKP £6.95

WHAT looks like dry, academic reading for educationalists turns out to be a lively and interesting book that avoids educational jargon. Shor is very illuminating on how the advances of the sixties have been pushed back by the conservative tide that culminated in the election of Reagan. The light this sheds on developments in this country is very useful.

Shor argues that from 1969 onwards there was strong and growing pressure from the right—big business, conservatives, religious fundamentalists—to reassert political and ideological control, especially on the education system which had been the focus of so much activity in the preceding ten years. This move coincided with the onset of the economic crisis.

At a local level business began to penetrate schools—companies adopted schools, provided them with obsolete equipment (which in an age of cuts schools could not refuse) and, through 'career education', put forward the message that hard work and discipline in the corporate interest lead to individual success and wealth.

Clearly there are comparisons to be made, particularly with the advent of vocational schemes into schools and YTS in this country.

Shor identifies three phases. The first is a stress on 'career education' launched in the early seventies. This naturally failed to tackle the fact that jobs were scarce, but Shor argues that it tended to shift the onus of responsibility—and guilt—onto young people and their private 'failure', fragmenting any resistance.

The second stage was a literacy scare, based on erroneous facts. This suggested that young people and indeed the nation were being let down by schools who were failing to teach the basic 'three r's'.

This led to the final stage in which the combination of basics and careers education gets more and more complicated, as the number of jobs and the possibilities of

advancement get less and less. Consequently, both students and teachers are on 'performance strike'. The task is to turn this passive resistance into something more positive.

Inevitably, the weakest part of this book is its conclusions. There is a long list of proposals regarding the opening up of education, increased choice within the system, anti-racist and anti-sexist policies and so on, and any socialist would support these as a matter of course. The problem is in their implementation. Shor admits that a fundamental reform of 'the corporate-military economy' is necessary, but doesn't attempt to explain how this could be effected. The book is, however, a very good analysis of what is happening in American and, by implication, British schools and society. ■

Janet Wolf

Support for some

Understanding Abortion
 Mary Pipes
 Women's Press £3.95

IF YOU are educated, middle class and the kind of person likely to seek help and advice from books then this handbook on abortion could prove useful to you.

It deals in great detail with the whole process of having an abortion—from discovering you are pregnant to dealing with the feelings afterwards.

The author states that she has written the book from a 'feminist viewpoint' and supports, like us, a woman's right to choose.

The factual information in the book is liberally supplemented with quotes from

women surveyed about their feelings and experiences on having an abortion. It is not clear what attempts to get a cross section of women were made, but the majority of quotes seem to be from younger, middle-class, unmarried women.

This means that problems faced by working class women, especially in areas with poor facilities, are ignored. It does not deal with the problems of having a number of children, struggling on a low income, in poor housing or when having another child may be the last straw. Having to face that with, say, a Catholic upbringing, is outside this book's comprehension.

Neither does it deal with problems of very young women who find it hard to get advice on contraception, let alone abortion, and who can face enormous pressure from their family to have the child.

The assumption throughout the book is of women who have women friends they can turn to for support and a middle class or white collar and independent lifestyle. In other words it implicitly excludes a large proportion of women.

Some parts of the book are interesting though. The first chapter, on 'Discovering you are pregnant', points out that for large numbers of women the contraceptives available are totally inadequate.

Thousands of women become pregnant in spite of trying everything they can to avoid it. Even today there is a tremendous stigma attached to an unwanted pregnancy. A woman is often made to feel it is her fault, that she is irresponsible and ought to accept the consequences.

For those who have had an abortion and still feel confused or unhappy about it, or those who want to know more about abortion—how to get one and what to expect—the book could be helpful.

The chapter on the history of abortion is both accurate and informative.

It is sad and annoying that the women who most need this type of information will be unlikely even to see it, and that the book has been written without them in mind, and written in such a way as to exclude them. ■

Nicki Sellars

Nicaragua:

REVOLUTION UNDER SIEGE

by Mike Gonzalez

Judge by the reaction of the U.S. and the Nicaraguan revolution is a Marxist threat on a par with Joe Stalin. According to its supporters, it is a socialist revolution 'of a new type'. Beneath these highly-coloured reactions, what is really happening in Nicaragua? Has mass involvement in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship been translated into mass democracy? What are the political effects of the US blockade and military threat?

★ £1.95 from SWP branch bookstalls and left book shops, or by post (add 30p postage) from BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE.

Ireland's Permanent Revolution

By Chris Bambery

Available from SWP branch bookstalls and BOOKMARKS, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London, N4 2DE.

Not too popular

IT'S GOOD to see an article like Chris Harman's (April *SWR*) which seriously attempts to take up the question of formulating a Marxist cultural politics. Much of what he says I agree with, but there is a dangerous elitist trend in his arguments for struggle in the sphere of 'high art'.

He is wrong to argue that art aimed at the upper classes can effectively challenge aspects of existing society. So called 'high art' is the preserve of an intellectual elite and appeals to their sensibilities and cultural and educational background.

There is nothing revolutionary about art to which only the dominant class have access and which the working class and other oppressed groups are cut off from. Art can only effectively deepen our insight into capitalist society and its exploitative and contradictory character if it is popular and accessible to us.

Chris Harman's view is that we should direct people towards the 'high art' of people like Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Stendhal, Balzac, Beethoven, Sartre and so on! But what makes their art better than popular art (only bourgeois aesthetic criteria), and how can people be expected to gain insights from art like this which panders to the feelings and culture of the ruling class and is inaccessible and meaningless to most of us?

As Harman himself recognises, bourgeois 'high art' is alien to the mass of workers who are denied the time and cultural background to relate to it.

Popular culture is no worse than high culture and more importantly it is popular and accessible to the working class. Obviously we can't build an anti-capitalist culture within capitalism but the left can create popular socialist art which contradicts dominant ideology, which is available and accessible to the working class and which works towards a progressive collective socialist consciousness.

The point of intervention for effective political struggle, therefore, should be in popular culture, not in 'high art'. It should be in culture which the working class relate to and not in art which, whatever its merits, is only available to a small intellectual elite in the dominant class. ■

Luke Martell
York

CHRIS HARMAN, in his article on culture (April *SWR*), defines popular art as an expression of, and an influence over, people's wider experiences. Fine. But he then defines attempts to establish a socialist version of this art as grandiose schemes doomed to failure until society is in a state of pre-revolutionary ferment.

He is probably not saying that there is little value in the expression of socialist ideas. Therefore he is apparently viewing 'art' as distinct from other social interaction, despite his earlier definition. Apart from being inconsistent, this is an extremely bourgeois attitude.

Surely the issue is not whether we challenge the culture of the ruling class in its own terms, as Harman seems to be suggesting. Lenin said that art should unite the emotions, the thoughts and the will of the people. The only hope of reaching a state of pre-revolutionary ferment is if we express and communicate by whatever means are available, as widely and as loudly as possible. ■
Andrew Squire
Glasgow

In the right wing camp?

WHAT possible justification is there for the Redskins' refusal to take part in Red Wedge?

The only logical conclusion to draw is that if we don't support Red Wedge then we don't favour the return of a Labour government.

It seems fairly basic to the SWP's politics that we want a Kinnock government in order to demonstrate in practice how useless he is.

What appears to bother the Redskins is that leading Wedgers Paul Weller and Billy Bragg both harbour illusions in Kinnock. They are anxious to differentiate themselves.

The result is Chris Dean sitting round the same side of the table as a Tory MP in a debate in *Melody Maker*. This is a case of how ultra-leftism can place you in the right wing camp.

We are not trying to convince Weller and Bragg any more than we are Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner. But do the Redskins think that the Red Wedge audience is made up of die-hard Kinnockites clutching Roy Hattersley's latest speech in their palms?

Within the relatively small number of Red Wedge followers interested in politics are a number open to our ideas. Unfortunately we cannot afford the luxury of throwing away this audience as the Redskins would have us do.

Last week at Sheffield Poly the Red Wedge comedy tour featured Skint Video. Apart from brilliantly taking the piss out of Kinnock they pointed out his betrayal of the miners and his votes-at-any-price politics.

Why can't the Redskins do likewise on the Red Wedge tour? ■
Greg Challis
Sheffield

One step forward...

THE discussion on positive discrimination in recent months has been alright as far as it has gone. But while there are good reasons for supporting positive discrimination in principle, we also ought to say something about what it means in practice.

Positive discrimination imposed by management for political reasons but without any real attempt to win support for it on the shopfloor or fire station, can too easily result in a step backwards.

The Labour GLC were undoubtedly sincere in wanting to do something about the very narrow group that the fire service recruits from and we would certainly support a lot of what they did such as pre-entry training and selective recruitment advertising.

But what was done to try to overcome the strong reaction that such innovations created in the fire stations? Very little that really connected with the average white, male firefighter.

Officers were ordered on to racism awareness courses and for firemen it was voluntary. The only station-based effort was the steady stream of glossy pamphlets and policy statements backed up by assertions from council leaders about the need for equal opportunity policies in the service.

It's doubtful whether much of it was even read or listened to in the average fire station, let alone changed anyone's mind on the subject.

The resentment was worsened when Ken Livingstone found that he could not sack one of the men involved in the abuse of the woman firefighter at Soho through the fire service Discipline Code. He acted just like the leader of any Tory shire council and hawked the case around the lawyers to see if there was another way of dismissing the man!

We have to argue in favour of positive discrimination but at the same time insist upon a campaign at shopfloor level and that would have to involve the unions.

The treatment of women in the London Fire Brigade has had an impact in brigades throughout the country and has generally reinforced racism and sexism.

The FBU needs to be seen both locally and nationally to be prepared to take on the issues, putting its own house in order first. For a start as well as local officials arguing in the fire stations we need coverage in the union journal that presents women and blacks in a positive way, both at work and in the unions.

It is a tragedy that one of the things that the GLC could best be remembered for by firefighters is that despite its well publicised good intentions on the subject, the Council actually set the clock back on equal opportunities in the fire station. ■

Terry Segars FBU
Basildon

No easy answers

LINDSEY GERMAN attempted to clarify the socialist position on 'no platform' in her article 'Free speech for all?' (*SWR* April). She advanced the following argument.

Fascists and racists 'organise against black people and other racial minorities and [aim to] drive them off the campuses—and of course ultimately drive them out of the country altogether'. In pursuing this aim they do not use rational argument and therefore cannot be won over in debate.

Furthermore, 'they would use democratic channels to build their support, and then suppress all forms of political opposition'.

Lindsey concluded, 'it was not enough to challenge such



organisations to debate—they had to be prevented from gaining a platform to propagate their ideas’.

This formulation of our position seems to beg too many questions. Some French Communist Party mayors have organised violent attacks on Arab workers’ hostels. Should socialists therefore deny the PCF a platform?

In general, are we for denying all Stalinists a platform on the grounds they would, presumably, ‘suppress all forms of political opposition’ if they came to power? The answer to both questions is clearly no. But it is *not* clear from Lindsey’s formulation.

We cannot solve the problem by reference to abstract liberal principles; we start, as always, with the concrete interests of the working class. It is then immediately obvious that whether one fights a political opponent by argument or by force is a tactical question and not one of principle.

Where possible we aim to win workers to socialist ideas by arguing with opponents and persuading our audience that we are right. Consequently, it is pointless for socialists to deny a platform to mainstream Tory MPs in a period like the present. It would simply appear that we were incapable of answering Tory arguments. We would lose the opportunity of winning over workers influenced by those ideas.

The fascists are quite different. Their supporters have accepted wholly irrational ideas and are rarely open to rational debate. Furthermore, they are extremely dangerous; they pose an immediate threat to black people; and in the long run threaten the entire organised working class with extinction.

In a capitalist crisis they have huge growth potential, and since it is far easier to smash them when they are small and defenceless, we should set out to stop them now.

The same applies to other hardline racists. Their arguments are irrational, they have the

potential to influence large numbers, and they could inflict massive damage on the labour movement. They should be stopped from speaking.

The point is clear. Genuine free speech is not possible in a class society governed by bourgeois democracy; it will become so only in a socialist society governed by workers’ democracy.

The question for us is purely tactical: should an opponent be argued with in order to win an audience of workers towards our ideas; or does an opponent constitute a serious threat to the working class that has to be physically stopped? There is no general answer; each case has to be decided by reference to the concrete interests of the class in particular circumstances. ■

Neil Faulkner
Guildford

Letter from Peru

AFTER nine months of Alan Garcia’s populist presidency, signs are appearing of a growth of militancy among Peruvian workers. This militancy is led by the unions of the state-owned mining company Centromin-Peru. Their seven week old strike for increased wages is still holding firm as we go to press, thanks to determined picketing in the Andean mining centres of La Oroya and Cerro de Pasco.

On 31 March the teachers union SUTEP called a strike to coincide with the nationwide return to school after the summer holiday. Teachers have agreed to report to their workplaces as normal, but are refusing to actually hold classes. There has also been continuing unrest in the state bus company, Enatru-Peru.

The curfew and state of

emergency imposed in Lima and Callao in February—in response to a huge increase in terrorist activity in the capital—has been extended for a further 60 days. So the armed forces remain responsible for internal order in the metropolitan area, and the streets are patrolled daily by armoured cars, troop carriers and even tanks.

In the main, the parties of the left including the Izquierda Unita (United left) coalition—which represents a broad spectrum of left opinion—have raised little or no opposition to the state of emergency. They regard it either as a necessary measure, or as a fait accompli.

Rumours abound of a military coup, but are given little credence. In what was seen as an attempt to show solidarity and trust between government and army, Garcia last month donned military uniform to carry out the inspection of a tank regiment.

The election of Garcia’s American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) may have raised expectations, but it has done little to improve the lot of the ordinary Peruvian worker. Popular gestures such as the inauguration of dozens of ‘comedores populares’ (people’s canteens or dining rooms) in Lima and other big coastal cities, have generated a lot of publicity but have done little to dam the small but growing tide of unrest.

Meanwhile the Maoist guerilla movement, Sendero Luminoso, and the MRTA (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru) are organising energetically in the shanty towns surrounding Lima, Trujillo and Chimbote. The last month has also seen the emergence of a shadowy ultra-right terrorist group, Sendero Verde, which is believed to be composed of sacked ex-army and police officials.

Garcia is being squeezed by all sides. On the one hand are the demands of the workers’ movement to see some real gains from the government. On the other is the continuing pressure from the IMF, the World Bank and big business to solve the Peruvian crisis at the expense of the working class.

Garcia, in order to maintain his position, may be considering converting his populist rhetoric into something more substantial. But given his record so far, and his willingness to accommodate to big business and the military, this remains extremely doubtful. ■

A correspondent
Lima

What about the workers?

THE article by Mike Haynes on the recent USSR CP congress (April *SWR*) analyses the problems of the party leadership (ie the Russian ruling class) in trying to make reforms to strengthen the Russian economy.

Unfortunately the article doesn’t mention that which revolutionaries are most interested in—the working class. Committed as we are to an analysis of the USSR as a class society, surely any examination of political/economic changes happening there at the moment must look at those changes in terms of the class struggle?

In talking only about the ruling class side of the Russian class divide, Mike Haynes ignores the only potential motor for real change in Russia—the organised working class. He misses the dialectical relationship between the power of the ruling class to maintain class society (eg by the reforms detailed in the article) on the one hand, and the consciousness of the working class regarding their objective position and the possibility of changing it on the other.

The result is confusing because a sense of the USSR as capitalist isn’t developed. For example:

‘...the current system is protected by the power of vested interests at all levels of Soviet society.’

Do Russian workers have a vested interest in maintaining the current system? If so, perhaps it really is a deformed workers’ state!

In the battle to win the argument that Russia today has nothing to do with socialism and workers’ states we must be clear in our position that Russia is a capitalist class society. Mike Haynes’ article doesn’t help us with this clarity as much as it should do. ■

Hamish Cunningham
Brighton

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

Darkness at noon

NINETEEN THIRTY SIX was the year which, in France and Spain, revealed the massive potential of workers' power. But in Russia—still seen by most on the left as the homeland of socialism—it was the year which disclosed the corruption at the heart of a defeated revolution.

On 19 August a trial began in the 'October Hall'—formerly a ballroom of the nobles' club. The 150 selected spectators and the thirty foreign observers were told that the accused had plotted to kill Stalin and subvert the Russian state, in league with western espionage services.

The sixteen on trial were all veteran Communists, including Lenin's close associates Zinoviev and Kamenev.

The public trial brought repression in Stalin's Russia to a new and terrifying level. Already in the twenties open opposition had been crushed. Trotsky had been expelled from the party and

Kamenev and Zinoviev had already been on trial for giving political encouragement to terrorism. Many thousands of others had been expelled from the party in the early thirties.

The turning-point came in December 1934 when Sergei Kirov, party boss in Leningrad, was assassinated. The facts behind the murder are still obscure. Kirov was a popular figure and a potential rival to Stalin, so it is far from impossible that Stalin himself had a hand in the killing. The murder was used to install a reign of terror in the party and the state.

In order to consolidate his rule, Stalin had to exterminate all those who still represented the revolutionary tradition in the party. Of those on trial in August 1936, Smirnov had joined the party in 1899, Kamenev and Zinoviev in 1901. All three had sided with the Bolsheviks in 1903; all three had been arrested and exiled under the Tsarist regime. Between 1928 and 1934 all the members of the party, except Stalin himself and Trotsky—were put on trial.

But if Stalin was the architect of the revolution, he also destroyed his own supporters. At the 17th Party Congress in 1934—'Congress of Victors'—80 per cent of the delegates were 'victors' over the next few years.

The trials were rigged as blatant show trials. Prosecutor Vyshinsky, an expert on the law, waited till after the trial to tell the Bolsheviks, raged at the verdict: 'I demand that dogs be shot, every one of them.'

Evidence was forged, and incompetently

forged. One of the accused, Holtzman, said he had met Trotsky's son, Sedov, in Copenhagen in 1932 at the Hotel Bristol. In fact the Hotel Bristol had been demolished in 1917. (The prosecution later discovered a confectioner's shop called Bristol just round the corner from a hotel of a quite different name.)

The prosecution had little difficulty getting the death sentences it demanded. These were carried out without loss of time. Kamenev and Zinoviev were shot in degrading conditions in the prison cellars.

Two more public show trials followed. That in January 1937 had seventeen victims, including Karl Radek, a revolutionary from the age of fourteen and a colleague of Rosa Luxemburg's. At the trial twentyone were executed without formality. A report from Leningrad describes prisoners queuing up to be executed at a rate of one every five minutes. The pretext for being executed was 'anti-socialism'.

The public show trials were the tip of an immense iceberg. The massive purge of every level of society. Many perished in local trials. Many were executed without formality. A report from Leningrad describes prisoners queuing up to be executed at a rate of one every five minutes. The pretext for being executed was 'anti-socialism'. The trials were delivered in a matter of days and the reason. In the trials, the victims were arrested, interrogated and then delivered into the hands of the executioners. The figures are obviously impossible. There were probably seven or eight million arrests in the 1936-8 period.

Why did a country, which had been advancing to socialism, resort to such charges? Stalin's personal brutality, though undoubted, cannot explain such a social catastrophe. The main reasons

honesty and integrity in agriculture, culture and industry, so 'sabotage' organised by 'Trotskyists' and foreign agents had to be used as an explanation.

In retrospect, it is hard to grasp why so many on the left outside Russia believed in the trials. True, the victims produced abject 'confessions'—Zinoviev told the court: 'My defective Bolshevism became transformed into anti-Bolshevism and through



Stalin

anti-socialism.' The trials could be explained by the fact that many of the victims were party officials—understand how they had become. The trials were the last on the left. Without tiny groups there was no alternative. The trials were indispensable against Franco and the trials kept the trials.

The public relations job was done by a Labour MP and lawyer on the Labour left. Bertolt Brecht ('All the vermin, and foreign, all the vermin, national criminals and informers, living here') to Ted Willis joined

The trials proved the fallacy of the argument. Those who believed in the trials could not understand Russia's counter-revolution. Spain. The Popular Front capitalist 'friends of Russia' absolute anti-fascists who were the Russian trials. Without honesty and clarity the left was in confusion and defeat. ■

Ian Birchall