socialist worker
Review
December 1986 Issue 93 60p

Labour's political thought

Books for Xmas

The politics of sex

Paul Foot on Enoch Powell

socialist worker
Review

Edited by Lindsey German
Assisted by Jane Basset, Pat Stack, Gareth Jenkins, Andy Zebrowski, Noel Halifax, Dave Beecham, Laurence Wong, Paul Foot, Pete Binns, Simon Terry, Clare Fermont, Pete Green, Frieda Smith and Lesley Hoggart

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

Subscription rate for one year:
Britain and Ireland £8
Overseas surface £9
Europe Air £11
Elsewhere Air £14.50
(institutions add £7.50)

Cheques and postal orders payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers.

Socialist Worker Review is sent free to all prisoners on request.

ISSN 0141 2442

Printed by East End Offset Ltd (TU), London, E3.

NOTES of the month

ELECTION

Can it happen again?

WILL THATCHER win a third term of office? A few months ago the answer to that question would have been a fairly confident 'no'. Even the political commentators believed that the poor performance of the government would lead to their defeat at the polls, and their probable replacement by a Labour government.

Now even socialists, many of whom have placed all their hopes for change in the election of a Kinnock government, are worried. They fear that far from Labour winning the next election, or at worst having to make some deal with the Alliance, the next victors in the election may well be the Tories.

At least some of the opinion polls point in that direction. They give the Tories a clear lead over Labour and put the Alliance badly behind in third place. Opinion polls are, of course, notoriously unreliable and cannot be seen as a completely accurate measure of opinion.

Nonetheless, every poll seems to indicate that Labour's electoral support is stuck at around the 37-40 percent mark.

What the figures register is firstly a decline in the Alliance vote. But that decline is not benefiting Labour. Instead, it is going to the Tories and it is this which may lead to the return of another Tory government.

To many people it seems incredible that after seven years of Thatcher's rule there are still millions prepared to accept the prospect of five more years. So why is it happening?

The first problem Labour has is that it represents a declining constituency without having also built a new one.

Attitudes change in the course of struggle and it was particularly after large struggles inside the working class movement (in the 1890s and in 1910-26) that Labour's original support was developed.

Much of what are today regarded as solid Labour bases were won in those periods.

But the restructuring of the working class has meant a decline in the population in many of these old working class areas (for example the inner cities). So Labour has lost many of the old working class votes.

However, it has all too often failed to establish a corresponding base among white collar voters, and so cannot rely on their votes in the same way.

In particular this is because although there have been struggles among white collar workers, these have often come into direct conflict with Labour governments. So there has been no immediate or obvious identification with Labour.

Labour has a second problem. Since the end of the miners' strike the party has moved dramatically to the right.

This has been justified in terms of gaining votes and electoral support when people are passive. All sorts of policies have been ditched in order to present Kinnock's party as the most respectable and law abiding.

Hattersley has wooed the bankers and the City of London to this end. Kinnock presents himself as a 'reactionary' where questions of the family are concerned. The shadow cabinet is backtracking fast on questions of defence.

But here they face a contradiction. They have moved to the right to appeal to the dominant ideas at a time when workers are not fighting and therefore are open to right wing ideas.

But their moves mean that the policies of the Labour Party on most major questions are indistinguishable from those of the Alliance or even the Tories. Nowhere was this more evident than when Nigel Lawson's financial statement (see over)

Another term?

NOTES of the month

caused such discomfort to Labour's shadow ministers. They complained that the Tories had pinched their ideas.

If the policies are indistinguishable, however, why should large numbers of voters bother to transfer their allegiances from the Tories or Alliance to Labour?

This is the dilemma Labour now faces. And it is why the difference between the parties are increasingly projected as issues of style, not policies.

Labour's success or otherwise at the polls becomes more and more a question of luck rather than anything else—will a left councillor say something which embarrasses the leadership, will Kinnock come across well on TV, will Thatcher slip on any more banana skins?

It is hardly surprising that millions of workers remain sceptical about Labour when its merits are projected as simply a dynamic young leader and a red rose instead of a red flag.

What will happen if Labour don't get in at the next election?

Some on the left harbour the idea that defeat for Kinnock can strengthen the left, and could even lead to a split. Such a scenario is highly unlikely.

Kinnock and his cohorts will use any defeat to strengthen their already strong hand within the party. They will argue that the retreat from left wing polices has not gone far enough, and they will blame the left for any defeat.

The recent attacks on left Labour councils by Kinnock and Larry Whitty are signs that the right wing is already preparing its alibi for any defeat.

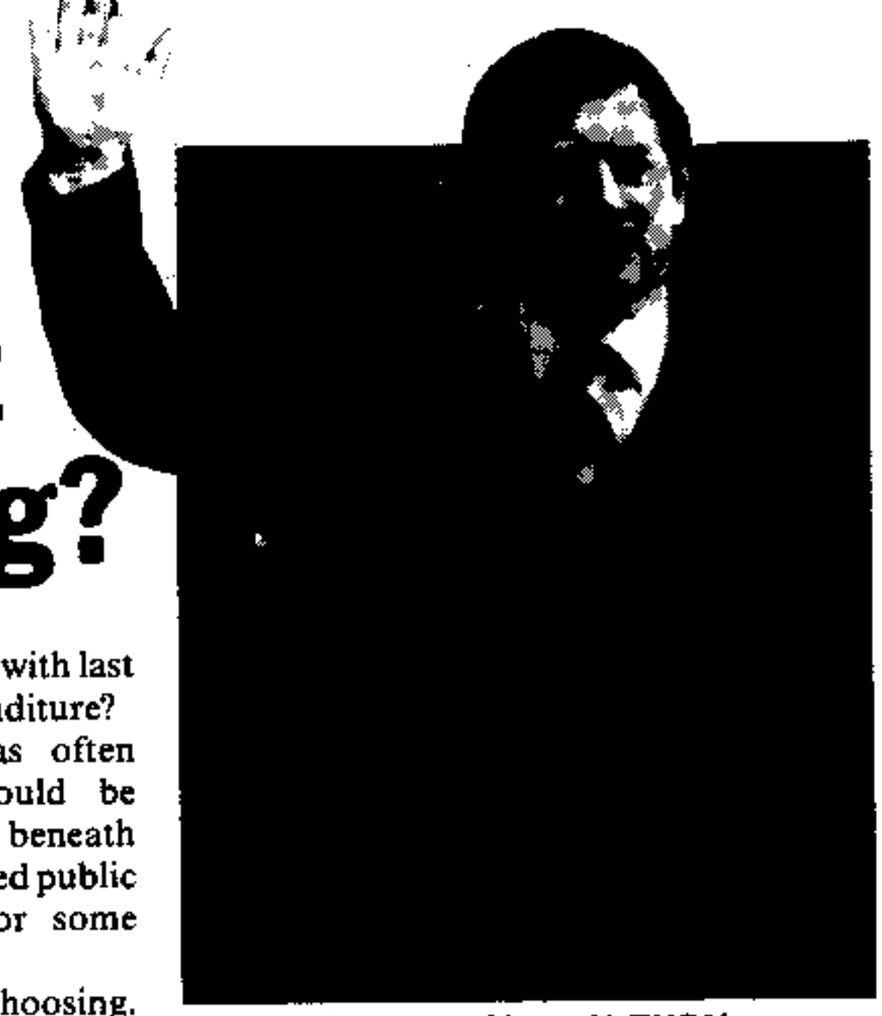
A third term of Thatcher government won't particularly strengthen the ruling class—the Tories' election campaign will be a very different affair from the one in 1983. A Tory government would face huge problems once back in office.

But there is one thing socialists do really have to fear from such a result. For many workers it would open the way for even greater illusions in the right wing of the Labour Party than at present, and make it that much more difficult to win people to revolutionary ideas.

Any great upsurge of working class struggle which took place could easily be derailed in the direction wanted by Kinnock and those to the right of him.■

THE ECONOMY

Who's not for turning?



We turn, they turn, I turn, U-TURN

HAVE THE Tories done a U-turn with last month's increases in public expenditure?

Chancellor Nigel Lawson has often claimed public expenditure would be increased over his dead body. But beneath the rhetoric the Tories have watched public expenditure steadily increase for some time.

This has not been of their choosing. More people claiming unemployment benefit and welfare plus local government costs ever increasing has made life very difficult for even the most enthusiastic of monetarists.

In the past year alone the government's public sector financial deficit has risen by 28 percent.

What the autumn budget statement showed was the Tories deciding to stop making rhetoric about the evils of public expenditure and start taking the credit for its increase.

In fact, as the *Financial Times* commented, Lawson didn't really increase public expenditure as such. He merely acknowledged the reality of its probable increase over the next year.

In doing so he did, of course, steal the Labour Party's clothes. One Labour MP commented that Lawson had managed to carry out the first year of Labour's proposals in 15 minutes. And Lawson put the Tories on a seemingly money-strewn road to the next election.

He also managed to avoid the CBI's annual tirade against the Tories. This year the CBI announced the end of its brief and tentative fling with Kinnockism, and put its weight firmly behind Thatcher.

It would seem Lawson managed to achieve a great deal with his statement. But the cost of playing the nice guy and winning the vote will be high.

More money floating around the economy can only make more acute the problems already being stoked up.

Already the consumer spending spree unleashed by the Tories' deregulation of bank lending is resulting in record spending on imports. This is shown up in recent disastrous trade deficits.

This, plus falling North Sea oil revenues and rising inflation, are the ingredients for a run on sterling.

The Tories like to mock the last Labour government's grovelling to the International Monetary Fund. But they are well on their way to finding themselves in a similar situation.

The government spent one billion pounds of the four it recently borrowed, keeping sterling afloat in October. How much will it have to spend next time round?

And how much will future governments have to attack wages and axe public spending when the loans are called in and there's no more North Sea oil and no more nationalised companies to flog off?■

The CBI: no trade this time

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Con trick on the cheap

THE CALL for a minimum wage looks like being central to Labour's election programme.

The measure has already been adopted by the TUC at its September congress following a lengthy and passionate debate.

The success of the proposal was a triumph for sections of the trade union leadership, especially Bickerstaffe of NUPE and John Edmonds of the GMBATU.

It has also been presented as a major step

forward for low paid workers. It is supposedly a chance for those poorly paid and poorly organised trade unionists to get a fair crack of the whip and a decent standard of living.

The amount being called for (£80 per week) will certainly not do this. But it is the strings attached to any such deal that make it unacceptable.

For the cost of the minimum wage will be paid for by better paid and better organised workers. It is the carrot that accompanies the stick of wage restraint.

Central to the economic policies of Kinnock and Hattersley is that workers will have to undergo sacrifices in order for Labour to cut the dole queues and help the low paid.

In last month's *Notes* we explained the reality of Labour's unemployment policy and the limited results Labour are likely to achieve. Perhaps even more dangerous, though, is the idea that wage restraint will help those at the bottom of the ladder.

The experience of the Wilson/Callaghan government shows that exactly the opposite is true. The voluntary restraint policy agreed by Callaghan and the TUC—the Social Contract—led to a fall in the living standards of all workers including those at the bottom of the ladder.

Callaghan's government was eventually confronted during the "winter of discontent" by some of the lowest paid workers in the country, who clearly didn't believe they had benefitted from the Social Contract.

The role of the Social Contract was both to hold down wages and dampen the spirit of struggle. In achieving this Labour smoothed the way for Thatcher.

This is of course the second main objection to the minimum wage. It is being put forward not as something to be fought for, but on the contrary as an alternative to fighting.

It is part of the new realism, a further element of negotiation and struggle to be removed from the rank and file and put in the hands of the bureaucracy (and the highest levels of the bureaucracy at that).

It is in this context that the TUC support needs to be seen. They hope that the demand won't embarrass a future Labour government, that it can be negotiated as acceptable without having to be fought for.

Unfortunately, for the time being the TUC is likely to succeed. In the absence of generalised struggle and in the face of the worsening economic crisis, it will seem all too reasonable to demand of the next Labour government that it prioritise the introduction of a statutory minimum wage—at the expense of higher wage earners.

The effect will be to hamper the efforts of the better organised sectors of the workforce to defend themselves against the employers. The argument will be that restraint will have to be coupled to the implementation of a statutory minimum wage.

The opposition to the minimum wage is not one of principle. There are many occasions where socialists would and

Workers fought while Labour paved the way for Thatcher

should fight for such a wage. Even today it is necessary to defend wages councils against attacks from Tories and employers.

There are also some grey areas. There are for instance those on the left who argue that the minimum should be £120 rather than £80. Of course if those are the only choices available then nobody could possibly oppose the higher figure. But often those moving the figure see voting for such resolutions as an end in itself and avoid the key argument—wage restraint.

At the end of the day the minimum wage will affect relatively few workers, a figure which will be drastically reduced by employers who will dodge paying it (or point blank refuse to).

Wage restraint will lead to a fall in the living standards of *all* workers, and will be used by government, employers and the trade union bureaucracy alike to attack those workers who try to fight back.

It is in this context that the minimum wage is being put forward, and it is in this context that it needs to be opposed.■

NOTES of the month

But Fitzgerald's worries are more fundamental. The South's image as the 'miracle economy' of Europe in the seventies is in deep trouble. It has now the fourth highest per capita public debt in the world. Unemployment stands at a quarter of a million. This is on top of the tens of thousands who have been forced to emigrate.

Its unique position as a low wage tax haven inside EEC barriers has been eroded. Henceforth, American and Japanese capital can look to Spain, Portugal and Greece for similar opportunities.

Unemployment is set therefore to remain at very high levels—possibly around one fifth of the workforce. For the many thousands who are condemned to this future, the struggle in Bogside, the Falls or the Ardoyne offers powerful symbols of resistance. In this situation Sinn Fein's identification with the armed struggle does no harm at the ballot box. It is this possibility of a fusion between both struggles that terrifies the Southern establishment.

But another section of the Southern establishment takes a very different view of Sinn Fein's decision. The *Irish Press* argued that:

> "Politicians may object to sitting down with these terrible people but, after all, isn't it a small price to pay for including them in the constitutional system?"

The *Irish Press* has traditionally been aligned with Fianna Fail. Publicly that party claims that Sinn Fein's decision is irrelevant. But throughout its ranks there is a feeling that Sinn Fein will now pose both a threat and an opportunity. It could expose the hollowness of Haughey's nationalist rhetoric—but it could also draw in some extra votes for Fianna Fail under Ireland's PR electoral system.

Both elements of the Southern establishment have, however, got it wrong. Sinn Fein's entry to Dail Eirann will not be the threat to democracy that Fitzgerald claims. But neither is it likely that they are about to be co-opted into constitutional politics, as the *Irish Press* and elements of Fianna Fail believe.

The present leadership of Sinn Fein differs in a number of respects from former republicans who turned when in parliament. It has developed a cadre around a Sandinista-type ideology. Its base is rooted in the struggle of the Northern minority. And it remains unreservedly committed to

SINN FEIN

Bullets and ballots

ONE OF the great taboos of Irish politics has been broken. At its recent Ard Fheis (conference) Sinn Fein, with the approval of the IRA, decided to enter parliament. Until recently, the mere advocacy of this course of action was enough to warrant expulsion.

Reactions from the Southern establishment to Sinn Fein's decision was mixed. Garret Fitzgerald called it a "threat to democracy" and demanded all party agreement to ostracise them. The prospect of Sinn Fein deputies could cause many problems. At the moment they are banned from Irish television and radio. The arrival of a Sinn Fein deputy with a 'democratic mandate' would make a complete nonsense of this ban.

NOTES of the month

the armed struggle. It will therefore be more able to combine a reformist parliamentary practice with support for a guerrilla campaign.

The decision to enter parliament provoked a major debate and an eventual split in Sinn Fein. Its original founders, O'Bradaigh and O'Connell, left to form Republican Sinn Fein. It includes many of the hard right. Their abstention from parliament mirrored a general abstention from Southern politics.

They saw the Southern wing of the movement as passive supporters of the Northern struggle. As a result they never built a significant base beyond rural areas around the border.

Adams and the present leadership won because they offer a strategy for building a serious political party in the South.

Increasingly they have come to realise that the South holds the key to breaking the log jam in the struggle.

Their first step in rebuilding in the South was the opening up of the movement to a number of ex-revolutionary socialists and feminists. This has been a contradictory process.

Objectively, Sinn Fein has an appalling record on women. It abstained during the abortion referendum; it allowed its members "rights of individual conscience" in the divorce referendum; it has dropped its right to choose position at this year's Ard Fheis.

Nevertheless it has a record of token recognition of women's issues. Thus one third of its executive must be women. This type of tokenism has helped to convince many feminists that Sinn Fein presents a serious arena for debate.

A similar pattern occurred on industrial issues. In recent years *Republican News* has backed workers on strike. But it has carefully avoided any criticism of most left wing officials. In this manner, Sinn Fein has managed to win a small audience amongst sections of the trade union bureaucracy with nationalist sympathies.

Despite the contradictions in its opening to the left, Sinn Fein has managed to recruit small but significant layers. The pattern is similar to the shift into the Labour Party in Britain in the 1979-81 period when Bennism was on the up.

The same GLC-type interest group politics is there. The same cynicism about building an independent Marxist force is there. The same type of ex-revolutionaries, most notably almost all the leadership of the Fourth International, People's Democracy, have found their new home there.

The full transformation of Sinn Fein in the South will come with a new emphasis on reformist politics. The argument about entering the Dail is presented as "entering the mainstream of political life".

Revolutionaries have nothing in principle against taking seats in parliament. It is a tactical question of how best to break illusions in bourgeois democracy. That depends on circumstances. Where the mass of workers have moved beyond any faith in parliament it would be criminal to take part.

But in periods of reaction, or when illusions are strong, it is often necessary to enter in order to use it as a platform from which to challenge those illusions.

Sinn Fein takes a very different view. For them, building a base in an area means establishing a network of advice centres. These concentrate on taking up individual issues through a maze of state bureaucracy. The emphasis is on the expertise and negotiating skills of your Sinn Fein representative rather than on organisation and self activity. Thus in the last local elections in the North, one of Sinn Fein's major slogans was a boast about its record of "effective representation".

All of this means that the new turn will present Sinn Fein with new contradictions. In the immediate term it will be subject to two pressures. Firstly, it will bend over backwards to hold the right and the militarists.

The dropping of the 'right to choose' position at the Ard Fheis was the first sign. Another was the total lack of reference to socialism in Adams' presidential address. In order to allay fears of going soft, there could be a stepping up of the emphasis on the armed struggle including the disastrous ultimatum to workers who collaborate with the British state.

Secondly, there will be the inevitable pull of electoralism. The first edition of *Republican News* after the Ard Fheis made the following statement about the Southern state:

> "The Garda and the Free State army are the constituted force of this institution and *we mean them no harm.*"

The specific turn of Adams' leadership will add to these electoral pressures. He has, since the H Block crisis, consistently pushed a unity offensive with Fianna Fail and the SDLP. He has called for talks with Haughey on opposing the Anglo-Irish deal.

Given this strategy and the Irish electoral system, the clear logic points in the direction of unofficial arrangements with Fianna Fail, particularly in marginal constituencies.

In the longer term too there are problems. The debate on abstentionism took place in a totally internalised atmosphere. There was no discussion on the defeats that Southern workers had suffered, or the effects of the Anglo-Irish agreement on their views.

A victory for Adams

The assumption was that simply by removing the ban on abstentionism, support for Sinn Fein may grow. This may affect the outcome electorally to some extent—not necessarily as much as the leadership seems to think. But the more fundamental problem was not even mentioned—the fortunes of Sinn Fein, like that of the left generally, are tied to the manner in which the working class rebuilds its confidence after the recent years of defeat.

Sinn Fein is not equipped to give answers to this problem. Its belief that class politics only arise after the border has been removed cuts it out of building a strong base in the Southern working class.

In the short term then, the dropping of abstentionism will pull new recruits from the left into its ranks. But in the longer term it raises the stakes for republicanism.

Its hope of making a breakthrough is not at all guaranteed. Instead the contradictions between its left rhetoric and its belief that class politics are not yet on the agenda will be thrown into sharper relief. Which is why the Irish left needs to redouble its efforts to build an alternative.■

Anti-PASOK demonstrator

NOTES of the month

GREECE

Return of the right

LAST OCTOBER'S local elections in Greece were of particular political interest.

Over a year ago the ruling socialists, PASOK, practically froze wages and devalued the drachma. They also embarked on a policy of drastic reductions of government deficits.

The election results have indicated the changes in the political scene after a year of 'socialist' austerity. Also, a verdict was pronounced on the favouritism, corruption and arrogance of the reformist government.

PASOK's share of the vote fell dramatically from the last parliamentary elections. It seems that this alliance of petty businessmen, peasants and sections of the working class is not all-powerful anymore.

The right wing, on the other hand, emerged as the largest party in Greece. Athens, Thessalonikki and Piraeus now have right wing mayors. The right has definitely returned from the wilderness it found itself in when PASOK won its first elections in 1981.

Five years of reformist government have brought a new powerful conservatism in Greek society. This is especially so among the youth.

Yet the major beneficiary of the erosion of PASOK's support was the Communist Party. Most of the disaffected working class PASOK voters have turned to the CP.

This is not accidental. In the face of PASOK's frontal attack, the working class has fought back very hard. Two general strikes took place last year. Large numbers of smaller strikes have been erupting ever since PASOK introduced its austerity policy.

This sustained militancy of the class is the source of the electoral shift towards the Communists.

Meanwhile the CP is becoming less and less left wing. It fought the elections mainly on the basis that it could provide better, more efficient manager-mayors.

Little was said about organising the defence against PASOK's wages freeze and against unemployment.

The Communists increasingly control the trade union bureaucracy. They are extremely keen to form a coalition government with PASOK.

The austerity drive is set to continue for the foreseeable future. Given this and the heightened militancy of the working class, the CP is leaving much dissatisfaction behind as it moves to the right. The situation presents a great opportunity for growth for the revolutionary left.

Already significant numbers of students and workers have become disillusioned with the established socialist organisations. The prospects for revolutionary Marxism to sink roots in Greece have rarely been better.■

Additional notes by Alan Gibson, Gareth Jenkins, Kieran Allen and Costas Lapavitsas.

NIGEL HARRIS

The half open door

IMMIGRATION has always been a difficult issue for the labour movement. Even among revolutionaries, opposition to immigration controls has often been a purely compassionate act, unrelated to the economic realities of capitalism.

Why is it difficult? Because 'common sense' seems to demonstrate a central principle of bourgeois ideology: employment is a function of the simple supply of labour (which is itself determined by population change, the sources of which are supposedly mysterious).

Unemployment therefore occurs because there are too many workers competing for jobs, not because the system, the employers or the government determine it. To admit foreign workers, in such a view, is palpable insanity.

The world is never so simple, and severe labour scarcities can co-exist with high unemployment. For workers cannot be substituted for each other. Unemployed miners cannot fill a lack of nurses; doctors will not work as sweepers; shorthand typists cannot turn their hand to farming.

The labour force is a complicated structure of skills and experience where the ability to do one job depends upon millions doing their jobs—one person's skill is only possible with the collaboration of masses of other skills.

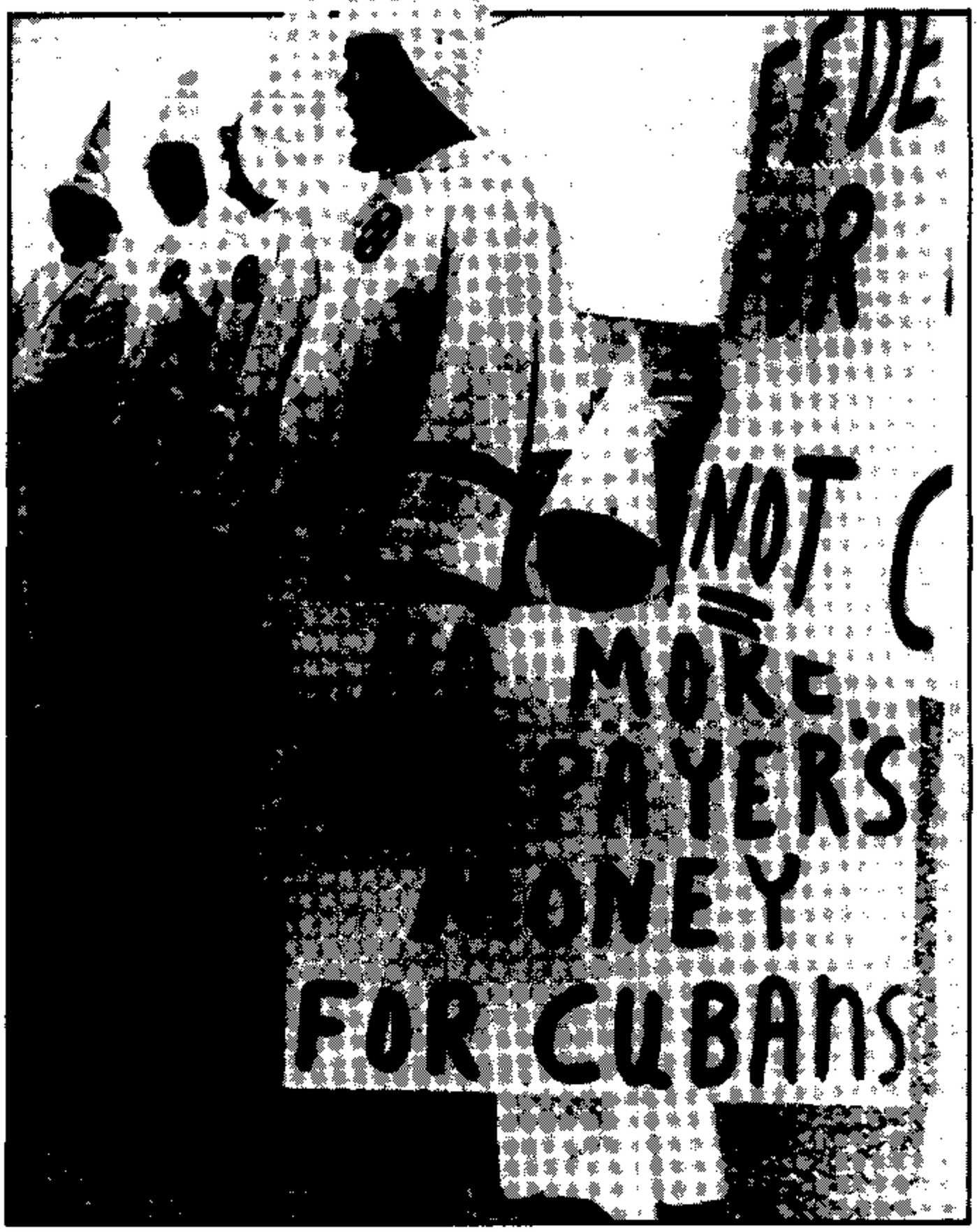
It follows that an economy could break down and precipitate mass unemployment not because the supply of labour was too large, but because it had the wrong bundle of skills. Such problems are likely to afflict a high technology economy more than a low skilled one—indeed, the more elaborate and sophisticated the skills become, the more the danger that there will be no one to do the low skill jobs without which high skills become nothing.

Astronauts and computer programmers depend on masses of lower skilled workers to be able to do their jobs, just as generals are just people dressed in fancy clothes without the soldiers.

Without the others, the high skill worker is reduced to foraging for his or her own food, doing their own laundry. This is why workers ought to have an interest in defending the whole bundle of skills that are the condition for their own job to exist.

How does this relate to immigration? There is a big contrast between Europe and the United States in the matter of immigration. In Europe, it is said, there is tight control of foreign workers entering and the stock of immigrant workers has been reduced in some countries.

In the United States, with its 2,000 mile border with Mexico, the control is only in theory tight; in practice the doors are always half open. The United States receives legal immigrants equal to about a quarter per cent of its population each year, and some people guess, about half a percent of illegal immigrants. On the orthodox case, therefore, there must be less unemployment in Europe than in the United States. In fact, the position is the reverse:



Klansmen rally against Cuban immigrants

Rates of unemployment, 1985

United States	7%	Spain	20.6%
Britain	11.6%	France	10.8%
West Germany	8.7%	Holland	14.4%
Italy	13.3%	Belgium	12.9%

The position is the opposite of the orthodox case—as the labour force of the United States has grown, so the number of jobs has expanded (over 8 million new jobs were created between 1981 and 1985), whereas in Europe the smaller the rate of growth of the workforce, the higher the rate of unemployment.

Nonetheless, American workers—like their European brothers and sisters—favour tighter immigration controls. Reagan's hysteria is not unpopular—"The simple truth is that we've lost control of our borders—no nation can do that and survive."

But there are powerful forces of opposition—farmers (some people estimate 90 percent of farm labour is illegal), sweatshop and restaurant owners depend on cheap immigrant workers, bankers fear the loss of their loans to Mexico if Mexican workers cannot earn in the United States and send the money home, and 200 churches defy the government by helping to smuggle and give sanc-

tuary to illegal immigrants on the run from terror in Central America.

The *Wall Street Journal* on ideological grounds opposes all border controls. But for the liberals, the horrors of police terrorisation against immigrants on the southern border confirm the commitment that control must be tighter—and must exist to prevent 'American jobs' being stolen by foreigners to the loss of the disadvantaged natives, blacks, women and hispanic people.

Four times since 1973 the opposition has beaten off the attempt to formulate a new immigration act in Congress. But now a new bill, agreed by both Houses, awaits the President's signature. It promises, for the first time, to punish employers if they employ illegal immigrants—but the fines are small, and the employer has only to ask to see evidence of identity, not to check that the evidence is not forged.

There is to be increased spending on border control, an increase in legal migration from Mexico and an amnesty for those arriving before 1982.

Finally, just for the Californian farm lobby, any illegal farm worker who spent at least 90 days in the country up to 1 May of this year, can claim temporary legal residence.

The Act will not control immigration to the United States, and if it did, it would be economically damaging both to United States capitalism *and* American workers. There is already a labour scarcity for unskilled workers—especially in farming—and American workers are too skilled, even the unskilled ones, to do that work. As the population ages and the number of teenagers (the people who do much of the unskilled work) declines, as more people take early retirement and other get more education and rise in the skill levels, the scarcities will get worse.

One study showed recently just how much illegal immigrants contribute to the Unites States national output, how little they take back—and how large a part of US total employment depends upon them being there to work.

Another study estimates that with a 3 percent rate of growth of national output and half a million immigrants a year, there will be a shortage of 5 million workers in the country by the year 2000, most of them unskilled. Without them, everybody else's jobs and income are threatened.

To stop workers entering the US is no substitute for the struggle to improve the wages and conditions of the poorest workers.

The issue of US immigration is only part of an emerging set of problems concerning the maldistribution of the world's labour force. For example, south-east and south Asia, with 45 million new inhabitants per year, is now producing 9 million graduates annually. The advanced countries, north America, Europe and Japan, grow by 10 million a year and produce 3½ million graduates.

But the output of the advanced countries is much more dependent upon a supply of skills than Asia—without access to the skills, the advanced countries could slow down even further. Some people see the United States' growth—compared to Europe's—as a by-product of the United States picking the most skilled workers worldwide and being able to find a supply of the least skilled as well.

At all levels, the United States is becoming more cosmopolitan. For example, at the top 20 universities, 15 percent of the staff are foreign born (compared to 4 percent in Europe). Foreign workers are also overrepresented in the key growth industries (aerospace, electronics, computers) and services (software development, advanced health care etc).

Is the new Immigration Act then just a mistake? From the point of view of capital's economic interest, it is irrational—a measure that, insofar as it is effective in its stated intentions, must be defeated. But this only highlights the essentially political role of the Act—concession to the battered nationalism of the Americans, surrounded by foreign imports and immigrants and supposedly directed at the most sensitive gut issue—jobs.

In practice, immigration will not be controlled but natives will feel someone in Washington cares—and the police, the courts and the employers will be armed with further instruments to terrorise the worst off sections of the labour force (and everyone who looks or sounds like a foreigner).

So the Act is a complex mixture of hypocrisy and oppression, covering the need of the American ruling class to accept a measure of the free international movement of labour as one of the conditions of its own economic survival. How long can the rulers of Europe hold their line?■

A reactionary strike?

The events at Sudbury infants school have caused much confusion amongst the left. Here we print two articles. Ann Rogers gives us the background to the dispute and we run a piece by Shaun Doherty which was originally written for the Socialist Teachers Alliance Journal, explaining what the attitude of socialist teachers should be.

ON 18 JULY this year Maureen McGoldrick, the head teacher at Sudbury infants school in Brent, was suspended for allegedly refusing to take a black teacher onto her staff.

The council's fault was not simply going for the wrong target. The problem went far deeper than that. Brent council believe that they can impose anti-racism by using disciplinary structures. This is an approach which cannot succeed and can actually weaken the forces which can fight racism.

Unfortunately this argument was not put clearly at the beginning of the affair and good socialists became drawn into simply supporting the council rather than stressing how to really fight racism.

The Tories have been able to use the issue to whip up a backlash against the council with cries of "race spies" and "a climate of fear". Brent council have moved further and further into a siege mentality insisting that their legalistic right to enquire must come before the particular rights and wrongs of the case.

The McGoldrick issue has highlighted the dangers in the type of anti-racist policies now being pursued by councils such as Brent and Camden. Where they are used against someone like Maureen McGoldrick there are two obvious pitfalls. The right can easily pick up on a bad case and mobilise substantial numbers of ordinary people against the council. Furthermore, the whole fight against racism can become discredited because of a council's shortsightedness.

The affair began over a remark McGoldrick is alleged to have made during a telephone conversation with the education office. She is alleged to have said she did not want another black teacher in her school.

The next day McGoldrick was called to a meeting at the Brent education office where she denied making any such remark.

So the council was faced with a situation in which two of its employees were saying contradictory things. And a head teacher, who already had black staff in her school, was apparently refusing to take another.

Yet even at this early stage the question of the employment of Ms Khan (the black teacher who McGoldrick was supposed to have refused a job) was disappearing into the background. Instead, the disciplinary procedure of the council was becoming the central issue.

The council could have resolved the issue quickly by asking McGoldrick (a head working in a school with 60 percent black children) what was going on and telling her she must take Ms Khan onto her staff.

If they had done so, they might have discovered at this stage that McGoldrick felt she was under pressure from her board of governors not to employ more black teachers. As it was, this story did not emerge until 20 September after confidential council documents had been leaked to the *Guardian*.

By September, when the new school term had begun, the union called its members at Sudbury Infants School out on strike in an attempt to get McGoldrick reinstated. During the strike a demonstration of teachers and parents marched to Brent town hall to protest against the suspension.

The fact that the demonstration was half black should have been a clear indication that McGoldrick was not a hard line racist.

But the council refused to look at the feeling of parents and teachers who knew and worked with McGoldrick. Instead they continued to make their disciplinary procedure the keystone of the whole anti-racist policy.

Rather than looking to how teachers and other unions which organise council employees could be won to fighting racism they shifted to attacking the Brent Teachers Association for defending McGoldrick.

The leadership of Brent Teachers Association has a terrible record on fighting for anything—and so was an easy target for both the council and teachers in the Black Teachers Collective and the Socialist Teachers Alliance to attack.

Rather than asking whether the council's action would help the fight against racism, socialist teachers concentrated their fire at the local leadership of their union. The chance to put an independent argument on how to fight racism was missed.

By October, as the case dragged on through the courts, the Tories realised that Brent council had presented them with a golden opportunity.

Kenneth Baker threatened to withdraw Home Office funding for over 170 extra teaching posts. These posts were to have been provided under a Home Office scheme which allows councils to claim money for projects and services for people of New Commonwealth origin.

He also sent inspectors into schools to examine Brent's education services.

Meanwhile the NUT had won its case in the court, which ordered McGoldrick's reinstatement. The council went to appeal but, under the now massive pressure from the Tories and the threat of another NUT strike, backed off and promised in court that they would take no further action against McGoldrick.

The situation in Brent is now horrible. The council have made fools of themselves and are now in a much weaker position to fight the Tories on any issue at all. The left in the borough is split, weakened and demoralised. There is even talk that the Black Teachers Collective, a group with a good record of militancy in the past, will leave the union.

Many members of the collective and the Socialist Teachers Alliance said that if the NUT called another strike to get McGoldrick reinstated then they would cross picket lines.

Like other Labour left councils Brent has ducked the fight over ratecapping. This means they are faced with a situation where they want to fight racism, but have very few resources with which to do so. Once the limits of ratecapping were accepted there was an inexorable logic towards tokenism.

This drift towards tokenism fitted with the ideas of black nationalism. Very few black activists in Brent are out and out separatists, but most do see the issues of race and class as separate. This has meant

that they have given almost uncritical support to the council's initiatives.

Not only do black activists and the council share common ground about how to fight racism, there is also a growing material base for their support. Brent cannot create jobs on a scale which could begin to solve unemployment. But through various initiatives and schemes they can create a few well paid, often semi-managerial posts for black people.

These posts may be few in number, but they are significant in drawing a layer of black activists closer to the council.

Brent's stated policy of increasing the number of black head teachers in the area is another way in which upwardly mobile black teachers are drawn closer to the council.

Their identification with the council has become so close that some members of the Black Teachers Collective now freely talk of crossing NUT picket lines and even of splitting from the union.

But in going down this route the Black Teachers Collective is turning its back on the very organisations which can begin to tackle the issues which worry the majority of black people. At base the question is one of resources.

Getting more resources means fighting the Tories. To do this successfully all workers, both black and white, need strong trade unions.

Housing, unemployment, transport facilities and education services are all getting worse as the crisis deepens. Because society discriminates against black people they suffer the effects of this crisis even more sharply. Improving services would be the biggest contribution any council could make towards anti-racism.

But because they are not prepared to fight the Tories over ratecapping, Brent council does not stand a hope in hell of tackling the grime and squalor which most Brent residents have to put up with. So instead it concentrates its efforts on nibbling away at the edges of racism.

And very quickly the individual ideas in people's heads begin to take precedence over the conditions in which they live.

Black children's under-achievement in school is put down exclusively to racist teaching rather than bad housing, unemployment rates and an education system which respects the values and prejudices of capitalist society.

Once the council has moved into imposing ideas rather than fighting to change them, it ceases to be concerned with how to win the maximum number of allies.

Indeed it is actively contemptuous of those very people who it desperately needs to win if it is to deliver anything at all.

At root many of the councillors have a fatalistic view of white workers as always and inevitably racist.

This means they fail to see how such workers can be won to anti-racism. They genuinely believe that anti-racism can be imposed from above. And they are afraid of mobilising their own workforce and the black community to fight for anti-racist policies.

When the black community do mobilise the council often keeps its head down. During the McGoldrick fiasco a Brent man, Anthony Lemard, died while in police custody, sparking off two demonstrations of several hundred people. Neither the council or Brent Labour Party had any organised presence on either.

Even on the issues which they hold so dear, such as anti-racist education, they do not try to mobilise people. Again the council is afraid of releasing a force which they cannot control. For the truth is that they cannot do anything about the issues which really concern black parents and black teachers in Brent.

Most black parents are worried about education—but not especially about the colour of their children's teacher. What concerns them are bad school buildings, understaffing and so on. Black teachers worry about pay, attacks on conditions and the daily problem of facing the sharp end of a crumbling education system.

None of these problems can even be touched unless the council is prepared to confront the Tories over ratecapping. They are not, so the last thing they want is to unleash a force of angry parents and teachers who will demand that they take up these issues.

The final outcome of such an attitude by the council is to see the organised working class as an enemy, rather than as the key to changing society. Their role as employers pushes their desire to fight the rotten ideas in society, such as racism, into the background.

The tragedy is not just that the council has gone down this path, but that it has pulled a good many socialists and anti-racists with it. The idea that it is acceptable to scab on a strike has gained currency. The notion has grown that if you don't like something your union does you leave it. The central importance of the only weapon with which the working class has to fight—its own organisation in the unions—is forgotten.

This may be acceptable to some councillors who see any force which can resist the cuts they will have to make being weakened. But for those who genuinely want an anti-racist society it must spell disaster. For it is when workers' organisations have been weakened that racist ideas grow with a vengeance. Unless those organisations are defended in Brent now then the council's anti-racist policies will amount to little more than tokens, and unsuccessful tokens at that.■

Ann Rogers

An emphatic no!

THE DECISION of Brent council to reinstate Maureen McGoldrick has rescued the Socialist Teachers Alliance from an acutely embarrassing dilemma. If the NUT strike against her suspension had gone ahead, would we have advised members not to support it? Would we have crossed picket lines? Would we have characterised it as a racist strike?

I am convinced that the answer to these questions should have been an emphatic no, but I am not convinced that is the answer we would have given.

It is certainly not the answer that the Black Teachers Group in Brent gave. It argued for the continued suspension of McGoldrick; it opposed the strike and argued that it should be broken. Many STA members accepted this position.

At the centre of the debate is the question of how racism can be fought. Is it fought primarily through the organisations of the working class or through the adoption of anti-racist policies by Labour councils and the imposition of these policies on their employees?

Whilst anti-racist policies should clearly be supported and campaigned for, the role of Brent council in the McGoldrick dispute highlights a number of fundamental problems.

A council that has failed to mount effective opposition to ratecapping is patently unable to deliver on the most important issues facing black workers such as jobs, houses and wages. In a period when successful struggles are the exception rather than the rule there is a temptation to look for short cuts.

The dangers of tokenism become apparent when statements of policy become a substitute.

Clearly we support the authority's anti-racist policy and we equally support their right to investigate any breaches of the policy. But suspension of a worker is a measure that we should think twice about supporting. If McGoldrick was a hard-line racist we would not only support her suspension but campaign for her to be sacked. We supported the Islington NALGO strike for the sacking of those responsible for the racist harassment of black workers.

It is significant that Islington council, despite its anti-racist policies, opposed the strike.

But even if the allegations against McGoldrick were true it was patently obvious that she wasn't a hard-line racist. She was quite prepared to make public her support for anti-racist policies and she was clearly held in high regard by many black workers and students. McGoldrick was not Honeyford.

When the chair of the Brent education committee says that there is no difference between a member of the National Front and a racist member of the Labour Party he is talking nonsense.

It is ridiculous to imagine that you can fight racism by disciplining all workers who have racist ideas in their heads. It is essential to attempt to isolate those ideas and to drive a wedge between the organised racist groups and workers who may be drawn towards them.

The battle for the middle ground is crucial. The Anti Nazi League was supported by thousands of people who were in favour of immigration controls, but in uniting with them against a common enemy it was possible to challenge those ideas.

When a council uses disciplinary action against workers, even in pursuit of progressive policies, it risks alienating the very people that are crucial to the success of those policies.

We did not present an alternative to the polarisation that had occurred between union and employer and effectively sided with the latter.

Part of that reason for this was our relationship with the Brent black teachers group. It should be made clear from the outset that we support the self-organisation of any oppressed group, indeed it was this issue that distinguished the STA in the debate on racism at last year's NUT conference. But we do not see this form of organisation is an alternative to union action, but as complementary to it.

Black workers groups should seek to increase the involvement of blacks in the unions and strengthen the union's stand against racism. When the black director of social services in Camden said recently that black workers should not have anything to do with the unions, two black shop stewards resigned their positions. Such a development strengthens the grip of racism on union members.

If black workers bypass the unions in their pursuit of the struggle against discrimination, to who do they turn? Sympathetic employers can at best provide individual advancement for a minority of black workers. The loyalty of these workers will then be towards their 'patrons' in the council and the interests of the vast majority of black workers will be undermined.

There is an alternative approach. It begins with the recognition that racism stems from the capitalist system that exploits all workers and it is used to undermine the ability of workers to fight collectively.

We acknowledge that it is a specific form of oppression that requires specific strategies to combat it. But unless these strategies are rooted in the organisations of the working class, unless they are rooted in the trade unions, unless they seek to unite black and white workers in the struggle, they will fail.

Historically, it is when workers' organisation has been broken that racist ideas have taken a grip.

The role of the union is central because it is the vehicle of collective action, it organises across the boundaries of race and gender and facilitates the necessary unity for a successful fight. This is not an abstract assertion, it is borne out by our own experience within the NUT.

The STA has an honourable record in campaigning against racism in recent years and in every instance we have utilised the structures of the union at different levels. We have not done so in opposition to local communities but with their support. Three examples will suffice.

STA members in 1978 fought for the establishment and implementation of anti-racist policies in London schools in the face of a hostile campaign by the National Front to turn schools into racial battlegrounds. These initiatives were pursued long before the councils made them part of their perspective. It was the STA that mobilised the biggest unofficial strike of teachers ever in support of members at Daneford who had been campaigning against racist attacks on Bangladeshi students. Even though we were castigated by the union executive we were able to use our base in ILTA and the local associations and schools to build for the strike and make it a success.

A docker supporting Powell in 1968

It is the STA officers of ILTA and local associations and STA school reps who deal with the many cases involving victimisation of black teachers. The union organisation in London is a bulwark against these attacks and black teachers look to it for support.

Of course there are still cases that we do not win, but the potential for success has clearly been demonstrated.

This remains true even when the local or national bureaucracy of the union is obstructive. Even when, as in Brent, the NUT resorted to the courts; called on the Tory minister to intervene; persistently obstructed the organisation of black teachers and even threatened them with disciplinary action for daring to voice their criticisms.

Our initial instincts were to disassociate ourselves from the discredited NUT leadership and support their opponents. These instincts were healthy, but even healthy instincts are no substitute for objective analysis.

From the start of the dispute we should have unequivocally argued against Maureen McGoldrick's suspension. But even though many of us felt uneasy at the draconian steps that the council took we fudged our response. In our understandable desire to identify with militant black teachers we ended up capitulating to their mistaken analysis.

We were wrong for all the right reasons, but wrong nevertheless. Because if the strike had gone ahead, its stated object of ending McGoldrick's suspension is one we should have supported. To argue for breaking the strike, as some of the black teachers did, has disastrous consequences. It undermines the whole basis of union organisation and makes future collective action against racism more difficult.

Even if a strike is reactionary, if the clear majority of workers support it socialists should not cross picket lines. Even in 1968 when the dockers went on strike in support of Powell, the one member of the then International Socialists on the docks, did not break the strike and go into work; he stood on the picket line with a placard denouncing the strike and attacking Powell's racism. He was abused and assaulted for his pains, but the impact of his response was far greater than if he had gone into work. The union organisation that built a reactionary strike was the same organisation a few years later that sparked off a general strike in support of the dockers jailed under the Tories' anti-union laws.

If the Brent strike had gone ahead we should have supported it and made our criticisms of the Brent NUT clear from a position of involvement in it. In so doing we would have had credibility for our ideas with an audience that is an indispensible part of the struggle against racism in Brent schools—namely teachers in schools.

The dangers of separatist solutions were there for all to see in Brent. A senior advisor to the council described white anti-racists as "parasites" on black struggle. This is the antithesis of the position we should be fighting for and plays right into the hands of the Tories, of racists and union bureaucrats seeking to avoid a commitment to anti-racist policies.

In conclusion we have to hold out against the siren voices looking for short cuts in the present difficult period and stick to the task of building unity in action between black and white workers. The politics of liberal white guilt are a barrier to this task.

Our strength lies in collective action through union organisation coupled with an unequivocal political commitment to the active pursuit of anti-racist policies. There will be many disputes in the near future in which this perspective will be put to the test and we ignore the lessons of Brent at our peril.■

Shaun Doherty

Powell's poison platform

WHY SHOULD anyone want to victimise a 74 year old gentleman who wants to speak to small university audiences on constitutional reform? His set speech, by all accounts, is very boring and not even very reactionary.

The gentleman is a former Tory MP (now an Ulster Unionist), but he has a reputation as a bit of a rebel in the Tory ranks. He was one of the first Tories to vote against capital punishment. He has always been sceptical about Britain's independent nuclear weapons.

In 1974, in the middle of an election campaign, he suddenly resigned his Tory candidature and urged people to vote Labour because he was opposed to the Common Market!

With such a record, as I say, why should anyone want to discriminate against the Rt Hon J Enoch Powell MP?

No one suggests that people should be stopped from speaking just because they are Tories. Surely, socialist students should leave this old gentleman alone.

Such is the argument being voiced by the Federation of Conservative Students, whose ledership has just been disbanded by Norman Tebbit because it is too right wing!

The FCS are hawking old Enoch round the universities, demanding for him free speech, and playing on his "fine record" as a "distinguished parliamentarian".

In truth, however, there is only one reason why Enoch Powell is popular with the FCS leaders. They like him not for his "maverick" views on capital punishment, Europe or defence. Indeed, they try to stop him mentioning any of these matters.

Quite accurately they have singled out the one issue which has made Enoch Powell famous—the issue which he himself has pushed to the fore unceasingly for the last 18 years—the issue of race.

At the start of his political career, in times when it seemed that the system he loves, capitalism, appeared to be working, Powell never expressed any interest in race or immigration.

During the big boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s when there seemed no end to permanent economic growth, and when black people poured into the country, free of all immigration control, to staff the lower reaches of the burgeoning industries and services, Powell, who represented Wolverhampton, a town of heavy immigration, uttered not a single racialist murmur.

When the Tory government finally imposed some controls on citizens of the Commonwealth, Powell supported them. But as minister of health (1960-1963), he sponsored schemes for recruiting black nurses and ancillary hospital workers in the West Indies, especially in Barbados.

It was the decline of the capitalist boom which sparked off Powell's innate racialism. In 1968, spurred by the then Labour government's capitulation to racialist pressure to introduce special and entirely unnecessary immigration controls on East African Asians, Powell went to Birmingham to deliver a speech which reeked of racialist hate against the black minority. He used the foulest racialist language, referring to black children as "grinning picaninnies".

He gave full vent to all the crudest racialist stereotypes, linking people's propensity to crime, fecklessness and disorder to the colour of their skins and their countries of origin. He predicted in the most colourful phrases a race war unless the numbers of blacks were cut down.

The response was devastating. Powell touched a deep racialist nerve, not just in his own class but in the working class as well. London dockers went on strike and marched to parliament calling for "Enoch for Prime Minister". All over the country

'He has persisted with the same racist demagogy'

racialists, who until then had felt something shameful about abusing immigrants, shed their inhibitions.

Although Powell was promptly sacked by Tory leader Heath from the shadow cabinet, his speech led to a great wave of suddenly respectable racialist propaganda.

Much of this found its way, through the post, to Powell's house. He boasted of "sackfuls of mail" which filled his basement. His boast was soon to turn against him. When the *Sunday Times* (then a newspaper of some repute) branded his speeches racialist, Powell sued for libel.

The *Sunday Times* won a court order demanding that all the letters sent to Powell be handed over to them. They argued that these letters might prove the real, racialist nature of the support which Powell had stirred up. Almost at once, before handing over the letters, Powell dropped the action.

Since then, he has never objected to the word racialist. Indeed, he has seemed to revel in his racialist reputation. Again and again over the last 18 years, every time the relationship between the black and white communities was rocked by some crisis, Powell has intervened to stoke up the flames.

None of his monstrous predictions in 1968 have come true. Yet he has persisted with the same racist demagogy, hurling insult after insult at black people.

His demands have been unclear, but consistent. First, he demanded more effective immigration control. When he got some more controls (as in the infamous British Nationality Act of 1971) he demanded more. He would not rest, he said, until all black people (including families of people already here) were banned from entry.

Gradually, this was conceded. In the 1970s, black immigration into this country was virtually stopped. When there was no more juice in that campaign, Powell turned his attention to the people already here, arguing with greater and greater force that they must be got out of the country if the apocalypse was to be avoided.

This logic drove him on, inevitably, to a call for compulsory repatriation. In a speech and a series of articles in 1985, he outlined his plan for a "repatriation programme" which *must* cut down the black population by a huge percentage.

Since Powell's own figures show that the black population is growing by about a hundred thousand a year (at the least) this means that every ten years, under his programme, a million black people must be "got back" to the so-called "countries of origin" (though of course many were born here, and know no other country).

There is no other way in which this could be carried out except by the cattle truck. Mass expulsions of people because of their race harks directly back to Fascist Germany, Fascist Austria, Fascist Poland, Fascist France, shortly before and during the last world war. "Expel them to save us from the holocaust of racial violence!" was the cry. The result was a racial holocaust on an unimaginable scale—the greatest atrocity in world history.

This is the reality behind the apparently friendly face which is being introduced on the campuses by your friendly new stormtroopers from the FCS. It is because of his record on the race issue that the National Union of Students have included Enoch Powell on their list of speakers who should not be invited on any campus anywhere.

This list is small. Apart from openly fascist organisations, for instance (who would be the first to put a stop to any free speech at all), it includes only Powell and a couple of spokesmen for the racist dictatorship in South Africa.

The argument is simple. Most speech leads to action. Speech which does not lead to action is usually futile and irrelevant. Racialist speech leads to racialist action. Permitting racialist speech, therefore, is permitting racialist action—encouraging the hounding and victimisation of people because of the colour of their skin and the country of their birth, neither of which is a matter of choice for anyone.

Thus there are occasions where tolerance of free speech can be tolerance of the very opposite.

This is certainly the case with the Rt Hon Member for South Down—and the Federation of Conservative Students know that very well indeed.■

Paul Foot

The politics of sex

Is this any more unnatural...

THE RIGHT WING have launched a substantial and, to date, effective ideological onslaught over the question of sex and morality. There has been the attack on sex education in schools, the backlash against gays in Haringey, North London, and the attacks on the BBC over so-called permissiveness. Overshadowing it all has been the continuing scare about AIDS. It may no longer be regarded as the gay plague—but gays are all too often bearing the brunt of the blame for it.

The strategy of attack on all things permissive has—barring certain mishaps like the Jeffrey Archer scandal—had some success. This is one reason, no doubt, why Tory ministers like Norman Tebbit keep raising the issue. They know that popular feeling can often be stirred up against those who appear outside the accepted norms of society. Lesbians, gay men and indeed all those, like socialists, who believe that every individual has the right to define their own sexuality can be branded as outcasts.

This has for the Tories two advantages. Crudely, they believe it can help them win votes—especially if they can tar Labour with the brush of the 'loony left'. In addition, attacks on those who appear 'abnormal' can help to reinforce the most conservative views of society.

It is no doubt for these reasons that in 1984 the *Sun* ran more front pages on AIDS than it did on the miners' strike.

Yet there is more to these attacks than the immediate political gains for the right wing. What lies behind them is firstly the impact of the economic crisis on ideas and secondly the attitude of our society to questions of sexuality.

One symptom of economic crisis is the tendency of capitalists to cut back on what are known as the costs of reproduction—the costs of caring for the sick and elderly, and bringing up the next generation of workers. This has been translated over the past ten years into cuts in public spending—designed to save the capitalist class money at the expense of the working class and in particular its families.

Alongside these cuts, however, comes a return to the *idea* that the family is the ideal which everyone should strive toward. So women are made to feel guilty if they leave their kids to go to work, or if they can't look after sick relatives. Divorce or single parenthood are problems, which should be avoided if at all possible. And anyone who actually doesn't want to live in a family, or have sex with one single member of the opposite sex, is treated as an outcast.

The most striking thing about these social attitudes is their hypocrisy. Over eight million women in Britain today work outside the home. In the inner cities up to one in three families are single parents. Divorce is a fact of working class life. Yet the Tories use this ideology to make people feel guilty that somehow they are not living up to the accepted standards.

But the underlying attitudes of the right wing stem from the distorted views of sexuality which exist in capitalist society.

We are all brought up to believe that there is a static and biologically determined 'normal' sexuality. Even the language used shares this assumption. Homosexuality, for example, is referred to as 'queer', 'perverted', 'bent' or 'deviant'. 'Normal' sex is regarded as the only 'natural' sort of sex.

This is clearly not true even in today's society. Hundreds of thousands of men and women are openly gay. Millions more are unwilling to come out openly. But even a cursory glance at the history of humanity shows that far from homosexuality being a deviation from the norm, for many peoples it was common and socially accepted behaviour.

Indeed one of the reasons for extensive missionary work in Victorian times was the discovery of diverse and, by British standards of the day, outrageous sexual practices—both hetero and homosexual—of the various tribes conquered by the empire.

In societies such as that of ancient Greece, homosexuality was highly valued. And in most societies, monogamy has been regarded as a peculiar deviation. What is clear from anthropological studies is that the expression of sexuality can take many and diverse sexual forms. These are determined not by biological genes but by how society is organised.

The question then is not what is 'natural' since much of that is socially defined, but why society should try to control sexuality? Why in particular does capitalist society stress the need for the nuclear family, for monogamy and for heterosexual love—although all these fly in the face of reality for millions of people?

To find the answers to these questions we need to look at the development of class society itself. Oppressions based on sex are deeply embedded in class society. Engels, writing over 100 years ago in *The Origins of the Family* located the oppression of women not in the attitudes of individuals but in the very way that society was organised—and the family form that resulted from that society.

Capitalist society created its own and very distinct form of family—the nuclear family. This had an impact on the form of sexuality which was acceptable. Capitalism created massive wealth but the relationship between the capitalist and the worker was very different from that between, say, the feudal landlord and his serf. In feudal society, wealth was produced by the forced labour of the serf for his master. Capitalist exploitation is, on the other hand, hidden behind the idea of free wage labour. At the same time, there is tighter ideological control of the exploited class.

Under feudalism peasants were oppressed by the church, but it was a comparatively loose affair. The Catholic Church has a long history of murdering and mutiliating 'sexual deviants', yet it turned a blind eye to old pagan orgies celebrating the turn of the seasons. As long as the crops were got in and the surplus extracted, no one bothered very much what the peasants got up to on midsummer night.

That all changed with the development of capitalism. The old feudal family was smashed. The old extended family, and the forms of sexuality which went with it, were destroyed. In the early years of industrial capitalism, it appeared that little was being put in its place.

The family often broke down under the pressure of the factory system as men, women and children were pulled onto the labour market, but as the system developed, the working class family re-established itself. With that came a whole series of controls of sexuality.

Attitudes to sex became not just a private affair, or something left to the church or the village, but a public matter where the state would if necessary intervene. One of the features of capitalism has been the way in which the state acts as a moral policeman to control the personal lives of individuals. Today, there are laws governing homosexuality, incest, divorce and marriage and ensuring that children are brought up as the state wants them to be.

The need for a disciplined workforce has also been important in stressing certain social norms and prohibiting others—including strong attitudes as to what is acceptable sex (monogamous, in marriage, not too often) and what is unacceptable (promiscuity, homosexuality).

Perhaps the time when these attitudes had most sway in Britain was in the mid and late nineteenth century. The bourgeois family was seen as the only norm. Defence of the family was meant to inspire respect for order and hierarchy. Sex was seen not as a means of gaining pleasure, but as a means of procreation.

Sexual enjoyment was not acknowledged or encouraged. Masturbation was considered a terrible sin (special corsets were even invented to prevent boys from indulging in this horror).

Lesbianism was considered so unthinkable that it wasn't even made illegal. Missions were launched to promote good, steady family life among the poor. Male homosexuality was outlawed—and even upper class men like the writer Oscar Wilde were criminalised because of it.

Yet all these values stank of hypocrisy. One in sixty houses in Victorian London was a brothel. Young girls could be bought on the open market for prostitution. Homosexuality was widespread. Those who were rich enough went abroad in order to enjoy their sexuality—those who did not frequented the many homosexual brothels of the big cities. The double standards of the bourgeois family meant that sexual disease was widespread.

For many upper and middle class men and women this all spelt out intense personal misery and guilt. For the working class it meant sexual exploitation for many individuals and, more importantly, a terrible ideological straitjacket which distorted their own sexual relations.

Behind it all, of course, lay the interests and needs of capital for a docile and domesticated working class which accepted its lot in life.

Since that time, the attitudes of men and women workers have changed dramatically. The capitalist system itself has forced these changes. Since the 1930s women have become a major and permanent part of the workforce. Attitudes to sexuality have undergone a transformation, as people have much greater access to information about sex, to contraception and to films, plays and books which tell them that not everyone lives in monogamous, heterosexual families.

The growth of the cities in the last two hundred years has also played its part in freeing people from the social and religious constraints of the old society. That is why today, attitudes to homosexuality or sex education in schools are usually markedly more progressive in the cities than in rural areas, or in advanced industrial countries rather than peasant societies.

It is unlikely that men and women will go back to the old ways. Society has developed too far. Women are far too keen, for example, on a life without the problems of constant pregnancy and childbirth (in virtually all the advanced capitalist countries the birth rate continues to fall).

Then this?

But there are those who want to destroy the gains made in the past decades. They rail against the so-called permissiveness of the 1960s, and are the very people who would deny children access to information about their own bodies and sexuality; who would deny that homosexuals have any rights; and who would say that women have no right to abortion.

They cannot put the clock back. But they can create a climate of guilt and secrecy where sex once again becomes a dirty word, where millions suffer because of the bigotry of a few.

Particularly in a period like today, when the working class is on the defensive, the right can make a number of gains. They can play on the fears and ignorance of people who feel atomised from one another.

Even quite limited economic struggle can change that. In struggle all questions can be asked, and the working class can move forward to create an alternative—pushing aside the old reactionary ideas on the way. Until then, socialists will often find they are battling against the stream to combat such ideas.

Yet that battle is an extremely important one. And there are always some people who will challenge ruling class ideas on some questions. At the moment the right is on the offensive. But it is not a rout. There are a large number of people who have lived through the gains of the last twenty or so years and who do not want to return to the past. It is not predetermined that the ideological attack by the new moralists will win.■

Noel Halifax

The volatile Molotov

THE LAST of the old Bolsheviks is dead. Viacheslav Molotov, born in 1890, joined the party as a 16-year-old student at Kazan University. He was deported for two years, but continued to be a party militant, and worked on the daily *Pravda* in 1912. During the war he helped Shlyapnikov reorganise the party in Petrograd.

Molotov's finest hour came in 1917. When the Tsar was overthrown and a Provisional Government set up, many Bolsheviks wanted to give it 'critical support'. Molotov, now editing *Pravda*, denounced the Provisional Government as counter-revolutionary, and called for all power to go to the soviets, thus preparing the way for the line Lenin would take on his return from exile.

But being right once does not guarantee one will be right again. When the revolution was in the ascendant Molotov would opt for workers' power, but when the revolutionary tide ebbed he failed to stand firm.

As the bureaucracy closed its grip on Russian society, Molotov rose in the party machine. Elected to the Central Committee in 1921, he got a higher vote than Trotsky or Bukharin. In 1922 he became assistant to Stalin, the general secretary of the party, and in 1926 he joined the Politburo. He had particular responsibility for reorganising the party during the twenties. After Lenin's death he was one of the first to publicly attack Trotsky, in a *Pravda* article of December 1924.

By now Molotov seemed to have lost the vision of socialism that had inspired him during the illegal struggle. In 1924 he wrote: "Our path to socialism lies through the increased productivity of labour on the basis of electrification." Whereas Lenin had defined socialism as "Soviets plus electrification", Molotov dropped workers' democracy in favour of productivity—a definition easily acceptable to a Wilson or a Kinnock.

Unlike Lenin and Trotsky, Molotov had no knowledge of the labour movement outside Russia, and he seems to have lacked any imagination. Isaac Deutscher describes his character as follows:

> "His narrowness and slow-mindedness were already bywords in Bolshevik circles; he appeared to be devoid of any political talent and incapable of any initiative. He usually spoke at party conferences as *rapporteur* on a second- or third-rate point; and his speech was always as dull as dishwater."

It is therefore hardly surprising that he was an active supporter of the purges of the 1930s, being one of the main advocates of a firm hand against all opposition.

Even more disastrously, he turned his hand to international matters. Replacing Bukharin as President of the Communist International, he was a leading advocate of the Third Period line, which saw social democrats as no different from fascists—a line which greatly eased Hitler's rise to power. In 1929 he actually argued that the main attack should be on the left wing of Socialist Parties, since they were the most subtle deceivers of the workers.

In 1939 Molotov became Foreign Minister. His predecessor was Litvinov, a Jew; since Stalin was now planning a deal with the Nazis, he had to be replaced. Molotov played a key role in negotiating the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939, becoming the only Russian leader to actually shake hands with Hitler.

Having done the dirty work, Molotov had to pick up the pieces. In June 1941 he broadcast the news that Russia's erstwhile Nazi allies were launching an invasion; Stalin was keeping his head down.

After the war he continued to serve as Foreign Minister, being praised by US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, for his diplomatic skill. At the Geneva Conference of 1954, which ended the first Vietnam war, he put pressure on the Vietnamese leaders to agree to the partitioning of the country—a compromise which paved the way for the second Vietnam war of the 1960s.

Molotov had been a loyal agent of Stalin for 30 years, but the old butcher showed no gratitude. On the contary, in his last years he grew increasingly suspicious of his closest collaborators. As Isaac Deutscher points out, they had consented to the murder of their associates. If they didn't mind this, then they must be scoundrels and wholly unreliable. If they did mind, then they were probably plotting against Stalin.

In the autumn of 1952 Stalin violently denounced Molotov in a Central Committee meeting. Molotov's wife was arrested and deported. It was only Stalin's death in 1953 that saved Molotov from going down a road he had helped to send so many others along.

Molotov might have seemed, on the grounds of seniority, to be Stalin's natural successor, but he soon lost out to Krushchev. Molotov had been too deeply complicit in Stalinism to carry through the process of de-Stalinisation. Krushchev too had blood on his hands, but he had not been so senior in the apparatus, and he had more room for manoeuvre. Molotov was sacked as Foreign Minister in 1956, and though he and Kaganovich came near to overthrowing Krushchev in June 1957, they failed.

The loyal hack had now become an oppositionist, arguing against Krushchev's decentralisation of economic management. Krushchev could not publicly purge Molotov—that would have meant washing his own dirty linen in public. But Molotov was slowly squeezed out and finally expelled from the party in 1962, as a member of the so-called anti-party group.

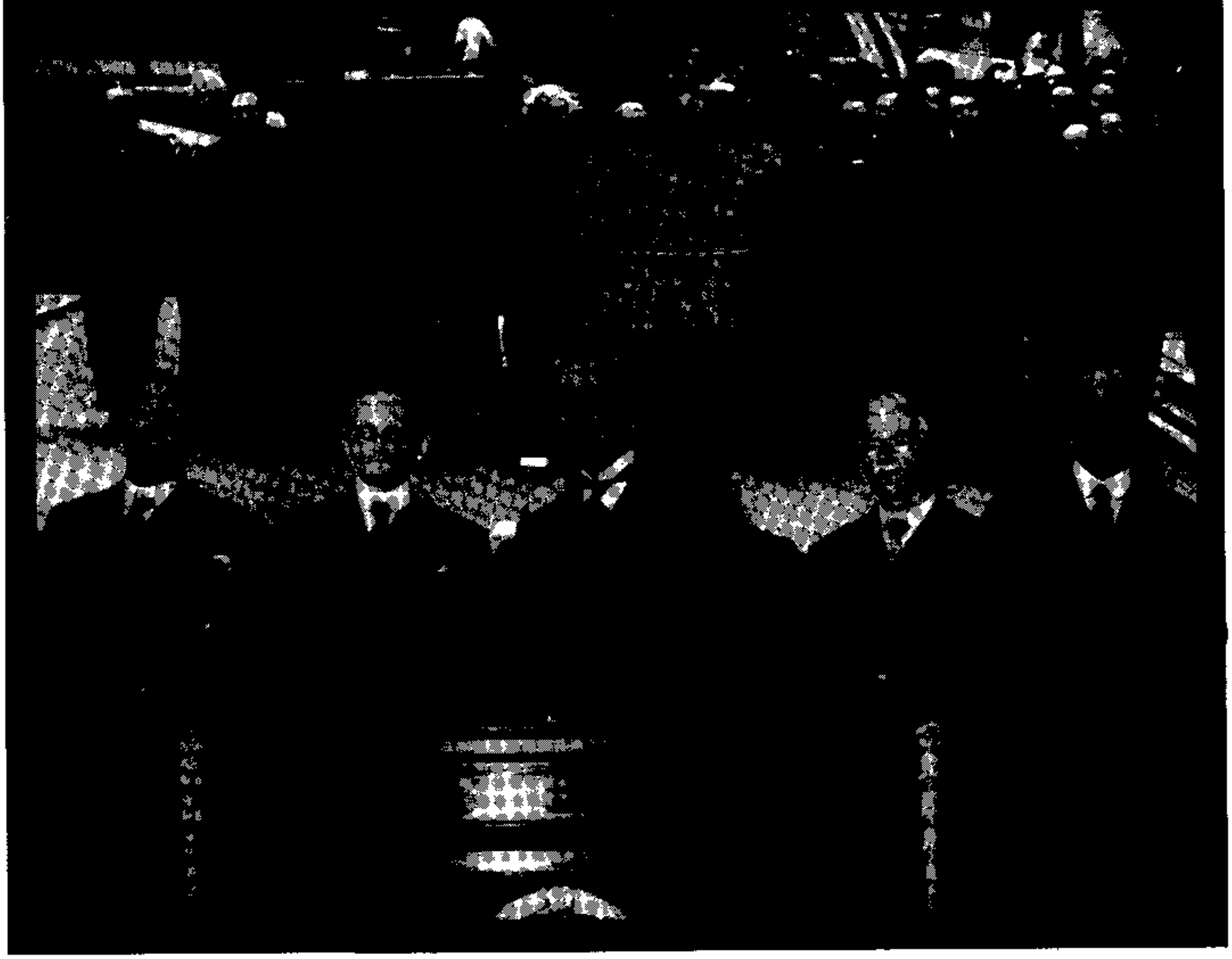
Molotov did not suffer the brutalities he had inflicted on others, but his final years were a long humiliation. He was sent as ambassador to Outer Mongolia, but then Krushchev realised this was too close to China. Fearing Molotov might plot with Mao, he recalled him. It was then proposed to make him ambassador to Holland, but the Dutch government refused to accept a man who, they said, obviously lacked the confidence of his own leaders.

In his earlier years, Molotov had seen towns, factories and mountains called after him—in old age he saw them renamed again. In 1984, on his 94th birthday, he was readmitted to the party. But now he was a pathetic, forgotten hack, a man with nothing left but memories—memories of fascists embraced and comrades sent to their death.■

Ian Birchall

Molotov takes tea with Hitler

Labour: a poverty of theory



Donny Gluckstein looks at the ideas which underpin the Labour Party and reviews a new book by left winger Geoffrey Foote.

TROTSKY summed up what the Labour Party is all about in a few lines. He showed the influence on Labour of Britain's gradual economic development, its pre-eminence as the first capitalist power, and the blurring of class struggle that resulted.

First there is empiricism, or contempt for theory. By ignoring theory, Labour pretends it is practical, undogmatic, and freely chooses its ideas. The reality is that far from having no set theory, it absorbes *without question* a whole baggage of ideas from the ruling class:

> "The outlook of the leaders of the British Labour Party is a sort of amalgam of Conservatism and Liberalism, partly adapted to the requirements of the trade unions, or rather their top layers. All of them are ridden with the religion of 'gradualness'. In addition they acknowledge the religion of the Old and New Testaments."

Along with these goes national arrogance. Trotsky says of Ramsay MacDonald, the Kinnock of his day:

> "MacDonald is convinced that since his bourgeoisie was once the foremost bourgeoisie in the world then he, MacDonald, has nothing whatsoever to learn from the barbarians and semi-barbarians on the continent of Europe."

Labour's reformism must not simply be commented upon, but broken:

> "Workers must at all costs be shown these self-satisfied pedants, drivelling eclectics, sentimental careerists and liveried footmen of the bourgeoisie in their true colours."

There is a difference between the right and left within the Labour Party, as Trotsky realised. However, he insisted that:

> "The characteristics of conservatism, religiosity and national arrogance can be seen in varying degrees and combinations in all the official leaders of today, from the ultra-right Thomas to the 'left' Kirkwood."

Dealing specifically with the Labour left he explained:

> "The main feature...is its reticence, its mediocre half-and-half nature. It keeps going so long as it does not draw the ultimate conclusions and is not compelled to answer the basic questions set before it point-blank... As

Ramsay MacDonald

soon as a question of action arises the left respectfully surrender the leadership to the right."

This assessment has been proved correct many times.

The Labour Party's Political Thought—A History by Geoffrey Foote is good and bad at the same time. It demonstrates brilliantly, and more convincingly than any critic could, how even the best of the left are appallingly weak and devoid of ideas. But Foote achieves only the most superficial analysis.

HIS book is torn apart by a contradiction which is posed, but never resolved: how can socialist change be brought about by a party machine which is wedded to working through the institutions of capitalism?

Labour has in a real sense no political thought to call its own, and still less a history of thought.

Today no one reads people such as Glasier, Jay, Wooton or Durbin or the host of others that Foote refers to. Even the more familiar MacDonald, Attlee or Crosland could never be looked to as guides to political practice, only as historical curiosities. There is no cumulative body of ideas. Each period rethinks its ideas anew and builds on sand.

This is not the case with either bourgeois or proletarian (ie revolutionary Marxist) thought. The ruling class has an intellectual culture created by philosophers, historians, politicians and economists.

The Marxist tradition draws on the international history of working class struggle, from Chartism to the Russian Revolution and beyond. The writings of Marx, Lenin, and other leading revolutionaries do not date because they are bricks with which a tradition continues to be built. Unlike Labour, both the ruling class and the Marxist traditions have an independent basis in the lives of the two contending classes of capitalism.

This statement may seem surprising. After all, the Labour Party receives most of its votes from workers. But getting votes does not mean that it is led by workers, serves their interests or can be shaped by them. As Lenin put it:

> "Of course, most of the Labour Party's members are working men. However, whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers but also upon the men that lead it, and the contents of its actions and its political tactics...from this point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party."

LABOUR'S politics are dominated by two forces—the trade union bureaucracy and professional reformist politicians. The working class plays only the most subsidiary role. Union leaders and MPs are subject to only indirect influence by the rank and file. Even party conference, where genuine workers may sometimes be heard, is tied up by the huge block votes of the trade union leaders.

However the trade union bureaucracy is weak on political ideas since its main job is to mediate on wages and conditions between workers and employers. As such it has no class interest to pursue, only a wish to keep these two classes at the negotiating table. Furthermore the bureaucracy is divided on sectional grounds—between different industries, crafts and so on.

Insofar as the officials concern themselves with politics, it is to intercede between capitalists and workers, this time at state level. To do this they need another group with broader political interests to represent them.

That is why the Labour Party has always consisted of a combination of trade union bureaucrats and reformist politicians. Early on, the political section was made up of ILP leaders. But since Labour acquired a number of MPs, the Parliamentary Labour Party provides this generalised political input.

The Labour Party leadership also mediates between the working class and capitalists—but through parliament. That is why it holds the House of Commons in such veneration. The ruling class is ready to ignore parliamentary conventions if inconvenient. It has no qualms about supporting all sorts of foreign dictators. Equally, revolutionaries do not make a religion of parliament. Labour, however, argues that workers' political demands must always go through parliament.

Just as the union bureaucracy exists to negotiate between workers and employers in the industrial field, so the Labour Party and its MPs can only exist so long as conditions of bourgeois democracy prevail. Fascism or workers' power would be equally fatal and this sets the limits, on right and left, in the party's thinking.

The union leader negotiates with just one section of employers and is not put in a position of feeling responsibility for the *general* welfare of the system (though of course general political ideas will exert an influence). The Labour Party, on the other hand must take a position on the whole range of legislation. To run the state it must pose as representative of the nation (the *capitalist nation* that is) as a whole.

The fact that the party uses more generalised arguments than the unions means it attracts left wingers whose ideals go further than just improving wages. But this is more than outweighed by the pressure on the leadership of running the capitalist state. Thus the ruling group in the party tends to the right of the officials while party activists tend to the left.

FOOTE cannot understand this. He rightly sees the history of the Labour Party as a battle between those who want Labour to represent workers' demands and those that want it to be a classless party, but concludes that the supporters of classless politics are always defeated. He forgets they have only lost when Labour is in opposition. The best example of this is Ramsay MacDonald who Foote says abandoned Labour because: "The Labour Party fundamentally represented one class...and MacDonald could not accept the consequences of this." This does not explain how MacDonald

managed to control the Labour Party for almost 31 years—longer than any other leader.

Foote cannot come to terms with the *permanent* contradiction between Labour's working class support and its attempts to run a state which, far from being neutral, is thoroughly capitalist in character. Although the emphasis may alter, the party always appeals to *both* class *and* to the national idea which is held to be above classes.

This is most obvious when it comes to *nationalisation* which is historically the central plank of Labour policy. Nationalisation appears to be a blow directed at capitalism on behalf of the masses. In actual fact it is achieved through the existing state, is run on 'business principles' (and so does not liberate the workers in the particular industry) and has been chiefly applied to those parts of the infrastructure capitalism needed for overall efficiency.

At least Foote has noticed the tension between class and nation, which breaks into open conflict every time Labour is in office. Since the rank and file have no real say in what goes on within the party, this tension can only be articulated in an indirect form through conflict between union officials and professional politicians. For the bureaucracy, though distant, has more of a relationship with class struggle at the point of production and is more susceptible to rank and file pressure than MPs. Unions exist all the time at the workplace as the basic defensive weapon of the workers. Voting, by contrast, is totally passive and happens at five-yearly intervals.

The clearest illustration of this conflict was the fall of the second Labour government in 1931. Hit by the effects of the 1929 crash, MacDonald's ministry saw its duty as saving the capitalist economy by slashing unemployment benefits. But it came up against the General Council of the TUC. Cabinet members like Sydney Webb might declare that "the General Council are pigs", but it was their resistance that kept the Labour Party from making cuts. To achieve his programme MacDonald had to leave the Labour Party and create a National Government.

More than any other issue strikes show the key decisions within party thinking. The professional politicians, in their concern for the state, regard strikes as a menace to be avoided. This does not date from Callaghan's appeal for people to cross picket lines in the 1970s. From the birth of the party the ILP took the position that strikes were harmful. Workers were to await their liberation through capturing the state and do nothing to undermine it. During the 1913 Dublin lockout when William Martin Murphy tried to starve Jim Larkin's transport workers out of existence, the ILP wrote:

> "In Murphyism and in Larkinism we see but opposite phases of the same wilful, anarchistic temperament. The one is the upper, and the other the lower, jaw of the same clinch... The fight to the finish with capitalism will rest...with the triumph of the social and political forces of general community over all interests and powers inimical to the collective wellbeing."

BECAUSE it lacks its own class basis and is intent on running the capitalist state, Labour's leadership has invariably lifted its ideas from the liberal progressive wing of the bourgeoisie—that group which believes that exploitation can be most profitably pursued by using the carrot rather than the stick.

Radical Liberal politics developed under Gladstone when Britain pursued a policy of free trade. The idea was to use this traditional capitalist framework to pay for a number of reforms (old age pensions, unemployment insurance and so on). These concepts underlay the programme of the first two Labour governments.

The Fabians became an important influence during the First World War. They had previously failed to win the Liberal Party by a policy of 'permeation'. Fabians believed that neither the working class (which they regarded as stupid and subversive), nor the greedy capitalists should govern society. What was wanted to save British civilisation was a group of 'disinterested' experts. Luckily they and their friends were generously prepared to play that role.

J M Keynes

A proof of Labour's intellectual poverty is the inability of its most profound thinkers to see one millimetre further than the end of their noses. Capitalist growth at the turn of the century convinced the Labour Party of what Webb called "the inevitability of gradualness". The economy would grow and grow, and the working class would come into its own.

After 1921 the deepening crisis of British capitalism led sections of the party to consider more modern ideas. Nineteenth century liberalism was now questioned, but only a more modern bourgeois viewpoint proposed as an alternative.

J A Hobson was now fashionable. An ex-Liberal, he admitted:

> "Though...my sympathies have been with the Labour Party, I have never felt quite at home in a body governed by trade union members and their finance, and intellectually led by full-blown Socialists. For neither section of this Labour Party avowedly accepts that middle course which seems to me essential to a progressive and constructive economic government in this country."

Hobson's idea was—pay the workers more, generate demand and the British economy would boom again.

It seemed as if the interests of capital and labour could be reconciled. Hobson's ideas fitted perfectly after the 1926 General Strike, when a mood of class collaborationism gripped the trade union movement. They also mesmerised the Labour left who proposed a "national minimum wage".

The disaster of the second Labour government put paid to Gladstonian economics and the Fabians' "inevitability of gradualness". Even Hobson's optimistic predictions now seemed patent absurdities and so the party turned to J M Keynes. As a Liberal he detested the "creed which preferring the mud to the fish, exalts the boorish proletariat above the bourgeois and the intelligentsia who, with whatever faults, are the

Hugh Gaitskell

quality in life." He thought that Labour was "a class party, and the class is not my class...the class war will find me on the side of the educated bourgeois."

Although Hobson aimed to revive Britain's ailing capitalism he had at least suggested it might be done by raising living standards. Keynes clearly did not care for the "boorish proletariat". His sole concern was the restoration of profitability through state intervention. Yet this openly capitalist theory came to rule over the Labour Party for the better part of thirty years.

In the conditions of the 1930s, 40s and 50s Keynesianism meant increasing demand through massive government expenditure on weapons of human destruction—human progress on the cone of the H-bomb. Even when there was room for reform once more, as in the post-war period, there was nothing specifically socialist in what was put forward. Beveridge—whose report led to the great expansion in social welfare—was a Liberal: while even the Young Conservative group in the 1930s championed the idea of using the state to aid both industry and the working man by the control of credit, marketing schemes, wages boards and workers' representation on boards of directors. This similarity of programmes led, in the 1950s to the phenomenon of 'Butskellism'.

The Labour left took a different path to reach the same end. The dramatic fall of the 1931 Labour government pushed them into a cataclysmic view of the future. Laski, Cripps and others looked to Stalin's five-year plans with their massive exploitation of workers and peasants as the way to successful socialism. In their eyes planning equalled socialism, and so by a roundabout route they came to agree with the Keynesian supporters of a planned capitalist economy.

If the 30s convinced the left of capitalism's inevitable breakdown, the 40s and 50s led them to believe that economic problems had gone forever. In the thirties Strachey had written books entitled *The Coming Struggle for Power* and *The Nature of the Capitalist Crisis*. After the war he called for a new 'democratic capitalism'. Laski had believed that the state was "an instrument...of the class which owns economic power". But when war began Laski's leftism evaporated. He wrote: "In the summer and autumn of 1940 there was...a regeneration of British democracy...which made the identities between citizens a hundred times more vital than the differences which had divided them."

The post-war years were the heyday of Labour's revisionism which held that Britain was now "a buoyant economy which could no longer be meaningfully described as 'capitalist'... The old objectives of socialism had been either achieved—as with full employment and social welfare—or had become irrelevant—as with the need to abolish private property."

Tony Crosland, high priest of revisionism, believed:

> "We need not only higher exports and old age pensions but more open-air cafés, brighter and gayer streets at night...better designs for furniture, pottery, women's clothes...street lamps and telephone kiosks, and so on *ad infinitum*."

The long boom began tailing off in the 1960s. Harold Wilson, without a more up-to-date bourgeois Liberal thinker to hand, clung to Keynes seasoned with a sprinkling of Fabian elitism—experts and the "white heat of technological revolution". When this failed he tried union bashing, but was blocked by the unions. In the 1970s, when British capitalism was in sharp decline, Labour clutched at straws. Planning, through incomes policies and Social Contracts, cut workers living standards, but did not cure the capitalist patient.

Today there can be no bourgeois liberal solution to capitalist ills, so Labour turns to the nastier illiberal side of the bourgeoisie.

Friedman's monetarism became fashionable under Healey. Now Kinnock looks to Japan's economic miracle and company unions for salvation—another capitalist solution with consequences only too easily imagined. Ironically, the last outpost of Keynesianism is the Labour left. They alone imagine that the puny forces of British capitalism can plan their way out of the gigantic international maze of capitalism.

SINCE reforms have to wait on capitalist success, Labour's political thought has principally been concerned with running the capitalist economy. Accepting the framework of capitalist institutions the left have never been able to effectively challenge this idea.

Foote gives detailed consideration to those on the left of the Party who tried to resist the idea of Labour as the manager of capitalism. One left winger after another, from Cripps to Bevan and Benn, has been defeated or has caved in. But we are not told of the corrupting effect of parliament, the distance separating the MP from workers or the impotence of government in the face of international capitalism.

The Labour Party is intellectually feeble. It borrows all its ruling ideas from the Liberal bourgeoisie and is condemned to nurture the very system it professes to hate.

The answer to the dilemma which Foote and those like him on the left of the Labour Party face is contained in the final words of his book:

> "As the 1984 miners' strike has demonstrated [workers] are as capable of self-sacrifice, courage and determination as their ancestors. As long as people are willing to fight the social struggles inherent in capitalist society there is hope that a socialist order will be eventually achieved."

It is true that in such struggles lies the hope for socialism. But it must be remembered that the Labour leadership sabotaged the strike. The hard work and financial generosity of many rank and file Labour Party members could not undo the damage done by their leaders.

The lesson of the miners' strike, in contrast to the history of Labour, is that only by creating a party which believes in and supports class struggle, can workers be liberated.

Their college or ours?

CIRCUMSTANCES sometimes produce strange bedfellows. Ruskin College, Oxford, is under attack. One of its staff, David Selbourne, a run of the mill intellectual, has gone over to the so-called libertarian right like so many others.

He is appealing to the capitalist courts to defend his right to contribute to Murdoch's scab newspapers without being boycotted by the decent element of the student body.

Hugo Young, the right wing *Guardian* columnist, has given Selbourne's case unprecedented publicity and support and the government has now got into the act; the minister responsible expressing "great concern" about "academic freedom" at Ruskin.

Of course we have to support Ruskin against these attempts at right wing intimidation. That must be said firmly and unequivocally because we do not, cannot, support the arguments which, for example, Raphael Samuel uses in its defence nor do we, or can we, support the very structure and ideology of Ruskin.

We must actively defend it against the right *in spite of*, not because of these things.

Ruskin College was founded (in 1899) by an American philanthropist, Walter Voorman. He was a bourgeois radical.

The object of the operation was, "extending the benefits of an Oxford education to members of the working class".

The Workers Educational Association (WEA) was set up four years later with the same notion but with a different method—evening classes. These efforts were supported by the right wing, class collaborationist tendency in the workers' movement.

Both Ruskin and the WEA soon gained a degree of financial support from the capitalist state.

Of course, the whole object of both schemes was to tame and house-break (a term used at the time) working class militants—and it still is.

But in 1906-09 many of the Ruskin students (miners and railwaymen in their majority) began to revolt against this. They were influenced by the beginnings of the great unrest, the biggest strike movement in Britain until then, and by the ferment of ideas triggered off by the Russian revolution of 1905-6.

Their historic strike in 1909, which paralysed Ruskin College, led to the beginnings of what they called Independent Working Class Education. "They demanded that the College abandon teaching Jevons' economics [ie bourgeois economics] and replace it by Marx's." Naturally, the college authorities could not concede this—*both* their university connections *and* the Kier Hardies forbade it. Most of the students (and the then Principal, Dennis Hurd) broke from Ruskin.

The spirit of the strike is summed up in a couplet that the strikers popularised:

"Oxford, city of dreaming spires,
And bleeding liars."

In short, the Ruskin strikers came quickly to the notion that there is no impartial social science in a class society, that universities and other state institutions teach *bourgeois* economics, *bourgeois* sociology and so on; that, therefore, class conscious workers must control their own education and that it must be independent of the capitalist state and financed *exclusively* by workers' organisations.

They adopted a striking sentence from Ruskin as their motto, "*I can promise to be candid but not impartial.*" Nobody, that is to say, is impartial. You are with us or against us in the class struggle. And academic impartiality is a fraud which serves the boss class.

'The whole object was to tame working class militants'

On this basis the bulk of the students set up their own Labour College which soon moved to London and fought hard (and partly successfully) for trade union support.

Still more important was the Plebs League, founded before the strike.

It was soon running Marxist classes in South Wales, Lancashire and Scotland. John Maclean was one of the Scottish tutors.

All this might have been merely an episode but for the specific circumstances of the class struggle in Britain at the time. The great unrest was getting underway, and *politically* the next two decades saw a hard fight between *Labourism* (class collaborationist, reformist, constitutionalist) and *socialism* (class struggle and more or less revolutionary) for the allegiance of newly awakened sections of the working class. The Ruskin/Labour College split played a rather important role in this fight.

In terms of ideas, the Ruskin/WEA tradition (state supported) was firmly on the side of Labourism, the Labour College movement on the side of the socialist left.

But why should a movement primarily concerned with working class education be so significant? (And it was *very* significant.)

Because of the fragmentation of the left. Syndicalists, BSPers, SLPers, the ILP left and independents could agree in hostility to class collaboration, in rejection of the capitalist state and all its works, in the belief that state education (and the state supported education of Ruskin/WEA) was wrapped up in bourgeois ideology—'head fixing' was the popular term.

They could not agree on a unified way forward but they could collaborate in the Plebs League/Labour College Marxist classes. And their collaboration was strenghtened by opposition to the imperialist war of 1914-18.

The role played by the Labour College Movement in its various manifestations (Plebs League 1908-27, Central Labour College 1909-29, National Council of Labour Colleges 1921-64) was, on the whole, a very positive one.

Look at the publications of the Plebs League and the NCLC. Mark Starr's *A Worker Looks At History*, W W Craiks *Outline of a History of the British Working Class Movement*, Tom Ashcroft's *History of Modern Imperialism* stand out among many others, as basic Marxist texts

We should not idealise these efforts. Having grasped the basic notion of the class struggle in ideas, most of the Labour College theorists did not get beyond a basic 'them and us' approach.

The Russian revolution of 1917 and the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920 changed things fundamentally. Although the NCLC was not set up until 1921 (with the support of the whole trade union left) a conflict was built into it from the beginning.

It had two bases of support; first, left union officials, second, CP militants.

So long as they stayed together, ie until the sell out of the General Strike of 1926, Labour College ideas had more support than Ruskin/WEA ideas in the workers' movement. The AEU, the NUR, the Boilermakers and the South Wales Miners Federation and a lot of lesser unions were committed to them.

In 1924-5 the NCLC ran 1,048 Marxist classes with 25,071 students—virtually all of them working class militants. The NCLC, together with the CP, conducted a militant opposition to the state-sponsored British Empire Exhibition in 1925. That was the high point. After 1926 the inevitable split developed.

The NCLC became a fake left opposition to the CP and the Ruskin/WEA revived and grew along with the Labour right.

The details of this, and its various twists and turns, are a fascinating chapter in the history of our tradition.

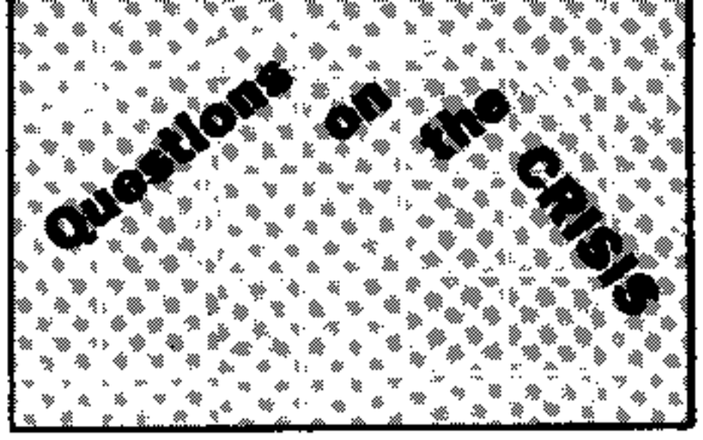
It was Stalinism that wrecked the (good) chance of continuing the tradition of independent working class education.

So back to Ruskin. It is today a hot-bed of opportunists, cynics and some serious reformists. It depends on government money.

But such is the shift to the right in ideas in Britain today that this 'EETPU' of ideas is being bashed from the right.

We have to bash the right in reply, in all the unions, colleges and universities where we have influence. Ruskin is not our friend, but our enemies have made it their enemy.■

Duncan Hallas



Money go round

CAPITALISM is in crisis. Yet there doesn't seem to be any shortage of money in the City or on the stock exchange. Where does all that money come from?

TIME AND again we hear the government arguing that there isn't enough money available for new hospitals, houses, or schools.

Yet all the publicity surrounding the Big Bang on the stock exchange suggests that the opposite is true. The gamblers, parasites and racketeers who populate the City's august financial institutions have been making millions in recent years simply out of dealing in money and bits of paper.

The figures involved are staggering, the zeros beyond any reality most of us can handle. The total value of shares traded on the London stock market is now £300 billion (11 zeros). But that figure is tiny compared to the amount of money floating around on the world financial markets. An estimated $200 billion *every day* gets moved from one foreign currency to another (with $90 billion of that passing through London).

It is easy to be mesmerised by the way in which these sums move from one computerised bank account to another, mysteriously growing on the way.

Yet one of the most basic points made by Marx is that money on its own is incapable of producing anything. The value money represents is created by human labour. If that labour stopped, all the money in all the bank accounts would be worthless.

In a rational society the critical question would not be where is the money to build new houses, but where are the unemployed brickies, carpenters, cement-makers, and glassworkers? If a shortage of money was the problem the government, or the workers' soviet, could just print it. (Monetarists argue that printing money just leads to inflation, but that's another question.)

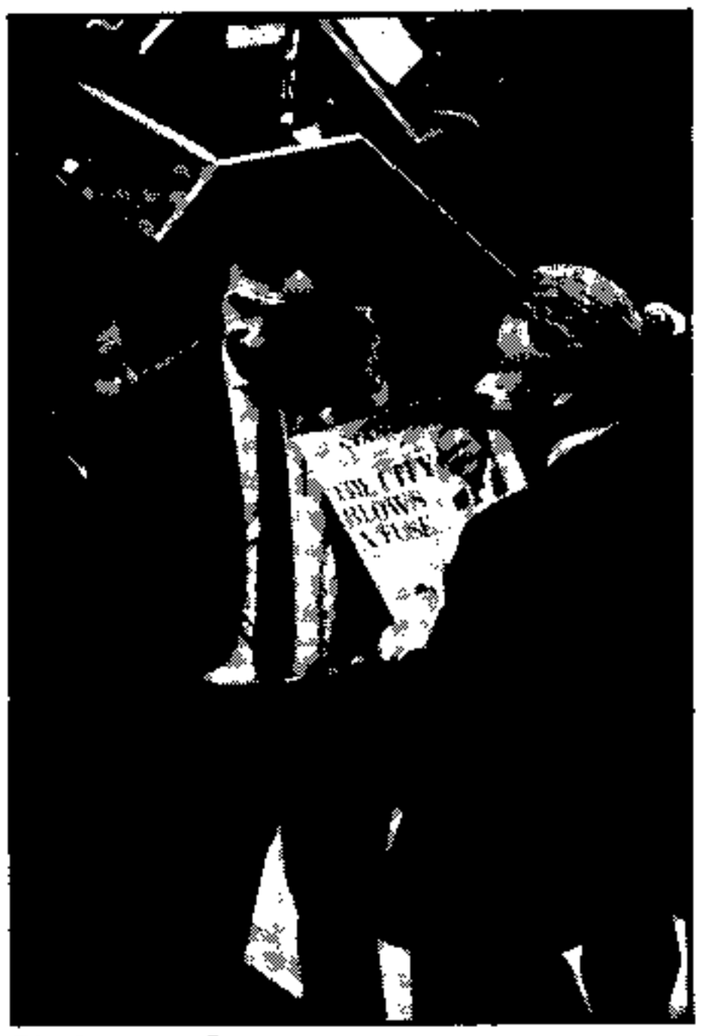
But we do not live in a rational society. We live in a society ruled by the pursuit of money and profit. What matters though is not primarily how much money there is or where it comes from (the crude answer being that governments still print it and banks pump it round and round the economy at an increasing pace).

What does matter is who controls that money and what they spend it on. If we look at the stock exchange in the course of its rise in the last five years (up over 100 percent on its level in 1981, though down 8 percent from its peak earlier this year) there are three main sources of the money.

Firstly, there are the rich. Some recent surveys suggest that 15 percent of the adult population now own shares. But most of these are members of the new middle class with a few shares in British Telecom or the TSB. A tiny 1 percent of adults (a few hundred thousand people) own about 80 percent of the shares not owned by institutions.

The rich have prospered in two ways in recent years despite the slump. They've reaped massive benefits from Tory tax cuts. They've also gained from the fact that while profits have risen since 1981, the dividends, interest, and rent paid out of those profits have risen even faster. Instead of investing those profits in new factories and machinery companies have been handing them out to the shareholders.

If they can't maintain the dividend the share values of the company will fall and it will become vulnerable to takeover by a more successful predator. Takeover money worth £7 billion also passed into the hands of shareholders last year.



Big bangers?

Then there are the institutions, the pension funds and insurance companies, which have grown enormously in size in recent years. Pension funds in Britain alone control £140 billion worth of assets built up out of the compulsory savings of workers.

For the Thatcherites this is another indicator of popular capitalism, giving workers a stake in the country. But, as Arthur Scargill and the NUM discovered in court, workers have absolutely no say in how these funds are used. They are run either by the bosses or by a select group of merchant banks in the city.

Finally there are the banks. In Britain as distinct from Germany or Japan, banks rarely invest directly in company shares. But they do lend money to individuals and other corporations who want to gamble on the stock market.

So much for who controls the money. But there are two problems with all this that also need to be clearly understood.

One is that the value of all shares traded on the stock market exists only on paper. All those pieces of paper are merely what Marx used to call fictitious capital as distinct from real capital—the bricks, mortar and machinery—they represent.

The paper value of fictitious capital cannot always be turned into hard cash. If every shareholder tries to sell, the price of shares will collapse.

The second important problem is the growing disproportion between the fortunes being made on the financial markets and the continuing stagnation of much of the productive system in Britain and elsewhere. Capitalists are all channelling their spare cash into the financial world instead of the purchase of 'real' assets such as factories, machinery and raw materials.

Very little of the money changing hands on the stock exchange finds its way back into industry. The piece of paper might say ICI or GKN, but when it is sold the money simply passes from one speculator to another unless it's a new share. But new share issues raising money for industrial expansion have been few in number since the early 1970s.

In the last year the government has raised more money from privatisation than companies have from new issues of shares. It's a comedy of grotesques feeding off a system in decay. Money circles repeatedly around the financial markets. The values of shares, bonds and all sorts of IOUs double or treble creating fantastic profits on paper (and genuine fortunes for the dealers who take a small fee on every transaction).

But in the end the gap between the spiralling inflation of the financial markets and the deflation (depressed prices) of the productive system, which is the ultimate source of those profits, has to be closed.

The gap can be closed in one of three ways. Firstly there might be a return of rapid economic growth and continued expansion of industrial profits.

Secondly it could be closed, as in the 1970s, by inflation raising the prices of real commodities compared to financial assets. But that was a time when, especially after the slump of 1974, shareholders and money lenders lost out badly and they don't want that to happen again.

Or thirdly there could simply be a crash of the financial system itself, forcing the government to bail out the banks and institutions affected but still intensifying the crisis of capitalism.■

Pete Green

Shattering powers

In 1956 the great Soviet Russian poet *Boris Pasternak* wrote an extended autobiographical sketch intended as a preface to a new edition of his selected verse and narrative poems. The sketch was published subsequently in English as a separate book under the title *An Essay in Autobiography*.

The compiler of the projected collection, Nikolai Bannikov, had persuaded Pasternak to add a chapter of his epoch-making cycle of lyrics *Life Is My Sister*, written in the summer of 1917, but the chapter was not incorporated in the published sketch and remained in draft pencil manuscript in Bannikov's archive.

It was first published in the Soviet Union in the appendix to *Stikhotvoreniya i Poemy*, Moscow 1965 (sections 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) and in *Vozdushnye Puti*, Moscow 1982 (section 4).

***Richard Chappell** has undertaken the task of translating Pasternak's words and holds the copyright. He kindly wrote the above introduction and offered us this piece.*

LENIN, the unexpectedness of his appearance from over a sealed border; his inflammatory speeches; his frankness that hit you in the eye; his insistence and impetus; the unexampled boldness of his address to the breaking storm of the people's elemental force; his readiness to ignore everything, even the unfinished war still being waged, in favour of the immediate creation of a new, as yet unseen, world; his impatience and unreservedness along with the acuteness of his toppling and derisive exposés, defeated dissenters, quelled adversaries and evoked the admiration even of enemies.

However widely the great revolutions of different ages and nations might diverge one from another, they do have, if you glance back, one thing in common that hindsight unites. They are all exceptional or extreme historical cases so rare in the annals of mankind and demand of it such utmost shattering powers that they cannot often be repeated.

Lenin was the soul and conscience of that rarest of sights, the face and voice of the great, unique and extraordinary Russian tempest. Unwavering and with the ardour of a genius, he assumed responsibility for such blood and demolition such as the world had not yet seen and he would not flinch at roaring a war-cry to the people, appealing to their most recondite and intimate yearnings, thus permitting the sea to rage and the hurricane to rampage only at his behest.

People who had passed through the harsh school of the outrages showered down upon the poverty-stricken by power and wealth, understood the revolution as the explosion of their own wrath, their lethal retribution for that prolonged and ever-protracted mocking torment.

But abstract contemplators, chiefly from among the intellectuals who had no conception of the sufferings with which the people had been worn to exhaustion, even in those cases where they did sympathise with the revolution, perceived it through a prism of the ongoing patriotic Slavophile philosophy, renewed, rife and rampant in those years of war.

They would not counterpose October to February as two opposing poles for according to their concept both upheavals merged into a single, indivisible, integral Russian revolution which immortalised Russia among nations and which in their eyes flowed quite naturally from the entire toil-filled, holy, religious Russian past.

Forty years have gone by. From so far in space and time the voices out of the crowds that congregated day and night in summertime squares beneath the open sky just as in the assemblies of ancient days can reach us no longer. But even at this great distance I can still see those gatherings like soundless spectacles or else like vivid frozen pictures.

Multitudes of quaking wary souls would stop each other, converge, throng together and, as "members of the chapter" would put it in days of yore, would start thinking aloud. Folk from the crowd would unburden their hearts and converse on that most important thing of all, how and to what end they were alive, and by what means could they establish a uniquely intelligible and dignified existence.

This infectious totality of their upsurge was blurring the boundaries between man and nature. In that celebrated summer of 1917, in that interval between the two revolutionary dates, it really seemed that roads, trees and stars were holding meetings and making speeches together with men and women. From one end to the other the air was in the grip of a heated, thousand-kilometre-long inspiration and seemed to have turned clairvoyant and animate.

To me today it seems that throughout long tranquil eras humanity could perhaps be always concealing beneath a mundane surface of deceptive calm replete with bargains with its conscience and in thrall to untruths, great funds of lofty moral demands and that it fondles the dream of another more courageous and pure life, albeit unaware and unsuspecting of its own secret designs.

But to shake up the firm references of society it takes some natural disaster or military defeat that rocks the solidity of the everyday, seemingly so unalterable and age-old, rather as some shining pillars of secret spiritual strata might burst wondrously upwards from underground out to meet the air.

People grow to their full stature, astonish themselves, can't even recognise themselves and people prove themselves giants. Encounters in the street seem no more to be anonymous passers-by but instead indices or delegates of the human race at large. This sensation of day-to-day life observed at every step yet at the same time turning at once to history, this feeling of eternity descending earthwards dropping everywhere into your eyes, this fabulous mood I attempted to convey on a personal plane in the book of lyric poetry written at that time entitled *Life Is My Sister.*■

May-June 1956

Off the Christmas tree

XMAS IS a time for reading. We asked people who work on *Socialist Worker Review* what they would like to give or be given.

The Chartists by Dorothy Thompson (*Wildwood House £5.50*)

Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism: the Struggle for the Working Class in Tsarist Russia by Jeremiah Schneidemann (*Cornell £3.25*)

Hollywood Babylon by Kenneth Anger (*Arrow £7.95*)

The Chartists is one of the best history books around. It's a detailed account of a new working class striving to become a class in struggle—and how close they came to smashing capital's rule. It makes you look at the 'British tradition' in a new light. **Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism** is a fascinating examination of the Russian secret police attempt to set up unions in order to control the working class. The underside of Hollywood is described in **Hollywood Babylon**. It reveals the real life behind the facade of America's myth factory which outdid even Victorian England for hypocrisy.□*Noel Halifax*

June 1936, Class Struggle and the Popular Front in France by Jacques Danos and Marcel Gibelin, translated by P Fysh and C Bourry, (*Bookmarks £5.95*)

Empire of the Sun by J G Ballard (*Granada £2.50*)

June 1936 wasn't the most important book of the year, but it was for me the most interesting. It is the first full length Marxist account to appear in English of one of those remarkable moments in working class history when mass struggle shakes the system. The lessons to be learnt are precisely the opposite of those currently being preached by the Kinnockite and *Marxism Today* crews. When workers fight with audacity and solidarity they can win major victories, but, as the book shows, such victories can be thrown away and the gains eventually lost by reformist leaders. **Empire of the Sun** is a novel set in China during the Second World War. The book is free of national chauvinism and liberal moralism. The story is told through the eyes of a young English boy as he grows up amidst the horror of war, internment camp and the disintegration of social relationships as the war comes to an end.□*Pete Green*

Strumpet City by James Plunkett, (*Arrow £3.50*)

War and an Irish Town by Eamonn McCann (*Pluto Press £3.95*)

My Life by Leon Trotsky (*Penguin £3.95*)

Christmas for me comes in three stages: first the journey home to Ireland. For this an absorbing novel that takes the mind off the impending doom of a family reunion. **Strumpet City** fills the bill—a superbly entertaining story that also gives you a real feel for the historic clash between labour and capital in the 1913 Dublin Lockout. Phase two is surviving the festivities, Pope's blessing etc. Try a lively irreverent but relevant book. **War and an Irish Town** is a wonderful commentary on the early civil rights movement in Derry told by someone who played no small part in the events he describes. Now it's all coming to an end and it's back to the real world. Required: a book to cut through the hangover and inspire you afresh for the year ahead. Trotsky's autobiography charts his early life, his experiences in 1917 and finally his exile under Stalin, yet even in these his darkest days the great revolutionary's optimism for the future shines through.□*Pat Stack*

Red Star Over China by Edgar Snow (*Penguin £2.95*)

Child of all Nations by Pramadoya A Toer (*Penguin £3.50*)

The first political book I read was **Red Star Over China**. It aroused great admiration for Mao and his wonderful feats. Considering that the book is banned in Malaysia, and that a twelve year old's heroes were supposed to be Churchill or Stamford Raffles, this was a very good thing. The novel **Child of all Nations** is set in Indonesia. It provides a moving insight into the humiliation of a colonial people who at the same time desire and are attracted to the culture and science of their oppressors. It also brings out the role of other races.□*Lawrence Wong*

Goya and the Impossible Revolution by Gwyn Williams (*Penguin £6.95*)

Prisoners of Power by A and B Strugatsky (*Penguin £1.95*)

Goya at the age of 53 turned his back on the comfortable life of a court painter and was transformed into a great revolutionary artist. Gwyn Williams looks at two devastating series of pictures: the *Caprichos*, in which Goya launched an onslaught against the superstitions of the church and the decadence of the ruling class; and the *Disasters of War* where he depicted the full horror of the wars which engulfed Spain in the Napoleonic period. Goya's genius is reclaimed for the revolutionary tradition. *Prisoners of Power* is about an uprising against state capitalism, written by Russia's most popular writers of science fiction. Their work is a blend of social satire with a socialist humanism which insists that people make history even if they can't choose the circumstances.□*Dave Beecham*

Studs Lonigan by James T Farrell (reprinted early next year—save your book tokens)

Socialism—Utopian and Scientific by F Engels (*Peking £35p*)

A Rumour of War by Philip Caputo (*Arrow £2.50*)

A daunting but addictive novel is **Studs Lonigan**—a story of 1930s Chicago in which the hero grapples with the hardship of depression and is constantly haunted by his Catholic upbringing. Farrell describes brilliantly the desperate racism and everyday violence of the time. It might sound absurd, but equally readable is Engels' little book. The introduction contains a most entertaining, accessible and concise exposition of historical materialism. Anyone interested in the Vietnam War could do a lot worse than start with **A Rumour of War**. The author was one of the first American soldiers to arrive in 1965 and, as a journalist, one of the last to leave ten years later.□*Simon Terry*

The Daughters of Karl Marx (*Andre Deutsch £4.95*)

The Five Great Novels of James M Cain (*Picador £4.95*)

Staying Power by Peter Fryer (*Pluto £9.95*)

Many of the letters of Marx's three daughters—Jenny, Laura and Eleanor—are contained in this book. They

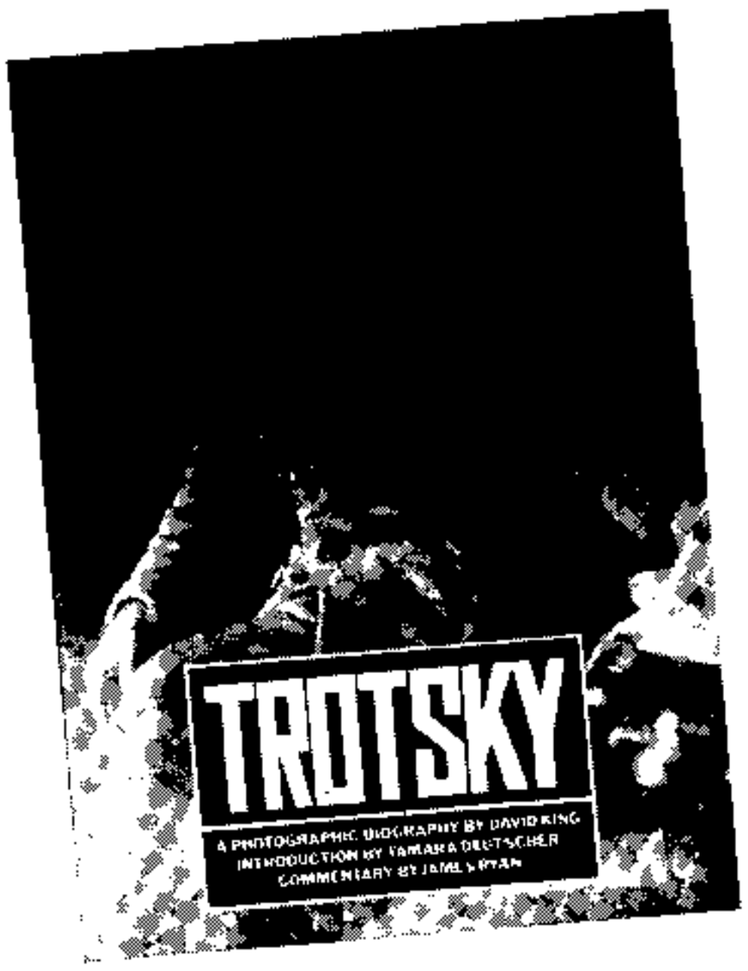
contain a mass of insights into the personal feelings of the Marx family. They also cover a range of political events from the Paris Commune to the growth of the new unions in Britain. None of them were spectators, but active participants in many of the events. If you love old Hollywood films like *Double Indemnity, The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Mildred Pierce* then try reading the novels on which they were based. The single volume of James M Cain novels contains all three. They have a political sharpness sometimes missing from the screen and show that the dollar rules—even over true love. Finally **Staying Power** covers the history of black people in Britain. It goes right back to the Romans but concentrates, rightly, on the period of capitalism. Although there are minor political quibbles with the book, it is very well written and contains invaluable information.□***Lindsey German***

Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte (*Penguin £1.50*)

Brecht's Poems 1913-1956 (*Ayre Methuen £4.95*)

Photographs of Trotsky a collection by David King (*Basil Blackwell £9.95* Bookmarks special offer)

Anyone who thinks 19th century English novels are stuffy and conventional should try reading **Wuthering Heights.** It's not just a love story; it's about the warping effect of class. The amazing thing is that it lacks any middle class moralising. Literature of a different kind comes in Bertolt Brecht's poems. Despite being tainted by Stalinist ideas he wrote some of the finest and most ironic socialist poems of this century, and in one of his last poems he took a magnificent swipe at the East German bureaucracy. When it comes to celebrating the revolutionary tradition the award this year must go to King's superb collection. With an introduction by Tamara Deutscher and commentary by James Ryan the book provides an inspiring pictoral survey of Trotsky's life.□***Gareth Jenkins***



Ten Days that Shook the World by John Reed (*Penguin £3.50*)

The Marx Engels Selected Correspondence (*Progress £3.00*)

Reed's is one of the finest eye witness accounts of the Russian Revolution. A few years ago Penguin put Reed's book in their Fiction Section, but the truth will out even at Penguin and the book is now listed under History. The book is an exciting account of the early days of Soviet power written by a committed American revolutionary. There are two introductions to the book—a load of senile drivel from A J P Taylor and one paragraph from Lenin. **The Marx Lenin Selected Correspondence** reads like a series of punchy articles explaining Marxist ideas and contains sharp criticism of their political opponents. The Moscow publishers have excised some of the more fruity language and the selection is only a small part of the correspondence available. Nevertheless it provides useful insights for revolutionaries today.□***Andy Zebrowski***

Quentin Durward by Walter Scott

Shoot Down by Bill Johnson (*Chatto Windus £10.95*)

Days Like These by Nigel Fountain (*Pluto Press £2.50*)

I came across some old Walter Scott novels going for next to nothing. I bought them and read **Quentin Durward.** Scott was a High Tory, deeply hostile to everything represented by the French Revolution through which he lived. He believed in things like chivalry and decency and loving one's neighbour. He also observed, rather to his distaste, that all the High Tories, anti-Jacobins and churchmen around them *said* they believed in all these things, but *behaved* entirely differently. Indeed, the higher they were in society, the more cynically and disreputably they trampled on their beliefs. The point of the novel, whose story bumbles along fast and furiously enough to keep you up at night, is to contrast the genuine high-mindedness of the relatively lowly Quentin with the hypocrisy of his masters, expecially the King. Political duplicity was the theme of my second favourite book this year, **Shootdown**. This book argues that the Korean airliner KAL 007 was deliberately sent over Russian territory by the loony clique of freaks who advise the President of the United States, who have succeeded ever since in covering up their atrocity. It is beautifully told, and superbly argued. Proof of the importance of **Shootdown** is the way it was ignored and boycotted when it was published, but it is, I gather, soon to come out in paperback. My third choice is a thriller by Nigel Fountain, the best-ever letters editor in *Socialist Worker*'s history. It is a good tale and it makes a lot of political points, not all of which are flattering to the Socialist Workers Party. The best thing about the book is its sceptical hero John Raven. He is so much like Nigel Fountain that he is absolutely irresistible.□***Paul Foot***

The House of Spirits by Isabel Allende (*Jonathan Cape £3.95)*

Rosa Luxemburg by Paul Frölich (*Pluto £4.75* Bookmarks special)

Isabel Allende's novel is a record of the brutal conditions in Chile both under the old aristocracy and under Pinochet's thugs. What makes it so compelling is the way these grim realities and the frustrating fragmented lives of many of the characters are part of an astonishing and even magical world. The result, as in many Latin American novels, is a completely believable story that you can't put down. Paul Frölich was a founder member of the German CP who wrote this biography 20 years after Luxemburg's death. Despite this you find the passionate debate and exchange of ideas could be taking place now, they are so relevant to today. And remember, it was Luxemburg who said the choice we face is socialism or barbarism.□***Jane Basset***

From Lenin to Stalin by Victor Serge (*Pathfinder £4.25)*

Eleni by Nicholas Gage (*Fontana £2.95*)

In his absorbing account of the degeneration of the Bolshevik revolution Serge presents an eye witness account of the most exciting and important historical event for revolutionary socialists. His active participation in the events brings the book alive as he weaves anecdotes into an analysis of the eventual failure of the revolution. Nicholas Gage is a right wing journalist who has written a documentary/novel about the execution of his mother in 1948 by communist guerrillas during the Greek Civil War. It is, not unexpectedly, extremely anti-communist. He is, however, a gifted writer who effortlessly manages to portray the conditions existing in the mountain villages in Greece whilst a desperate civil war raged. The communists fought a rearguard action against the American aided right wing—over 158,000 Greeks were killed. The poverty, backwardness and sheer horror of having to live through this is brought alive in an unforgettable tale.□***Lesley Hoggart***

Testament of revolt

Class Struggles in France
Marx and Engels
Progress 95p

IN 1895, THE year of his death, Engels wrote the introduction to the first reprint of Marx's *Class Struggles in France*. It was one of his last writings and is sometimes known as his "testament".

This work has been subject to a fair amount of misinterpretation. Even those sympathetic to the ideas of Marx and Engels, such as the academic Marxists David McLellan or Lucio Colletti, accuse Engels of a major fault. They claim that he laid the groundwork for some of the ideas of the revisionist Bernstein. In making this claim they distort some of Engels' ideas.

A reading of the "testament" shows that the accusation of revisionism was in fact an unfair one.

Engels argues that in 1848 he and Marx had thought Europe was ripe for socialist transformation. They were wrong. In the half-century since, capitalism had shown remarkable vigour, industrialising all of Europe including Germany. Not only were their economic analyses wrong in 1848, says Engels, so too was their theory of revolution.

"Strongly coloured by memories of the prototypes of 1789 and 1830," the two co-founders of Marxism believed that revolutions could be revolutions of a minority. While this had been true for every revolution in history prior to that of the proletariat, for the proletariat it was impossible. A proletarian revolution could only be one involving the vast majority of the proletarians, or it was nothing. "The mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete in every respect, and this is a point which deserves closer examination on the present occasion."

From the analysis of the need to draw in the vast majority to the project of socialist transformation, Engels spoke approvingly of the tactics of the German Socical Democratic Party. "Long, patient work—slow propaganda work and parliamentary activity"—is recognised as "the immediate task of the party". Two dangers faced this work—a reversion to a "minority revolution" perspective as in 1848, and a premature seizure of power by one city isolated from the rest of the country, as in the Paris Commune of 1871. The electoral franchise, granted by the bourgeoisie as a means of duping the working class, had to be transformed into an instrument of emancipation.

Colletti does not identify this with Bernstein's views, but says it reflects the same "strategic perspective". "The right to vote is considered as a weapon which can, in a short space of time, carry the proletariat to power; the Paris Commune is regarded as a blood-letting not to be repeated."

But Engels nowhere *says* that. He *does* say that the franchise is a weapon. But its use does not lead to workers' power, but rather the strengthening of the workers' party. His "inevitablism" concerns not the inevitability of workers' power through parliament, but of the inevitable growth, under the then current conditions of legality, of the size of German Social Democracy. "Its growth [the party's] proceeds as spontaneously, as steadily, as irresistibly, and at the same time as tranquilly as a natural process."

Engels also explicitly states that revolutions are by no means obsolete. "Of course, our foreign comrades do not renounce their right to revolution. The right to revolution is, after all, the only real 'historical right' the only right on which all modern states without exception rest."

Revolutions from below were over "for the time being". Proletarian aspirations were unripe "at that time" but capitalist development itself was creating "the conditions under which they were bound to ripen".

When Engels examines the Paris Commune, he does *not* conclude that violent revolution from below is obsolete as a strategy. The Franco-Prussian war which preceded it:

> "...called forth a victorious rising. It was shown once more that, in Paris, none but a proletarian revolution is any longer possible. After the victory power fell, wholly of its own accord and quite undisputed, into the hands of the working class."

The rule of the working class proved impossible, not because of the strategy of violent revolution, but because:

> "On the one hand, France left Paris in the lurch, looked on while it bled from the bullets of MacMahon; on the other hand, the Commune was consumed in unfruitful strife between the two parties which divided it, the Blanquists (the majority) and the Proudhonists (the minority), neither of which knew what was to be done."

The conclusion of *this* line of reasoning is not to abandon a strategy of violent revolution for all time but rather to ensure that such a revolution is not isolated to a minority of the country and disarmed because of a divided leadership. The lesson of the Paris Commune is that a minority of the working class cannot hold power if it comes to them as a 'gift' from the collapsing bourgeois state.

Similarly the lesson of 1848 is "how impossible it was...to win social reconstruction by a simple surprise attack". The lesson is not, choose parliament over armed revolution, but don't engage in an adventure where a revolutionary *minority* attempts to seize power prematurely on behalf of a passive working class majority whose only role is that of observers. Revolutionaries must win the political leadership of the class conscious working class—and then violently smash the state.

"Rebellion in the old style, the street fight with barricades...was to a considerable extent obsolete," but not *totally* obsolete. "Slow propaganda work and parliamentary activity are...the most immediate tasks of the party." Social Democracy is "just now doing so well by keeping within the law," but there is *no* suggestion that this "immediate task" which "just now" is working so well is fixed in stone as the *only* tactic of social democracy, or as *the* way the workers will come to power.

In fact it is easier to come to the conclusion that what Engels was arguing for is using legality and the franchise to win the political leadership of the working class as a prelude to a revolutionary struggle for power. Universal suffrage "became our best means of propaganda"; election agitation "provided us with a means, second to none, of getting in touch with the mass of the people"; the Reichstag became "a platform from which they [the Social Democratic representatives] could speak to their opponents in Parliament and to the masses without, with quite other authority and freedom than in the press or at our meetings."

The lesson of 1848 and 1871 is that minorities cannot establish workers' power. Legality and parliament are useful in the run-up to a revolution in winning the battle of ideas inside the working class.

> "The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for. The history of the last 50 years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long persistent work is required, and it is just this work which we are now pursuing, and with a success that drives the enemy to despair."

Colletti's interpretation is plausible. The "testament", as it was first printed, is ambiguous. Colletti is in good company in making much of this "ambiguity". David McLellan in his work *Marxism After Marx* ends his discussion of the contribution of

Engels to the Marxist legacy with an extensive quotation from the "testament". He comments on it as follows:

> "In any event it can be readily appreciated that Engels' rather ambivalent position provided ammunition for both sides in the great debate on whether Marx's political doctrines needed to be revised in the light of changing circumstances."

But the ambiguity of the text disappears when we examine it, not as it was first published, but as it was *written*. Its first published version—which is the version Colletti analyses—was edited and cut by Wilhelm Liebknecht (a leading SPD member and father of Karl Liebknecht).

Despite Engels' protestations, the uncut text was not printed for 40 years. Had it been published as it was written, no one—not Bernstein, not McLellan and not Colletti—could have claimed that this "political testament" involved a break from Engels' revolutionary past.

Engels vented his fury on Social Democracy's leaders precisely because he was well aware that the ambiguous edited version could serve as a cover for reformism. On 1 April, 1895, he wrote to Karl Kautsky:

> "To my astonishment I see in the *Vorwarts* today an extract from my *'Introduction', printed without my prior knowledge* and trimmed in such a fashion that I appear as a peaceful worshipper of legality at any price. So much the better that the whole thing is to appear in the *Neue Zeit* so that this disgraceful impression will be wiped out. I shall give Liebknecht a good piece of my mind on that score and also, no matter who they are, to those who gave him the opportunity to misrepresent my opinion without even telling me a word about it."

The old man was in a rage. Two days later he penned a letter to Paul Lafargue in Paris.

> "...Liebknecht has just played me a nice trick. He has taken from my *Introduction* to Marx's articles on France of 1848-50 everything that could serve him to support the tactics of *peace at any price and of opposition to force and violence*, which it has pleased him for some time now to preach, especially at present when coercive laws are being prepared in Berlin. But I am preaching these tactics only for *the Germany of today*, and even then *with an important proviso*. In France, Belgium, Italy, and Austria these tactics could not be followed in their entirety and in Germany may become inapplicable tomorrow."

Liebknecht's "nice trick" was not put right until 1930. So for the first three decades of this century perhaps there was room for some misinterpretation. But when Colletti and McLellan wrote, the *real* version of Engels' "testament", as well as Engels' venomous correspondence denouncing the legalistic cretinism which had gutted his article, were public record.

Let us examine the chief bits Liebknecht found so obnoxious. The first occurs in Engels' evaluation of street fighting as a tactic in light of the experience of 1848. He argues that barricades alone could never win a revolution. But they *can* shake the morale of the military and help the revolutionary forces to split the army, a necessary preconditon to victory. Liebknecht's scissors removed the next few lines:

> "This is the main point, which must be kept in view, likewise when the chances of contingent future street fights are examined."

This was appalling to the parliamentarians.

Engels then developed an argument about how the bourgeoisie was much more prepared in the 1890s than in 1848 to deal with street fighting. There have been changes "all in favour of the military". Armies are bigger, extensive railroads make their quick concentration anywhere in the country much easier, breech-loading rifles have replaced the clumsy muzzle-loaders, and percussion shells exist which can "demolish the best barricade". But things have changed not just in terms of military technique, "all the conditions on the insurgents' side have grown worse".

'The Bolsheviks did not know they were doing in action what Engels anticipated in theory'

It will be hard to unite all "the people" against the regime in a proletarian-led revolt. The mass urban base for the "reactionary parties gathered around the bourgeoisie" is incomparably larger than in the early days of capitalism.

"The 'people', therefore, will always appear divided, and with this a powerful lever, so extraordinarily effective in 1848, is lacking." A section of the soldiers will still split to the side of the revolution, but arming them with sporting rifles and luxury guns is not nearly as effective against the military's new weaponry. "And finally", continues Engels:

> "...since 1848 the newly built quarters of the big towns have been laid out in long, straight, broad streets, as though made to give full effect to the new cannons and rifles. The revolutionary would have to be mad, who himself chose the working class districts in the North and East of Berlin for a barricade fight."

Left there this amounts to an evangelical plea against *ever* organising an armed insurrection. Engels didn't leave it there. The rest of the paragraph, removed by Liebknecht, reads as follows:

> "Does that mean that in the future the street fight will play no further role? Certainly not. It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavourable for civil fights, far more favourable for the military. A future street fight can therefore only be victorious when this unfavourable situation is compensated by other factors. Accordingly it will occur more seldom at the beginning of a great revolution than in its further progress, and will have to be undertaken with greater forces. These, however, may then well prefer, as in the whole Great French Revolution on September 4 and October 31, 1870, in Paris, the open attack to the passive barricade tactics."

Here Engels sketches with startling clarity what was to transpire in Russia in 1917. The February revolution of 1917 ushered in a situation of dual power at the beginning of which the Bolsheviks led a minority of the working class. Between February and October they won majority support in the workers' councils of Russia's major cities, split the army and, on that basis, launched a "street fight" to overthrow the bourgeois state.

The Bolsheviks did not know they were doing in action what Engels anticipated in theory—the uncensored version of Engels' piece was still collecting dust in 1917—but they carried it out to the letter, to the extent of preferring "the open attack to the passive barricade tactics" when it came to organising the insurrection.

Engels is not prefiguring Bernstein. He is prefiguring Lenin. From another standpoint he is prefiguring Gramsci, whose whole analysis of the war of position and war of maneouvre is directly anticipated by Engels. "Long persistent work", "slow propaganda work", are Engels' equivalent of Gramsci's "war of position".

Neither of them renounced the use of force (although there are those who try to claim Gramsci did, in much the same way as a similiar claim is made about Engels), they simply argue that the revolutionary party must engage in years of preparatory work to strengthen itself and win the political leadership of the working class before an armed insurrection is on the agenda.

The roots of Bernstein's revisionism were deep inside the Second International orthodoxy. But one of these roots was *not* Engels' "testament". A serious examination of this text shows clearly that, if anything, it was part of the revolutionary Marxist "orthodoxy" Bernstein was polemicising against.

We don't have to twist and bend the last article of a lifelong revolutionary to see how his ideas went astray. Because twisted and bent it had to be, in order to turn old Engels into a forerunner of Bernstein. The Engels of 1895 was no different from the Engels of 1874 who wrote:

> "...force...plays yet another role in history, a revolutionary role...in the words of Marx it is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one...it is the instrument with the aid of which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilised political forces."■

Paul Kellogg

Images of struggle

JOHN McGRATH has been actively involved in socialist theatre and radical television since the fifties. Born in Birkenhead, he was conscripted into the army after the Second World War and travelled the Middle East as an officer. He had never met members of the ruling class at close quarters before and he was disgusted by the way the army policed the British Empire.

After that educating experience McGrath went to Oxford University and started to write. During the late fifties and sixties he was writing for TV—for* Play for Today *and* Z-Cars*—as well as developing a kind of theatre that attracted working class audiences.

With the upturn in class struggle in the early seventies McGrath joined forces with other socialists in Scotland to found 7:84. It was a kind of theatre company that concentrated on bringing militant drama to the workplace, the occupied factory and the working men's clubs. Most recently he's directed a TV version of his play* Blood Red Roses*, shown on Channel 4 this month.

JACK ROBERTSON and CHRIS NINEHAM went along to talk to him about his latest work, and about how his attitude to the current problems of the labour movement are reflected in his work.

***SWR:* As a socialist playwright and director do you approach your work differently now to the livelier days of the seventies?**

JMcG: You have to. People forget that in the early days of the seventies factory occupations and high levels of political action were the norm.

I was working with the 7:84 theatre company taking a mixture of agitprop and socialist drama to the occupations and the factory gates. Nowadays it's much more difficult to relate to a working class audience. Now we are dealing with a crisis of confidence in the labour movement.

***SWR:* What do you think has caused that?**

JMcG: That is a very difficult question. There were economic and social factors that weakened working class organisation, but the Callaghan government caused us a lot of problems.

After all those years of excitement and militancy, the Labour government was so boring. They just sat around and the energy was lost. Quite how they managed to completely contain the widespread militancy I don't know.

***SWR:* How do you combat the deadening weight of the Labour Party and the trade union machine? In your new series the way you've written the characters suggests a distrust for any political solutions or political analysis.**

JMcG: No, that's not what I've been trying to put across at all.

When it comes to making political films or writing political plays it seems to me there are two things you've got to do. First, you've got to present the world in a different perspective from the normal, ruling class point of view, show things in a new light. Second, you've got to make it clear by the way you portray the world that things need changing.

I don't think that plays or films should be dogmatic, in the sense of ending with some sort of political or social manifesto.

There's two reasons for this. One is that if you try and ram things down people's throats they're likely to turn round and tell you to piss off and then the whole effect of a carefully developed perspective is totally wasted.

Young Bessie and her father heading for Glasgow

I believe that you have to let the audience make up their own minds and compare what you are showing them with their own experience.

The other reason is more practical. If I was working as part of a group that was totally identified with one political organisation, my own political judgement would have to be overruled by the perspective of the party, which might not be objective.

***SWR:* Isn't the collective judgement of an organisation of hundreds and thousands of socialists likely to be more 'objective' than the opinion of any one person?**

JMcG: Maybe, but there is also the point that if as an artist you pin your colours to a specific group, you run the risk of being ignored by a large section of the public. In other words you wouldn't be communicating.

After thinking about the question for a great deal of time, I've come to the conclusion, maybe wrongly, not to link my work, or the work of 7:84, with any particular group.

I try and give people images, perspectives, analyses, and say to people: you look at this and decide for yourself what's got to be done.

***SWR:* Surely the problem with that is the way you analyse or present a situation *is* going to affect what people want to do about it. You can't avoid reaching conclusions in what you write.**

JMcG: No, I just want to point out how things are. It's up to others to take action. It's up to the political parties to argue over conclusions.

***SWR:* You are a playwright who has always written with ideas of working class struggle in mind. Nowadays most writers have given up such 'unfashionable' ideas. Have the defeats and the backsliding of the last ten years or so given you a new approach to the class struggle?**

JMcG: No. I lived and was politically conscious during the fifties and so I've seen a lot. In fact I remember coming down to London in 1959 and seeing a Tory government elected.

I just couldn't believe that the people of this country had brought the Tories back. But for all that, by the mid-sixties things were on the move again.

Then in 1968 I was in Paris.

I saw the level that everyone reached—not just the leaders and the students but the action committees and the workers. It all happened so quickly, people learnt lessons about the state and the reformists in a matter of days.

Once you've seen that level of mobilisation and seen almost the whole class take on the system, you've got no reason to give up your belief in class struggle.

There's no doubt we are having a bad time. We have to face up to it, but there's no point in giving up.

The working class *is* on the defensive,

but that can't be permanent. The situation is constantly changing.

I think the kind of Hobsbawm idea that the working class can no longer be at the centre of change is very deadening. Sure, there's changes going on, but the nature of the working class has been changing ever since the 1840s.

But the working class hasn't gone away. In fact it's been growing. Even in Britain the working class is now bigger than it's ever been.

I think the main task that faces the working class is to learn to operate internationally.

That's what the play *Lay Off* is about, and that's partly what *Blood Red Roses* is about as well.

Many of the international trade union bodies are actually run by the CIA and so workers have to make contact on a rank and file level, almost on a personal level. At the same time there has to be a high level of political organisation.

SWR: **So surely the central question must be: how can we develop that combination of links at a rank and file level with a strong understanding on an international basis? It seems to be a question that you avoided in the *Blood Red Roses* series.**

JMcG: That's not true, in fact I deliberately made the hero's daughter join the Socialist Workers Party. After all, you were called the International Socialists in those days. And I wasn't trying to be critical of that decision.

Bessie, her mum, says to her in the programme, "Good, well done." I wanted to show that there are people around who know where to land the first punch.

At the same time I think you've got to be honest and looking around there's no doubt things are pretty miserable.

SWR: **But I'm not sure people need to be told that.**

JMcG: No, but I'm not out to depress people. The point about Bessie and her daughters and the dad is that they are fighters. And none of them are going to stop being fighters.

And then there's the end of the series, the Scottish May Day march with representatives from trade unions all over the country. It's trying to end the programme on an optimistic note. It's trying to say that the struggle will go on.

SWR: **At the same time the characters respond to the situation towards the end of the series by looking towards personal solutions—it withdraws into the family.**

JMcG: Well, you can't really blame Bessie for becoming a little bit bitter.

She spent the best part of her life involved in struggling for herself and her workmates and she turns round in the late seventies to find that no one will support her anymore.

So she has a go at them. And in a sense she's right—she has been deserted.

Meanwhile her husband has taken a different path upwards in the trade union movement. He admits to her that he's a bit of a coward. But they know that what he's doing will be useful, because by taking a trade union position he can give invaluable

Radical steward Bessie celebrates

aid to workers when they do start fighting again.

Bessie and Alex have a very important conversation and he says, "I'm just trying to make the system work for myself and if it means sitting in a trade union office then that's the way it's got to be."

Bessie replies, "I know your game and one day we'll find out that the trade union isn't quite so right wing as we thought it was, because you're there."

And so Alex's contribution isn't insignificant. I'm not trying to say that he's sold out in the film, but Bessie points out that he can't do anything without her and the rest of the rank and file. And she rightly says, "We'll be back".

So in a sense the two positions are complementary.

SWR: **There seems to be a problem with that. In the mid-seventies the role of the trade union bureaucrats was actually to defuse and contain rank and file struggle**

JMcG: You can't tar the whole of the trade union bureaucracy with the same brush. Certain people, like Eric Clarke from the Scottish NUM, can help strengthen workers' struggles at certain times.

SWR: **There's a definite feeling in *Blood Red Roses* that you're worried about the role that male dominance in trade unions and male workers in general can play in holding back the interests of women**

JMcG: In my experience it's an essential weakness of the British labour movement. Bessie has so much more to cope with than her husband.

First she has to struggle at work and then she has to come home and struggle with the problems of the family. Alex is totally insensitive to this.

SWR: **Again, the question must be: How do you overcome these divisions inside the working class?**

JMcG: Well I think that the left as a whole has got to accept the role of women's groups in strengthening the confidence of women workers. And I think that we could all learn from the ways women found to organise in these groups.

They are so much more open and so much less authoritarian than either the democratic centralism of the SWP or the straight bullying you sometimes get in union meetings.

I don't think that the men in the labour movement can accept that women are different yet equal.

SWR: **Do you think women can completely solve any of their problems on their own?**

JMcG: I think psychologically some women do need to go through a period of some sort of consciousness raising in order to break from patriarchal or male dominated psyche.

I don't see it as a serious long term political solution, but it is something that people need therefore I'm not opposed to it as such.

SWR: **The problem is that in practice a lot of women have gone through that process and have ended up not finding their way back to a position on the left—like Germaine Greer or Bea Campbell, for example. They have completely lost touch with the idea of the working class struggle.**

JMcG: It's such a complicated question, but I do think that some women have such a bad time that they couldn't get by without the support of other women.

SWR: **Do you find it's very difficult in practice getting the resources to make socialist TV nowadays?**

JMcG: It was never simple. It would now be impossible to come fresh to the business and start making disturbing or subversive programmes.

You have to have a track record or a reputation of some sort before you are allowed anywhere near the control room.

Also it's a question of building up relationships with producers and programme makers over the years.

I worked on *Z-Cars* for a long while and through that I've got a whole lot of connections which enable me to work relatively freely.

You have to study the development of the industry in order to see where the openings are for progressive, challenging TV, because the structure of the beast is always changing.

Sometimes, once you've actually made a programme, you will have to argue about keeping certain sections in, but by and large my position is secure.■

An aid to understanding

AIDS: A Guide to Survival
Peter Tatchell
GMP, £3.50.
Death Rush: Poppers and AIDS
John Lauritsen and Hank Wilson
Pagan Press, £3.25.

THE SPREAD of AIDS has been met with a glut of books. Most sensibly and sympathetically refute the scare-mongering of the tabloids and gay-bashing of the right.

These two have proved the best sellers at London's Gay's the Word Bookshop.

Tatchell's books claims to be a practical guide for those at risk, their families and friends. And for the most part it cannot be faulted.

Tatchell explains quite simply what causes AIDS, and how it is spread, the symptoms, how the risks can be minimised, and so on.

He catalogues the tabloid sensationalism, and the increase in gay-bashing and unwarranted fears it produced.

It was Derek Jameson, he recalls—former editor of the *Daily Star* and recent speaker at *Marxism Today*'s Left Unlimited weekend—who called AIDS a "gift from God".

But the bulk of his slim book is "a guide to survival"—advice to those with the AIDS-causing virus on how to avoid triggering development of the syndrome, advice to AIDS sufferers on how to fight the full-blown disease.

It seems churlish to carp—I am sure Tatchell's book is helpful—but his style would at times make Anna Raeburn blanch.

"Coping with a life-threatening illness is never easy," so "Think of others worse off than yourself such as political prisoners suffering torture or starving children."

"Pick yourself up, dust yourself down and start all over again." "No one has told the bumble bee that, aerodynamically, it cannot fly." And so on—you get the picture?

There is advice on diet, exercise, relaxation, meditation, the use of mental imagery, "Imagine the AIDS viruses as little hamburgers being devoured by a pack of huge, hungry dogs," or as "soldiers in blue uniforms"—and much, much more.

He is excellent in detailing the gay community's highly effective response to AIDS, and contrasting it to the Tories' mean-spirited sloth which will cost many thousands of lives.

It was, for instance, the Gay Medical Association which first advised gay men not to donate blood—more than a year before a similar government request.

It was Lesbian Line which launched "Blood Sisters" to encourage lesbian blood donors—lesbians being among the lowest AIDS-risk group.

It was the Metropolitan Police, in contrast, which seized 100,000 of the first safe sex leaflets as obscene!

In terms of the task he set himself, Tatchell's is an adequate guide. But as the work of a political activist, the book is profoundly disappointing.

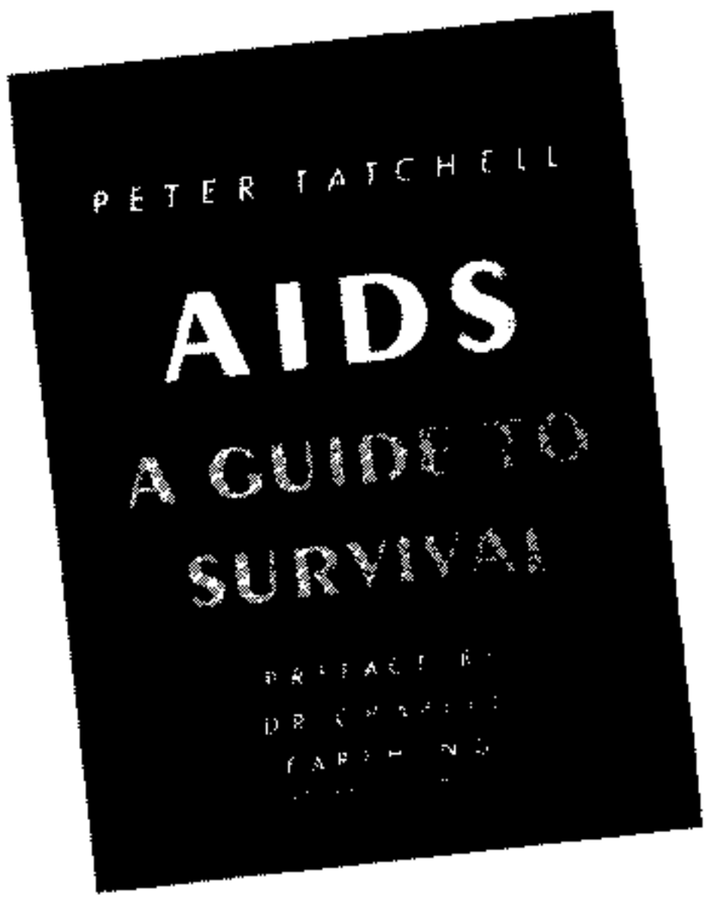
He concentrates almost exclusively on the individual response to AIDS. And he suggests, in the process, some appalling role models for sufferers—Douglas Bader, Francis Chichester and the films *Chariots of Fire* and Gandhi.

Yet the battle for decent treatment for AIDS victims, and for the openness, honesty and education which are the only means of limiting its spread, can only be a collective one.

Some 250 gay men, lesbians and socialists succeeded in stopping the public burning of the book *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin*, in the north London borough of Haringey last month.

No doubt this is considerably less than the number who will read Tatchell's book, but that demonstration—not watching reruns of *Gandhi*—showed the way to fight AIDS.

Death Rush: Poppers and AIDS is an even slimmer volume, desperately overpriced, which no one should bother to buy. Three-quarters of its 64 pages consist of a bibliography and appendices!



Poppers are a liquid mixture of isobutyl nitrate and other chemicals which, inhaled, give a brief flush of eye-popping well-being, and which, equally, are not worth buying.

Advertised and sold almost exclusively to gay men under names like 'Rush', 'Ram' and 'Thunderbolt', they are cheap, legal, widely available and worth millions to their manufacturers.

Blithely marketed as room odorisers and aromas, they are subject to no official testing nor quality control.

Any link with AIDS remains unproven and seems unlikely. But there is plenty of evidence that they are in any case best avoided. I won't be using them.■
Ian Taylor

A moral majority?

British Social Attitudes: The 1986 Report
edited by Roger Jowell, Sharon Witherspoon and Lindsay Brook
SCPT, Gower

A BIG SECTION of the left has been beguiled by a horrific myth for the last five years. They have come to believe that Thatcherism has tapped a deep well spring of reactionary, authoritarian attitudes among the mass of people.

Once you accept this myth of 'authoritarian populism' there are only two things you can do. You can abandon hope of achieving any sort of positive social change. Or you can begin making concessions to reactionary, authoritarian attitudes in an effort to occupy the 'main ground' of political debate.

This second path has been the one followed first by the Eurocommunist wing of the Communist Party, by independent left academics like Stuart Hall who have moved sharply to the right to join the *Marxism Today* circus and, most recently, by large numbers of Tony Benn's one time supporters.

But is the myth itself correct?

Those of us who have stuck to Marxism have always argued against the myth on the grounds that people usually adhere to bundles of quite contradictory ideas. They accept much of what the media tell them. But they also accept attitudes which derive from the particular social group to which they belong, even when these are completely opposed to the media's message.

The relative balance of the different sets of ideas in people's heads changes with the ups and downs of the struggles they are forced into. So no opinion poll, however thorough, can grasp the full complexity of people's ideas. The best that can be done is to give a glimpse of what the balance is like at any moment in time.

This is what the latest British Social Attitudes Report does.

It is fascinating reading despite these limitations. For it refutes most of the contentions about 'authoritarian populism'.

It shows that on a whole range of important issues the shift in recent years has been *away* from right wing and reactionary positions.

Just to take a few examples:

On racism: only 15 percent of people say that racists should be allowed to teach 15 year olds and only 38 percent say they

should be allowed to hold public meetings. Thirty four percent admitted to being "prejudiced" against people of other races, 65 percent claimed they were "not prejudiced at all".

On welfare issues: 44 percent of people say unemployed benefits are too low and cause hardship as against 34 percent who say they are too high and discourage people seeking a job.

Forty five percent say the government should increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits as against only 6 percent who accept the pure Thatcherite message of reducing taxes and spending less on health, education and social benefits.

On class: 28 percent of people see themselves as "middle class", but 66 percent as "working class" (of which 19 percent say they are "upper working class").

On abortion: 52 percent of men and 47 percent of women say that a woman should "be able to decide on her own whether to have a child" (33 percent of Catholics hold this view). Fifty four percent of people think an unmarried mother should be able to have an abortion if she wishes and 58 percent think that couples who cannot afford to have more children should be able to. Twelve percent more people favour abortion rights today than in 1983.

On sexual matters: half the population regard sex before marriage as not wrong, but 80 percent regard extra-marital sex as always or mostly wrong.

There are two issues on which the 'moral majority' really is the majority.

The first is that of the death penalty: 77 percent favour it for murder in the course of a terrorist act, 71 percent for murder of a police officer and 66 percent for other murders.

The other is homosexuality. Here people's own experiences seem to have done less to break inherited prejudices than anywhere else.

Sixty nine percent believe sex with someone of the same sex is always or mostly wrong as against 16 percent who believe it is rarely or never wrong. And only 36 percent of people believe it is acceptable for a homosexual to be a school teacher as against 54 percent who think it is unacceptable.

The answers to both questions show a move to the *right* of about 5 percent since 1983—presumably as a result of the media labelling AIDS as the 'gay plague'.

But these two issues alone are not enough to even begin to justify the 'authoritarian populist' line.

That still leaves open an important question. If the basic values of so many people are still so different to those professed by the Thatcherite wing of the Tories, how come the Tories have been able to win two general elections and stand a fair chance of winning a third?

The simple answer is that the experience of Labour in office has not been such as to provide an antidote to Tory and Alliance propaganda for many workers. So fewer than half those who identified themselves as "working class" voted Labour in 1983.

One area illustrates this more than anything else—housing. Council house tenants were the traditional core of the Labour vote, and it has been they who have had the most immediate experience of long term Labour rule at the hands of the overwhelmingly Labour councils of the big cities.

The survey asked council tenants whether it was true that "councils give a poor standard of repairs and maintenance". Sixty eight percent answered "yes". It then asked them whether "council estates are generally a pleasant place to live in". Forty five percent said "no" and 47 percent "yes". Finally it asked them about their rent levels: 49 percent thought they were "on the high side".

Given this level of dissatisfaction it is not surprising that some council tenants have opted for the Tory way out of buying their own homes. Nor is it surprising that other tenants do not, by and large, object: 61 percent think "council tenants should generally be allowed to buy their homes or flats" and only 9 percent think they should not be allowed to.

Labour's willingness to balance budgets by imposing poor standards and high rents on what was once its captive voting force has driven most of them to accept a stereotyped Tory argument.■

Chris Harman

Pigs and pickets

Policing Industrial Disputes 1893-1985
Roger Geary
Cambridge

Political Strikes: The State and Trade Unionism in Britain
Peter Hain

THE FIRST of these books is hardly more than a chronology of strikes. It divides strikes into groups, not by any social criteria, but entirely by their techniques.

The first and violent period, from 1893 to the First World War, is characterised by "stoning and shooting"; stoning by pickets, shooting by the forces of law and order. (This applies to Featherstone in 1893 and other, mainly miners', strikes). There is a "pivotal period" from 1909-1914 when picketing against scabs rather than destroying property predominated (Tonypandy, 1911 transport strikes, 1912 national coal strike). The next period, from 1915 to 1945, is characterised by a "decline in violence" (1919, the General Strike).

Finally comes the period from 1946-84, characterised by "pushing and shoving" (Roberts-Arundel, Saltley, Neap House Wharf, Grunwick, the steel strike). This is backed by police/striker contacts and police humour (!) to defuse situations. Police centralisation and intelligence gathering develops, with Police Support Units, Special Patrol Groups, phone-tapping, plain clothes police infiltration and provocation of pickets, the development of the police cordon and the police wedge.

The riots of 1981 gave rise to the introduction of riot squads which operated in the Warrington NGA dispute (1983) and brought a revival of violence. The miners' strike continued the tale of violence, though here violence was sporadic rather than sustained.

The author notes that all the trade union officials interviewed disapproved of violence because it damaged Labour's electoral chances. He also observes that strikers can no longer win by conventional picketing.

Peter Hain's *Political Strikes* needs to be taken more seriously because it is not divorced from social reality. It reflects a tendency which, if not in close accord with rightward moving Kinnockism, nevertheless can give it comfort, by showing how a large section of one-time left Labour in reality accommodates to the leadership.

The book has quite a lot of useful historical material including the development of ever wider military, police and judiciary discretionary powers which have permitted them to indulge in activity not previously debated or sanctioned by parliament. This includes the setting up of the National Security Committee (1973), the interception of strikers moving about Britain, the setting up of the National Reporting Centre and activity in violation of the law, such as, at Orgreave, the deliberate maiming and injuring of people to disperse them.

But the actual ideas the lengthy background leads up to are fudged. Sharpness and clarity are further confounded by the ideas being spoken through the voices of others rather than Hain's own. The final perspective is the summation of this confusion.

In tracing the history of trade union organisation and strike activity in Britain he shows that the union officials almost invariably attempted to restrict strikes to narrow sectional industrial issues. Any politicisation of strikes was provoked by the government.

His solution is that the unions should be more political. They should adopt a political strategy to complement parliamentary procedures and strike for "wider issues" which are not only of interest to workers but have broader, more "democratic" connotations, such as feminist issues, consumer and other community interests. Translated into the concrete terms of the miners' strike of 1984/5, this causes him to regret the absence of a ballot, to wag an admonitory finger at the miners' leaders for not

denouncing picket line violence and criticising Scargill for concentrating his fire on police violence.

He defers to feminism constantly and, while praising the activity of the miners' wives, nevertheless more often emphasises Bea Campbell's complaints about "the men's movement". Traditional strike methods cannot mobilise women trade unionists, "the masculine image and *style* of trade union bargaining is a tough, aggressive one with which women do not identify"; "trade unionism is overwhelmingly orientated to men's interests and men's lifestyle"; "confrontational picketing", though sometimes necessary, puts up "barriers against wider involvement". "Wider involvement" also causes him to support selective strikes in the service industries which proved so ineffectual. All-out strike in these areas would, he says, deny the recipients the particular service and antagonise them.

What the miners should have done, according to Hain, was break out of their narrow industrial thinking and formulate a "workers' fuel policy" in conjunction with oil, gas and electricity workers and co-ordinate action to implement it. For it to have clout, Hain reasons, they should participate in management. This he proposes as a move towards workers' control and he criticises the NUM for refusing this role when offered it by Attlee at the time of nationalisation.

It is quite consistent with Hain's argument that he should be in full support of the Lucas Aerospace alternative to capitalism's excesses, and the introduction of co-operatives—the solutions sanctified by Tony Benn and the Institute of Workers' Control. But to succeed, he says, these schemes need government backing. He deplores the fact that the Labour Party was held back from supporting the scheme by trade union leaders who were scared of this "shopfloor power"(!)

These ridiculously ineffectual alternatives to the sharp edge of workers' industrial struggles against the bosses and the government began to be indulged in after the decline of the high level of strike activity of the early 1970s. When 200 factories were occupied over eighteen months in 1971-2 who spoke of co-operatives, of participation with management?

Utopian socialism was fine in its time—at the beginning of industrial capitalism. In 1986 it is effete and ultimately reactionary.■

Chanie Rosenberg

Saga of intrigue

A Savage Enquiry: Who Controls Childbirth?
Wendy Savage
Virago, £2.95

THE FIRST demonstration protesting against Wendy Savage's suspension as a consultant took place in June 1985. Writing about it in her book she describes how "I learned afterwards that a senior professor, who had watched the march arriving from an upstairs window, remarked, 'Who would have thought to see the day a rabble marched on the London Hospital.' That's no rabble, I thought, those are your patients."

That difference in attitude resurfaces again and again in this saga of hospital intrigue.

Wendy Savage, consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology at the London Hospital, was suspended for incompetence on 24 April 1985. It's an almost unheard of procedure unless a doctor has turned to drink or drugs or some other form of unacceptable behaviour.

At enormous cost Tower Hamlets Health Authority held an enquiry which exonerated her in July 1986. After another four months of wrangling she was finally allowed to go back to work.

Her account of the sequence of events which led to her suspension and the enquiry proceedings itself are interwoven with her views on childbirth, her philosophy as a doctor and her belief that women do have rights over their own bodies. She cautions us against developments in the USA, where it is illegal in most states to practice as a midwife and where, in 1985, nearly a quarter of all babies were delivered by caesarian section.

Her ideas derive from her experience rather than from the received opinions of the medical establishment. And for her, the question of control is central: "Accepting that the woman should have control over her own fertility by means of access to contraception and abortion on her terms, not those of the medical profession, and understanding that the women should have choice about the way her pregnancy and labour is conducted, seems to be deeply threatening to some obstetricians—of both sexes." So threatened were the obstetricians at the London Hospital that they manoeuvred to rid themselves of her.

The story begins way back in the mid-seventies. Wendy had trained at the London and returned to work there under Peter Huntingford—remembered by those of us active in the National Abortion Campaign for his outspoken support of a woman's right to choose to have an abortion.

When Wendy was suspended, Jean Richards, the District Medical Officer, was to claim that the opposition of some of her colleagues stemmed from these days and the experience of the day care abortion clinic they established, which "had turned Tower Hamlets into the abortion capital of London".

I wonder if they had said any such thing when it is known that most of her colleagues run hugely profitable private practices—which has always been one way of getting an abortion for those who could pay.

We will have to await the turn of events to find out how the story ends. Will the consultants who brought the case against Wendy Savage now admit they were wrong, or will their true motives force them to try again?■

Margaret Renn

FILM

One dimensional women

IT'S DIFFICULT to see a common thread linking the exciting number of new films that have hit the screen in the past couple of months.

Aliens, the sequel to *Alien*, continues in the nail-biting fantasy tradition of man (or rather woman) against foreign life forms. It is galaxies removed from films like *Mona Lisa* or *Betty Blue* which attempt to deal with the frustrations and desires of reality, even if that reality is quite distant from everyday life.

Yet, if anything does connect life on a starship to life on earth, it is the theme of random violence, with human beings virtually powerless to control it.

The story line of *Mona Lisa* is certainly punctuated by violent outbursts right from the beginning. When, for example, Bob Hoskins arrives home with a bunch of flowers after a spell behind bars, the meeting between husband and wife degenerates quickly and without warning into a slanging match.

Later, an almost idyllic trip to the seaside suddenly erupts into a murderous encounter with Michael Caine's thugs.

The violence goes hand in hand with a sense of incomprehension. Much of the time, Bob Hoskins does little more than hang around, waiting for the woman he's chauffeur to, to finish her mysterious business with her clients.

It is a world that seems pointless, devoid of rational purpose. Each character is seen in the pursuit of another, but the pursuit is mysterious. Bob Hoskins' infatuation is hopeless, entangled in an equally hopeless endeavour to rescue a girl from addiction. The girl herself is at the other corner of the triangle of pursuit.

No wonder the film ends in retreat. The big outside world is full of nothing but decay, corruption, drug addiction, sexual perversity—and, of course, violence.

Betty Blue, a French film by the director of *Diva*, appears very different. Unlike *Mona Lisa*, it is not the world of low-life gangsterism in the metropolis. It is set in the altogether more tranquil world of the French provinces, either the seaside or the countryside.

But violence erupts in this world too. What starts as an erotic, passionate love affair progressively becomes marked by manic and destructive behaviour as Betty falls victim to madness.

Some have accused the film of pornography because of scenes featuring nudity and explicit sexual activity. The accusation (and the related one of sexism) would only make sense if these scenes are not understood in context.

The film does not set out to be exploitative. The explicitness serves as an example of a more general theme, which is that Betty is always trying to get beyond the limits of mundane existence.

The eroticism is a symbol of her desire for a perfect relationship. Once that extreme proves impossible, Betty moves to the opposite extreme of love—destructiveness.

This makes the film sound gloomier than it really is. In fact, it is often very, very funny. What is tragic for the central characters works out as comedy for the others.

The overall picture, though, is of a world as uncontrollable as that of Mona Lisa. Human beings long for an impossible beauty and harmony in their personal and social lives

Cheated of that, madness and withdrawal seem the only options. Characters are isolated with no possibility of connection with their fellow human beings, no possibility of collective solution.

The result is profoundly depressing even though it expresses a moment of reality typical of our times.

So, we have films that are technically very competent, exciting to watch and—at one level—quite moving in their ability to capture certain facets of human behavior.

But they are also profoundly unsatisfactory because of their onesidedness.

Human beings are only ever seen in a single dimension. They lack any social depth, any connection to the ways in which human beings interrelate to satisfy their needs. All that side of existence remains an enigma.

That means that any solution based on social life is excluded. Consequently, the films are also, despite their good qualities, profoundly disappointing.■

Gareth Jenkins

THEATRE

A peep behind the curtain

SEX AND morality are much in the news at the moment. A new production of *Ghosts* is most timely.

Henrik Ibsen wrote the play in 1881. It was published at just this time of year to catch the Christmas sales rush.

But there was no rush—Ibsen had produced a play which rubbed the noses of the Norwegian middle class in the dirt. And, right and left, they were outraged. No theatre dared perform the play in Norway for several years. When it opened in London the critics said it was "putrid", Ibsen was "a crazy, cranky human being". The *Daily Telegraph* described the play as "an open drain; a loathsome sore unbandaged".

Of course, it's not shocking at all. But when you lift up the corner of the curtain on seemingly polite society and suggest that underneath all is a seething mass of hypocrisy and double standards, then it's very likely that people will be outraged, refuse to watch your play and refuse to buy your books.

What were they so disgusted by? In a word—syphilis. Just as AIDS is demanding a more forthright discussion of all things sexual at a time when the Tory government has been doing its best to sweep such matters under the carpet, so in the last century syphilis was a terrible nightmare—there was no cure. Many women carried the blame, but it really was a disease where the sins of the father were cast down on the sons, and Ibsen spells it out.

He rages against ignorance: Mrs Alving, the widow (played brilliantly by Vanessa Redgrave—another reason to go and see this production), has been reading books which the local pastor thinks are unsuitable. "What have you actually got against these books?" she asks. "What have I...? You surely don't imagine I waste my time examining that sort of publication?" he replies. "Which means that you know nothing at all about the thing you're denouncing," she retorts.

The pastor is the personification of everything the play is directed against—ignorance and that terrible thing called duty. Duty which demands a wife stay with her husband, whatever the price... Yet Ibsen writes in such a way—and Tom Wilkinson acts in such a way—that we can't just dismiss the pastor. He too is the product of society. He demands our understanding if not our sympathy.

The pastor has come to this rural backwater to be at the opening of an orphanage dedicated to the memory of Mrs Alving's husband. The husband is remembered as a pillar of respectable society—but in truth he was a philanderer of the worst kind. Also home for the occasion is their artist son, who idolises the memory of his father. He will discover what the pastor already knows but has chosen to ignore.

The production has been transferred from the Young Vic, where all the audience have the wonderful advantage of sitting no more than 40 feet from the actors (and the seats are cheap) to a big West End theatre where the tickets are expensive. It's running from now until 17 January and would make a real Christmas treat.■

Margaret Renn

Ghosts by Henrik Ibsen. Produced by the Young Vic, Wyndham's Theatre, London. Tickets: £4, £7.50, £11, £13.50.

Not a matter of choice

I HAVE just read, to my disgust, a letter worthy of Margaret Thatcher herself. This self-righteous piece of bigotry was written by Ted Crawford.

Crawford appears to believe that gays have simply made the wrong choice, and therefore have only themselves to blame for their troubles. If sexual persuasion is simply a matter of choice, I wonder how easy Crawford, presumably heterosexual, would find it to 'decide' to become gay.

Although opposing gay liberation, Crawford supports a "limited political demand". Gays are not a minority of moral degenerates whom we must tolerate; their sexuality, like that of heterosexuals, must not be repressed. It must not be regarded as unnatural or abnormal to be gay. We should support gay liberation because we should support the liberation of all oppressed minorities. We should therefore disregard the smug, prejudiced views of narrow-minded, conservative pseudo-socialists like Crawford.■

Barry Graham
Glasgow

Bigots' backlash

THE ARTICLE in November *SWR* on gay rights and the Tory offensive against them provides a largely excellent analysis of the key issues. However, we now need to go a bit further if we are to get at the roots of the question.

Last month the *Economist* revealed the cause of the Tory anti-gay hysteria: "The heightening of the issue may be due more to political frustration. At the local elections in May Labour—and especially the Labour left—strengthened its hold on the inner cities. Any populist cause makes a good cause to hit back with."

Events in Haringey indicate that the *Economist* is correct. In the May council elections, despite their attempts to whip up a racist backlash against Bernie Grant, the Tories, in most areas, did not make ground.

This reinforced a split in their ranks with some previously wet Tories joining an extreme right wing group based in Tottenham. This group spent some time looking for an issue to attack the council on. In August they hit on gay rights. Why did they regard this as a good issue? Certainly because they are bigots, but also because they perceived, however dimly, that like racism and Ireland this was a question on which the council were edgy.

The majority of councillors, while supporting action on these issues as individuals, are also aware that they may be potential vote losers. They also know that they are issues where Kinnock is actively opposed to their stance.

This leads to all sorts of problems. It means that the left Labour activists are, on the whole, unwilling to mount campaigns on gay rights or racism. Their support for such causes, although genuine, is basically tokenistic. They tend to look at these issues in an individualistic and moralistic way rather than tying them in with a class analysis. In effect they highlight the weaknesses rather than the strengths of anti-racism and anti-bigotry.■

Keith Flett
Hornsey

Dishonest distortion

TED CRAWFORD (November *SWR*) protests that AIDS is an irrelevant issue that has only been mentioned to dishonestly distort his views. But the issue is far from irrelevant. Indeed the original article by Noel Halifax (July *SWR*) which prompted this exchange of letters, was specifically about AIDS!

The issue of AIDS clearly demonstrates the very genuine oppression of gays. The vicious and prolonged campaign of hysteria by the vultures of the gutter press characterised AIDS as a gay plague.

In my own workplace there has been a significant increase in anti-gay prejudice. One girl developed the habit of scrubbing her hands after dealing with gay customers!

The question of choice raised by Crawford is at best disingenuous. One could equally argue that blacks could escape prejudice by emigrating to Africa. To claim that gays only become the victims of oppression by a free choice of lifestyle identifies the gay lifestyle as the cause of bigotry. It is only a short step from here to saying gays should get back in the closet and thus solve the whole problem.

Another irrelevant point is the existence of rich and privileged gays. No doubt Ted Crawford

also believes that the Queen and Mrs Thatcher prove that women's oppression doesn't exist. The fact is that very many working class people find fulfilment through homosexual love. Countless others fail to come to terms with their own sexuality and lead stunted, unhappy lives.

Finally, what a cosy picture Crawford paints of the working class family! It is certainly true that for many workers, both men and women, the family provides a sanctuary of relative sanity and security in an otherwise pitiless world.

Yet the family can also be the scene of incest, rape and domestic violence. Even in the absence of these, family life is often a melting pot of frustrations, unfulfilled ambitions, financial insecurity and petty jealousies. Ted should consider how lonely and boring life is for young women stuck at home servicing the needs of demanding young children.

While I have no more time for lifestyle politics than Ted, it is ridiculous to suggest that only those in a "left wing ghetto" can see the glaring faults of the family. To suggest that anyone who doesn't share the prejudices of the most backward workers lives in such a ghetto is a self fulfilling prophecy.■

Andrew Newman
Bristol

Technical problems

ALEX CALLINICOS, in his article on Machel's Mozambique (November *SWR*), says the key to liberation in southern Africa lies in the hands of the black workers of South Africa.

But the flight of the Portuguese settlers, along with a substantial part of the country's capital, crippled Mozambique from the start.

What are the implications for South Africa of the "enormous difficulties" brought about by the flight of the Portuguese?

A number of different conclusions are drawn. Alex deals with one: that socialism is impossible in southern Africa. White control of the South African state and economy will only be broken on pain of them doing what the Portuguese settlers did in Mozambique.

So defenders and reformers of apartheid alike use it to justify a strategy for keeping cheap labour capitalism intact.

A variation on this theme argues for decisively smashing apartheid, but doing deals with big business leaders. This is the line of the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party.

None of these groups are in the business of fighting for socialism, but what of the rest?

Some of the left in Britain, notably *Militant*, draw a different conclusion based on a *class* struggle for socialism. And they rightly argue for the leadership of the black working class.

But then they say that the strength of apartheid and the technical skills problem can be overcome by winning significant sections of white workers over to the side of the revolution.

Of course, *individual* whites have long played a courageous and admirable role in the struggle against apartheid.

But a strategy aimed at winning *significant* sections of white workers is dangerous in the extreme.

Some of the independent unions, notably the retail union CCAWUSA, have had some success in recruiting white workers.

These are largely low paid (by white standards), women workers who join the union because it has defended them against a sacking or because their wages have risen as a result of union activity.

But their interest stops there. They are not in the least concerned by the political principles of the union or the fight against apartheid.

If people join the union on this basis, fine. But a policy *directed* to recruiting white workers would mean ditching the very policy that can unite the black working class

in struggle—an unremitting opposition to apartheid.

What, then, is the answer?

Firstly, the potential for white sabotage is less in South Africa. Mine owners have not yet been known to pick up a mine and run off elsewhere with it.

More seriously, one of the fundamental difficulties for big business over the last twenty years has been to fit *more* skilled black workers into the context of apartheid.

The real problem is how these workers can direct a national economy and a state in which they have little or no experience.

This is not a problem specific to Africa. It is a universal question for all workers' revolutions.

After the Russian Revolution there were countless acts of sabotage and non-cooperation by the upper and middle classes (with their virtual monopoly of technical expertise) directed against the new regime.

But the effect of this could be minimised in the short term through material incentives (either financial or in the form of a gun to the head of the reluctant). In the long term the Bolsheviks held out the prospect of a better society for all.

The experts might not have a short term material interest in socialism. But they can be dragged screaming and kicking to see the long term benefits.

But all of this depends, as Alex says, on people recognising that "their struggle can succeed only through a revolution which spreads throughout Africa, and then to the advanced countries further north.

"Only one class can initiate such an international revolution—the black working class, concentrated in the factories and mines of South Africa."■

Duncan Blackie
North London

Minimum demand

GARETH JENKINS' article on the TUC and low pay (October *SWR*) failed to offer a clear socialist response to proposed minimum wage legislation.

I assume Gareth is actually opposed to a minimum wage. Certainly he makes no reference to any benefits. His essential criticism is that it would, in practice, be used to justify wage reductions for better-paid workers, that the overall effect would be to drive down wages.

It is quite certain that a Kinnock government would argue the need for a trade-off: help for the low paid in return for union wage restraint. As Gareth makes clear, the argument is already widely accepted within the TUC.

But this connection between minimum wage legislation and wage controls is an ideological one, put there by the would-be Social Contract makers. The link is not a real one. It does *not* follow that socialists, in order to oppose wage controls, have to oppose low pay legislation as well. On the contrary, our argument would be precisely the opposite: a high legal minimum wage will only be achieved if a high enough level of class struggle exists to compel the employers to grant it.

Consider Gareth's arguments in detail. He points out, quite rightly, that the proposed £80 minimum is too low and will therefore affect too few workers. Nonetheless, on Gareth's figures, there would still be some three and a half million workers in line for a pay rise! So are we for or against a bill to make employers pay them? Surely we are for it. Just as we are for effective enforcement of such an act. And just as we are for a much higher minimum wage.

But Gareth then argues that "employers will argue against any adjustment upwards for these workers (those earning just above the minimum) if at the same time they have to honour a legal requirement. They are also likely to shed labour on the grounds of pressure on their profits."

If Gareth is saying pay rises for some workers mean pay cuts and job losses for others, then he is very seriously wrong. We are always for every section of workers fighting for as much as they can get, since any gains made are at the expense of the employers and give confidence to other sections to fight as well.

Let me assume, then, that Gareth simply means that the employers will use a minimum wage to "argue down" wages. The teachers were met with the argument that higher pay for them would mean lower spending on buildings, equipment and books. But socialists do not oppose calls for more spending on schools on the grounds that it will mean less money for teachers! It is up to teachers to reject the employers' argument and fight for both more pay *and* better schools!

Arguments do not determine wage levels. Arguments help determine whether or not people are willing to struggle. But it is that struggle, or lack of it, that then determines wage levels. The fact that the employers choose to use the existence of a minimum wage as an argument against higher pay rises is *not* a reason for condemning the minimum wage. On the contrary, we support the minimum wage to the extent that it benefits some workers who would otherwise be paid even less. But it is not enough and we are for everyone who can, going for more.

The Kinnockites and the New Realists are using minimum wage legislation as a left cover for wage controls. But we cannot therefore simply oppose the minimum wage. It is *not* an accident that Hammond was one of its most vehement opponents at the TUC. Gareth's explanation of this was weak: "Hammond is opposed to the idea because he wants to keep his hands free to negotiate deals with management."

There is more to it. Hammond represents everything that stinks in the TUC; not just business unionism and organised scabbing, but also a sectionalism that is contemptuous of anything as sentimental as solidarity with the lower paid.

The employers will oppose minimum wage legislation. If it comes they will dodge it and twist it. They will oppose effective enforcement. They will oppose raising the minimum. They will try to get the whole thing scrapped. They are against it; therefore we are for it. And that in no way compromises our view that workers advance by class struggle.

If in three years' time, Gareth Jenkins argues in his trade union branch against sending a delegation on a demonstration for immediate implementation of the minimum wage, will he be advancing the cause of his class?■

Neil Faulkner
Guildford

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.

Spark of victory

THE END OF December 1936 saw the opening shots in America's single most important labour dispute.

It centred on General Motors plants in Flint. The battle was over union recognition—something GM had publicly determined not to grant. One manager spelled it out: 'Will a labour organisation run the plants of GM...or management continue to do so.'

But the biggest company in the massive US auto industry was routed. The workers' victory was a breakthrough for trade union organisation from coast to coast.

Up till the 1930s the history of union organisation in the States was appalling. Unions refused to organise unskilled workers. Key industries like rubber, steel and crucially auto production were unorganised.

Companies like GM employed hordes of spies and ran their own private armies. They controlled the police and local government in the towns where they set up plants. Wages were cut and the lines speeded up.

But in 1935 GM workers in Toledo went out for union recognition. It was a rank and file revolt in which the American Trotskyists played a crucial role. It sparked the formation of the United Automobile Workers. That in turn became central to the setting up of a new, militant union federation aiming to organise the unskilled—the CIO.

The UAW began to gain a foothold in GM plants. In November 1936 militants spontaneously took over the Fisher Number One plant in Flint. They invented a new tactic: the 'inside picket line' or sit-down strike. It brought quick victory.

Sit-downs spread across company plants over incidents like militants being victimised for wearing union badges. The rank and file demanded union recognition. The union officials argued such a move was 'premature'.

The rank and file took over. On 28 December 7,000 workers in Cleveland struck for union recognition and took over the plant.

Two days later, after workers at the Fisher Number Two plant in Flint had demanded a contract, they saw inspectors who supported the union being transferred. They sat down.

That night at Plant Number One workers saw crucial equipment being shifted out of the factory. They also sat down.

Production of all GM cars was halted. Within three weeks all 15 GM plants were out. Out of 150,000 workers, 140,000 were on strike.

The leadership came from a 'board of strategy', elected by the rank and file, who drew up the demands for union recognition, shorter hours and control of production. Trotskyists like Kermit Johnson, and other radicals played a leading role. The officials were towed behind.

The company responded in the way it knew best. It tried to physically break the strike in Flint.

On 12 January all heat in the Number Two plant was cut off. Cops and vigilantes surrounded the plant and announced no food would get in.

Pickets physically attacked the cordon to get coffee and bread through. A three hour battle erupted in which the cops used gas and buckshot on the occupation. The police were eventully routed when the strikers used their secret weapon—the plant's fire hoses.

During the 'Battle of Running Bulls' the strikers seized the sheriff's car and three police tenders!

Terrified of the consequences, President Roosevelt pressured the company and union officials into a deal. The workers saw victory as theirs. As they prepared to march out of the occupations with banners and bands, news leaked that the company was also negotiating with the scab Flint Alliance. The barricades went up again.

Barricades go up at Flint

By now it was clear that they could not rely either on the officials or Roosevelt.

To win they had to halt all GM production. The key Number Four plant at Flint produced all GM's engines. But now 1,500 National Guardsmen were occupying the area. How could they capture plant Number Four?

Kermit Johnson recalled that the strikers knew there was a company spy in the local leadership. A 'secret' meeting was set up with the stool pigeon there, held under candlelight at the dead of night, to reveal plans to seize Plant Number Nine.

By the next afternoon Number Nine plant was surrounded by police. Several thousand workers descended on it crying 'strike, strike' and fought a pitched battle with the police. Seeing what was going on the workers inside the plant tried for an occupation.

But all the time it was a diversion. The plan to occupy Number Four plant was going ahead. Kermit Johnson was hidden in a toilet in the Number Four plant. When battle began he emerged. As planned another organiser arrived, but instead of the three hundred men he was supposed to have, only 20 were behind him. They had to hurriedly get reinforcements.

While battle was going on around the Number Nine plant the key Number Four plant was peacefully and quietly occupied.

A key part in all of this was played by the Women's Auxiliary led by Genora Johnson. The strikers' wives were not content with making coffee. They joined the picket line battles and were in the front line countering police batons with baseball bats.

One striker's wife was quoted as saying: "I'm living for the first time with a definite goal... Just being a woman isn't enough any more. I want to be a human being with the right to think for myself."

Another woman militant wrote: "Women who only yesterday were horrified at unionism, who felt inferior to the task of organising, speaking, leading, have, as if overnight, become the spearhead in the battle for humanism."

The battle lasted another two months, spreading across all GM plants. But in the end the company capitulated. It was a green light for an explosion of militancy across the USA. In the following month 193,000 workers were sitting down. 1937 saw one and a half million workers strike for union recognition.

In the process they exploded a set of arguments all too familiar today. Because prior to Flint the view was that new industries like auto could not be organised. The workers were too backward, the company too strong.

But overnight all the accumulated bitterness exploded. The American working class unleashed the greatest strike wave in history. And in the process individual socialists like Kermit and Genora Johnson moved from the sidelines to centre stage.■

Chris Bambery