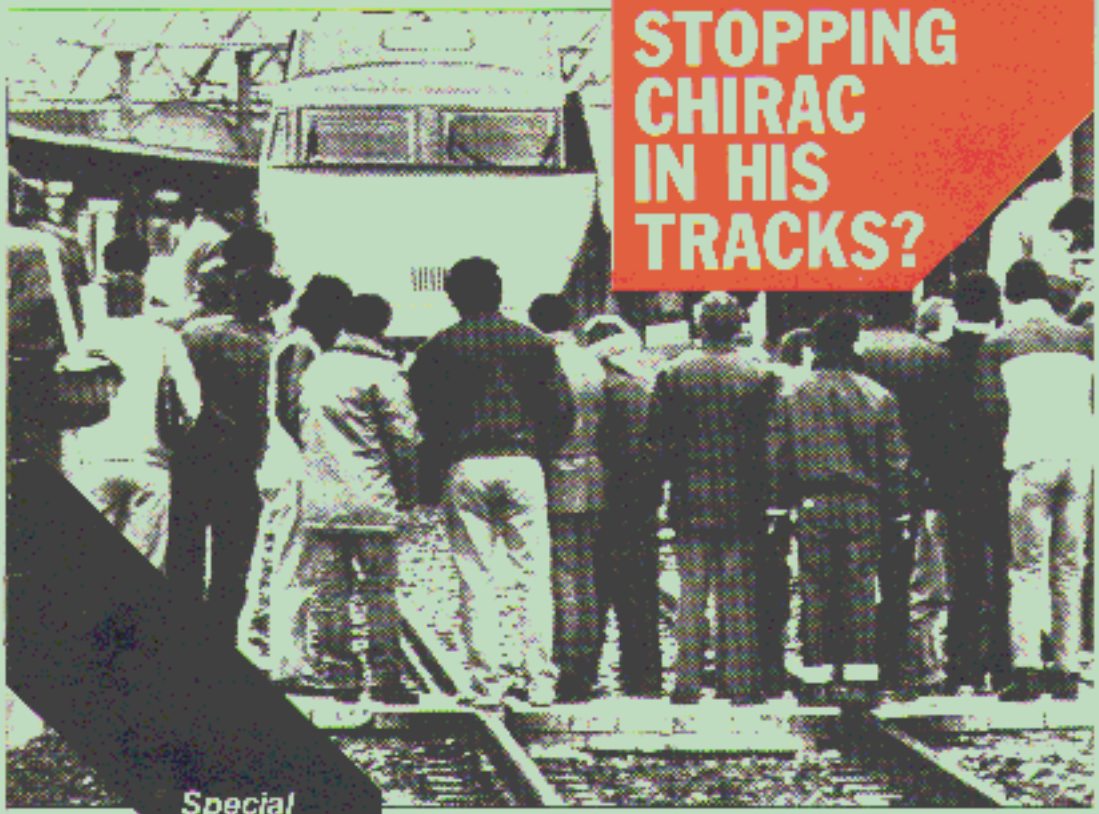
socialist worker
Review

January 1987 | Issue 94 | 60p

STOPPING CHIRAC IN HIS TRACKS?



Special international issue

FRANCE

CHINA

RUSSIA

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

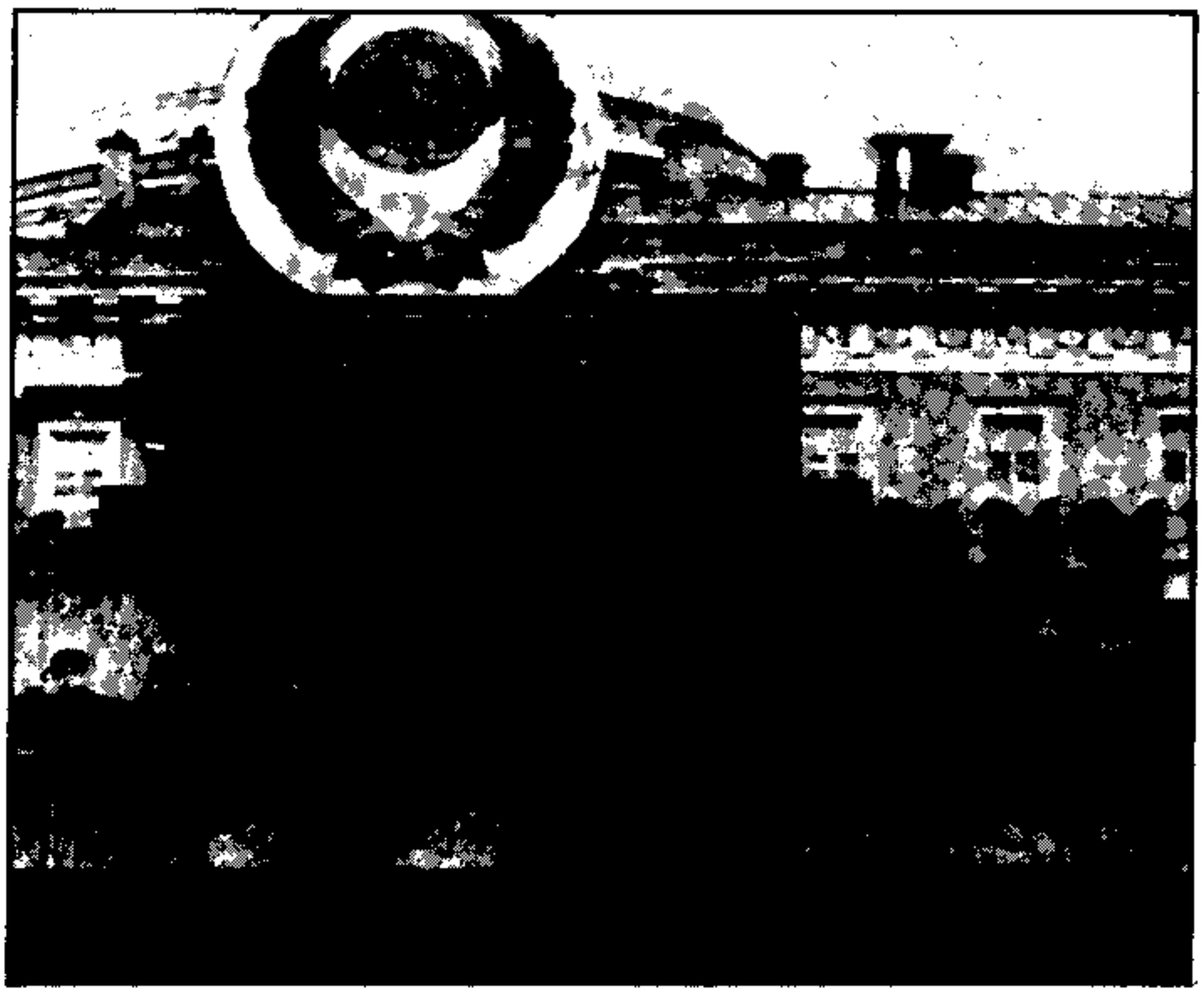
Subscription rate for one year:
Britain and Ireland £8
Overseas surface £9
Europe Air £11
Elsewhere Air £14.50
(institutions add £7.50)

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

CLASS STRUGGLE

A happy new year?

THE LAST month of 1986 and the first weeks of the new year have produced a level of struggle which has taken most socialists by pleasant surprise. Student protests in France and in China have already won major concessions from their rulers. There have also been significant student protests in both Italy and Spain.

But the student demonstrations have been symptoms of a wider dissatisfaction. Workers in China joined the protests. Most importantly, the French rail workers' strike followed hot on the heels of the students victory. Once some concessions had been won from the government other public sector workers also decided to join the battle.

As if all this were not enough, just before Xmas there were riots in the Soviet Asian province of Kazakhstan aimed at the central regime.

A large portion of this *Review* is given over to describing and analysing these particular struggles. However there are a few general points which can be made about them.

The first is that they point to the level of world crisis 14 years after the onset of recession. In every country the ruling classes have a simple solution—hold down wages, raise productivity, cut public spending. Often they are at least partly successful—witness the level of cuts, unemployment and productivity deals which have been imposed without a real fight in Britain.

But the scale of the crisis is such that governments and employers have to keep coming back for more. Their attacks force workers and students onto the defensive and sometimes the result is the sorts of struggles seen around the world in the past month.

What has given at least the struggles in France and China extra impetus is the idea that victory is possible—that our rulers are not all powerful. Students in France forced Chirac to scrap his education reforms. Protests in China have secured the release of some detained students . Hundreds of thousands now know that just because a head of government says no, that isn't always the end of the story.

We don't know the outcome of the rail workers' strike and the associated stoppages in France as we go to press. Chirac is saying he will stand firm and refuse to concede to the strikers' demands . But he has little room for manouevre. In particular the strikes have put real pressure on the French economy and have led to the dramatic fall of the franc on the money markets. As the *Financial Times* put it: "The French franc's latest fall has been exacerbated by political uncertainties in Paris stemming from the prolonged train strike after the student unrest at the end of last year."

The protests also give the lie to those who argue that students and workers are bought off, that strikes and occupations are old fashioned. Time and again over the past two months we have seen that theory disproved before our eyes.

The experience of well over a decade of crisis, the negative experience of social democratic governments in the West, and of the totalitarian regimes which masquerade under the name of "communism" in the East, have all taken their toll. So too has the crippling role of the trade union bureaucracy.

It is hardly surprising that some of the characteristic features of the recent struggles have been calls for democracy, and claims that the movements themselves are non political. Even these terms are reflections of a disillusionment with the existing organisations of the working class.

We do not know whether these events will herald a new year of struggle, or whether they will subside. What we do know is that already grave political crises exist throughout the world. There is the continuing crisis in the Middle East. There is the uneasy truce in the Philippines. There is the continuing struggle in South Africa. Even in the heart of capitalism, the crisis over Reagan's arms dealing is severe.

Although we cannot predict—as the events of the past month have shown—when and how a fightback in these areas will occur, we can be certain that it will happen.

The lessons of the recent struggles are not just to confirm that fact, but to raise even more urgently the building of revolutionary organisations capable of both intervening in the struggles and of pointing beyond them to an alternative organisation of society.■

USA

Contra dictions

SOMETHING MORE THAN the surgeon's knife is needed to cure the ills affecting Reagan's presidency.

The revelations that the White House had been selling arms to the Ayatollah Khomeini was just the first squall in what's

NOTES of the month

become a storm surrounding the presidency.

Few readers will be shocked that Reagan lied about the arms sales or even that the profits on them were shipped to the Contras, the right wing murder outfit seeking to overthrow the Nicaraguan government.

Even fewer readers will lament for the fall of the likes of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North—the man who interrogated a dying Che Guevara, oversaw the invasion of Grenada and liaised between the White House and the Contras.

But the revelation that Reagan was less than honest has blasted a hole in the whole presentation of the administration.

After all, his appeal is based on two things: the boast that Americans have never had it so good, coupled with the image of a reborn America once again astride the world after the nightmare of Vietnam and the Teheran hostage crisis.

Reagan has not been able to shake off the crisis. He's not been helped by the sight of key aides running for cover and blaming matters on anyone but themselves. Next year is election year and it's not only opposition Democrats who want to make mileage on the issue. Contenders for the Republican nomination want to ensure a clean nose.

But what is far more worrying for the ruling class is just how far Reagan has been unable to deal with the problems facing American capitalism.

The economic growth of past years was based largely on massive government spending, financed by foreign borrowing. America sucked in capital from abroad, paying out high interest in return.

Despite monetarist rhetoric, government spending has increased under Reagan. Today the Federal deficit stands at a massive $221 billion. The American state is the biggest debtor in the world.

The American boom also sucked in imports from around the world as its rivals cashed in on growing demand. Today America has a massive trade deficit of $170 billion.

Reagan's cure has been to let the dollar slide so as to cheapen American exports and raise the price of imports. The result has not only been to throw the world money markets into disarray but to open the prospects of another powerful recession sweeping the States.

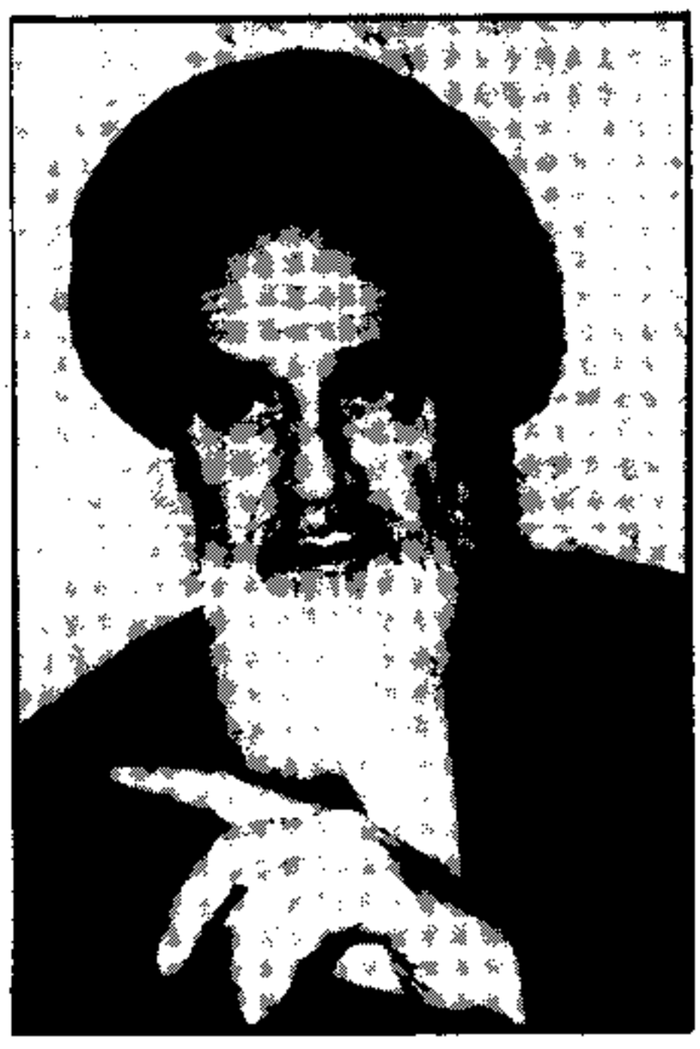
The US economy depends on foreign investors maintaining their credit. But if they begin to desert the ship Washington will have to hike up interest rates. The result will be to push the US economy into recession.

On a world level the crisis over Iran has shown that, while Reagan can police tiny Grenada, he is nowhere near solving the key problems facing the world order. While billions goes on Star Wars technology, the whole concept is treated as a dream even in the Pentagon.

Unfortunately the only real challenge facing Reagan comes from the Democrats, who have been trying to out-Reagan Reagan.

They attack him for "negotiating with terrorists", and with being "soft" on Khomeini. Their objection is not to arming the Contras but to the fact that Congress was not consulted.■

Pest—wanna buy some arms?



THE GENERAL ELECTION

The left's big hope

AS THE PRESS and TV have been telling us ad nauseam, 1987 is almost certainly election year. The next few months will see a round of speculation, predictions and promises from various politicians. One of the reasons for the speculation is because the outcome of the election is by no means certain.

Thatcher is relying on relatively favourable economic indicators—and rising living standards for those in work—to ensure her government is returned for a third term. Unemployment is not going up and the official (repeatedly fiddled) figures are even falling slightly. Inflation is set to rise but so far is rising slowly, far below the level of wage rises. The budget will provide bait in the form of tax cuts.

It is by no means certain that Thatcher will succeed. But as we pointed out in last month's *Review*, Labour is not so far presenting an effective electoral challenge.

The swing to Labour is astonishingly low after eight years of Tory government. Its defence policies—despite being couched in the most patriotic terms—have not had the popular success that Neil Kinnock hoped. There is some evidence to suggest that the opposite is true.

At Bishops Stortford Labour said it was going to fight the election mainly on economic issues. But if, as Roy Hattersley predicts, Thatcher will have to cut and run and call the election by the summer, there is no guarantee that the Tories' economic record will be clearly exposed. In any case, Labour has no real alternatives on offer.

All the Tory crises of the past year are cases in point. On each occasion—Westland, Libya, Chernobyl, MI5—Thatcher has looked as though she would slip on a banana skin. On each occasion Kinnock stopped her from falling. He refused to really expose MI5 because he expects to collaborate with MI5 in government. He didn't make political gains from the Chernobyl disaster because of the pressure of big business. He is a reformist without reforms.

The prospect of another Thatcher government has caused panic among sections of the left. The newspaper of one entrist grouping carried this new year message:

> "Right now the upcoming election is the best chance we have of removing Thatcher in the immediate period ahead. The left must take that chance, and put all its enthusiasm and energy into winning the general election."

Kinnock and cronies: is their defeat the worst thing that can happen

Those socialists outside the Labour Party, like the SWP, are castigated for "helping the Tories against the Labour movement" unless they actively campaign for a Labour government.

Are they right? Should all socialists be out canvassing, arguing the merits of Neil Kinnock on the doorstep? The answer must be no. Not because no one cares who wins the election. The return of a Kinnock government, despite its right wing policies, would show that many workers had broken from the most backward ideas of support for Toryism.

But it would not be a victory for workers. Workers' living standards would still be under attack. Trade union organisation would not be protected. Hattersley and Kinnock talk about low cost or no cost reforms—hardly likely to deliver much to those who have lost their jobs or who have spent years on the housing waiting list.

If workers in Britain are to safeguard jobs and maintain wage levels they are going to have to take their lead from actions like those of the French workers, not simply rely on a future Kinnock government.

In this sense the most important thing facing British workers in the coming year is not the election: it is whether different groups of workers can develop sufficient confidence to fight back against attacks from the employers or the government.

This points to quite different conclusions to those arrived at by much of the Labour left. A Kinnock defeat will show that many workers have not broken with the Tories, and will show that significant numbers of workers still adhere to some of the most backward ideas.

But it will not necessarily be the unmitigated disaster that the Labour left seems to fear. In the Labour Party, it will further strengthen the hand of the right, who will argue that Labour has not adopted sufficient right wing policies, or has not done enough to purge the left. But inside the working class movement as a whole, organisation remains intact and the ability to struggle is still there.

What separates revolutionaries from those in the Labour Party is not whether or not we want a Labour government. It is that we consider the crucial question to be how the class struggle shapes up. French workers have already started the year by reminding us of that lesson.

They spent 25 years waiting for the return of a socialist government. Its defeat in March last year was hailed as a disaster for the left. Yet under a year later, it is clear that real power lies with the working class.

As Lenin put it, one mass strike is worth ten elections. It is an indication of how far to the right Labour has moved that very few of its members are looking in that direction.■

NUS CONFERENCE

Tokens and talk shops

THE RECENT National Union of Students conference in Britain could not have been in greater contrast to the events in Europe and China. The overriding impression was one of bureaucratic incompetence and boredom.

There was little discussion of relevant

NOTES of the month

issues—the French students were hardly mentioned—and no policy was passed until the final day of the conference.

One explanation for this anarchic state of affairs was the way conference was run. But the real reason is to do with the depoliticised nature of the conference. The National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) dominated executive is incapable of giving any direction to the conference. Its only strategy is one of waiting for the return of a Labour government.

Any real attempt to raise major political issues, or to talk about a fightback is squashed.

The main response to the passivity of the executive has taken two forms. The first is to look not to possible struggles among students, but to the internal structures of NUS. So the main debate on grants and housing was not posed as between those who wanted a real campaign in the colleges and those who put their faith in a Labour vote. Instead it was between the executive majority who wanted single issue campaigns, and those in Socialist Students in NOLS who want an integrated campaign. SSIN used a lot of left-wing rhetoric to win this argument, but in practice rely upon the bureaucracy to deliver. In fact it is only a more open and militant version of the vote Labour strategy. The only common thread through the integrated campaign strategy is the left bureaucracy's desire to be seen to go through the motions.

The second response to the national union's passivity was one of tokenism. So the conference was dominated by the idea that you couldn't talk about racism unless you were black or Jewish; or that the way to fight sexual harassment was to have women-only conferences.

It is clear that no one was happy with the way the conference went. It wasn't even a showpiece debate, but an organisational shambles. New delegates complained bitterly that they couldn't understand anything that was happening. But the NUS leadership, having been responsible for the almost total lack of politics, now have no solution other than getting rid of the conference altogether. They want to move to one conference a year instead of two.

The lack of real political discussion meant there was a vacuum. This was most

NOTES of the month

marked on the conference floor around the question of women. The debate centred around two major questions: the election of a women's officer to the executive from a delegate based women-only conference; and a move to reserve half of all executive places for women.

Socialist Worker students argued against both proposals. The effect of them would be to reduce the fight for women's rights to the question of a few elections, and to section off the women's question. The women's officer should be elected by and accountable to the whole conference as are all other executive members. And since over half the present executive consists of women and has done little to campaign around the real issues, positive discrimination is obviously not the answer to women students' problems.

It was possible to score a minor victory by throwing out the proposal for reserved places. This illustrated that a number of students were fed up with the tokenistic arguments and wanted a real fight.

Outside the conference there was also a substantial minority open to socialist ideas. Socialist Worker fringe meetings on fighting racism and Ireland both attracted 150 people, and one on AIDS over 100.

Even in a period when the mood of conference has moved to the right, revolutionaries are able to make an impact by providing the answers to a whole number of questions people want answered.

No doubt Easter conference will be better organised bureaucratically. It will no doubt try to maintain the same low level of politics. But the opportunities for intervention will be equally as good. And if the events in different parts of the world begin to seep through the bureaucratic haze and have an impact on British students, then the ability of revolutionaries to give a lead will increase.■

NIGEL HARRIS

The r

THE CAMPAIGN for famine relief in Ethiopia and Sudan had the merit of spotlighting the terrible conditions there. But it had the bad effect of concealing just how many other countries were starving or close to starving. The chart shows the countries where the average calorie intake has fallen below what is considered medically the minimum between 1974 and 1983.

The chart does not include all the countries that, in 1984, had insufficient food per head; 44 of the 96 main developing countries were in that position. And it does not include some key famine cases, for example Ethiopia and Sudan, because they *improved* their position between 1974 and 1983—from 82 to 93 percent for Ethiopia, and 88 to 90 percent for Sudan.

Above all, the figures do not tell you who actually eats what; the figures are based upon the availability of foodstuffs, not the availability of money to buy the foodstuffs.

However, despite these severe weaknesses, the chart does show that a lot of countries now have access to only four fifths of what food is needed to maintain a minimum standard of life (and it is a pretty austere minimum). And it highlights some catastrophic cases—Mali, Ghana, Chad. Ghana is especially extreme—like, to a lesser extent, Zimbabwe—because of the disastrous fall between the two years.

It also illustrates one of the elements in the growing import of foodstuffs by developing countries. Between 1970 and 1984 these imports increased 71 percent. Now there is no harm in food imports—indeed, the enhancement, enrichment and diversification of diets requires increasing trade—provided developing countries have an equal opportunity to export those goods where they have an advantage.

That is the problem. Agriculture is one of the most extreme cases of tight control within world capitalism—indeed, a new theory of imperialism could be based upon the control of foodstuffs rather than capital or manufactured goods. And it is here where we can identify one of the most powerful sources of famine.

The good citizens of Europe, North America and Japan pay roughly an extra £51,000 million annually to subsidise food production at home. The Europeans, especially generous in this respect, pay about £66 for every man, woman and child in Europe each year.

As is notorious, this prodigious open handedness has built mountains and lakes of surplus foodstuffs, now sufficient to feed the whole population of Africa five times over. World cereal stocks are approaching 200 million tonnes—when the countries of

...emountains of profit

the Sahel region in Africa needed only 3 to 4 million tonnes to keep their starving alive.

The size of European foodstocks is at last becoming insupportable. The value—£8,760 million—is notional, because if an attempt were made to sell the stocks, world prices would crash so low that less than half the notional value would be recovered.

The cost of storage is now coming to exceed the value of what is stored. Take, for example, the one and a half tonnes of butter (ten pounds a head of the European population). It costs £143 million per year just to keep it—and even then an unknown quantity is deteriorating into nasty butter oil.

No wonder the EEC is so desperate to offload the stocks in any way at all provided it does not reach needy consumers in Europe. They are now selling butter stocks at under 3p per pound (as against £1 per pound on the European retail market) to be fed to calves. And this year the Russians will be given a £143 million subsidy to take EEC butter.

This astonishing heap of corruption is not, however, the problem, nor simply the way in which European governments oblige their inhabitants to pay astronomical prices to produce foodstuffs that must be in the main pure waste. The real problem—and where it connects with famine—is that the EEC subsidises agricultural exports.

Europe spends £3-4,000 million annually to dump foodstuffs on the world market—which then wrecks the export markets of developing countries. As a result, developing countries are denied the opportunity to earn the revenue that allows them to buy grain (even though prices are now desperately low) to offset famine.

Take, for example, sugar. Because of the subsidies, the EEC has now become the largest exporter of sugar in the world, even though, compared to sugar cane growers, sugar beet producers are very inefficient. In the sixties Europe supplied about 8 percent of world sugar exports; in the eighties, over 20 percent.

The scale of subsidies is scarcely believable—especially, compared to Mrs Thatcher's notorious views on social spending. In mid-1984, when the EEC exported sugar at £93.50 per tonne, it was buying it from European sugar refiners at £346.50 per tonne. The subsidy—of £253—was nearly three times the value of the sugar on the world market. You wonder why they don't just pay the money and cut the sugar out altogether.

Such a scale of subsidy is death to Third World producers. On the island of Negros in the Philippines there is a famine because of the mass sackings that have resulted from the low sugar price that Common Market exports have caused. Filipino exports—2.6 million tonnes in 1977—were 600,000 in 1985.

Mozambique is now an endemic famine area; 100,000 are said to have died in the famine three years ago, and over three million people are at risk in the season 1986-7.

Mozambique's sugar exports, running at nearly 200,000 tonnes in the early eighties, were 23,000 tonnes in 1985. Mauritius depends for 65 percent of its export earnings on sugar, not to mention Jamacia. The World Bank reckons the developing countries are losing about £5,400 million per year because of the agricultural policies of the More Developed Countries.

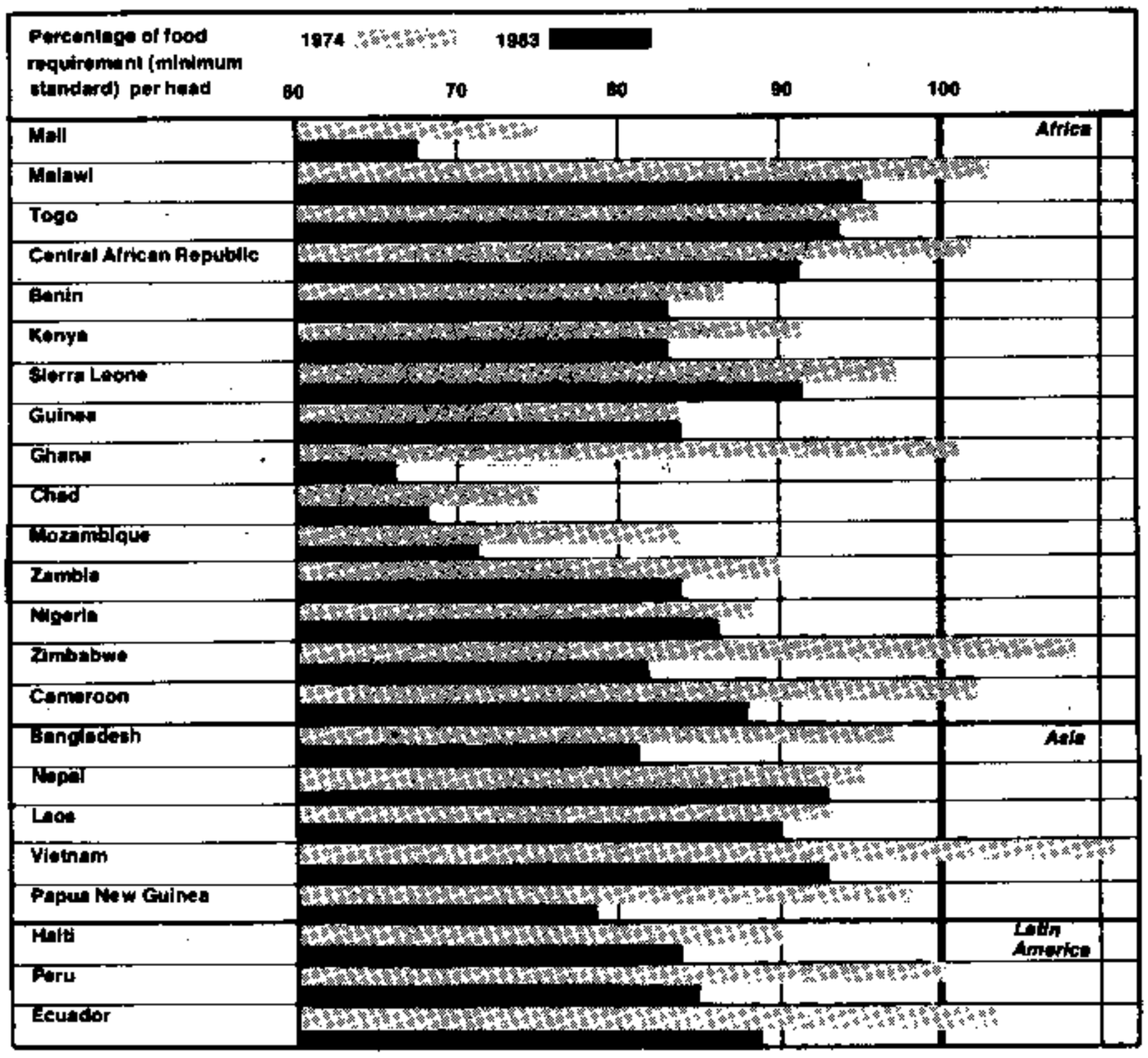
The EEC is doing the same thing with olive oil, wrecking the export markets of Tunisia and Morocco. Argentina's debt crisis is vastly exaggerated because the EEC has taken to dumping wheat and beef in key Argentinian markets (beef exports from Argentina have fallen 40 percent in the past 15 years).

Brazil has been hard hit in the sugar market where it is one of the cheapest producers (production costs are under half Europe's)—earnings from exports of sugar fell by 56 percent between 1979 to 1983. The United States has launched a major programme to subsidise rice exports to the severe loss of the world's largest exporter, Thailand.

World agricultural trade has become dominated by these monstrous conspiracies that simultaneously rob the consumers at home (particularly hitting the poor through high food prices) and wreck the markets of developing countries, so forcing famines on them. The price of hunger is growing abundance of wasted food. And on top of that, the system does not even protect the farmers.

Since the early seventies the income of British farmers has been halved and their debts doubled (they may total £8,500 million this year). The Mid West of the United States is now being reduced to a new rural dereliction as family farms fold under the weight of debt, followed by the towns, villages and factories they supported. The only gainers are a handful of the largest farmers (usually companies), and big processing, storing or trading companies.

Now, more than ever, the struggle to rid the world of famine starts here—not with the begging bowl and pleas for pity, but by breaking the criminal conspiracy of the Common Agricultural Policy.■



Democracy—the fifth modernisation?

AFTER FRANCE, China. For the second time in two months a mass student movement has forced a determined government to back down. And the long-term repercussions of the student unrest may well be even more important in China than they have been in France. For the recent protests have shown a depth of opposition to the ruling class not seen since the Democracy Wall movement of 1979.

In Shanghai the city centre was blocked for five days by crowds of up to 70,000 people. Demonstrations went on for another five days in the nearby town of Nanjing. Sporadic protests were reported in at least another 16 cities across China. Though the original marches were limited to the students, they quickly widened out to include significant numbers of workers.

Most importantly of all, in Beijing (Peking) four days of vigorous protests not only proved that the state was unable to enforce the ban on holding marches in the heart of the city, but also succeeded in getting 25 arrested students freed. Faced with the potential threat of sympathy actions spreading, the state backed off. Direct action has been seen to work.

The student movement was sparked off by a variety of causes. One crucial factor was clearly the example set by French students. The ruling class was very aware of this, as the secretary of the French Socialist party (who visited Beijing in late December) confirmed. But its deepest roots are to be found in the long-running split inside the Chinese ruling class, and the consequent crisis in economic and social policies.

For the past eight years the Chinese state has been carrying out an ambitious strategy for economic change, known as the "four modernisations" (of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and defence). This involved two key elements: an opening up to the world market, in order to swiftly modernise Chinese technology; and the scrapping of tight state direction of large sections of the economy, replacing it with a reliance on market forces (in other words, the profit motive).

So in the countryside the fields have been turned over to individual peasant families for them to grow whatever they choose. A fixed sum is paid to the state in taxes—they keep the rest. In the cities factory managers have been allowed to hold onto their profits (after taxes) and invest them as they wish.

The result has been that the economy has probably grown faster than at any time in this century—but that growth is both highly volatile and increasingly difficult for the ruling class to control. For control of the effective running of the economy has passed from the centre of the state machine to an army of local bureaucrats, who make decisions, not on the basis of the interests of the ruling class as a whole, but on their own sectional interests.

Matters came to a head in 1985, as the economy went out of control. Total output was planned to grow by 8 percent—it actually grew by over 18 percent. Energy output and transport facilities failed to keep up, leading to daily power cuts in most major cities, phenomenal amounts of waste in some areas of production and shortages in others. The enormous increase in investment also led to the state running short of funds.

At the same time, production of grain (still the staple diet in China) dropped for the first time in eight years. Though the drop was not very large, what alarmed the ruling class was the reason for it: peasants were moving out of grain production into more profitable areas. Output could now only be increased if the state paid more for it. But about 12 percent of the state budget already goes on grain price subsidies—to spend any more would cut directly into funds needed for investment.

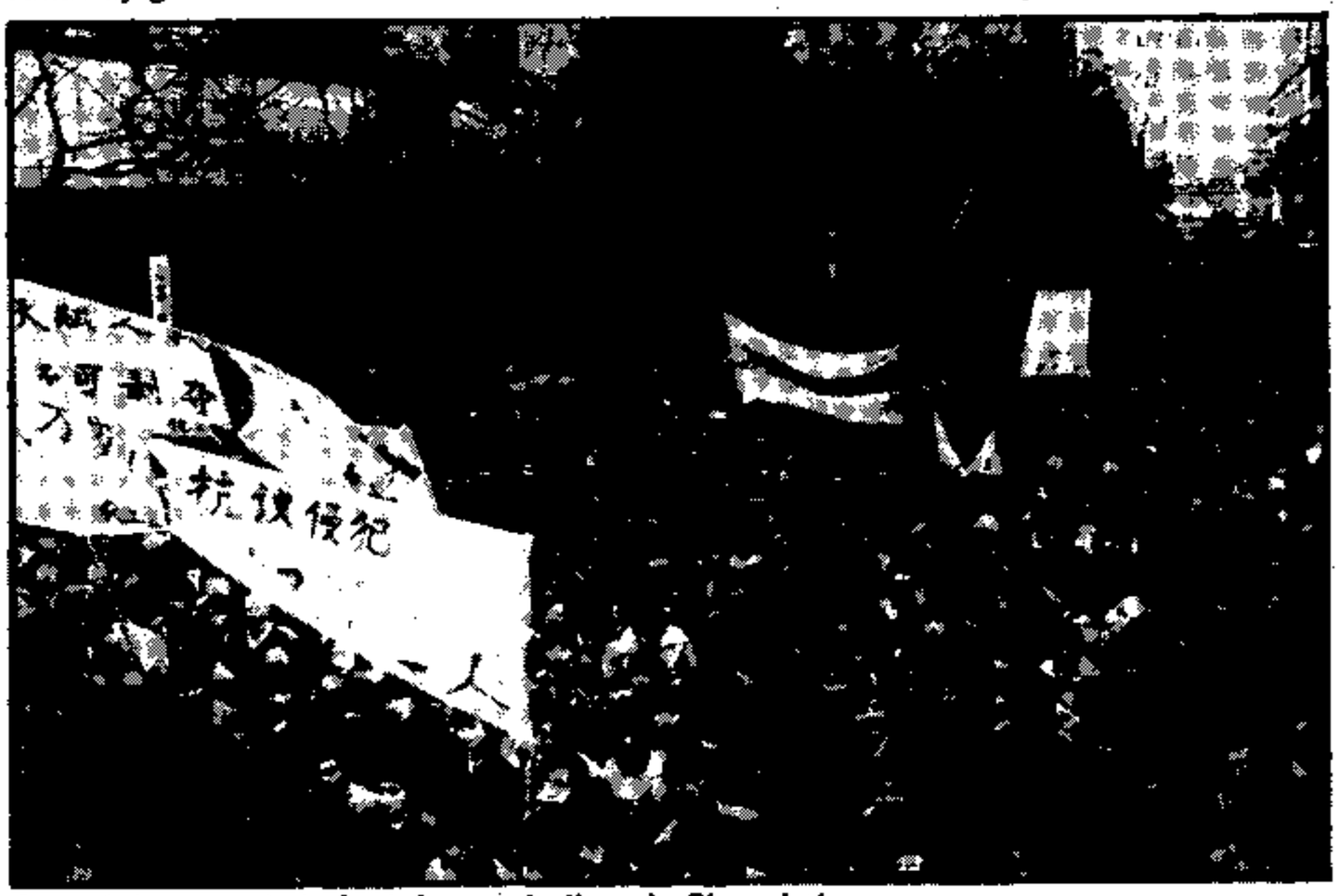
An open split developed inside the ruling class, with veteran economist Chen Yun publicly attacking Deng Xiaoping (the leader of the modernisers) for his handling of the economy, the rampant corruption of the lower levels of the bureaucracy and the spreading of "bourgeois morality" among wide sections of society. That battle was quickly decided—Deng Xiaoping won agreement on his long-term strategy, while conceding the need for an immediate strengthening of state powers to bring the economy back under control and halt the runaway growth.

Yet to the extent that the slow-down worked, it did so because of shortages of energy and other materials rather than the actions of the state. Investment continued to rise far faster than planned, as many factory managers simply ignored the state guidelines. Internationally, hopes of reducing the massive trade deficit were dashed as the world price of oil (China's major export) collapsed, while imports continued to grow. Meanwhile, the slow down led to a drop in contracted foreign investment of over 40 percent as international business confidence in the ruling class slumped.

In the countryside, despite increased subsidies, the grain harvest was up only ten million tonnes over 1985 (still below the 1984 figure), and in ten of China's 29 provinces grain acreage was further reduced. And the very success of rural industries (which now employ about 60 million workers) in competing with state-owned factories made the imbalances in the economy worse.

Lastly, despite a vicious clamp-down, including a string of public executions, official corruption remained completely beyond the control of the state. Not all the economic news was bad—shipbuilding and arms exports grew—but the crucial lesson of 1986 was that the state, having given away control of the direction of the economy, could not simply take it back.

As this became clear in the course of the year, it deepened the split inside the ruling class. Deng Xiaoping came increasingly under attack from conservatives demanding a greater strengthening of state control and a halt to any further reforms until firm control was re-established. Those attacks were aimed not only at his economic



One of the recent student demonstrations in Shanghai

policy, but also at the very mild liberalisation that has taken place in recent years.

The student movement seems to have started to give Deng Xiaoping support against the conservatives. The first demonstrations—on 5 and 9 December—simply demanded reforms in local election procedures, which were quickly granted. They received favourable coverage in the national press, and certainly had the support of local elements of the bureaucracy close to Deng Xiaoping.

But in a society as repressive as China, any call for greater democracy is potentially explosive. By the time the protests reached Shanghai, they had clearly gone beyond the aims or the control of any faction of the bureaucracy. Workers joined the protests in large numbers—one told the *Financial Times* reporter that he was there because his bosses got all the benefits of economic reform while he got nothing. And according to *Le Monde* about 2,000 workers held an independent demonstration in support of the students.

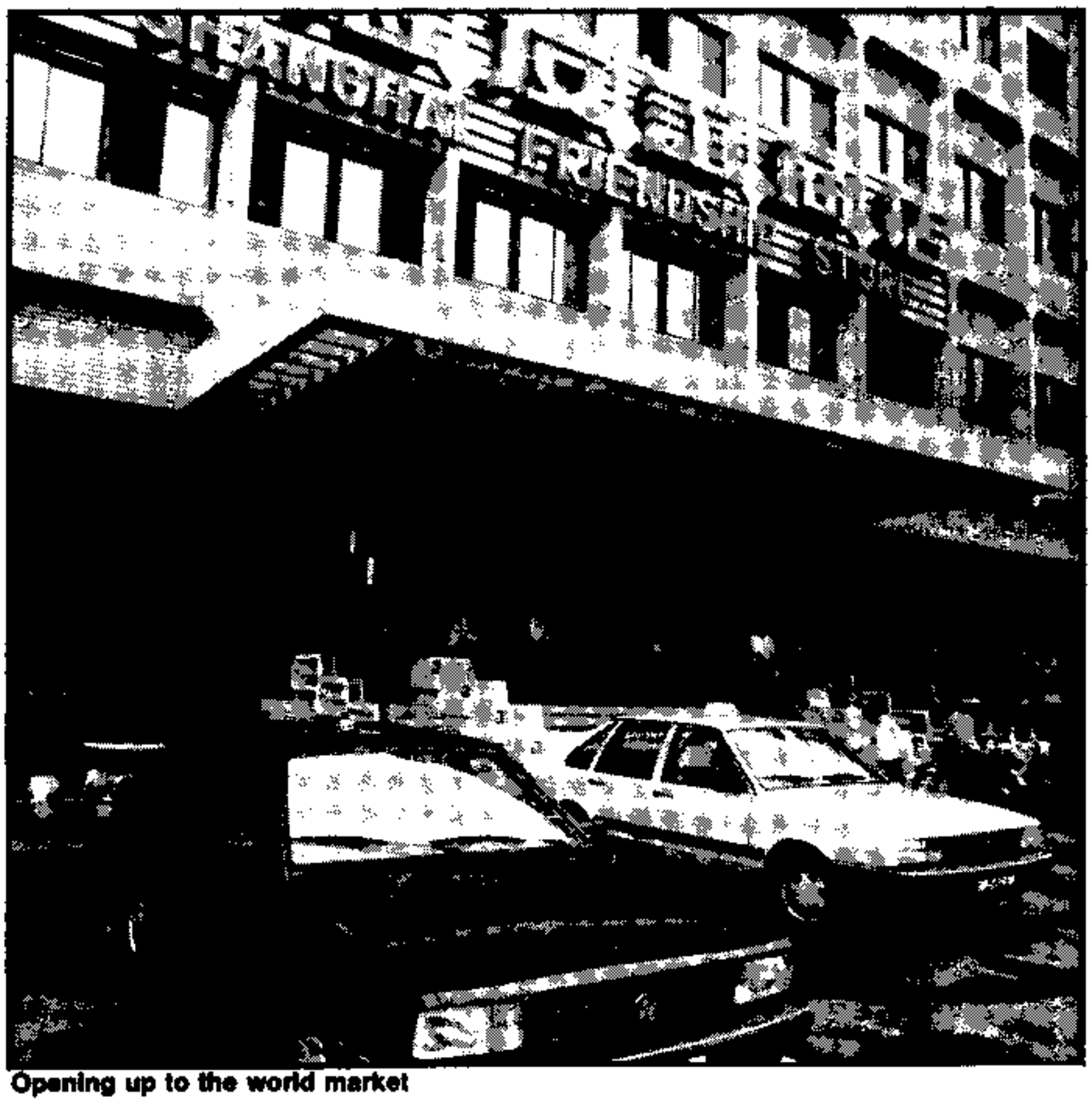
The targets of the protesters ranged from price rises and official corruption to police brutality (an issue smouldering since students were beaten up at a concert given by ageing surfers Jan and Dean). The atmosphere was far more militant than on the earlier marches, with at least sections of the crowds showing a healthy contempt for the "modernisers". One prominent banner read: "If you want to know about democracy, ask Wei Jingsheng" (a leading member of the Democracy Wall movement jailed for 15 years after he attacked Deng Xiaoping).

As the Shanghai protests were finally stifled by armed police who prevented students from leaving their campuses (and the arrest of over 300 marchers), so the movement spread to the nearby city of Nanjing, and to Beijing.

The movement in Beijing, though fairly short-lived, won the most significant victories of all. The authorities had banned all meetings in Tiananmen Square in the city centre—and flooded it to turn it into a sheet of ice! Hundreds of students gathered on 1 January to defy the ban and 25 were arrested as they broke through police lines. The next day over 4,000 students set out for the square to demand their release. Even after they were assured that they had won, about 1,000 of them carried on to make their original protest. Then, as the arrested students returned to their campus, another 1,000 marchers set off to prove that the ban could not be enforced. The police just stood and watched, clearly under orders to do nothing to stop them.

Though many of the Beijing students argued that they were demonstrating in favour of Deng Xiaoping, they were not prepared to simply wait for him to give them reforms. And their illusions are likely to be quickly dashed as the coming repression starts to bite.

During the marches the divisions inside the ruling class were reflected in press assessments of the movement. On the one hand it was argued that the students were simply showing their patriotism and love for the party, and if some of them were a bit too boisterous...well, you know what students are like. On the other hand leading conservatives muttered darkly about "irresponsible elements", "Taiwanese agents" and that old favourite of ruling classes everywhere, "outside agitators". Since the marches finished, the conservatives have definitely gained the upper hand. If the movement was planned to strengthen the hand of Deng Xiaoping, it was a gamble that went badly wrong. The conservatives will now demand blood and Deng Xaioping will be only too happy to comply. He was ruthless in crushing the Democracy Wall movement after it had enabled him to finish off the die-hard Maoists—he will be even more vicious if he is trying to regain the advantage.



Opening up to the world market

Even if the present spate of protests is over (and that is by no means certain) the problems of the ruling class are not. The student upsurge could scarcely have come at a worse time for them. Their plans for this year hinge on a series of "urban reforms" which add up to an employers' offensive on a gigantic scale.

Uneconomic enterprises (on the latest figures, 20 percent of all factories) are to be allowed to go bankrupt. Local managers are to be given the right to hire and fire as they please. A comprehensive price reform aimed at phasing out all food subsidies is to be introduced. Inflation is already running at over 10 percent a year as a result of the changes in agriculture, and unemployment is rising steadily. In such conditions these attacks are likely to cut very deeply into workers' wages and conditions.

The ruling class has been postponing its attack for fear of the reaction. But as the crisis of economic strategy and direction gets steadily worse, it cannot be postponed much longer. For if China is to compete in an increasingly harsh world economic climate, the ruling class has to register major increases in productivity and profitability.

The key question for socialists is how Chinese workers will respond to these attacks. There have already been unconfirmed reports of strikes and food riots in parts of the country. And from the complaints of people such as the World Bank and American capitalists, it is clear that there exists a strong, if informal, shopfloor organisation among many groups of Chinese workers. For much of the time that pressure is exerted through passive resistance (responsible, for example, for the common practice of converting productivity bonuses into wage supplements paid equally to all workers).

Faced with a frontal attack on dearly held rights, however, that organisation could well be capable of turning to much stronger forms of action. If the pent up anger of Chinese workers is released in response to a ruling class attack, it will make the present student unrest seem tame in comparison. And though the students' struggles by no means guarantee that Chinese workers will fight, they do make it a much greater possibility. As the French railway workers have reminded us, seeing other people humiliate a government can be a powerful stimulus to action.■

George Gorton

Tightrope to reform

THERE IS a buzz in the air in Moscow. December saw the return of the dissident scientist Andrei Sakharov, sharp criticism of the former leader Leonid Brezhnev in *Pravda* and riots in Alma Ata, the capital of the central Asian republic of Kazakhstan. And now the new year is beginning with the introduction of Gorbachev's first economic reforms. All of which leads to the question: how should we assess the current situation in the Soviet Union?

The simple answer is with considerable caution. The Gorbachev era has brought change but he has yet to show himself as "the great reformer". To appreciate the limits of what is happening it is useful to start with the criticism of the legacy of Brezhnev.

In December Pravda carried an article praising the general achievements of Russia under Brezhnev's rule from 1964 to 1982. But the article also complained that at the end of the era the rate of economic growth began to fail and no real attempt was made to reconstruct the economy. Negative social trends had emerged, there were serious inadequacies in the work of party and state organs and insufficient democracy, openness, criticism and self-criticism.

This is a fair assessment of what happened. Under Brezhnev the system grew slack and his supporters grew old in the little niches and kingdoms they had made for themselves. Some Western commentators have seen in these trends the death of the Soviet system. Gorbachev, no doubt, sees them as reversible trends. The truth lies somewhere between.

The Soviet Union is suffering from growing long term problems but reports of its imminent death have been greatly exaggerated. There is, as the eighteenth century economist Adam Smith once noted, a great deal of ruin in a nation and the Soviet Union is no exception. Things slipped so badly under Brezhnev that some improvement seems almost inevitable. But short-term, cosmetic changes will not fundamentally solve the underlying structural difficulties.

Gorbachev has yet to find this out. For the moment much seems possible with minor changes that eliminate some of the more obvious absurdities. The current economic changes are of this order. Debate is still continuing both about whether any more fundamental reform is needed and what shape it should take.

The release of prominent dissidents that has culminated in Sakharov's return from exile in Gorky is also a low cost policy that offers significant rewards. Not all have been as lucky as Sakharov. In December too the dissident Anatoly Marchenko died in prison where he had spent some 20 of his 48 years. Gorbachev could not afford a similar fate for Sakharov in exile. But the release of dissidents is less a sign of fear than confidence.

Black marks for Brezhnev

The repression of prominent dissidents brought few benefits. With Sakharov free and the pressure off others like the historian Roy Medvedev, Gorbachev can walk taller abroad. He can also have Sakharov's genuine concern about international developments like Star Wars discussed in the Western press to defuse American propaganda.

The dissidents at the moment offer little challenge at home. Most are isolated but many will be sympathetic to Gorbachev's own plans for change. Socialists in the West must respect the courage with which individual dissidents have pursued their struggles. But we should be under no illusion that their politics are socialist. What they want is at best a democratisation of Soviet society.

This alone would not be so bad were it not for the fact that when workers do struggle the dissident movement often fights shy of them. Sakharov and his wife, Yelena Bonner, for example, are notorious for their suspicion of Vladimir Klebanov, a Donbass miner who took up the cause of his workmates and found himself hounded into a psychiatric home.

Nor is Gorbachev faced with a huge camp system of political prisoners. That was dissolved in the 1950s. Today the Soviet Union probably has no more political prisoners than Chile or Turkey.

This is not to minimise the repression or to disparage the fate of those who suffer it. But the Soviet Union is a world away from the mass prison camps with their millions that existed under Stalin. And it should lead to an important conclusion. Repression is no longer the first line of defence of the system. If Gorbachev cannot command people's enthusiasm he depends in the first instance on their apathy, not their fear.

Occasionally this acquiescence breaks. It did so in Alma Ata on 17 and 18 December when major riots flared. These seem likely to have been the biggest street disturbances since the early 1960s—although the true dimensions are still hazy. But they also fit a general pattern of protest in the Soviet Union. So long as sustained, independent worker organisation is impossible, mass protest, when it happens, has a sheet lightning character. It will suddenly flare up with great intensity and then disappear.

The catalyst in this instance was the sacking of the local Kazakhstan party leader and his replacement with a Russian. The deposed leader Kunaev was both a native Kazakh and a former Brezhnev supporter. Under Brezhnev the central Asian area became notorious for its corruption and the development of personal fiefdoms. Kunaev was one of the last of the old guard to be removed and it seems unlikely that the protest was inspired by any individual love for him.

The greater problem is that the Kazakhs are one of the hundred or so nations that make up the Soviet Union and the nationality problem continues to be a serious difficulty. Central Asia has in the past been eclipsed by nationalist protests in the Baltic states. Now it has come to the fore.

Although the Soviet government has tried to equalise development the constraints under which it has operated have not allowed it to fully respect what the different populations see as their "national rights". Kazakhstan itself is huge (five times the size of France) and Alma Ata has a population of over a million. But it is dominated by native Russians. Only 35 percent of the population are Kazakhs compared to a native population of 68 percent in neighbouring Uzbekistan and 56 percent in Tadjikistan. This has led to the belief that native Russians are not only filling the best jobs but distorting the economy of the area to their own benefit. It has also been suggested that Islamic fundamentalism is at work in these areas but the evidence for this is ambiguous.

The incident shows, however, the tightrope that Gorbachev has to walk in his reforms. The Soviet media in reporting the incident, itself a sign of Gorbachev's new openness (though there were no pictures!) described the rioters as students who had been led on by "hooligans, parasites and other anti-social elements". It was clear that it was much more than this and that deep rooted tensions remain beneath the surface of Soviet society.■

Mike Haynes

France—a test of strength

Gareth Jenkins reports from Paris

11am. Paris South West Train Depot: **The strikers' meeting has just ended. Some 150 rail workers pour out of the small room that is the local strike headquarters. "Come with us," they say.**

We follow them onto the tracks, dodging round stationary rolling stock. We walk about a quarter of a mile in the direction of the Gare d'Austerlitz. Then we can see the red smoke of flares. Up the track two trains, one main line, the other suburban, have stopped. Behind the flare, the strikers, blocking the line. They are joined by other groups of strikers from other depots.

In all some 300 strikers are moving around on the track. "We're not sabotaging," says one. "That's propaganda put about by the press. We just stop the trains for a half hour, then let them go. We explain to the passengers why we're doing it."

There's an argument between the older and the younger strikers. The younger ones want to keep the trains stopped longer. Eventually, to jeers of a modified football chant, "Allez les jaunes, allez les jaunes, allez" ("jaunes" are scabs), the trains roll slowly past. Some of the passengers are abusive, the rest indifferent.

2pm. Outside the Gare du Nord: **A noisy demonstration sets off across Paris towards the Gare St Lazare. Three thousand strikers with their local committee banners, with banners proclaiming that the struggle continues, fill the air with chants. "We shall win!" "We want, we shall have satisfaction." "Open your eyes, turn off the telly." "Rail workers, passengers, solidarity!"**

A favourite with one particular section of the predominantly younger railworkers is "Up Douffiargues, higher than Devaquet". They jump in unison while shouting it. Douffiargues is the Transport Minister. Devaquet was the Education Minister till the students forced him out.

This is what rips through the air in the New Year as the government suddenly realises that a strike that came from nowhere threatens all their plans for making France safe for French capital.

The students started it. Railway workers have picked it up. Do we need parliament to get rid of what we don't like? Is the solution in the street? Are we back in 1968? But didn't 68 finish up with the right even more firmly in power? These whispers, doubts, queries are present, mixed with the militancy.

And the militancy is there. The papers are full of it, nervous about the effect on the economy. It's an endless subject of discussion, producing fear or inspiration depending on your position. Sometimes the media try to pretend that the strike is finished, that more and more railway workers are going back. At other times they mutter about dark forces ready to overthrow civilisation as we know it.

The truth is, it's anyone's guess as to where the strike's going. It's not official, nobody can speak for it, neither the unions nor the Socialist opposition. Only the strikers are confident, supremely confident, with a sense of newly born strength.

The railway workers aren't alone. Though they are the only group of workers continuously on strike since 18 December, other groups have gone into and out of action, before and since Christmas.

Bus and metro workers have created moments of wonderful chaos. Less obviously, post and telecommunication workers have been testing their strength. More spectacularly, since the New Year towns the length and breadth of France have found themselves plunged into semi-darkness as electricity workers pull the plugs.

It's a test of strength. The government is under pressure, its different constituent elements pulling against each other. The prime minister, Jacques Chirac, alternates between belligerence, swearing by national unity, and soft soap, pleading the cause of the underprivileged whom he's protecting against the powerful.

The railway workers have upped their demands, even wanting more payment for days on strike. Other workers in the public sector are pressing their demands, fed up with the endless decline in living standards, fed up with forever being squeezed by first the Socialist and now the right wing government.

Yet they are operating independently from one another, not linking up their demands, backing away from the charge of wanting to bring down the government, as if blind to the nature of their united power.

So near and yet so far. A sense of tremendous strength, but a sense of nothing quite coming together. If only the links, political and organisational, can be made before the weight of official society, of inertia, of trade-uniondom clogs the pulse of energy beating through the railway workers' strike movement.

The highest level of organisation so far has been among the railway workers. Solidly on strike for a month, they have had the opportunity to develop rank and file control, the like of which has not been seen for a generation. In fact, in its scale and size it goes beyond even 1968.

It might seem odd that a strike movement of this type should begin among train drivers. After all, they are among the best paid section of the French working class, earning way above the average and in many instances above such respectable white collar workers as teachers.

They are known colloquially as "the senators of the track". But if their pay is good, the conditions are lousy. They are often forced to work long hours, they often spend nights away from home in sub-standard hostels, and with "natural wastage" and the introduction of one man operated trains they are also subjected to enormous physical and mental strains.

Safety margins are cut to the bone—but the drivers are made to carry the can if there are accidents.

What made this deep reservoir of discontent flow over was management's proposal to restructure the grading system. Instead of gaining more pay simply through seniority, a merit system would be introduced. This would amount to nothing other than a crude tool in the hands of management to divide and control the workforce.

When this discontent flowed over just before Christmas, it bypassed the unions. Strike action didn't get under way as a result of a decision by the unions to call out all their members on the railways. It started because a handful of drivers at the Gare du Nord, Paris, persuaded the local Socialist union (the CFDT) to declare an official strike over the consolidation of a bonus into the basic salary.

From there it spread like wildfire to the other depots in Paris and the provinces. But it no longer needed even the minimal cover of appearing to be official. It became a purely unofficial movement. The demands also broadened to include withdrawal of the new salary structure, better overall conditions and more pay.

The biggest and most important union, the CP-dominated CGT, did everything in its power to apply the brakes. CGT officials argued that it was wrong to take action before the Christmas holidays because it would alienate passengers. At some depots they even tried to organise a back to work "picket".

Faced with this sabotage, the strikers realised that they would have to create their own structures. Democratically elected and recallable strike committees sprang up in the depots, with general assemblies meeting daily to decide on whether to con-

tinue the strike and what action to pursue.

Strike committees may not appear very extraordinary in Britain, but in the context of the French workers' movement they are a major step forward. Under normal conditions strike action is totally under the thumb of union officials. There is no say by the rank and file.

The striking train drivers have gone one step further. They have created national "coordinations" between the depots throughout France. They have enormous power both in terms of coordinated activity and in terms of not being dictated to by the union bureaucrats.

The fact that these strike committees and "coordinations" are run by non-trade unionists as well as rank and file trade unionists may also appear strange to British eyes. French trade unionism by its nature tends to exclude some of the most militant workers who are not prepared to put up with the bureaucratic way it is run. These militants either tear up their union cards in disgust or are expelled.

WHAT WE have in France is a qualitative development in the class struggle. A powerful section of workers has rediscovered the tradition of democratic self-organisation, which has always been the precursor of much greater social movements challenging the very basis of official society. Examples include Clydeside engineers in the First World War and Russian soviets in 1905 or 1917.

Unfortunately we are nowhere near that point in France at the moment. Nevertheless, it is this new form of organisation that frightens the government and the trade union bureaucracy because of the potential within it.

It is also beginning to inspire other sectors of workers. Post office and telecommunication workers have in some cases begun to set up their own strike committees and general assemblies. Perhaps out of this will develop national coordinations.

However, if the potential is there, consciousness lags behind. Even the most militant among the train drivers have not yet realised how to take the movement forward. Simultaneously with this advanced form of organisation, the grip of old ideas has still to be loosened.

Take the two national coordinations among railway workers. One (the bigger, based on the Gare du Nord) takes in only train drivers. Undoubtedly that gives it enormous authority among the strikers. Its narrow organisational basis is also a means of preventing its being taken over by "broader" interests (which is what the unions represent) and so having its demands diluted.

The sectionalism also limits its ability to look for the wider support which will be needed if the movement is to break the resolve of the government to stand firm.

The other national coordination (based on the Paris South West depot) insists that the movement should be open to all railway workers, whether they are train drivers or not. Thus it accepts delegates from strike committees in the marshalling centres, workshops, administration etc.

This broadening of the base is important, not least because there have been strikes among other sections of the railway workforce, including an important one among reservation clerks in December which was settled (unsatisfactorily) by the CGT.

This **Coordination Nationale Intercategories** claims to represent more than 15,000 strikers.

Even so, and despite the lack of sectionalism, it does not see itself as seeking support on a wider basis than railway workers or trying to unite all the different groups of workers on strike in a generalised offensive against the government.

Even the most politically experienced leading elements, such as Daniel Vitry, are unwilling to challenge this. He recognises that the movement needs to expand beyond the railway workers, but argues the time is not yet ripe. He says the strike needs to be consolidated before an attempt is made to go to strikers elsewhere in the public sector.

He also claims that militants don't yet understand this—and it is true that when you speak to railway strikers there is a tendency for them to see other public sector workers as not yet approachable because they have different demands from their own.

In other words, even the most conscious of railway workers will not generalise beyond a certain point.

Unless the railway workers, as the most advanced sector, generalise and tie together all the different, partial challenges, the movement will not gain the momentum to force a retreat on the part of the government.

Daniel Vitry's response is that "you have to be one step ahead and not ten. Otherwise you don't convince anyone."

The question of at what point to raise political demands is always a sensitive one. The pace of political generalisation cannot be forced. But the role of the government and the unions will not allow a purely spontaneous development.

The government's response is instructive. At the beginning it was caught napping. It did not expect so powerful a strike and, after ignoring it initially, then instructed the railway management to be intransigent.

On 26 December the Director General of the French Railways (who is also a leader of Chirac's party) declared: "A return to work is the precondition for any negotiation."

However, with the franc under pressure and disagreement among the parliamentary majority as to whether the best strategy was to tough it out, the government then appointed a mediator.

The mediator declared that the notorious new salary structure was suspended. The government clearly hoped this would be enough to produce a return to work. But the strikers were suspicious. They weren't after "suspension" but for the salary structure to be withdrawn completely.

The government prevaricated, exhausting its linguistic dexterity to avoid using the word "withdrawal". It was clear to the strikers that it had not yet been beaten.

At the same time the government kept up a steady stream of disinformation, lying about the number of trains running and about the impact of the strike. Its propaganda line is to try to isolate the train drivers as "privileged", arguing that if the government gives way to their demands the unemployed will suffer.

So far this line has had minimum impact on the strikers. Their confidence and combativity remain high.The strikers must find ways of replying to the government's claims that it has the interests of the disadvantaged at heart. It will not be sufficient just to argue that the demands can be won by railway workers being determined to win them.

The urgency of a political response became clear at the first joint demonstration by the two national coordinates held in Paris on 7 January, which drew together some 3,000—mostly Parisian railway strikers.

The speech, when the march reached the management headquarters, by a leader of the coordination that organises only train

Strikers and families sit on the rails

drivers was militant but non-political—saying that marchers should block the road by a sit-in until the management agreed to negotiate.

The speech by Daniel Vitry of the intercategory coordination was couched much more politically. Although there was no mention of going out to other striking public sectors—bus, metro, electricity and gas workers were on strike that day—there was at least talk of the need to put the blame on a government that is ready to give huge tax concessions to the wealthy while claiming it hasn't got anything extra in the kitty for public sector workers. He also changed the slogan about solidarity with passengers to solidarity with other workers.

IF THE government hasn't been able to demoralise the strikers, the role of the unions, particularly the CGT, has to be examined.

Once it became clear that the CGT was not able to stop the strike movement, it joined in, in an attempt to regain some sort of control. So far it has had to make concessions to the mood of democracy. In the Paris South West depot, for example, the nerve centre for the intercategory coordination, the CGT has been forced to set up its own "general assemblies" in direct competition with the real thing. It also says it is happy to be "overtaken by the base", though nothing could be further from the truth.

In reality it takes every opportunity to rubbish the unofficial movement. It says the delegates are unrepresentative. Georges Wallerand, CGT reresentative on the South West Paris regional joint negotiating committee, claimed: "These are people who have only just come into the union movement. They don't understand how it works."

He also claimed that 24 hour stoppages were more effective than open-ended ones which frittered away their strength. Yet only this present strike has forced the government to make any concessions.

Worse, he asserted that the unofficial movement was undermining the CGT, which is what the bosses want. The management didn't like the way in which the CGT had been the majority union in the secret ballot to elect union representatives, whereas the open meetings, with open voting, could easily be manipulated by people who didn't have the workers' movement at heart.

Georges Wallerand's comments were little more than a veiled attack on Daniel Vitry and are part of an orchestrated attack on him by the CGT.

So far the CGT's poison has not had too much effect among the militants. But there is an objective factor that will help it regain control. That is its position in the negotiating process.

At the end of the day the strikers' demands will have to be taken up by the CGT, as well as by the other unions. The strikers are quite rightly suspicious of what the unions will do (especially as the CGT, according to Georges Wallerand, thinks

Striker dragged off by cops

there are some "positive points" in the proposed salary structure which can be negotiated, involving a balance between the management's demand for extra money based on merit and the strikers' demand to keep the old system based on seniority).

How can the strikers ensure they are not led by the nose by the unions? Neither national coordination is prepared to dissolve its organisation precisely because they don't trust the unions to represent their interests. But the train-drivers-only coordination sees a division of labour whereby the unions negotiate and the coordination organises. It doesn't demand a voice in the negotiations.

That shows a weakness that the CGT has tried to exploit. It has argued (and in one instance—the depot at Lyon—successfully) that now that the action is off the ground there is no further point to the strike committees and general assemblies: it's up to the unions, so the assemblies should be dissolved.

The other intercategory coordination is demanding observer status in the negotiations in an effort to control the unions. If it wins that demand it will be a major victory and an indication that the movement is so powerful that the government is retreating in the face of the strikers' demands.

But winning the demand for observer status will also be because the movement will have broadened politically into a generalised assault by different sections of public sector workers on the government.

AS WE GO to press the outcome of the movement is unclear. Maybe a steady trickle of strikers going back to work, with the unions regaining the initiative, will give the government the relief it sorely needs. At the moment this seems more probable than the movement developing into a generalised assault—though that can't be ruled out.

Revolutionaries know that many strikes, even as promising as this one, go down to defeat. If this happens, the important thing is that the best militants learn where the movement went wrong in order to do better next time. Intervention by revolutionaries is vital. Learning cannot be left to spontaneity.

Where was the French revolutionary left in this dispute? Tragically, almost invisible. The biggest and most serious organisations, **Lutte Ouvrière** and the **Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire** were conspicuous by their absence. Although it was an open secret that both had some influence (particularly **Lutte Ouvrière**), neither made any effort to sell their papers on the demonstrations or openly argue their politics.

The reason normally given was that no opportunities should be given to the enemy (or the unions) to exploit fears among strikers about manipulation from the outside, and that winning credibility from within by being the best and most consistent militants was the important task.

While there is an element of truth in all this, the overall strategy is a mistake. It means that revolutionaries are not free to address a minority of strikers about what has to be done.

So, for example, when it came to the accusation about the strike being "political", there was no one openly moving beyond the purely defensive argument that the government had made it political.

Yet it was vital to argue that the rail strikers had to go out to other groups of workers on strike, not simply to show support for their demands (and seek support for their own), but to argue the political case for a generalised assault on the government.

The strikers were capable not simply of satisfying their immediate demands but, by defeating the government, introducing a different form of politics altogether, one based on workers' power, not on the kind of parliamentary manipulation beloved of the official political opposition (the Socialist Party and the Communist Party).

No doubt, here and there this was being argued. But not even the most impressive of the rank and file leaders (like Daniel Vitry) showed any sign that he was prepared to be influenced publicly by such arguments. No doubt too, these arguments would have been difficult to win: the majority of militants saw no necessity to generalise beyond their own ranks. What it meant was that no elements of openly revolutionary as opposed to militant leadership began to evolve.

It is little short of criminal that the French revolutionary left refuses to come out of the closet. Even if one accepts that revolutionaries in the workplace have to observe a level of caution in order to avoid marginalisation (or worse), there is absolutely no justification for not intervening from the outside.

Such intervention is not substitutionism. Rather, it is about carrying the political argument over what needs to be done, even where that remains at the level of propaganda.

If the French revolutionary left continues to ignore this task it will never get beyond a mixture of syndicalist militancy and abstract propagandism, and golden opportunities like the present will be squandered. ■

IT IS, as the song says, a long way from May to December, and between May 1968 and December 1986 a long distance has indeed been travelled. Ever since 1848 revolutionaries have fallen into the trap of seeing new struggles as if they were reruns of old ones. Marx's reminder that when history repeats itself it does so the first time as tragedy, the second as farce, stands as a permanent warning.

Yet it is scarcely surprising that the recent student struggles in France have been compared, by friend and foe alike, to the events of May 1968. Many of the same elements seemed to be present—the spontaneous eruption of struggle, mass street demonstrations, a government forced to retreat by popular action. Even if it was clear that this time round things would not go so far, something of the same spirit was aroused. *Lutte Ouvrière* quoted a car-worker from Renault Billancourt who remembered the May events as saying: "It's not 68, but it's not bad."

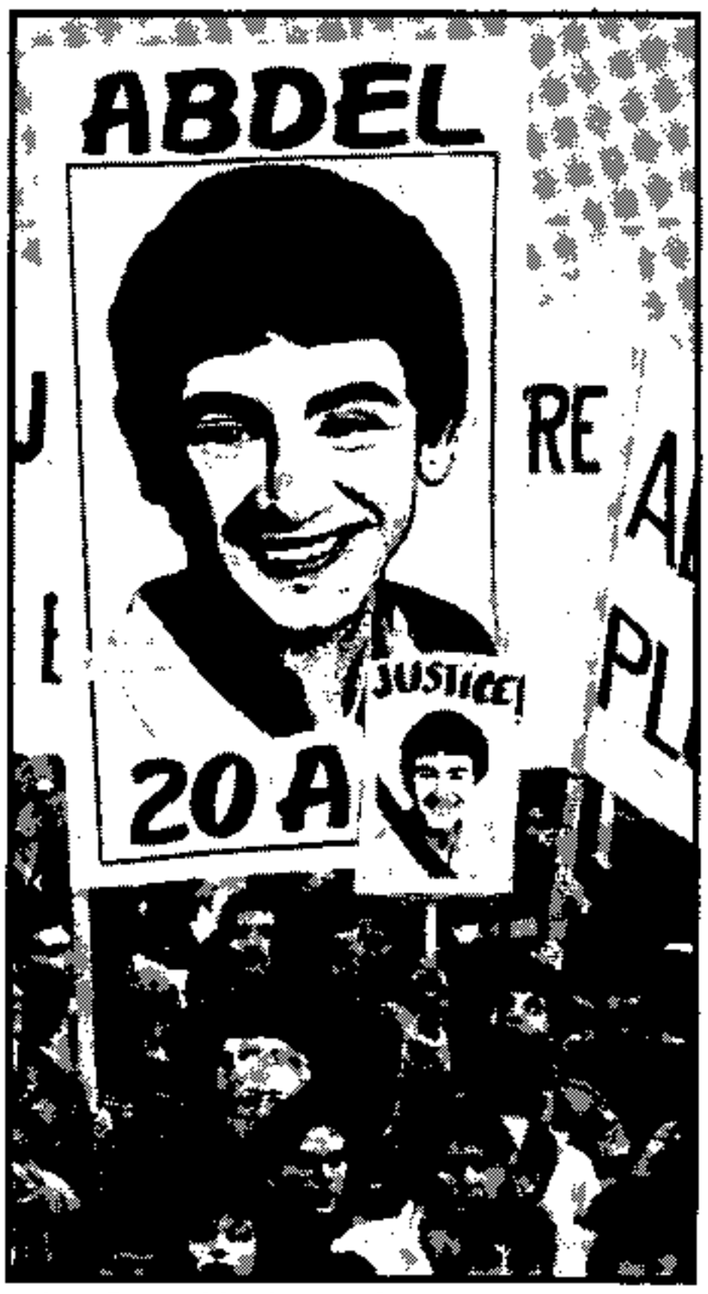
It is therefore useful to compare the recent events with May 68, to see both the crucial differences and the underlying similarities. It is now fashionable among many on the left to downgrade May 68. Often those who at the time were most swallowed up by ultra-left euphoria are now the quickest to write off the whole thing.

So it is important to begin by recalling the sheer scale of the events. In 1968 the students provided the detonator—but the mini explosive charge came from the working class. Between nine and ten million workers were involved, in all branches of French industry and in every reach of society, from astronomers to footballers. They did not simply withdraw their labour but challenged bourgeois property rights by occupying their factories and workplaces.

By so doing they brought the regime to the brink of overthrow. The government of General de Gaulle tried to resolve the crisis by calling a referendum, but ran up against the problem that not a single printshop in France—nor in Belgium—would print the ballot papers. According to the Memoirs of Prime Minister Pompidou, de Gaulle then suffered an "attack of demoralisation" and took a plane to Germany, intending to abandon political life. He was persuaded to return by one of his generals.

Since May 1968 workers in Portugal and Poland have raised the struggle to even higher levels of initiative and organisation. But Portugal was still a backward country, brought to crisis by a prolonged colonial war; Poland was a state capitalist tyranny where workers lacked basic democratic rights. The argument that the proletariat in advanced capitalist countries can still be a revolutionary class must rest substantially on the experience of May 1968.

Above all May 1968 was a magnificent demonstration of the power of spontaneous action and the ability of workers to take things into their own hands. The very first factory occupation, at Sud-Aviation in Nantes, was sparked off by the demands of a small group of Trotskyists in a local



After Oussekine's murder

union branch. But as the movement snowballed, it was the spontaneous action of workers which created the dynamic. It took several days before the union apparatuses were able to re-establish their control.

In a few towns, notably Nantes in Western France, something approaching dual power was brought into being. Workers and students set up road blocks and controlled petrol supplies; links were made with local peasants to provide cheap food supplies. Union organisations exercised permanent supervision over prices; teachers and students ran nurseries for strikers' children.

To understand why recent events have developed differently from 1968, it is necessary to identify a number of key aspects of the situation: the crisis of the educational system; the role of reformism; the level of politics among the students; and the part played by the revolutionary left.

In 1968 French capitalism was still enjoying the fruits of the post-war boom. De Gaulle had imposed austerity on the working class, but he had done so in the name of modernising French capitalism. State planning and the forced reduction of the agricultural sector were designed to make the French economy more competitive. Unemployment was still low—around half a million, though disproportionately high among young people.

Part of the effort to modernise took the form of a rapid expansion of education. Between 1958 and 1968 the number of students in higher education in France rose from 175,000 to 530,000. In Paris alone the figure rose from 68,800 in 1958 to 130,000 in 1967. In the good old days higher education offered two things: the myth of learning for its own sake, and a passport to privileged career possibilities.

The new mass production universities could offer neither. Overcrowding, inadequate facilities and poor employment prospects for graduates produced simmering revolt, which finally exploded at the beginning of May.

The educational crisis of the sixties was a crisis of growth; the crisis of the eighties was rather different. French higher education was still irrational and inefficient, with enclaves of gross privilege existing alongside squalor and penury. But if reform was needed, it had to be carried out in the framework of economic recession, and hence could not draw on any additional resources. As a result the government produced proposals which were seen as a threat by students who already faced the difficult task of qualifying themselves for a job in a period of mass unemployment.

The government faced another problem. University education no longer guarantees a passport to a successful career, but graduates nonetheless constitute a social layer that has some small relative privileges

in comparison with the rest of the population. As such they are an important element for the stability of any regime. No government could risk estranging the entire student population. Hence, faced with the revolt of the universities and the *lycées*, Chirac had no option but to step back.

In 1968 students were fighting to change the world, even if the change they aspired to might seem Utopian and ill-defined. In 1986 they were fighting to defend a not very satisfactory *status quo*, and their victory, although very real, was a defensive one.

The political situation too was very different in 1968. De Gaulle had been in power for ten years and seemed to be immovable. The only speculation about change concerned what would happen when he died. The last time the left—in the broadest sense of the term—had been in power was in the mid-fifties, when a coalition led by Socialist Guy Mollet had presided over torture in Algeria and the Suez invasion.

By 1968 the Socialist Party was politically discredited and in electoral decline. When the great march of 13 May passed Socialist Party headquarters, there were chants of "Guy Mollet to the museum". The dominant party of the established left was still the Communist Party, with five million voters and a tight grip on the biggest union federation, the CGT. The Communist Party was still resolutely Stalinist. Stalinism was conceived in struggle against the left opposition, and its political evolution was deeply marked by the Popular Front. Thus the CP found it easy to make concessions to its right, but very hard to accept any alliances to its left. In 1968 it was trying desperately to make an electoral deal with the Socialist Party. As a result it was anxious to draw a very clear line between itself and the radical leftists of the student movement, who were denounced as "false revolutionaries... serving the interests of the bourgeoisie and of big capital."

The student leaders of 1968 thus had little choice other than to act politically independently of both Socialists and Communists. In 1986 the picture was very different. After five years in power the Socialist Party retains strong support; above all it has succeeded in marginalising the CP and eroding its electoral backing. And ever since the early 1970s Mitterrand and friends have shown themselves to be adept at co-opting and absorbing radical currents to their left. As a result the Socialist Party could show itself to be far more friendly to the protesting students. Lionel Jospin, the Party's first secretary, could declare: "As the Socialist Party, our relation with this movement is one of respect... we are in full solidarity." It is in this context that we have to see the allegedly "non-political" nature of the 1986 student movement, summed up by the placards which ironically proclaimed: "We're manipulating ourselves". On 20 November, just before the movement erupted, *Le Monde* published the results of a survey of student attitudes, and concluded that the students of 1986 prefer practice to theory, reject prophets and gurus, and are independent but not rebels.

Certainly students who have lived through five years of Socialist government and seen the failure of even a programme of mild reforms, are unlikely to have great faith in the possibilities of rapid social change. And living in a period of "cohabitation" between a Socialist president and a conservative cabinet, they are unlikely to identify with the rhetoric of either left or right.

But though the distrust of politics is evident, the picture is not completely clear. In the *Le Monde* survey students were asked which philosopher or political thinker had had the greatest influence on them. The most frequently named was Freud (14 percent) second came Marxist existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (8 percent) and third Marx (7 percent). Clearly there is a small but not insignificant minority who are open to left wing ideas. More generally, the anti-racist campaigns of SOS-Racisme had clearly had an impact on many students.

Beyond this, it is important to remember that "politics" does not consist in paying lip-service to verbal formulae, but in the experience of realities. Over the last few weeks many tens of thousands of students have learnt that mass action is more powerful than individual action; that strikes and demonstrations are more effective than voting and passing resolutions; that the state apparatus is not neutral in social struggles. Whether or not they express these truths in the language of the traditional left is, for the moment, a secondary matter.

It is in this context that we must see the position of the revolutionary left. Certainly it would be wrong to romanticise the role of the revolutionaries in 1968—it is not true that every second student was an articulate Marxist agitator. The revolutionary left at the beginning of 1968 was considerably smaller, in terms of numbers and influence, than it is now. Certainly individual revolutionaries played a role in initiating occupations. But it is also true that the 1968 left was politically fragmented and incoherent.

Many were attracted to the ideas of anarchism, pleasingly libertarian, but volatile and quite devoid of strategy. Even more were drawn to adulation of Chairman Mao—this produced an ultra-left voluntarism decked out with odds and ends picked up from the history of Stalinism. The Maoists of 1968 lurched from the Third Period to the Popular Front and back again, and some even extended their hero-worship to Joe Stalin himself. Above all the 1968 left showed itself unwilling and unable to make any effective

Students join workers on picket line in '68

use of the United Front strategy in order to win away any section of workers influenced by the Communist Party.

In the 1969 presidential election Alain Krivine of the Fourth International took just over 1 percent of the poll—a fantastic result compared with anything Trotskyists had gained over the previous 20 years, but still an indication that the revolutionary left was only a tiny minority.

If the revolutionary left was better rooted by 1986, it was still far too small to manipulate the movement as some on the right claimed it was doing. But if the 1968 revolutionaries had been guilty of ultra-leftism, the problem was now the very opposite, with revolutionaries making concessions to the non-political attitudes of the bulk of the students.

Thus revolutionaries have taken positions in the movement without clearly proclaiming to those who elected them that they stand on a revolutionary programme. This has been accompanied by a reluctance on the part of revolutionaries to push their press on the large demonstrations. The UNEF-ID (Independent Democratic French Students Union) has in its leadership former members of the POI (France's most right-wing Trotskyist grouping) who have now joined the Socialist Party. Whether they still have the Transitional Programme hidden in their back pockets is impossible to tell. And when *Lutte Ouvrière* announce that "the problem is not to politicise" the movement, "it is political in its essence", they are hiding behind a half truth to opt out of their responsibility to fight for their political line.

There are thus many differences between 1968 and 1986. But behind them one fundamental similarity remains: the example of successful struggle can be infectious. In 1968 Prime Minister Pompidou decided, faced with student demonstrations, to reopen the closed Sorbonne. He had little choice as he writes in his memoirs: "I preferred to give the Sorbonne to the students than to see them take it by force." In many situations it is confidence, not consciousness, that determines workers' actions. It is not that they like or approve the system, rather that they lack any faith that they could change it. Once Pompidou was publicly shown to be not invincible, workers rapidly gained the confidence to act for themselves.

In 1986 the process has been slower and more fragmentary, but there is some evidence that it has taken place. *Lutte Ouvrière* in a recent issue reports workers' reactions to the student movement, showing not only expressions of sympathy but a recognition that they had given an example to be followed. At a post office in Dijon canteen workers had complained to a union representative about working conditions. He told them: "Do like the students. Go on strike." They promptly decided to do so.

Moreover, capitalism is now in a far more fragile state than in 1968. Then it could ride out the storm and give concessions. The substantial wage increases granted were fairly rapidly swallowed up by rising prices. And some larger employers welcomed the wage rises as they would drive smaller firms out of business.

A spreading wave of militancy now would be a very different matter. It is interesting to compare the reactions of a perceptive organ of the British ruling class, able to look at French events with a degree of detachment. In May 1968 *The Economist* greeted the French student movement with cheerful tones: "Student protest should be encouraged, to preach, to march, to diagnose, to throw stones, to be absurd. That is what we pay students for."

In December 1986 the tone was very different. Now *The Economist* warned that giving in to the students was like doing deals with terrorists—an encouragement to more demands:

> "... across much of Europe it is the unemployed young and blacks who could be most tinder dry. France has provided no Christmas present to its neighbours by advertising that some objectives can be secured by murder and mild rioting on the streets, especially by those who have a juvenile vision of what their objectives are."

Their fears are our hopes. In the words of the old 1968 slogans: "It's only a beginning; continue the fight."■

Ian Birchall

Student Power?

Italian poster for student-worker unity 1969

HISTORY REPEATING itself? For a moment in late December it seemed like it. Huge and successful student demonstrations in Paris followed by a wave of public sector industrial disputes, most notably on the railways and metro. Strikes by secondary school students in Greece and Spain. The biggest protests since 1977 in Shanghai and Beijing (Peking).

It was all a bit like a rerun of the film of 1968, even if on a smaller screen.

The media, of course, put all the emphasis on the differences with 19 years ago. The Parisian students, they insist, were non-political and not at all like the 1968 revolutionaries. The Chinese students, they say, were calling for Western style democracy—something quite different from the new Paris Commune talked about during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-7. The protests in Spain and Greece were not even thought worth a mention.

The truth is concrete for Marxists. So we cannot afford to ignore the important differences between this and previous spells of student rebellion.

But we also have to notice the obvious: there were similarities, however intent the media are on ignoring them.

For these similarities are not an accident, but flow from one of the structural features of ageing capitalism—the concentration of a layer of youth into huge educational establishments which create conditions in which rebellions can suddenly flare up.

As an International Socialists pamphlet of 1968 put it:

> "Modern capitalism requires a huge expansion of higher eduation, and the changes which must occur are qualitative as well as quantitative. In earlier periods the universities served to educate the ruling class itself and narrow strata of future professional grades (doctors, lawyers, teachers) who would themselves be considerably privileged compared to the majority of the population. In the present stage the higher educational system is required to produce, in addition, great masses of highly trained individuals whose destiny is to become white collar employees.
>
> "These changes have profound effects on the political and social character of the student population. No longer part and parcel of the ruling class or of a privileged elite, increasingly destined for subordinate positions in society, unsure even of this future and existing only in an extremely insecure condition, students no longer identify automatically with the bourgeois order. They become open, in a way they would not have been in the past, to political and social ideas and modes of action."

This does not mean that students are in any sense permanently in revolt against capitalist society. They are brought up in existing society and by and large accept its ideas. What is more, a few at least can do quite well within capitalism—providing they keep their noses clean. The student population is not a homogenous class within capitalism, but a heterogenous grouping of young people who come from different classes and who are destined to enter different classes on completing their studies. Their situation structures them in such a way as to rule out stabilised, continuing forms of organisation, similar to the trade union organisations of wage labour.

This situation as a transitory grouping between the major classes also means they are very sensitive to elements of social crisis in society as a whole. They often react to these before other groups in society. The student population suddenly erupts in an explosive fashion. Protests develop out of nowhere to involve thousands of students in a matter of days.

This is what happened at institutions of higher education in Germany, Italy, Britain, the US and France in 1967-8.

The following years saw further waves of such struggles—for instance, in the US at the time of the invasion of Kampuchea in 1970, in Britain in 1971-2, in Italy among the middle school students in 1973-4.

Most of the struggles died down in 1974-6 and clever journalists were already writing obituaries on the spirit of 1968. By contrast, the International Socialists' analysis indicated that further student revolts were likely. As an important article in the *International Socialism* journal argued in Feburary 1975:

> "Aspirations as to what college life might be like are soon dashed by the reality. Insecurity about their future is reinforced by the isolation of life on campus. Although the discipline is less rigid than at school, decisions about course content, appointments, price levels or anything else remain just as remote... This general alienation of students creates their readiness to rebel."

The inbuilt, systematic character of the student revolt was shown again in 1976-7. There was a renewed series of occupations in Britain (involving more colleges but probably less overall student participation than earlier) and a huge upsurge of struggle in Italy culminating in clashes with armed police in Florence and Rome.

In most of these struggles students began with very non-political attitudes. The Berkeley revolt of 1965 was initially backed by all the political groupings on campus, including those of the bourgeois parties. The LSE occupation of 1967 took place under the nominal leadership of a Tory union president (who received about five times as many votes as the socialist candidate).

In March 1968 French revolutionaries were still complaining to visitors from abroad how backward French students were compared to those in Germany and Britain. The political backwardness of even many militant students was shown by the way in which, until the French general strike of 13 May 1968, the most common slogan was "Student power". And even after the French May, the talk in some circles (like *New Left Review*) was of "Red Bases" or (for the Fourth International) "the international student-youth vanguard".

Consciousness changed in the course of struggle. Whether the individual students liked it or not, students are a strata in an ageing, crisis prone capitalist society. Any struggle they engage in comes up against that reality in the shape of the police truncheon.

Hence any mass student movement rapidly begins to undergo politicisation. Students who initially do not want to hear anything about politics soon change their attitude. The initially united, non-political student movement becomes polarised in these political and ideological arguments.

This does not mean that the politicisation has to be in the direction of revolutionary socialism.

Here there is a very sharp contrast between the fate of the movements of the late 1960s and those of the mid-1970s.

The bulk of the activists involved in the struggles of 1967-9 moved very quickly to the left and towards what they regarded as revolutionary socialism.

This did not happen in 1976-7. In Britain the National Organisation of International Socialist Societies was much bigger than the revolutionary left in the colleges had been in 1967. It was able to lead most of the major occupations and to mount substantial "struggle contingents" on National Union of Students demonstrations. But it could not succeed in achieving the mass politicisation that the much smaller and worse organised forces of the revolutionary left had nine years earlier.

In Italy the picture was even grimmer. The movement of 1977 contributed to the demise of a revolutionary left that had, just two years before, involved perhaps 30,000 activists. Politics developed, but it was the politics of "autonomism". This held that each movement was sufficient unto itself, with no need for formal political generalisation.

The problem of working class leadership of the struggle was solved by decreeing that the new "proletariat" was made up of all those elements—the unemployed, part time workers, students, housewives, prisoners—who were "marginal" to the capitalist prodution process, which in turn was manned by a "labour aristocracy" of industrial workers. The slogan "The personal is political" was adopted, and interpreted to mean than any expression of individual alienation or revolt was as political as any great mass struggle. It was as important to laugh and to cry as to understand and change reality.

Mass arrests at Berkeley, California

Students attack Communist Party leader, Rome Universit

The movement of 1977 moved in two directions on the basis of this politics. The first was towards the actions of small, conspiratorial terrorist groups like the Red Brigades, the Armed Proletarian Nuclei and Prima Linea. Whatever the intentions of these groups, the result of their action was completely counter-revolutionary. They isolated militants from the mass struggle, and provided the pretext for the state to launch a vicious wave of repression against the whole revolutionary left in 1979-80.

The second was to retreat into the form of extreme liberalisation preached by the Italian Radical Party. What mattered became getting signatures for referenda, not engaging in real struggle. It was not far from that to collapsing toward Craxi's Socialist Party.

The key to the different fates of the 1967-9 and 1976-7 movements lay in what happened outside the student milieu. In France and Italy the upsurge in the student movement was followed by a very big upsurge in the workers' movement. Students who fought the police on the Left Bank in Paris in the second week in May were able to relate to the movement of workers occupying their factories in the third and fourth weeks of May. Students who occupied most of Italy's universities in 1968 were able to intervene in the huge strikes at the country's biggest factory, FIAT Mirafiori, in May and June 1969.

As an excellent history of the Italian revolutionary left tells:

> "The struggle which lasted the entire week from 16 to 20 June was prepared at meetings between workers and students which were held twice a day in the hall of the medicine faculty... These not only informed and coordinated the platform, but succeeded in taking the

he University

role of leading the struggle, via the real vanguards of the different sections who used the 'student' meetings to decide what initiative to take." (L Bobbio, *Lotta continua: storia di una organizzazione revolutionaria.*)

Even in Britain—where reformism traditionally has had much deeper roots than in France and Italy—and the level of workers' struggle never reached that in Southern Europe, the students who were radicalised in the late 1960s were able to relate to a growing level of worker militancy in the years from the attempt of the Labour government to introduce anti-union laws in March 1969 to the fall of the Heath government in February 1974.

Such experiences gave credibility to the initially very small minorities of students who argued both that the working class was the key to social change and that it could be won, in struggle, to revolutionary politics.

Things were very different in the mid-1970s. By the time that upsurge of student struggle took place, capitalism had been able to contain the wave of workers' struggles and to restabilise itself politically with the cooperation of the bureaucracy of the working class movement. The deflecting of the May movement in France into the electioneering of June 1968, the social contract in Britain, the incorporation of the Communist Party into the parliamentary majority for the government in Italy, the strangling of the Portuguese revolution by the Socialist Party government of Mario Soares, the Pact of Moncloa between the unions, the Socialist and Communist Parties, the government and the employers in Spain, all curtailed workers' struggles and left those who wanted to fight on isolated.

Under these circumstances students were not pulled towards the revolutionary ideas of working class self-emancipation. In addition many people who had been won to these ideas in the past began to feel that they were "impractical" and to drop out of activity or drift towards reformism.

The situation was made worse by the fact that much of what had passed for revolutionary politics in the past was simply a regurgitated form of Stalinism. So in Italy, for example, the major revolutionary organisations, Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaia, were both trying to model themselves on the Chinese Communist Party by 1974. When the reality of what Stalinism meant in China, and above all in Kampuchea, came out in the mid-70s, many former activists turned against any form of Marxism at all. Others, especially in France, began to put their faith in a revival of the Socialist Parties. When these failed in government to behave any differently from any other capitalist party, the conclusion was drawn that nothing could be done to change society.

We cannot tell yet what the fate of the movement of December 1986 will be.

There have been some signs in the last couple of years of some revival of the workers' movement internationally. In Europe there have been the miners' strike in Britain, the public sector strikes in Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Sweden, the metal workers' strike in Germany, the wave of strikes in Greece. Generally, however, these struggles have been much more defensive in character than the struggles of 1968-74, and much more under the influence of the trade union bureaucracy.

Outside Europe there have been the series of metal workers' strikes in Brazil, the struggle of 1980-1 in Poland, the upsurge of workers' organisation in South Africa. The old Stalinist and reformist political organisations have had little or no influence on these struggles, nor have old established trade union bureaucracies. The struggles have often been led by the most democratic forms of workers' self organisation, based upon delegate bodies elected from and answerable to the shop floor.

But this workers'-democracy-in-practice has rarely been accompanied by any sense of being part of a Marxist tradition based upon notions of workers' self-emancipation. This has been truest in Poland, where most workers are positively hostile to any notion of Marxism, identifying it with the state which exploited them, and in the Arab world where the new forces of revolt are more likely to be organised around the banner of Islamic fundamentalism than around a "Communism" which long ago sold its soul to the allegedly progressive Arab regimes of Egypt, Syria, Iraq or Algeria. But it has also been true in Brazil and South Africa, where some of the best militants have adopted "non-ideological", workerist ideas and rejected any idea of building a Marxist party.

Now there are signs of a similar "non-political" version of workers' democracy in Europe in reaction to the betrayals of reformism in government. Although individual revolutionaries have sat on co-ordinating committees of both the student and rail workers' struggles in France, they have not been able to prevent the official "non-political" pronouncements of these committees.

The result over all is that even where there is an upturn in workers' struggle, there is no automatic generalisation of the sort which can lead people to revolutionary socialist notions. This in turn means that the upturns in the struggle are defeated by more or less sophisticated ruling class strategies.

The ruling class will not always be able to win by such strategies: if nothing else Reagan's Irangate affair shows that our rulers are often much less sophisticated and able than they would like to pretend.

But for the time being the heritage of Stalinism and reformism means that even in the most favourable instances the international workers' movement is thrown back to the situation it was in at the time of the First International—of practice surging ahead of ideas, so that workers do the most revolutionary things without understanding they are doing so. It is not a situation which can last indefinitely. Either ideas will catch up with practice, or practice will fall back to the level of ideas.

We certainly cannot expect any automatic move to the left from the new wave of student struggles. It may show elements of 1968, but it also shows traces of 1977. What we can hope for is that in every country some individuals will begin to look towards those very old Marxist ideas which make sense of new forms of struggle.■

Chris Harman

DEBATE WITH FRENCH LEFT

Dear Comrades
In *Socialist Worker* 107, 13 December 1986, Mike Simons wrote:

> "Unfortunately France's revolutionary organisations are still virtually invisible to most students.
>
> The two main far left organisations, the LCR and Lutte Ouvrière, are actively involved in the student movement but neither has an independent presence. Neither had paper sellers on Thursday's demonstration, nor were they present on Saturday's memorial march.
>
> The LCR publish a daily strike bulletin. It contains information about the movement but never argues what is to be done next. Even after the vicious attacks by the CRS it made no attempt to explain the nature of the state."

In order to encourage and help discussion among European revolutionary organisations, we think it is useful to send you the following remarks for publication in your journal.

Several years ago, the LCR set up an independent youth organisation which regularly and actively intervenes in the different social movements of young people. The student and school student movement was a huge movement that was independent and united. It was a whole new generation that abruptly entered into mass political activity. Certainly it lacked experience but it clearly mistrusted the traditional political organisations. Among other things, this movement strongly defended its unity and its democratic functioning.

In this context, an organisation like the JCR, *which was very active in the movement*, which had several members in the leadership of the movement, could not behave exactly like an organisation intervening in a simply propagandist way from the outside. The JCR was part of the movement, its members in local general meetings and in the national coordinations were obviously not visible to those who only saw the street demonstrations. Nevertheless, there was an "independent presence" in the sense of an independent practice.

Throughout the movement the JCR distributed a daily newspaper, 50,000 copies of which were printed, which was the only regular journal to appear throughout the movement, which is another example of its presence.

On Wednesday 10 December, the LCR itself also published a special issue of its newspaper for the demonstration that day.

We do not know what Mike Simons means by "to argue what is to be done next". You are obviously not aware of the problems posed for an organisation with real responsibilities in a mass movement of this size.

In every local and national structure of the movement, the members of the JCR daily gave their position on how to continue the mobilisation. This is obviously infinitely more useful than what Mike Simons describes as the need to explain "the nature of the state". The youth movement learnt in practice what was the apparatus of repression. To help it reach this stage the priority was to talk "concretely" every day on the objectives and actions of the movement. The result is something quite different from what abstract propaganda would have been.

Hoping that you will transmit our remarks to your readers, please accept our best revolutionary greetings.■
Claude Gabriel
For the International Commission of the LCR

THE LAST MONTH'S EVENTS in France have presented the revolutionary left with both fantastic possibilities and many difficulties.

But the choice before revolutionaries in such circumstances isn't either submerging ourselves in the movement or simply making abstract propaganda from outside, as Claude Gabriel implies.

There are basic principles to be followed. The first is to fight for the leadership of the movement and do so openly, as revolutionaries.

In France, the right wing press witchunted the "Trotskyists" in the student leadership only to be answered by a fudge as revolutionaries said, "we are representatives of the whole movement".

It is possible to respect the democracy of the movement, be part of the leadership and an open revolutionary. Indeed, it's vital.

The second task of revolutionaries is to win support for their ideas: to explain that socialism means neither reformism nor Stalinism but workers' power.

This can best be done by meetings, discussions, selling papers and pamphlets and the like. It wasn't being done either on the demonstrations I saw, or the colleges I visited.

Thirdly, every revolutionary in such a period should try to recruit the best activists to the revolutionary party. This can't be done if the revolutionaries are pretending that they are simply good activists. Being the best activist is a prerequisite to building, but it is not enough.

Claude Gabriel's attempt to explain why no revolutionary paper sellers were to be seen on any of the major marches in Paris is, frankly, pathetic.

Why publish a paper at all? Is it simply to be a cheer leader for the movement? Isn't it to argue "what is to be done" and, at the same time, to educate? Aren't we constantly trying to win a new audience for our ideas and convince activists in one struggle to read about and support another?

The distribution of the daily strike sheet of the LCR's youth section around the colleges is hardly an alternative to selling revolutionary papers on million strong demos. The contents of the strike sheet certainly weren't an alternative means of conveying revolutionary ideas.

Claude Gabriel dimisses my complaint that there was no explanation of the "nature of the state" in the JCR paper after the CRS attacks on demonstrators and the murder of Malik Oussekine.

It's true "that the youth movement learnt in practice what was the apparatus of repression". But what conclusions did they draw?

Most French students, even a majority of the best activists, were not transformed into revolutionaries by the behaviour of the CRS. They didn't call for the overthrow of the state but instead demanded "democratisation of the police" or perhaps disbanding a section of the CRS. Hatred of the police is one thing, how to deal with them is another.

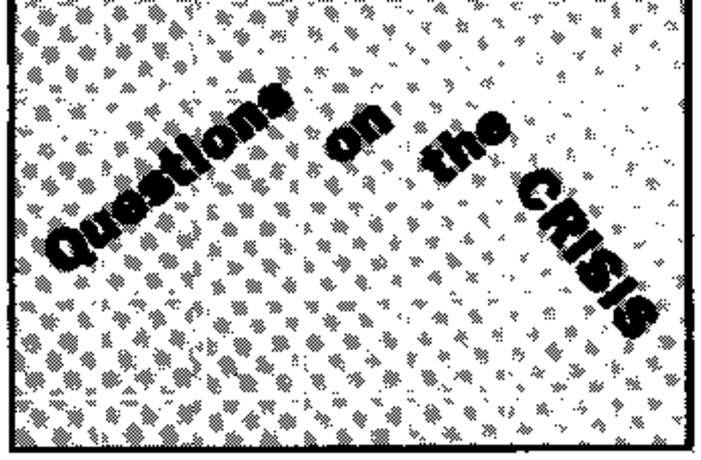
If it only took a beating from the police to make a revolutionary, we would long since have been living in a socialist paradise.

No, something else—Marxist ideas—are also required. And surely the LCR is not simply equating Marxist ideas with abstract propaganda.

I really was surprised that Claude Gabriel should take exception to my comments on the French revolutionary left—for they in no way conveyed the frustration I felt at the opportunities I saw being missed.

I hope that when a similar situation occurs in Britain, Socialist Worker Party members will be in the heart of the movement. We should be trying to carry revolutionary ideas into every area of the struggle.

And that, comrades, is not counterposing our own interests to those of the movement. The more conscious revolutionary socialists there are in the struggle, the better its chances of victory.■
Mike Simons
Socialist Worker



What about robots?

MARXISTS argue that labour is the sole source of value, and thus of profits. But doesn't the use of machines and robots increase productivity and enable capitalists to make bigger profits?

THIS QUESTION arises out of a serious misconception concerning the labour theory of value. But before trying to clear that up, it's worth dealing with a number of myths.

One is the idea that Marx ignored the role of machinery. In fact Marx was the first economist to give the subject serious attention, devoting a large part of *Capital* Volume 1 to the impact of the industrial revolution.

Marx argued that capitalism's development of machinery, increasing the productivity of human labour massively, would also prepare the material conditions for socialism. For Marx a machine was nothing but a complex tool, which had to be designed, produced and operated by human beings.

It is true that *individual* workers can find their labour dominated by the rhythms of the machine. That provides the objective basis for the absurd idea that things as well as human beings can create value. But machinery is itself the product of a *collective* labour force. Machines contain dead labour. They have to be galvanised by living labour.

There is nothing qualitatively different about computers or robots in this respect. They have to be designed, made, assembled, transported, installed, operated and maintained by human labour. Ford's plant at Dagenham which has the largest number of robots in Britain still employs 10,000 workers.

Another myth is the idea that introducing robots or other forms of new technology is a guaranteed route to making bigger profits. In reality even the leading manufacturer of robots in the United States, Cincinatti Milacron, has made a profit on them in only one of the last eleven years.

General Motors spent $40 billion in the last five years investing in new equipment. Labour productivity has increased. But they've only been able to sell all the extra cars by cutting prices and offering interest-free loans which have wiped out their profits in recent months. As the *Financial Times* commented:

> "The huge capital-spending programme has introduced a dangerous inflexibility into the company's financial structure. As one analyst put it, 'Workers can be laid off but robots can't.' "

But there is a genuine problem raised by the question. It is true that companies which introduce new technologies can gain a competitive advantage and increase their profits, at least until their rivals catch up.

It is also true that capitals in industries which are in general highly automated, such as chemicals or oil refining, can provide their owners with returns as high if not higher than capitals in very labour-intensive industries.

But this does not refute Marx's ideas at all. Confusion arises because many people think that exploitation is something which happens just in individual factories—that the boss simply extracts profits only from the workers he himself employs. What Marx stressed was that exploitation is a relationship between classes, not between individual employer and individual workers.

The working class as a whole generates a mass of surplus value. But different capitals (and sections of capital not directly involved with production at all such as traders and the banks) also compete with each other for shares of the available surplus.

A successful capital can gain at the expense of its competitors in an industry as a result of introducing the latest technologies. It can make a temporary surplus profit. But when all the capitals in an industry get in on the act the price tends to fall, and the extra profit is wiped out.

Man or machine—who dominates?

There have been countless examples of this in the electronics industry, from calculators to compact discs in recent years.

Equally important is the fact that all the companies in a highly automated industry can draw on the surplus value generated by workers in the rest of the system. So a capital like ICI or BP might obtain a bigger share of the pot of surplus value than its workers have put in. Correspondingly other capitals with more labour intensive methods of production will get a smaller share than their workers have put in.

All these transfers of value take place continuously in the course of competition, and buying and selling. But the size of the pot, the mass of profit available for the carve-up, strictly depends upon the amount of surplus labour-time grabbed from the working class as a whole.

What would happen though if every industry became highly automated? What if we did arrive in the science-fiction fantasy world of factories without human beings?

Bourgeois economists who use this to refute the labour theory of value (and there was even an example in the *New Left Review* recently) really haven't thought it through. In particular they fail to grasp Marx's basic distinction between use-value and exchange-value.

Use-values are simply things. In a world of assembly-lines run by intelligent robots, the capacity to produce use-values would be unlimited. It would be a world of abundance, the final conquest of scarcity, a world in which there would be no need for mindless, backbreaking toil. It would be, could be, wonderful.

But exchange-values refer to the amount of money received when you sell a commodity, a quantity Marx argued which is based ultimately in the amount of labour necessary to produce it.

What would be the basis for exchange-value for the whole business of buying and selling, markets, and money in a world in which labour is unnecessary? If capitalism still prevailed, there would be this huge mass of commodities for sale, and the vast majority of the population would be unemployed and unable to buy them.

The difference between use-value and exhange-value explained by Marx would become stark. There would be unlimited use-value and no rational basis for exchange-value whatsoever. The system would fall apart.

The obvious solution would be to share out the use-values on the basis of human need. But that would mean the abolition of the market system and the disappearance of exchange-value. It would be what Marx and Lenin meant by communism.■

Pete Green

What intelligence?

The recent MI5 trial in Australia has resulted in a farcical humiliation for the British government. John Rees looks at the history of British intelligence and also examines Peter Wright's carreer.

THE GOVERNMENT'S attempts to stop ex-MI5 agent Peter Wright from publishing his book *Spycatcher* with its revelations of MI5 operations against the Wilson government will have fuelled left wing concern.

But in reality the secret services are neither as effective as their right wing champions like to claim, nor as dangerous as some on the left would have us fear.

The secret services, as a permanent state institution, were born as imperial rivalry reached its peak in the years immediately preceding World War One.

The birth was almost simultaneous in Britain and Germany with deliberately manufactured spy scares acting as midwife.

The US didn't have a centralised secret service until it emerged as the major imperial power during the Second World War.

While British imperialism retained its power in the inter-war years the secret service was the playground of a wealthy, eccentric and not particularly bright section of the ruling class.

The agents thought that spying was the "Great Game" described by Kipling in *Kim*.

One of its recruiters was the jingoistic spy novelist John Buchan, author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and the real agents modelled themselves on its hero Richard Hannay.

Throughout the 1930s the security services refused to recruit in the universities because of the predominant left wing mood.

The KGB had no such scruples. During the massive wartime expansion of the secret service, Philby, Maclean, Burgess and Blunt could rise quickly because they had "the right background".

The only way into the secret service was through personal contacts, usually the public school network and family ties.

At one time Anthony Blunt, Stewart Menzies, head of MI5, Claude Dansey, head of MI6, and Guy Liddell, director of MI5 counter-espionage, were all related to each other.

Hugh Trevor-Roper, now Lord Dacre, was in MI6 and recalls that its officers were "pretty stupid and some of them very stupid".

He goes on to claim that they were of two types: "the London end which consisted of elegant young men from the upper classes who were recruited on the basis of trust within a social class. It was said that they were recruited in Boodles and Whites."

Then there were "the Indian colonial policemen of quite extraordinary stupidity. They didn't move in the Whites Club-Boodles world. They were rather looked down on."

Joan Miller, in her book *One Girl's War* which is still banned in this country, records that she was recruited by an old school friend. She was previously a cosmetics demonstrator for Elizabeth Arden.

She got a note telling her to board a bus outside the Natural History Museum, where she found other girls "all got up in the ex-private schoolgirls' daytime uniform—grey flannel skirt, lambswool jersey and single string of pearls".

Joan Miller obviously fitted the criteria for women agents laid down by MI5's first head, Vernon Kell, "They must be well bred and have nice legs."

Even now the selection criteria is scarcely wider, they still take people who fail the Foreign Office entrance exam.

At least recruits don't still have to face the first head of MI6, Captain Mansfield Smith-Cumming, who used to stab his leg with a penknife during interviews to test the applicants' reactions. They weren't to know it was wooden.

He also made his way around his office on a child's scooter.

There has only ever been one occasion when the secret service attempted to break with this pattern of ruling class bungling.

For a brief period at the start of World War II Britain was completely isolated. Europe had fallen to the Nazis and America had not entered the war.

After Dunkirk a significant part of British strategy turned on fomenting civil war in occupied Europe. The Special Operations Executive was set up to give aid to the resistance movements.

This strategy was always a fantasy and the SOE never had the resources to even attempt to carry it out.

But while the policy lasted it must have been a shock to hear Churchill's Minister for Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton, proclaim that what was needed was a "European Revolution" and that "we must organised movements in every occupied territory comparable to the Sinn Fein movement in Ireland".

Dalton soon found that the bunch of dim, upper class misfits who populated the secret service weren't much good for this task. So he started recruiting working class officers for the SOE.

James Klugmann, the Communist Party historian, was in SOE at this time.

Dalton also found that the various exiled governments that Britain harboured and the pathetic movements that they supported were not up to the task of fighting the Nazis.

Only the Communist led resistance seemed to have the motivation and discipline.

This was a dangerous conclusion and Churchill sacked Dalton for having the temerity to draw it. The war wasn't going to be won at the cost of revolution.

SOE was quickly restaffed with recruits from the public schools, Oxbridge and the City.

They were politically illiterate about Europe but at least they didn't go on about the European Revolution.

So this one attempt to reform the secret service failed.

The British Empire crumbled in the post war world. Britain's economy declined.

Disillusion and bitterness spread in the secret services. But, more than this, their past came to haunt them.

The legacy of the domestic social crisis over which the British ruling class had presided, and its pro-fascist sympathies in the

Nice uniforms, shame about the brains

30s, was a small group of middle class intellectuals whose loyalty was to Stalin.

It is this mood of cynicism and betrayal, where the only ones with any idealism are the "traitors", that John Le Carre captures so well in his novels.

But why did the British ruling class not reform the secret arm of the state?

After all, the rest of the British state was transformed from an aristocratic clique into an administrative machine capable of running an industrialised society and drawing its members from, at least, the upper reaches of the middle class, over 100 years ago.

Of course the secrecy itself was one protection, but another reason is that the secret service is often marginal to political events.

For the most part, as Phillip Knightley shows in *The Second Oldest Profession*, the 'intelligence' that the world's secret services produce is unverifiable gossip or economic analysis culled from freely available papers and specialist journals. Even when the secret services do produce vital information, it is only used when it conforms to the political prejudices of the ruling class.

Stalin's intelligence chief, Golikov, wary of his masters' displeasure, simply marked any intelligence that didn't fit in with Stalin's preconceptions "doubtful". The KGB warned of the German attack on Russia in the Second World War, Stalin ignored it.

British intelligence told the Americans that the Japanese intended to attack Pearl Harbour, but the Americans dismissed it as an attempt to drag them into the war.

When the CIA sent a series of reports to President Johnson telling him that bombing North Vietman wouldn't work and that the cherished domino theory was bunk, they were frozen out.

The CIA learnt its lesson. One agent wrote that if they sent in reports that contradicted Washington's policy "they sent them back to us. If we persisted they would put notes on our personnel files... Washington had decreed that Vietnamisation was working and it was seen as disloyal to report that it was not."

Far from giving the ruling class a true picture of reality, the secret service just reflects its predetermined views.

Even in times of social upheaval the security services haven't proved of much value to the ruling class.

During the Russian Revolution the British had two key agents, Sidney Reilly, glorified in the TV series *Reilly—Ace of Spies*, and Robert Bruce Lockhart.

Reilly was so fanatically anti-communist that he fed the British ludicrously optimistic, from their point of view, information about the chances of a counter-revolution.

Bruce Lockhart, despite his involvement in the fringes of the plot to assassinate Lenin, was so impressed that he seriously considered joining the revolution.

He said that two Frenchmen who had accepted the Bolsheviks' offer were not traitors but "like most of us they had been influenced by a cataclysm which they realised would shake the world to its foundations."

The secret services are a product of the imperial age and have been ridden with crises just as the societies that produced them have been. They are at the mercy of political events, not their master.

In short, the secret service is not the inner sanctum of the ruling class. It is not the heart of the ruling class, just its gormless minder.

But sometimes, when the minder believes that it has the sanction of the ruling class (or when it believes that it is doing what the politicians would like done, if only they could admit it) then the secret service can go beyond the limits to which the politicians pay lip service.

This is the case with numerous American covert operations, of which the Contragate affair is only the most recent.

In Britain the MI5 operations against the Wilson government show the exact relationship between the mainstream of the ruling class and their shadow cousins in the secret service.■

Wrights and wrongs

PETER WRIGHT, the ex-MI5 agent at the heart of the trial in Australia, is an obsessive right winger.

His claim that former MI5 head Sir Roger Hollis was a Russian spy, politically the least interesting thing to come out of the trial, is almost certainly nonsense.

Wright bases his claim on information from a defector called Golitsyn, who said that the western establishment and intelligence services were riddled with KGB agents.

The only problem was that Golitsyn was stark-staring bonkers.

He told his interrogators that the split between the Russians and the Chinese was a ruse to get the west to believe that the Communist bloc was weaker than it was.

Golitsyn claimed the same was true of the split between Russia and Yugoslavia.

Most of the CIA disbelieved him and the one senior officer who didn't eventually got the push.

But in Britain it was different. Wright and others swallowed Golitsyn's story hook, line and sinker.

But what is far more interesting is the things that Wright's obsessive anti-communism led him to in British politics.

When Harold Wilson resigned in the middle of the last Labour government's term of office he had already been worried for some time that the secret services were plotting against him.

Few took him seriously. Wright has settled the issue. There was an attempt by some 30 MI5 officers to smear and discredit Wilson.

MI5 burgled Wilson and systematically leaked stories to the press. These claimed:

- **That Wilson had had two children by his secretary, Marcia Williams.**
- **That Marcia Williams was a communist agent and that Wilson was covering up for her.**
- **That there was a KGB cell in 10 Downing Street.**
- **That former Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell was murdered by the KGB in order to bring Wilson to power.**

These, and many other equally potty stories, were leaked to the press.

In reality Wright and his cronies could only run this operation because a section, albeit a small minority, of ruling class opinion was looking for desperate solutions.

In the early seventies the ruling class were increasingly fearful of a working class at whose hands they had suffered defeat after defeat.

A small section of the establishment thought that it might be necessary to go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy in order to contain the workers. They began to get a wider hearing.

Right wing propaganda institutes which blacklisted militants flourished.

A few ex-army officers started talking about founding private armies.

Wright and his operation were part of this trend. The *Observer* has now revealed that Tory MPs helped Wright.

After the Tories were defeated in 1974, Wright and Co did their best to ensure that Thatcher replaced Heath as leader by running a whispering campaign against Heath.

They saw Wilson as a continuation of the threat, not its antidote.

History, of course, took a different course. Far from needing Wright and his little band to save British capitalism from the unions, the establishment relied on Labour's Social Contract.

Thatcher, benefitting from Labour's spadework, jettisoned her unwelcome allies as soon as she was elected in 1979. She also tried to put a stop to the Hollis nonsense.

Embittered that his masters didn't think that the end was nigh, Wright was left to crawl off into the outback from where he has continuously warned us, through the press and other authors, of the communist threat.

Wright was momentarily useful for the far right of his class. His moment has passed and he remains a crazy embarassment to them. To us he is a warning of what lies behind the mask of bourgeois democracy.■

The facts about AIDS

ACQUIRED IMMUNE Deficiency Syndrome has reached the proportions of an epidemic in Central Africa. It threatens the same in the United States, Britain and elsewhere.

The appearance of the new virus is almost certainly a natural calamity, but the course AIDS has taken and the scale of the disaster are directly attributable to capitalism.

Its spread was advanced by the studied inaction of governments so long as it could spuriously be passed off as "the gay plague".

In the United States, for example, early blood samples from people believed to carry the virus went untested for 18 months at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Georgia. There were no lab technicians to process them.

In that first year the Centers' budget was cut by 25 percent! Though by the end of 1985 Reagan's administration had committed millions of dollars to AIDS, it still amounted to less than the US government had spent almost a decade before on an abortive vaccination campaign against swine flu!

For its part the British government had, by mid-1985, set aside just £50,000 to combat AIDS. Despite incessant warnings it planned to hive off the Public Health Laboratory Service, the UK equivalent of the CDC.

And the Tories have continued to batter the NHS. Almost half of all the people with AIDS in Britain have been treated at St Mary's Hospital, west London. It falls under the North West Thames Area Health Authority, whose budget has been cut by between £700,000 and £1.7 million every year since 1978.

In Africa research which revealed alarming rates of infection was repressed by governments burdened with soaring debts and desperate not to lose a leading source of foreign exchange—tourism.

Reduced by imperialism to poverty, wracked by malnutrition and disease, Africa has long been unbearably ripe for epidemics.

In the West the hypocritical "morals" of the right hinder the containment of AIDS. Governments slash health care while spending on arms, and drug companies and research scientists compete rather than cooperate in the search for vaccines and treatments.

The course of any epidemic is shaped predominately by the society—the social conditions—in which it occurs. The infectious organism itself is of far less importance. We must point the blame at capitalism.

Nonetheless, the starting point for countering the moral backlash stoked by the tabloids is to deal with the unnecessary but real fears that people are prey to.

So what is the current state of knowledge about AIDS?

In its full blown state AIDS totally destroys a sufferer's immunity to disease and appears always to be fatal.

It is caused by a virus now called HIV (human immuno-deficiency virus). But there is a vital distinction between infection with the virus and the onset of AIDS.

AIDS comprises a wide variety of symptoms which only when taken *together* indicate the breakdown of a person's immune system.

It is unknown at present how many infected with the virus will go on to develop AIDS. The most common estimate is one in three, though some virologists insist it could be as high as 70 percent.

The virus does not just attack the immune system, however. It also directly infects the brain. Most scientists now agree this could form the most serious long term effect of infection by the virus, with even those who show little impairment to their immune systems suffering serious neurological damage.

Like all viruses, HIV is tiny—about one thousandth the size of the blood cells it infects. And like all viruses it can only replicate (reproduce itself) within living cells.

It specifically attacks those white blood cells known as "helper" T-cells that trigger our immune system to destroy invading micro-organisms.

The virus has a number of important characteristics.

Firstly it causes a *persistent* infection, which means that once infected with HIV it appears a person will both retain the virus and remain infectious.

Secondly, it is slow working and may lie dormant for long periods after initial infection—for up to five years on present knowledge, maybe much more.

Thirdly, the virus is very unstable. Unlike the viruses which cause smallpox or measles but similar to that which causes flu, it mutates easily. Already a great many subtle variations from the basic virus have been discovered.

This may give a clue to how such a virulent new virus developed in the first place, mutating from a much less dangerous form.

The more it spreads and replicates, the more mutations will occur. It cannot, however, change its mode of transmission. It will remain a blood borne, primarily sexually transmitted virus.

And the good news is that the virus is not easily transmitted.

The most powerful illustration of this is that of more than 650 reported cases of "needle-stick injuries" involving HIV-infected blood—where a doctor or nurse is accidently punctured by a syringe needle—*not one* has resulted in infection.

In only one instance has a health worker been infected at work—when a nurse fell on a syringe containing infected blood and "injected" herself.

That is the key. HIV *must* enter the blood stream if it is to infect someone. And though in *theory* a single virus particle might be enough to cause infection, effect-

ively it is impossible. The virus must be transmitted in some quantity.

HIV cannot survive outside of blood and body fluids and all the evidence is that it can be transmitted *only* in blood, in semen and, it seems, in breast milk.

It can for certain be transmitted from women to men in the course of vaginal intercourse. The virus has been found in vaginal secretions. But whether the bleeding that often occurs in intercourse or these secretions are responsible for its heterosexual transmission has not been settled.

Oral-vaginal sex obviously carries a reduced risk, though doctors warn against it. But semen definitely transmits HIV. This isn't really surprising since semen contains large quantities of white blood cells—precisely those in which the virus replicates.

It is spread, then, chiefly through sexual intercourse—but also by infected hypodermic needles, contaminated blood transfusions and from mother to baby.

Safe sex, not exhortations to celibacy or monogamy, is the single most important means of containing the virus. It means sex which does not involve the exchange of body fluids and possible entry of HIV to the blood stream through minor sores or abrasions in the vagina, anus or on the penis.

Use of a sheath vastly reduces the risk of infection, though of course penetration is not the only way of enjoying sex.

It seems likely that untreated sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) play a role in passing on the virus—especially where they cause genital sores. Lack of such basic health care means that in parts of central Africa, for example, some STDs are running at 30 times their rate in London.

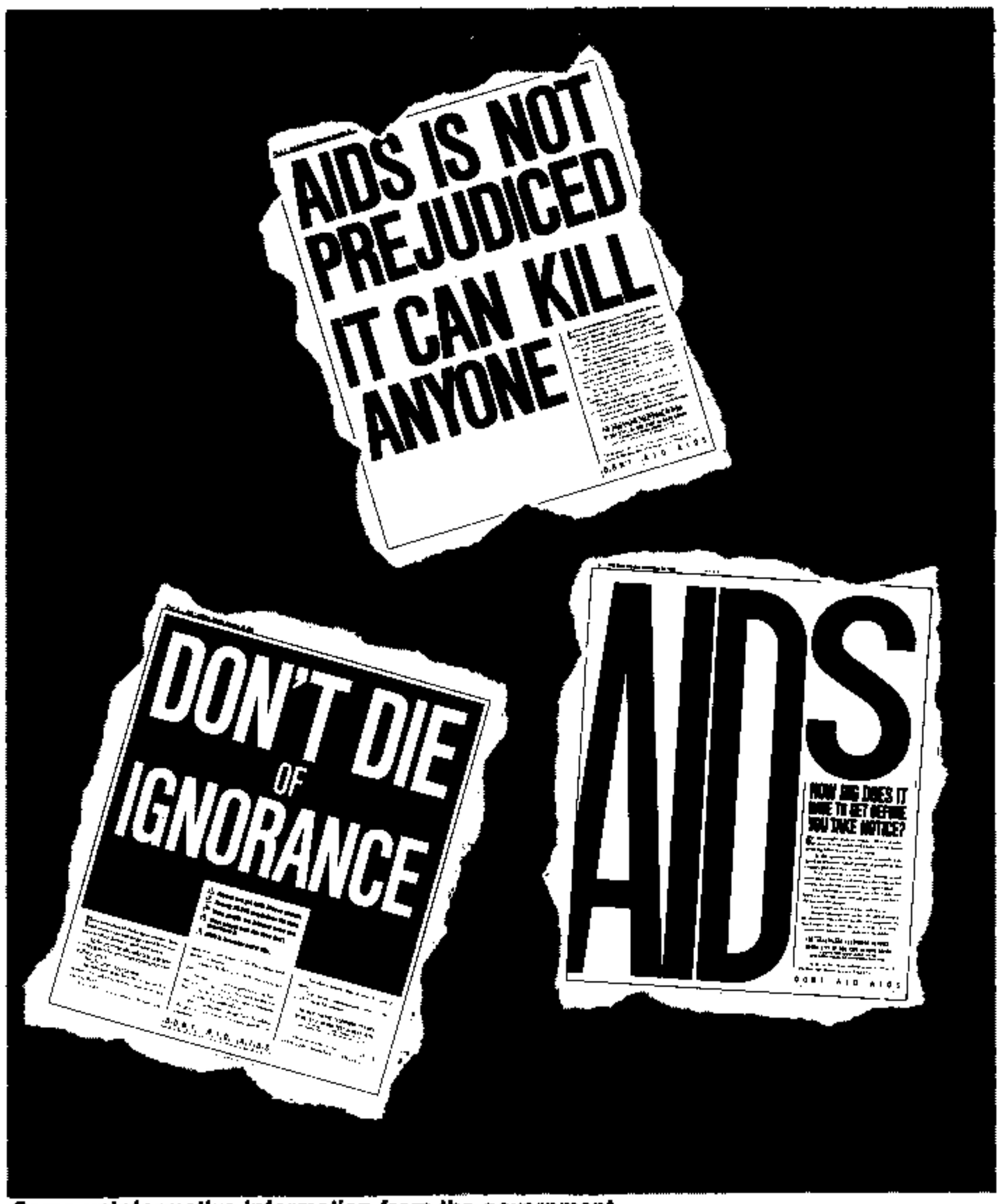
And studies show that the various components of the immune system are most susceptible to the viral infection when they are actively engaged in fighting other kinds of infection.

Clearly too, there are factors other than straightforward HIV infection involved in triggering the onset of full blown AIDS, most obviously anything which damages the immune system—malnutrition, endemic disease, repeated infection, heavy drug use and so on.

There is a *hypothetical* risk attached to "deep", "French" kissing since tiny amounts of virus have been isolated from the saliva of some sufferers. But there is no evidence whatever that the virus can be transmitted in this way.

HIV cannot survive on the skin, is not transmitted in sweat and is in no way airborne. It has not been found in urine or faeces, though even if it had there would be absolutely no risk from toilet seats or swimming pools.

What's more, it is easily destroyed by the simple health measures used to protect against much more highly infectious blood borne diseases such as hepatitis B. It is killed by household disinfectant and bleach, and no special precautions are necessary for health workers, lab workers



Some uninformative information from the government

and so on.

The chlorine used to purify our water supply kills the virus, as does moderate heat (158 degrees Fahrenheit for ten minutes).

HIV was first isolated by separate teams of scientists in the USA and France in the course of 1983-4. They have not co-operated since, as lawyers wrangle over patent rights.

Because they are only active inside living cells, viruses are notoriously difficult to detect. What can be detected is the antibodies we produce to a specific infection. The discovery of HIV made possible the development of tests for the presence in blood of antibodies to the virus.

Such tests have been available since March 1985. Six US companies currently dominate the market, worth 120 million dollars last year.

The test does not show whether someone has the virus, merely that they have been exposed to it. Blood screening seems to register exposure correctly in 96 percent of cases. People found to have been exposed to HIV are termed antibody-positive or seropositive.

Other than screening blood supplies, the test serves no useful purpose. It does not show someone has AIDS, or that they have the virus. But until there is a direct test for HIV itself, seropositive people will be considered infected and infectious.

There appears to be a lag of usually three months—but occasionally much longer—between exposure to the virus and the appearance of antibodies. A small number of people show no antibodies at all.

This means there continues to be a small risk involved in blood transfusions, and is what caused the infection of a leukaemia patient in Glasgow at the start of January. That was a personal tragedy. The reaction of the BMA, warning that no one should give blood who in the past four years had had sex outside of a strictly monogamous relationship, was rank idiocy.

The risk remains tiny. *More* people would die from a lack of blood for transfusions than the tiny number who might be infected as a result, and such restrictions would do relatively little to contain HIV.

Much more important, however, *all* blood donations could be rendered safe by simple heat treatment—like pasteurising milk.

It isn't being done because it would cost money. But then that's the story that has accompanied AIDS from the beginning.■

Ian Taylor

Britain's 'special' crisis

Peculiarities of the British Economy
B Fine and L Harris
Lawrence and Wishart £7.50

THIS BOOK is a sophisticated attempt to argue the case for the uniqueness of the British crisis, and for a special strategy for dealing with it. It is very detailed in its treatment of post-war British economic history, but from an essentially mistaken set of premises.

The authors set out to answer an interesting and important question, namely, why it is that British capitalism is relatively weaker than its major competitors among the advanced industrial countries.

They review critically a number of explanations which have been put forward at various times, and their arguments against the idea that the City has squeezed industry, or that strong trade unions and high wages are to blame, are quite useful.

However, their notion that the main problem has been the lack of a strong centralised state intervening to restructure industry permeates every aspect of the book. The issue of whether the banks have failed industrial capital by not lending sufficient funds for investment is a good example.

Fine and Harris demonstrate that industry hasn't been starved of funds by finance capital in the way so many reformists believe. Their argument is that the banks have lent, but that they haven't been vigorous enough in enforcing discipline on their industrial debtors, unlike their counterparts in West Germany and Japan.

According to them, it would have been better if the banks had not come up with the funds at all, since by so doing they robbed the state of the opportunity of lending to industry with much greater strings attached.

> "Because of the adequacy of bank finance there has been no pressure on the state to intervene in financing industry itself and hence nothing to force the state to develop financial strategies as an element in the rational planning of industry itself. It has been a case of a monopolistic banking sector thereby hindering the rise of a rational planned capitalism."

The trouble with this idea is that it begs so many questions, notably why this external force—either finance capital or the state—is required to induce industrial capital to restructure and modernise. The crucial issue of profit rates is barely mentioned in the entire book.

Secondly, there is the breathtaking assumption that a "rational planned capitalism" is a serious possibility. This idea is based on the existence of other, more successful national capitals. But it completely ignores the fact that such planning as does exist within individual capitals takes place in the context of an anarchic market.

The competitive struggle between capitals in the international economy constantly disrupts what planning is possible, and constantly determines the priorities of capital.

In a period of crisis, that means the attempt to force down wage levels and cut public expenditure. The implacability of the market is something which Fine and Harris do not acknowledge. They seem to believe that a regeneration of British capital can take place without cost to the working class, indeed that such a regeneration would be in the interests of the working class.

This belief in the ability of capitalist planning to benefit workers is demonstrated again in the chapter on multinational corporations (MNCs). Apart from some interesting data, which reveals that British based MNCs avoided competition by directing their activities towards production in trade with the former empire, the general drift of the argument is nationalism, dressed in "socialist" clothes. The distinction between foreign and domestic capital is seen as the important one.

> "The secret power with which multinationals have been and are reshaping the international division of labour and British workers' place within it has been maintained with the support of successive British governments. The failure to develop any effective planning or state intervention in production and investment has meant that what is produced, how it is produced and what the implications are for living standards and the quality of life in Britain have to a large extent resulted from the unfettered worldwide strategies of multinationals. MNCs have had a much greater significance for the British economy than for West Germany, Japan and comparable countries."

It is undeniable that Britain is more open to the world economy than Japan—more of its national output is traded—but it is certainly not unique in this. All the advanced capitalist countries are becoming more and more integrated in a single world

division of labour, even the United States.

But, more fundamentally, the notion that anywhere in the world workers have more control over what is produced, how it is produced and so on is a fantasy.

Are Fine and Harris seriously suggesting that Japanese workers have more control over their lives because the Japanese state intervenes more extensively in the organisation of the economy than he British one does?

Of course, Fine and Harris do believe that the state capitalist countries are socialist, and in many ways this illuminates their whole project. If nationalisation and a centralised state equals socialism, and if a single country has the ability to plan its economy—as they believe the Soviet Union can and does—then it is much easier to believe in the possibility of planning capitalism in a "socialist" direction by taking control of the state in Britain. What is interesting is the convergence of this with the straightforward reformism of the Alternative Economy Strategy.

The authors do perceive that there might be a case to answer in identifying nationalisation with socialism, in the British context. Their treatment of state capitalism is tortuous to say the least. They argue correctly that:

> "Struggles over nationalisation and the nationalised industries can reflect within capitalism a challenge to the relations under which production is organised."

But they go on to say:

> "These struggles may have a formal similarity to those undertaken within private capital, by workers over wages, conditions of work and redundancy, by capitalists for market shares, credit and even government aid. But the content of the struggles can be different. For private capital, the survival of production and capital are synonymous whereas for the nationalised industries the two are quite distinct (although the latter requires the former). In short whereas the reproduction of private capital involves the struggle to make production profitable, the NIs are first involved in establishing the extent to which production is capitalistic."

This seems to me to be mystification. It ignores the context within which nationalised industries operate, namely capitalism.

Take the health service, which Fine and Harris rightly describe as an integral part of the reproduction of labour power. Its priorities can be fought over, and are, but so long as the capitalist system remains, in the final analysis its operation will be determined according to the needs of capital accumulation. Broken legs will be fixed, old people and the mentally ill will be left to rot.

In a period of crisis, the contrast is sharper between the treatment given to those who are needed back in the workforce and those who are of no further use to capitalism, but the distinction was there even in the years of boom.

My expectation on turning to the chapter headed "Arms, the State and the Economy" was that although Fine and Harris were likely to disagree with the theory of the permanent arms economy, they would do it the justice of a serious consideration. Instead they cannot even state it correctly.

German workers: do they have more control than their British counterparts?

> "Another type of analysis...argues that since arms are neither consumption goods for workers nor inputs into other industries (as machines would be) they are luxuries and therefore their production does not contribute to capitalism's inherent tendency for the rate of profit to fall." OK so far. "Therefore it is argued, arms production benefits Britain's capitalists by absorbing resources which would otherwise speed the decline in industrial profits throughout the economy."

On the contrary, the theory of the permanent arms economy argues that one of the reasons for British capitalism's poor performance (the subject of this book!) is the relatively high proportion of Britain's investible surplus devoted to arms production compared with more successful capitals such as Japan and West Germany.

What the theory states is that the vast resources devoted to arms, especially by the USA, in the post-war period underpinned the great boom by retarding the tendency of the rate of profit to fall over the world economy as whole.

Those capitals which devoted least resources to arms spending expanded productive investment faster and hence benefited more.

Having misstated the theory, Fine and Harris go on to dismiss it in one sentence:

> "These purely theoretical propositions are claimed to derive from Marx's theorems, but that claim is mistaken and in fact there is no basis for the argument."

As they are by no means stupid, one must conclude that either they haven't read the relevant material or they find it inconveniently difficult to refute. Incidentally, this was the only reference to the tendency for the rate of profit to fall that I came across in the whole book. Surely Marx's theories deserve better consideration, even if Fine and Harris think the SWP's don't?

The final chapter, which purports to offer a way forward, reiterates the notion that the British crisis cannot be seen as a mere fragment of the world crisis, and so there is a need for a unique "British" alternative strategy.

Since the notion of Britain's peculiarity is basically flawed (unless in the most obvious sense that all nation states have unique features) it is hardly surprising that the conclusion is a combination of rhetoric, wishful thinking and downright nonsense.

Fine and Harris regard those on the left of the Labour Party who think local initiatives like the Greater London Enterprise Board are a substitute for nationalisation utopian. They seem unable to grasp the notion that national state planning might be equally utopian.

Of course they are right in saying that the Kinnockite rejection of nationalisation is a rightward step, however much it may be camouflaged by left sounding talk about workers' dissatisfaction with big impersonal bureuacracies and the need for local democratic control.

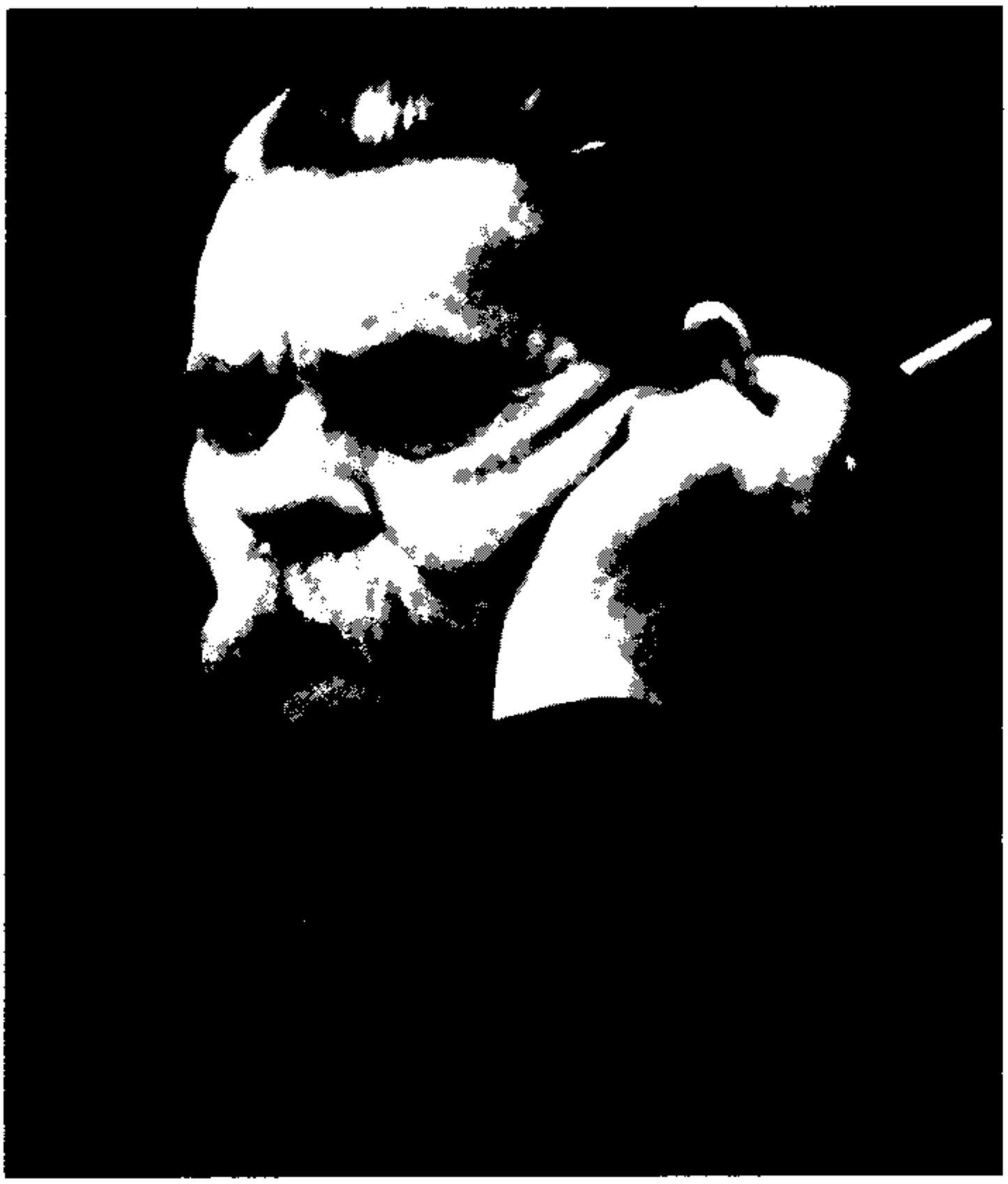
Yet they go on to argue that all the negative experience so far of nationalisation and the parliamentary road to nowhere should not discourage us. It doesn't *have* to be like that, and anyone who thinks it does is taking "a very pessimistic view of some essence of the capitalist state".

We certainly do think that the state has an essence and, in common with Lenin, we think its essence is capitalist. In that lies our fundamental disagreement with Fine and Harris.

Reading this book would be instructive for anyone who still believes that they and their fellow authors of *Class Politics* are any more left wing than their Eurocommunist foes.■

Sue Cockerill

The bitter Maxim



ALEXEI PESHKOV changed his name in the 1880s to Maxim Gorky (which means "bitter") as an indication of his complete opposition to Tsarism and capitalism in Russia. A close personal friend of Lenin, Tolstoy and Chekhov, his early writings chronicled the revolutionary struggle before the 1917 Revolution.

By the time he died in 1934 though, he had been reduced to a public mouthpiece for Stalinism.

The night after the Tsar's troops massacred the "Bloody Sunday" demonstration and set in motion the events of the 1905 revolution, a meeting of revolutionary workers and intellectuals was held to discuss what had happened and what should be done. Father Gapon, organiser of the march to the Winter Palace, addressed the meeting.

> "He then read a letter which...spoke of the Tsar's brutality, hurled curses on his head, and called on the workmen to join a revolutionary open struggle. That letter...had been just composed on the spot by Maxim Gorky. It was widely circulated in Petersburg, and later throughout Russia."

Gorky was arrested two days later, released after an international petition (signed by hundreds of European intellectuals) had been organised and then played such an active part in the unsuccessful Moscow insurrection later that year that he had to flee the country.

Gorky was no passive observer and recorder of the events he lived through. His life and writing are a series of examples, both good and bad, of the relationship between art and revolution.

His involvement with Marxist ideas began in 1884 when he heard a reading of Plekhanov's attack on narodism and his call for the building of revolutionary organisation based on the Russian working class.

Four years later Gorky was so badly beaten up by Cossacks that his health was permanently affected. In 1897 he was placed under surveillance by the secret police, and remained so for 20 years until the police files were captured in the revolution.

After the production of his first play, *The Lower Depths*, in 1900 he became the darling of the liberal opposition to Tsarist autocracy centred around the Moscow Arts Theatre.

At this time the theatre in Russia was an important mechanism in the expression of opposition to Tsarism and uniformed police were often sent to act as ticket collectors in an effort to discourage attendance at productions.

Gorky's documentary style of theatre, describing the degradation of the urban poor, was both a bombshell and a popular success. But as Gorky became more closely associated with the RSDLP and his plays became more overtly political, he began to attract the attention of the censors.

Enemies, written in 1906 in exile, and set against the strike wave of the summer of 1905, is the story of the developing working class movement in Russia and the bourgeoisie's need for violence to maintain its rule. As the censor wrote:

> "These scenes present a clear picture of the irreconcilable emnity between workers and employers, with the former portrayed as resolute fighters advancing clear-sightedly towards their declared aim of the overthrow of capital, and the latter shown as narrow-minded egotists. Furthermore, in the words of one of the characters, it is immaterial what kind of a man the boss is, it is enough that he is 'the boss' for him to be the enemy of the workers. The author...forecasts victory for the workers. These scenes are an outright provocation against the ruling classes and therefore cannot be authorised for performance."

During this period Gorky also wrote *Mother*, the story of a woman's developing revolutionary consciousness, praised by Lenin as having been of great service to the revolutionary movement in the years of reaction after 1905.

His close personal friendship with Lenin developed during these years of exile and reaction, but it was never an easy relationship. Gorky wrote in later years that he had been "a Bolshevik since 1902".

Two things are inaccurate about this statement. First, he never actually joined the Bolshevik party and, secondly, the Bolsheviks were not formed until 1903, after the split with the Mensheviks.

Gorky's association with the revolutionary movement began after the crucial debates in 1903 and, like so many others at the time, he didn't understand the importance of Lenin's activities.

Gorky addresses Russian workers—1929

In a period when the Bolsheviks were attempting to build a revolutionary party, Gorky was attempting to reunite the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. This led to a long exchange of letters in which Lenin attempted to win Gorky away from his association with people like Bogdanov, who was developing a theory that revolutionary socialism was a substitute for religious belief!

Lenin was basically suggesting that Gorky stick to writing novels and plays that supported the revolution and that he at least keep out of the dispute with Bogdanov. But Gorky's refusal to accept this and his return to Russia under a general amnesty for political opponents of Tsarism led to a breakdown in their relationship.

From 1914 to 1921 Gorky edited a journal called *New Life*. Attacked by the right for his anti-war stance, Gorky was an enthusiastic supporter of the February revolution. But his long association with the Mensheviks led him to oppose the October revolution believing it to be divisive and he was increasingly attacked by the Bolsheviks for his conservative position.

This conservatism led him to keep his distance from the explosion of revolutionary acts after 1917. He preferred to turn his house into a museum of pre-revolutionary art and artists rather than write any signficant work in this period.

But his views on art and literature coincided to a great degree with Lenin's (who preferred Tolstoy to Mayakovsky, writing lengthy articles on the former and claiming he couldn't understand the latter).

Indeed, the Bolsheviks' agnostic position on art and revolution, which favoured no one group of writers or artists, led to Gorky being appointed to the Commissariat for Education where he organised worker theatre festivals and competitions in which thousands participated.

But his continued opposition to the Bolsheviks led Gorky to leave Russia again in 1922. Lenin's position seems to have been, "If you can't support us, at least don't work against us," and he used his renewed friendship to persuade Gorky to depart.

For the next eight years Gorky lived abroad, only returning to Russia following a lengthy rehabilitation campaign by Stalin after Lenin's death.

For the final six years of his life Gorky was publicly Stalin's lap dog, writing orthodox "socialist realist" plays, defences of the doctrine of "socialist realism" and, worst of all, whitewashing the labour camps. In short, becoming a spokesman for the new class rule as state capitalism emerged in the 1930s.

Stalin's repayment came in 1936. Having outlived his usefulness, Gorky was almost certainly murdered in the run-up to the purges. Stalin wasn't prepared to allow even the slightest possibility of the Bolshevik tradition, represented by an old friend of Lenin, to survive. Within a year all those present at Gorky's funeral, with the exception of Stalin, had also been murdered in the first great purge.

Gorky's private doubts about Stalin, expressed in his diaries and papers, led to the burning of his library after his death. When asked about the contents of the private manuscripts Yagoda (the secret policeman in charge of the destruction), in a clear reference to Stalin's bribery, later said of Gorky:

> "No matter how you feed the wolf, he'll always keep looking away into the forest."

Whatever his doubts were, though, Gorky had been fatally compromised by a series of weaknesses in his political thinking. His longstanding attachment to the Mensheviks led him to misunderstand the need for building a revolutionary party, the armed overthrow of the state and the building of workers' power.

Without these crucial ideas, it is easy to see how he could be swept along by the floodtide of Stalinism.

It would be very easy to let the later part of his life obscure Gorky's earlier achievements.

There are two schools of abuse of Gorky. The Stalinist school, in which the great founder and exponent of socialist realism can do no wrong, mirrored by the bourgeois school, in which Gorky is rejected as a great writer because of the inclusion of politics in his writing.

We can, and should, reject both of these interpretations. Gorky's most significant works, *Enemies* and *Mother*, were written when he was in tune with the revolutionary movement.

As Trotsky said of him, his commitment to revolutionary socialism gave Gorky the potential for greatness and his lack of commitment impeded the development of that greatness.■

Richard Bradbury

From world war to class war

War, Peace and Revolution: International Socialism at the Crossroads 1914-1918
David Kirby
Gower (no price given)

1914 REMAINS an enigma for socialists. The failure of the European labour movement to prevent the war, the apparent complicity of the working class in its own butchery, are still powerful arguments for those who claim that internationalism is a doomed utopia, that the force of nationalism will always be stronger than the power of solidarity.

David Kirby's book does not solve the problem, but it is a serious and scholarly contribution to the argument. It traces the strengths and weaknesses of European socialism during the four years of carnage.

What is clear is that the capitulation was not inevitable. In the days before hostilities broke out there were mass demonstrations of workers against the war throughout Europe. Workers did not volunteer to fight out of inborn patriotic enthusiasm, but were the victims of a massive ideological offensive and direct intimidation by employers.

Above all, the war could not have been fought without the active assistance of the right wing socialists who mobilised their members behind the national flag. Kirby quotes German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg as saying in 1917:

> "The trade unions complain that they no longer control their people, who are incited by the radicals who say that the Imperial social democrats have done nothing for them. It is absolutely essential that the right wing of the social democrats are strengthened once more. For what is to be done if the government can no longer count on the help of the trade unions in combatting the strike movement?"

Kirby traces in meticulous detail the various attempts to hold international conferences during the war. But he quotes Trotsky as saying in December 1917 that the Bolsheviks were not really interested in conferences. For them the key issue was mass struggle by workers in the various nations at war.

1917 saw a massive wave of strikes and mutinies. In Germany workers struck against food shortages, in France against falling wages. Mutinies swept through the French and Italian armies and there were hunger riots even in neutral Sweden.

Kirby attributes this activity to "deteriorating material conditions." Certainly workers were initially driven to action by economic conditions, but the movement had the potential to be mobilised against the whole social structure that had produced the war. The real tragedy, which Kirby in his preoccupation with conferences neglects, was the failure of the left to take a lead in these struggles. In Britain many of the best militants were conscientious objectors or deserters; in France even the supporters of Zimmerwald took a conscious decision not to try to organise among serving soldiers. So when revolt erupted there was no leadership to guide it towards revolutionary action.

Yet the real problem lay even further back. Alfred Rosmer began his great history of the labour movement in World War I by noting that "when war begins, the working class has already been defeated." The various peace campaigns and manoeuvres that Kirby chronicles were all too late. What really mattered was the failure of the left to organise to stop war before August 1914. Even the strident anti-militarism of the French revolutionary syndicalists had failed to grip the rank and file. As Pierre Monatte noted in 1913, the mass of workers were "tired and fed up with the futility of insurrectionism."

After four years of war millions of workers were ready to rally to the banner of the Russian Revolution— but millions more did not live to see that day. In the past revolution has come *after* war—we shall not have that possibility. The nuclear holocaust permits no mutinies, no food riots. All the more reason to study the lessons of what went wrong *before* 1914.■

Ian Birchall

Digging up gems

Red Hill: a mining community
Tony Parker
Heinemann £9.95

RED HILL: a mining community is a book about a contemporary mining village in the north east of England. It is a village where the pit has been earmarked for closure only a few months after the end of the 1984/5 strike.

The author, Tony Parker, an ex-public school boy turned conscientious objector, had his first contact with miners during the Second World War. He had to work a compulsory 18 months in the Lancashire coalfield as a punishment for not serving King and country. That experience of pit life ensured that he was to become a fervent supporter and sympathiser of miners and their struggles.

Parker's mission is to restore the balance between the media propaganda and the miners' cause—in this he has been successful. He has taken a cross section of opinion from the community, from scab to sacked miner and from policeman to priest. The results he gets from interviews are a very vivid and accurate portrayal of the life, feelings and aspirations of the community.

His interviews with scabs capture graphically the varying reasons for returning to work. On the one hand the hardened "gaffer's man", looking out for his family and staying loyal to a "good employer", and on the other hand the naive, isolated inactive striker who just couldn't take any more.

The sacked miners who contributed reflect perfectly the prevailing political climate of Kinnockism—a lack of confidence in workers' self-activity leading to a sense of hopelessness and demoralisation. As one of them says, "Our only hope lies in the return of a Labour government."

But by far the best section is the interviews with the women who were active in the support groups. There are some real gems showing how people change through struggle—"If you would have told me ten years ago I would stand up in front of 200 people, I wouldn't have believed you," and, "If someone stuck a knife into a policeman, right in front of me, I wouldn't help." It was through the struggle that the women began to generalise, drawing the links between themselves and the black workers of South Africa or the women of Greenham Common.

The shortcoming of any book of this nature is that it offers no concrete political analysis, not only of the past strike but of future political trends. Because the book offers no lead it only reflects the misery of a pit village, soon to be without a pit. How refreshing it would have been to have interviewed a Bolshevik!■

Joe Henry

Work: a man's world?

Waged Work: a reader
Edited by Feminist Review
Virago £5.95

ANY BOOK which deals with women's position in the workforce is welcome. Women's increasing participation in waged work has had a massive influence on every aspect of their lives. Many of the facts and figures in this book show the central role women's labour plays for capitalism.

The recession has complicated this picture. Angela Coyle's interesting article

on the effects of privatisation on the conditions of hospital cleaners is one example of how women's working conditions have worsened under the Tories. Unfortunately this article is marred by its conclusions.

Coyle points out, quite correctly, that by competing with private firms for tenders NUPE may have kept jobs unionised but the price it has paid has been the wages and conditions of its members. But she then goes on to claim that this is because the structure of the union is paternalistic and under-represents women.

This approach is characteristic of almost every article in the book. For example, Nicola Charles writes in painstaking detail of the failure of trade unions to push for such basic demands as meetings in work time and workplace creches, both of which would obviously be of tremendous benefit to women workers. But she then goes on to claim that this failure is because "the world of work, which includes the trade unions, is structured according to the needs of capital in the first instance but also according to the interests of men".

We never get an explanation of how this serves men's interests. Those men who own and control wealth certainly do benefit from women workers' low level of participation in the unions. But the majority of men—the fathers, husbands and sons of women workers—do not. Surely it would be in their interests for women to have better pay and conditions, as this would mean a higher standard of living for the working class family as a whole?

Looking at the world this way says very clearly that class is more important than gender. And this is something none of the contributors to this anthology is prepared to accept. This means that many of the contributors end up in a very reactionary position. Thus Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor say, "It is an irony of great concern to feminists that one of the most celebrated episodes in the history of British class struggle—the shop stewards movement of the First World War—drew its strength from the resistance of men workers to a dilution of their jobs by women."

But would it have served the interests of women workers to see one of the strongest sections of the working class smashed? Quite clearly it would not. It would have meant vicious attacks on the rest of the working class, both male and female, as the ruling class pressed home its advantage. But Taylor and Phillips miss something else as well. The fight by the shop stewards opened up the opportunity for socialists to agitate against the war. The rising level of confidence in the working class meant that revolutionary ideas began to find an echo in the working class.

Failure to understand how struggle makes it easier to fight against divisions in the working class means most of the articles are seriously flawed. Perhaps this is clearest in the article on homeworking by Sheila Allen and Carol Wolkowitz. The information they give on the working conditions of homeworkers is interesting. But the conclusions are feeble in the extreme. We are told that "serious attention needs to be paid to the conditions of those presently carrying out waged work at home".

This lack of any strategy and complete absence of any notion that in order to gain anything from capitalism you have to fight means that although the book is interesting it is never inspiring.■

Ann Rogers

The image not the action

Women Photographers: The other observers 1900 to the present
Val Williams
Virago £9.95

THE CAMERA was born in 1839. It took less than 30 years to develop from a toy for the artistocracy to a mass produced tool used for police filing, family snapshots, war and military documentation, pornography and scientific investigation. It was a product of industrial capitalism and suited its needs.

Photography fragments reality, freezes time, places events and people out of context and outside of any process, and then presents it as the indisputable truth. Hence its early and effective use by the Nazis, the police, the bourgeois press and advertisers.

This (and far more sophisticated analyses) is more or less ignored by Williams. She shows how this era was dominated by aristocratic women using their cameras to record family life and how this was then used to portray the ruling class as they liked to be seen.

By the beginning of this century, photography had become more accessible and there was a brief moment between the wars when it challenged fine art and became a public medium which could be used democratically.

This period in Williams' book makes fascinating reading and includes some wonderful photos because her women are involved in the social upheavals, are part of a progressive women's movement, and, in some cases, identify with the working class. It also opens up the discussion on how the medium so suited to the mystification of capitalism can be used effectively by those struggling to demystify and overthrow it.

In all the other sections, those factors are lost, as Williams reverts back to the individual woman photographer and her contribution to image-making, art and feminism. The restrictions and negative effects of photography—even on the women's movement itself—are ignored.

In the strongest section of the book, Williams shows how women photographers moved (along with their male colleagues) to documentary and reportage which depended on the exploration of occupations and lifestyles outside the photographer's own class.

This meant women like Norah Smyth documented the lives of working class women in London's East End, and Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm took their cameras to First World War trenches. These overtly political pictures had particular force.

Smyth dealt with poverty, the exploitation of labour, the insufficiency of pre-welfare state education and social provision. She also portrayed the work of radical groups such as the East London Federation of Suffragettes.

As chief co-worker with Sylvia Pankhurst, Smyth organised and contributed to the Federation's newspaper, the *Women's Dreadnought* (later the *Workers' Dreadnought*). It was one of the first illustrated journals of propaganda, and Smyth was determined to use her photographs to convince and gather support.

Smyth's East End was undramatised—the face of poverty was demystified and rid of the ghosts and goblins of the Victorian imagination. It was powerful propaganda. The photos lost their fragmented and momentary nature due to the context into which they were put (the text), and the fact that Smyth was *recording* the events for her movement, rather than *reporting* them for someone else.

Williams show how even the best documentary photography was largely ignored by the radical pamphleteers of the thirties, with the Communist Party and the Left Book Club taking only partial account of the power of the photographic image.

She writes: "The scarcity of photos in the influential and fashionable Left Book Club is symptomatic of both the failure to use photography as an instrument of propaganda, and a lack of visual consciousness among the British left."

The political and radical documentary photography was quickly superceded by a mystical and romantic photojournalism which is still strong today. This relies on the ability of the photo to make an emotive point directly and quickly without relying on the political or intellectual views of its audience.

As an historical record of forgotten women photographers, Williams' book is interesting and includes some lovely prints. As an attempted discussion on the development of the medium, it is frustrating. It distorts photography's past by only briefly mentioning the many important male contributions. And it gives unjustified significance to any work done by women for women by evading a serious discussion on the art form itself—the result, ironically, of a political outlook which prioritises images over action.■

Clare Fermont

Tell Sid it's socialism

Understains
Kathy Myers
Comedia £5.95

MS MYERS is an intellectual surfer. The art of surfing involves choosing the right wave and making sure that you stay just ahead of the peak; the skill lies in being able to perform the contortions needed to keep your balance. The wave that Ms Myers has chosen is a small tidal phenomenon running towards Westminster. She, and **her publisher, are riding the Kinnock Bore.**

She claims that advertising is important and that the left should drop their prejudices and embrace it. In order to do that she starts off with a critique of Marx. "Useful things, according to Marx's explanation, are objects without the social gloss."

Early in his career, in the famous *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx argued that there was no such thing as "natural" needs, an argument he expands in *Capital*, book one, part one, chapter one.

Her substantial argument is that advertising has the function of ensuring consumption, completing the necessary circuit of capital. To the extent that this is supported by an economic theory, she relies on Keynes. Yet only a decreasing and minor proportion of the world's production, essentially consumer goods, are the the subject of the sort of public advertising Ms Myers is interested in.

By 1970 roughly 66 percent of the world's output was heavy industry. In Europe the classic consumer industry, food and drink, declined between 1900 and 1970 from 27 percent to 11 percent of the value of manufacturing output. It is true that ships, tanks, raw pig iron, machine tools and the like are sold in part by advertising but it is rather different in form and function from the Benson and Hedges model she writes about. Such advertising is, economically, very marginal: in the most developed case, the USA, it accounts for about 2 percent of GNP. She has chosen to focus on an aspect of capitalism which is simply too small to play the crisis-preventing role she wants it to have.

Psychologically, too, she has little of value to say. This is partly because she avoids any difficult problems. For example, shifts in drinking patterns, and their relation to advertising, are one of the hotly debated and researched areas of contention. Numerous studies suggest a much more complex relationship between social habits and the "symbolism" she finds in advertising than she admits.

What all this packaging is designed to sell is a political point: it is designed to justify the new Labour Party. Ms Myers shows how first the GLC and then the Labour Party have been able to change their image and win popularity.

She is absolutely silent about the political changes that went with this shift. The gist of her whole book is: advertising is important. It works for capitalism. It can work for the left. Anyone who goes on about political principles being ditched doesn't understand anything. So shut up and dish out the red roses.

Pretty nasty stuff, but about average for what is happening to a layer of former libertarian leftists. I see from the cover notes that Ms Myers teaches Media Studies. It's people like her who make the trade a laughing stock.■

Colin Sparks

Merlyn's murderous memoirs

Northern Ireland: a personal perspective
Merlyn Rees
Methuen £19.95

LOOKING BACK at the last Labour government it is easy to forget that the issue it finally fell over was Ireland. After all, in the plethora of books published by the Labour left to explain what went wrong the word Ireland seldom gets as much as a sniff in the index.

The most useful books on the Labour Party's attitude to Ireland have been written by right wing Labour MPs. James Callaghan's *A House Divided* and the Crossman and Wilson diaries all show Labour's basic intentions in Ireland. They would like the North to be less sectarian and more like a normal liberal democracy. This they hoped to get by a mixture of repression and reform. The strategy depended on using the state to effect change. However, by bolstering it the major agent of Catholic oppression is strengthened.

Rees, when Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, fitted into the same tradition. Unfortunately he has less talent for writing than his predecessors, and the book's politics are submerged in the most boring and turgid text I have ever read.

He portrays a remarkable picture of what is wrong in Ireland. For example, on the question of internment without trial we are told, "Detainees are not held for their political views but because of their involvement in violence." But then, referring to 1974, he tells us that "I was not willing to release men at a moment when their friends were blowing things up." You could be locked up without trial for having the wrong friends.

Rees, however, sees the problem not as one of a grave miscarriage of justice but one of words. "Internment was an emotive word in the Catholic community," he tells us. So what was Labour's solution? They replaced internment with juryless Diplock courts and lengthy remand periods for untried prisoners. It wasn't the first time Labour had just changed the words. In 1969 Roy Hattersley was responsible for the transformation of of the hated B-Specials into the better armed and equally sectarian UDR.

Rees, like his successor Mason, was always better at implementing repression than reform. The key to his policies was the "criminalisation" of the conflict—a drive on law and order. Thus the White Paper of 1974 stated that "The problem is now [a] small number of ruthless and vicious killers." In line with this, Rees removed political status, causing in time, the "dirty protest" and the Hunger Strikes in the H-Blocks and Armagh.

The book also contains copious praise for Enoch Powell, Tebbit-style attacks on the media coverage of the 1981 Hunger Strike, agreement with Paisley that it was unwise to compensate the relatives of those murdered by the British Army on Bloody Sunday, and praise for the SAS even when

Nothing but praise for the army?

they got caught in covert operations in the Irish Republic.

This book is odious and horrible. It accurately reflects its author's politics.■

Mike Thompson

Early Eastenders

Jew Boy
Simon Blumenfeld
Lawrence & Wishart £4.95

THIS NOVEL, first published in 1935, is based on the experiences of life in the Jewish East End of London. It represented the start of a new strand in English literature. It follows the main character, Alec, at work, at play, in love and in his political activity.

The description of the Jewish East End comes over well: the tailoring sweat-shops, the cafes, and the concert halls, where proletarian audiences took self-conscious pride in listening to Haydn and Beethoven.

Unfortunately the politics don't fit too well. Blumenfeld, like so many in the Jewish community in the 1930s, was a supporter of the Communist Party, then in the middle of its Popular Front stage, and the lack of political clarity shows in the wildly extravagant propagandist passages.

He does, however, see clearly the implications of Zionism; in one scene Alec accuses a Zionist of being, "busy making Palestine safe for the Anglo-Dutch oil kings". But as the culture of the Jewish East End was being opened up to a wider audience so the community was dispersing, and as fewer Jewish workers fought their Jewish bosses so the Communist tradition lost its dominance, leaving a vacuum which Zionism started to fill.■

Richard Readshaw

Every picture tells a story

New Worlds: Russian Art and Society 1900-1937
David Elliott
Thames and Hudson, £12.95

NEW WORLDS is primarily a picture book. Over three hundred excellent photographs with informative captions, researched by Alla Weaver and laid out by David King, provide a documentary history of Russian cultural production between the hectic years of 1900 and 1937.

It reveals the artistic ferment before the revolution, followed by the transformation of society and art in 1917, where for a few years modernism in art coincided with socialist aspirations; and then the slow deterioration of art into propaganda for the state as "socialist realism".

David Elliott's introduction and notes to the photographs unfortunately lack an understanding of class society and history. He characterises the October Revolution as a coup where the Bolsheviks seized power and he explains Stalin's deadly grip on party and state as being solely the result of personal ambition.

His discussion of the art is better than his understanding of society, nevertheless he makes no substantive connection between the two. This tends to result in a misleading chronology where apparently random events and movements are left with little explanation or criticism.

Despite these shortcomings in the text, any book that makes these pictures available to us is worth looking at.■

David Mabb

FILM

Subverting with rhythm

MUSIC IS at the heart of two new films. Both raise interesting questions about the relationship between music and politics.

Round Midnight is an emotional account (based on the real lives of Bud Powell and Lester Young) of the life of a black jazz musician in exile in Europe in the 1950s. The central character, Dale Turner, lives in a seedy hotel and is slowly drinking himself to death. But he continues to play beautifully most nights in a Paris club. The film contains some of the best recorded live jazz to appear on a film soundtrack.

True Stories is the first full-length movie (though there have been many stunning videos) by David Byrne, singer and songwriter for New York rock band Talking Heads. Based on some of those amazing but true stories you find in local newspapers it weaves film, music and speech into a portrait of life in a small town in Texas. It is both very funny, and one of the most innovative movies I have seen in years.

In *Round Midnight* a young, earnest, French fan, informs the rather quizzical ageing black musician he has taken into his home that jazz taught him the meaning of freedom.

To one critic at least (Judith Williamson in the *New Statesman*) the relationship between the two, around which the film's plot revolves, smacks of "colonisation which allows the music to seem as much the product of white European as of black American culture".

Apart from assuming that an audience could draw such a stupid conclusion from a film dominated by Dexter Gordon (who plays Dale Turner) and the many other black jazz musicians who appear in it, the criticism stinks of the "all white men are racist" view common amongst feminists.

Bertrand Tavernier, the director, (who has also made two excellent left wing movies, *Watchmaker of St Paul* and *Clean Slate* where the politics are explicit) has given us a film which is not just about jazz but about creativity, loneliness and indeed freedom.

Anyone who wants to understand something of the revolutionary significance of blues and jazz for twentieth century culture should go, see and listen to it.

They wouldn't put Dexter Gordon, or Talking Heads for that matter, on the muzaktape for the shopping mall in Virgil, Texas. Both forms of music challenge and subvert the dull monotonous rhythms of capitalism.

No doubt the HMV and Virgin megastores will be making plenty (I spent £14.90) out of the two albums, and glossy book, which accompany *True Stories*, David Byrne's satire on American consumerism.

In revolutionary times Byrne's prodigious imagination and skills would be flowing into and out of the class struggle. As it is there is always a danger that, like Ken Russell, his inventiveness turns in on itself, and his rejection of the horrors of Reaganite America collapses into cynicism or mysticism.

But anyone who doubts that we can still claim him, and Talking Heads, for our side should consider the wonderful irony in the song that climaxes the film.

Louis, who works in the local silicon chip factory (like most of the main characters apart from those who own it), is a bit of a racist, and desperately wants a wife, finally fulfils his dream of appearing on stage in the town's anniversary concert. "People like us," he sings to a country music tune, "we don't want freedom, we don't want justice, we just want someone to love."

But then you have to see it and hear it to fully appreciate it. I'm going to go again—but then maybe I'm just another fan.■

Pete Green

To break a strike?

SORRY, but I must quibble with (some of) Shaun Doherty's article on socialists and reactionary strikes (December *SWR*).

I'm sure that Shaun's arguments in the McGoldrick case are right, but he is less right when he goes on to generalise. In particular Shaun has some wrong impressions about the 1968 march by London dockers in support of Enoch Powell, and since this is still the most widely-used example of a reactionary strike I think it's worth putting the record straight.

Shaun is factually wrong when he argues that the union organisation that built the Powell strike also "sparked off a general strike" in 1972. The Powell strike was organised more or less spontaneously by a handful of National Front supporters. The organisation behind the 1972 strike was the Royal Docks Shop Stewards Committee, which in its earlier form of the Liaison Committee opposed the Powell strike, albeit half heartedly.

I'm not sure Shaun is right in saying that the only IS docker of the time, Terry Barrett, opposed the strike from the picket line. Since the strike was in the form of a lightning afternoon walkout leading to a march on Westminster, picket lines played little part in the affair.

What I am sure of is that the decision whether to break the strike split socialist dockers right down the middle. Some argued that though the strike was reactionary they still had to respect picket lines, others argued that since the strike was wrong in principle they had an obligation to break it. One at least—Tony Delaney in the West India Docks—was beaten up for his principles. For what it's worth, speaking as an SWP docker today—though I didn't start work there until 18 months after the strike—I'm fairly sure that I would have gone to work with Tony that afternoon.

I'm also uneasy about the claim that Terry Barrett's impact was greater than those socialists who broke the strike. Obviously, this is something which no one can be definite about. But everyone remembers that some men, men who were often widely respected, refused to join the strike *as a matter of principle* and in the face of some personal danger.

Finally, I think it is wrong to be so categorically sure that racialist ideas *only* take grip when workers' organisation is broken. Generally that might be true—in this particular instance it most certainly wasn't.

The 1968 march came at the high water mark of militancy amongst London dockers. In fact I suspect it was the very confidence created by that militant tradition that convinced dockers they could challenge the government policy on immigration. Dockers were militant and racialist—what could be more natural than to be militant racialists?

This last point isn't an exercise in point-scoring. I think it gets us closer to the central *political* problem posed by reactionary strikes. I'm convinced that the Powell strike could have been stopped. London dockers had an established unofficial leadership, the Liaison Committee, which commanded an unparalleled respect and loyalty built up over 20 years. The Liaison Committee was then—as always—under Communist Party control. Had it been prepared to risk some sort of short-term unpopularity by taking a hard unyielding political line and counter-attacking the Powell strike then it need never have happened.

Instead the Liaison Committee sprawled all over the place. Some of the younger members opposed the strike vehemently. Others were compromised because they silently sympathised with it. The chairman, Jack Dash, was out sick. His lieutenant, Dannie Lyons, tried to find a political short-cut by getting a Catholic priest to speak against the strike. Given the background of antagonism against the Catholic church in the docks this was calculated to be the most disastrous move Lyons could possibly have made.

But assume that the Liaison Committee had been made of sterner political stuff and had counter-attacked. What would they have said? They would have used all the familiar anti-racist arguments, and they would have gone on to call on dockers to *ignore* the strike call. In plain words this would have meant aborting the strike by crossing picket lines—hopefully in droves.

Let me quote a second, less widely-known, case to emphasise my point. The fascists tried several times to relive their success of 68 without ever getting close, until 1976. That summer two black dockers—the only two blacks working in London docks—were sent to work in the Royal Docks. The Front tried to organise a backlash strike.

Certainly there was a lot of hostility to the black workers, and for a time we were worried. So the Royal Group Shop Stewards Committee voted to do anything we could to smash the threat of a strike.

Statement against racism in the docks in the summer of 1976

We issued a leaflet calling on men to work normally alongside the black dockers. More than that, we informed the fascists that we would organise as many men as we could to break-and if necessary to fight our way through—any picket lines. In other words we called on dockers to break the strike, and I think we were totally right—especially since it worked.

Had we followed Shaun's formula that socialists should never cross picket lines if a reactionary strike commands majority support, then presumably we would have stood outside the dock gate counting heads until 50 percent (plus one) had gone to work, and then we could have followed them in. The Liaison Committee's political paralysis in 68 could presumably be justified because the strike was so popular.

Political leadership is about leading politically, not simple mathematics. Whether to break a reactionary strike or not is a tactical question that has to be carefully calculated—but not ruled out in advance.

This is several political light years away from Brent. It's almost as far from the messy defensive trench warface that most *SWR* readers find themselves in today.

I'm sure that in the present political dog-days Shaun's arguments are much more practical and, well, relevant. But this downturn will not, I'm assured, last for ever. Then the sad lessons of London dockers will be more important. In my opinion these lessons undermine some of Shaun's long-term certainty.■

Bob Light
East London

Keeping women out

I COULDN'T agree more with Ann Rogers (November *SWR*) when she said that the situation of men would be improved if they worked in the home, if they didn't have to work long hours of overtime, it they spent more time with their children.

Part of the reason they don't is that they can rarely *afford* to be employed for fewer hours. Individual men are trapped in the role of breadwinner, but we should remember that that role was "created" by men to protect themselves from the low paid and unpaid work of women.

In the long run then the sexism that men perpetuate is actually a barrier to the organisation of the kind of society that we want and in that sense is a barrier to the real fulfilment of men's lives, as well as women's.

In everyday life women do face the problem of male power and sexism. Ann mentioned the case of the GLC fire station where a woman recruit was subjected to a most terrible degree of sexual

harassment, bordering on rape. I have no doubt that the GLC, and certain councillors in particular, made mistakes in this case.

But we have to face the fact that it was men, male firefighters, who were harassing her sexually and assaulting her as part of their everyday culture. At the tribunal they said in their defence that every recruit is treated to sexual horseplay and that, as the FBU put it, if women wanted to be firefighters they would have to take the rough with the smooth. What more effective way of keeping women in their place?

Things like that are going on every day. We know in the end that such divisions of sex are also part of something which keeps the working class down. Cynthia's analysis recognises that.

Maybe too, in some fundamental sense, sexist ideas are ideas of the ruling class. But they are also the ideas that have helped structure the way the working class has organised itself. As socialists we have to recognise that fact and confront it at every level.

We have also, of course, to recognise that there is a material basis to male workers' sexism. Why is it that men resist the entry of women into "their" jobs? If you look at clerical work, which was originally a male preserve, it is clear that "ladies" were recruited as cheap labour and that, as women took over, male clerical pay dropped right down the male pay league.

If men are to remain the breadwinners, earning enough to keep a wife and children, so they have to exclude the rival cheaper labour of women. This is what has been going on, wherever men have had the organisation to resist. As Ann says, male compositors earn £700 a week doing jobs that can be done by young girls at £50 or £60 a week. It's no wonder that the NGA was so resistant to women entrants. Of course Murdoch and the rest of capital make use of such differentials, but we must recognise that these are benefits to men. The higher pay gives them a lot of clout and power within the home—or do you really think that everything is fairly shared within the confines of the family?

I can see nothing socialist in those kind of differentials—for the same work. Do we really want a society based on those sexual inequalities? In order to overcome it, we cannot simply focus on the ruling class, nor simply talk about "false ideologies" of sexism and racism—we have to confront the material interests of men in perpetuating sexual inequalities.

It is not a question of saying there is a fixed set of skilled, well-paid jobs and therefore if women get more, men will get less. It is also a question of arguing about what happens in work in general. If we simply say women have to wait till the cake is bigger, women will never have the kind of power and control they need to push their own interests. At the same time as arguing for a larger cake and more money, we need also to be tackling the discriminations perpetuated by one part of the working class against another.

The fight against capital has to be a united fight of equals and not a differential fight between layers of the working class. That is why we have to recognise the real benefits that men do get from the status quo. That's what makes Cynthia's contribution so important in our struggle for a united working class that can effectively challenge the ideas and power of capital.■

Irene Bruegel
North London

Selling the future

YOUR *Note* "Can it happen again?" (December *SWR*), while acknowledging the real possibility of the Tories winning the next election, did not explain the effect this may have on the working class as a whole.

The overwhelming mood within the class at the moment is that people want to see the back of this government, but Kinnock's attitude towards us means that large numbers of workers (blue and white collar) will simply not waste their boot leather in going to the polling booth. The net result of this attitude is the likely return of a grossly unpopular government that thinks because it has a mandate it can go on the rampage.

The malaise that this will cause the Labour Party—and socialists inside the Labour Party—will be a deep one. It *is* possible that in real terms the Labour Party could shake itself to bits.

Where does this scenario leave the working class? It leaves us headless—confidence in Labour and in the trade union bureaucracy is currently low and it is set to sink even lower.

In France the result of such a situation was the growth of the National Front and undoubtedly Britain's disgusting version of that organisation will also grow. The difference is that the working class in this country do not have the illusions in the established left that the French did, and as a result could be more open to ideas like those of the Socialist Workers Party.

It is no good having the perfect analysis if we do not relay it to the people that count—those of the working class that are prepared to fight. This means we must sell the idea of socialist revolution to our workmates now in the belief that they will collect the goods later.■

Dave Hammond
Lewisham

Book or footnote?

PAT STACK'S review of Hal Draper's new book (November *SWR*) has it all wrong. First of all, the book isn't called *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. It's called *The "Dictatorship of the Proletariat"*. The quotations are important. They're meant to show that Draper is talking about the *term*, not about the workers' dictatorship itself.

Pat has also grossly overrated the importance of the book. For one, it is entirely too long and tangential, providing pages and pages of little stories about Marx, but mostly about Marx's contemporaries, to prove what could have been proven in a short appendix—that Marx was not a Blanquist. In fact, the entire book struck me as a giant footnote. I got the feeling that Draper needed to send something to keep his publishers happy while he worked on his *next* volume, apparently to be entitled *The Road to Power* (without quotes).■

Paul D'Amato
Chicago

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.

BACK CHAT

Dedicated followers

THIS WINTER has seen the launch of a new magazine, *Arena*. It is a women's magazine for men. At £1.40 a throw it is crammed with full page glossy ads for clothes, perfumes for men and consumer durables. It is the male equivalent of *Elite*, *Vogue* and *Company* and like them it is up-market.

The clothes presented include a hooded jacket for £289.50, scarves for £26, a shirt for £32. In common with the other magazines, the reader is unlikely to buy these goods. They are there just to aspire to—window shopping for £1.40.

And of course it is all concerned with fashion. Like its successful parent *The Face*, *Arena* has a view that style is all. Both portray a world where there is no content, only form.

The sickest example of this was in *The Face*. Under the guise of street styles were displayed the clothes, equipment and accessories of the warring factions of Beirut. Each model was fully equipped and each item listed and priced—Christian milita this year are wearing...etc. It was a joke, a parody of itself, but as Freud pointed out jokes can often tell us more than serious writings.

To the makers and moulders of style, what you are is unimportant, what counts is what you display—what you buy. People are defined not by production—what they do—but by consumption. You are what you wear.

Much of the fashion is arbitrary. One year's hip is next year's naff. It is a never ending pursuit of the ever changing. The consumer dog chasing its retail.

But it is not totally arbitrary or unpolitical. The class struggle is related and reflected even in the world of *Arena*.

Clothes are traditionally a uniform, an indicator of status and class (look at the pin-striped suit of the City). But at a time when the mass of people have no power over their lives and see little prospects of ever having any, then fashion can take on other meanings as well. It can be the one area they feel they have an element of control. The less power people have the more they grasp onto the appearance of it.

The alienated worker is converted by the "magic" of the market to the free and all powerful consumer/customer to decide what to buy, even what to be. You can choose style X from C&A as opposed to style Y from Marks & Spencers. Or for those more dedicated followers of fashion, who are often the most powerless, choose to be a punk or a skin. We are all caught up in this process of the market, including those who deny it, the anti-fashion lobby—(the drabbies).

Style can be part of rebellion, but it always retains its elitist and divisive characteristics. Mods hated rockers, skins battled mainly not against the state, but punks. It is at heart based on making yourself special, or being part of a special group in a world where you are considered nothing. It reflects the divisions in the working class as well as occasionally showing the creativity of the masses in street styles.

Even the styles themselves are not totally random. In the 1950s, a time of deep reaction and dominance of right wing ideas, fashion emphasised that men should be "real men". The role models provided by Hollywood were respectable beefcake or rebels without a cause. Women were presented with sex goddesses or domestic comforters—a woman's place in the bed and/or kitchen. It was all James Dean or John Wayne, Doris Day or Marilyn Monroe—stereotypes ruled.

In the 1960s things changed, and rapidly. Styles came and went overnight, stereotypes broke down. The teenager took centre stage. It was no longer only big business that determined what was in, in part it took to the streets—an echo of the rising level of struggle. Fashion became a dirty word—it was unfashionable. Style became associated with rebellion and breaking rules. The styles came so quick and fast and were so creative that the past 20 years seems like a slowed down re-run of those hectic days of the upturn. Mods, suedeheads, psychedelia, hippiedom, rockers, skinheads—the fashions are reworked and presented as new.

Style: elitist character

In the 1980s it would seem we are back to the 1950s. Muscles are back, Marilyn Monroe is recreated in Madonna, Elvis returns through Bruce Springsteen. Hollywood movies are full of hunks fighting the evil reds.

But first appearances can be deceptive. History does not go in circles, it moves on. In the 1950s, the style was not seen as style. It was seen as what was best, what was real. Today it is aware of itself as a style—the McCarthy witch hunt suits without the witch hunts. We are not reliving the 1950s. The working class is not smashed ideologically, it is a time of slow and gradual retreat.

Fashion for women has moved towards the 25-35 year old market. With mass unemployment and part-time work the youth market has declined. Fifties snobbery is back. The upper class twit is no longer a fashion joke but is reborn as the Sloane or young fogey, or is aspired to by the yuppies. Even debs and all that word means have returned. What the royal family wears is once again considered of fashion interest.

But again it is not a simple return to the bad old days. In the 1950s and 1960s men were not supposed to be interested in fashion for itself. If you wore a certain style it was because it reflected an attitude or activity. A 1960s CND supporter wore a duffle coat and cord trousers as part of being a protester. Style was then only a part of what you did or were.

Today men are sold consumer goods more or less on the same basis as women. For men to be sexually attractive they are told to conform to rules and fears just as women have been told for generations. Men are used as sex objects. Levi jeans or Flannel aftershave use male bodies in the same way as *The Sun* uses a woman's on its page three. Men are now sold style as style. You wear a certain piece of clothing because it is fashionable and that is all.

In London today there is a shop which sells the style of "Russian Revolution": thick ankle-length black overcoats, black or dark blue collarless shirts, enamel badges and expressionist T-shirts. It is selling a style. It can be disconcerting to see someone wearing both a Stalin and a Trotsky badge side-by-side. But to the shop and the person wearing them there is no contradiction. They are emblems of the style—they have no other meaning.

Which brings me back to *Arena*. It is one response to these days of prolonged recession, for people who are not looking to change the world but the colour of their socks. The fashion slaves are a small dedicated group, but the attitude which they express has a large and growing following.■

Noel Halifax