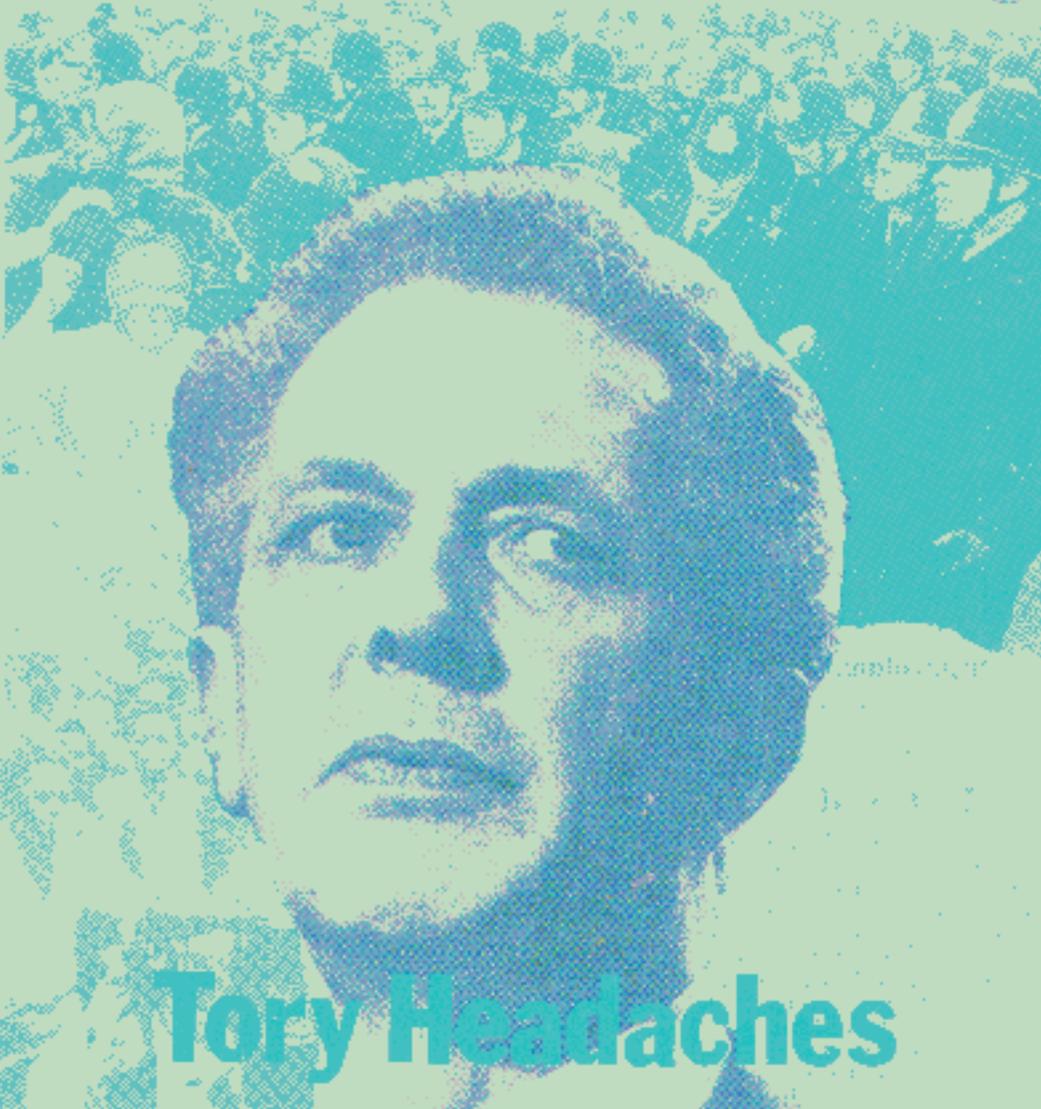


socialist
REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

Zimbabwe: The Future
Paul Foot on Tony Benn
Eamonn McCann
dissects the Guardian

22 March-18 April 1980 £ 40p



Tory Headaches

Tory Headaches

'After nine months in power, the Thatcher government is in a crisis from which there is no obvious escape ...'

Newspapers are prone to exaggerate. Sensationalist first paragraphs are designed to sell, as much as to convey realities. Nevertheless, the quotation, from the *Sunday Times* of three weeks ago, sums up a certain mood of desperation within governmental circles. The desperation has two linked causes.

First, there is the bitter realisation that the economic strategy underlying last year's budget, the public expenditure cuts, the high interest rates and the high value of the pound, is just not working—at least in the short term. The economy is already entering into recession despite the fact that the expected recession has not yet materialised in the US and Europe. The rate of inflation is still on the up. The annual rate rose from 17.2% to 18.4% in January. And the balance of payments shows a marked deterioration, despite the rising output of North Sea oil.

Second, of course, there has been the steel strike. What concerns people in high places here is not so much the economic effects of the strike—at the time of writing exactly what these are is still uncertain, but they seem to be less than they feared (and we hoped). Their main worry is the social effects of the strike and the threatened closures. As the *Sunday Times* puts it, there is a 'growing body of Tories who fear that the total impact of government policies is about to impose an intolerable strain on the social fabric with destructive political effects.' Government minister Ian Gilmour hinted what might be at the back of their minds in a recent lecture when he quoted Harold Macmillan: 'If capitalism had been conducted all along as if the theory of private enterprise were a matter of principle ... we should have had a civil war long ago.'

The great fear of people like Gilmour is of social confrontation that produces a sudden escalation of working class anger. This, as they see it, could destroy much of the 'British tradition' of respect for authority and acceptance of the framework of capitalist rule. Such fears are not new: they featured very prominently in ruling class deliberations in the U-turn that led to producing a limited lifebelt to UCS in 1971, the decision to release the dockers from Pentonville in 1972, and the isolation of those within ruling circles who were training police and troops for use against the miners in 1974. Such fears today mean that top ministers are complaining that Thatcher and Joseph are not paying enough attention to hiding the iron hand within the velvet glove.

So the *Observer* can report that 'Several ministers fear that the government is heading for dangerous confrontation.' Apparently, these include what their enemies call the 'wet and unruly barons in the government': Prior, Carrington and Walker. (24 Feb). The *Financial Times* claims that the basic fear of certain ministers is of: 'The steel strike continuing for another month or so' leading to a 'Suez style crisis with the Conservative party tearing itself apart trying to decide whether to back down in the face of massive confrontation with the unions.' (25 Feb).

These fears will have been laid to rest a little by the collapse of the threatened strike by the South Wales miners, the abandonment of Robinson by the Leyland workforce and the drift back to work in private steel. But the success of mass pickets in temporarily closing Hadfields in Sheffield will have brought uneasy memories of Saltley and Pentonville. So, for instance, Alan Watkins of *The Observer* can tell how: 'Sir Geoffrey Howe is none too happy about Mr James Prior's proposals and would like union funds rather than individual trade unionists to be put at risk under civil law: to which the Prior supporters reply with unashamed argument that it was dear Geoffrey who got us in the mess last time.' (24.2.80)

Indeed, Howe was not the only one to be outvoted by fear of a too openly confrontational approach—it seems that over a fortnight ago Thatcher was unable to get a cabinet meeting to push through a one clause bill to ban picketing at places like Hadfields and Sheerness.

Even the police chiefs are not too happy. Some will, of course, use every opportunity to seek to strengthen their own legal powers. But they are very wary of using these powers against large groups of workers for fear of undercutting the 'British tradition' of respect for authority.

'There was never any question of making mass arrests,' said a senior officer at Hadfields. 'If we locked up 500 or 1,000, none of us had much doubt that there would be 5,000 there the next day and 10,000 the day after that. With mass arrests the scene would have turned very ugly.'

This, too, was the message that the chief constables gave to the Home Secretary William Whitelaw, when they met him last week. The police are determined that they are not going to be pushed by politicians into action which might raise the levels of violence beyond their control. They are not prepared to treat pickets, for instance, in the same way as student demonstrations outside the American Embassy, one police chief told the press.



Picture: John Sturrock (Report)

'We could import a group like the French CRS riot police and end the problem of disorder in this country,' said Alan Goodson, who led the chief constables' delegation. 'But that would be deplorable ... We have got to have policing by consent.' In the end, as one senior officer outside Hadfields said: 'We have got to live with these people once the strike is over.' (*Sunday Times*, 24 Feb 80).

None of this means that the 'wet' section of the Tory party are averse to using repression (Whitelaw was, after all, in charge of Northern Ireland at the time of some of the bloodiest murders by the forces of the state). But the British ruling class has a long tradition, going back as far as the time of the Chartists, of avoiding, if it can, head on confrontation with a popular movement that is growing—buying time till it can cause the movement to split, and then using the forces of the state to clean up the divided and demoralised fragments. They believe that such methods have stopped them provoking the sort of mass revolutionary consciousness that European countries such as Germany, France, Italy and Spain have experienced at various times.

Yet there have been points when a different mood has swayed powerful sections of the ruling class, when the economic problems of British capitalism have made them feel that they cannot afford to buy time. That was the mood that came close to prevailing in Tory circles at key moments in 1972 and 1974. And now it is the mood epitomised by Thatcher, Joseph and Howe.

Whether it succeeds in reuniting behind it the mass of Toryism and big business in the months ahead will depend very much on the response of the working class movement.



Yorkshire Miners' reaction to Len Murray on 9 March

picture: John Sturrock (Report)

TUC Tranquilisers

It would be nice to say that the atmosphere of near civil war inside the Tory cabinet had been matched by a concerted development of the class war outside. Unfortunately, it would be a wrong thing to say.

The ranks of the steel workers have fought heroically. They are completing nine weeks of strike without strike pay as we go to press. It is not their fault if steel has systematically leaked through their blockade. They were not to blame for the way their leadership began the strike by arguing against the blacking of private steel, for Sirs' talk of a dispensation for the big Sheffield firm Hadfields in the middle of the strike, for the failure of their leadership to argue effectively with the private steel workers as they drifted back to work, for the contradictory advice it gave on the Steel Corporation's ballot.

Nor were they to blame for the way in which the leadership of the mighty TGWU sat back, week after week, as steel continued to pour in through certain docks and TGWU officials up and down the country told drivers it did not matter if they ignored picket lines.

The TUC organised the huge demonstration in London on 9 March – but did not use it in any way to rally active solidarity with the steel workers. The last such TUC demonstration, against the Heath government's Industrial Relations Act in 1971, was led by postal workers who had been six weeks on strike; a few days later the strike collapsed because the TUC refused to raise the money needed to keep the strike hardship fund going. This time round it did not even bother to go through the motions on the demonstration itself; most of the union leaders there hardly seemed to know the strike was taking place, and the steel workers had to wait their turn well towards the rear of the demonstration.

But then, this time round, the TUC had already done its utmost to bury the potentially most significant move towards solidarity with the steel workers, the call for a South Wales general strike – as we show elsewhere in this *Review*.

But it is not good enough just to say that the steel strike was sustained by rank and file activists, despite the national leadership of 'this great movement of ours'. It is also

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necessary to add that those activists could not themselves coalesce into any organisation capable of taking over the national leadership of the strike. The strike committee made the running from the beginning – but they were *local* strike committees. And they were much more effective in some localities than others.

It was pure chance that enabled them effectively to veto the first attempts at national negotiations: the main union, the ISTC, has long had a system whereby dozens of lay delegates attend formal negotiating sessions; this never meant anything in the past, and the delegacies were hardly contested; but as an average selection of union activists, this time the delegates could hardly avoid reflecting the feelings of the strike committees.

Such accidents have not been able to stop the leaders of the steel unions preparing new terms that go more than half way to meeting the steel corporation's terms for selling jobs. The lack of a *national* rank and file structure has left them with a free hand to do so.

On the initiative of rank and file activists in the Sheffield area a national meeting of strike committee delegates did take place late in February. Unfortunately, it seems that the delegates did not feel confident enough to challenge the union leaders when it came to the *national* direction of the strike. They even went so far as to invite one executive member from each of the ISTC's divisions to their next meeting, so as to make it clear they were not challenging the official leadership's authority. Yet, faced with its appalling record throughout the strike, precisely such a challenge to its leadership of the strike was needed.

Again and again we are brought back to the central weaknesses of our movement – weaknesses that mean that the government stands every chance of emerging from its first major crisis almost unscathed. The official leaders at the top are out to assure the government what good allies they would make if it would only mend its ways. And the very many rank and file activists who will resist particular acts by the TUC have not yet developed the confidence, the clarity of purpose and the political know-how to provide an alternative leadership from below.

The results are enormous gaps in the defence of the whole class against the Tory attacks: gaps when it comes to providing a cohesive response to employers' initiatives, gaps when it comes to union activists communicating with the real rank and file in the workplaces and counteracting management secret ballots. We believe that if these problems are faced openly and honestly the gaps can be closed (for further arguments, see the articles on South Wales and Heathrow). But we have to face the problems. That is why we make no apology for repeating – ad nauseum if necessary – the central argument for building an activist, organised, socialist, party presence in the workplaces.



A knife in the back? Kinnock and Benn

Soft Left Shuffle

Talking about the Labour left after talking about the steel strike is like moving from reality to the nether world. For, the Labour left has said little and done less through all the turmoil of the strike – from the first mass pickets, through the interference of Denning and the scenes at Hadfields and Sheerness, to the Steel Corporation's ballot on a ballot.

The Tory government may have seen the strike as its greatest *political* challenge yet. But for the Labour left it is an 'industrial' issue, something that should not worry the heads of the 'political wing' of the movement. Hence the deafening silence from those who made so much noise about 'left victories' at the time of the Labour Party conference last autumn.

So what has been the 'politics' that has been devouring the time of the Labour left's leaders? It has been the politics of manoeuvre within the structures of the party, especially within the National Executive Committee (NEC) and the Commission of Inquiry into party organisation. In neither, apparently, has the left been doing very well.

His fellow union leaders persuaded Kitson, a TGWU left winger, to withdraw from the Inquiry, and since then they seem to have ensured that the right is well placed in the subcommittees carrying most of the Inquiry's work.

More significantly is what has been taking place on the NEC. It was the domination of this by the left, organised around Benn, which gave the last party conference such a left wing air. The NEC-selected platform speakers were markedly to the left of the official, parliamentary leadership. But the balance in the NEC has now shifted away from Benn's supporters. Individuals like Neil Kinnock and Judith Hart have distanced themselves from Benn, forming the

basis of a 'soft-left' group which will in all likelihood push someone like John Silkin for the party leadership as against Benn.

This does not seem to us an accidental development. Power inside the Labour Party has always depended upon agreement between the three forces which created the party and which sustain it: the individual activists who keep the party just about alive at the local level, represented by the constituency delegates to conference and a minority of NEC members; the Parliamentary Labour Party; and the trade union bureaucracy which, with its block vote, has the predominate voice at conference and in the NEC.

The problem for those on the left who seek to win Labour 'to a socialist policy' has always been that effectively that means winning over a substantial section of the trade union bureaucracy's block vote. So, for instance, the left's demand for a wider body than the parliamentary party to elect the party's leader, is very much, in practice, a demand for the trade union bureaucracy to play a bigger role in such elections.

The trade union bureaucracy does not mind a certain degree of leftism in the party – particularly in the aftermath of Labour governments with which it has fallen out. But it does not like things to go too far. And so there has always been a certain pattern to the development of the Labour left.

It starts off with a certain degree of trade union support and a certain influence within the structures of the party. Then the trade union leaders begin to lay down increasingly stringent conditions for further support. The left faces a choice between being cast out into the outer wilderness – or travelling the road that leads to moderation and the laurels of leadership.

In the 1930s Cripps was cast out (he was expelled from the party) while Attlee

became leader. In the early 1950s Bevan faced expulsion threats while his former friend Wilson moved towards the leadership. In the mid-1950s it was Bevan's turn to buy a place in leadership by denouncing his own erstwhile left colleagues. This time round it only required a minimal flexing of muscle by the bureaucracy in the Kitson affair for Kinnock and Hart to begin to scamper towards the centre.

There is a lesson in all this for those who believe that it is 'more realistic' to work within the Labour Party than to build a new, revolutionary, socialist party. People like Kinnock have got where they are because of sustained work by devoted local activists. But at the end of the day it is not these activists, but the trade union bureaucracy that is the arbiter of their actions.

You cannot break the hold of the trade union bureaucracy on the Labour Party unless you first break its hold on the unions. But for that you need coordinated action in the workplaces—precisely the sort of action of which the Labour left has been so disdainful during the steel strike. You need a party that operates against the trade union bureaucracy outside the Labour Party, not a left which tries to win its ear for fights inside.

Employment

**A
B I L L**

To provide for payments out of public funds towards trade unions' expenditure in respect of ballots, and for the issue by the Secretary of State of Codes of Practice for the improvement of industrial relations; to make provision in respect of exclusion or expulsion from trade unions and otherwise to amend the law relating to workers, employers, trade unions and employers' associations; to repeal section 1A of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974; and for connected purposes.

Presented by Mr. Secretary Prior

**New Law:
Old Memories**

The government has had to go ahead with amendments to its anti-union laws sooner than it wished. The changes, effectively remove trade union 'immunity' from civil prosecution for actions which go beyond the immediate suppliers and purchasers of goods to and from firms hit by strikes. Large areas of union activity, much wider than picketing, are thus opened up for action by employers in the courts—above all, blacking.

In widening the attack on union rights, however, the Tories have come up against the

central dilemma that the Heath government faced in 1972 under its Industrial Relations Act. Thatcher's recent interview on *Panorama* recognised the problem for the government in creating martyrs who are prepared to go to jail by defying the law. Rather than face the risks of mass strike action to free jailed trade unionists, the government wants to make unions as a whole liable for civil damages. This was the course the Heath government originally intended the Industrial Relations Act to take, and which the courts took after the mass strike to free five jailed dockers in July 1972.

The the inconvenient fact which Thatcher preferred to ignore in her BBC interview is that it was not only trade unionists in jail and the resulting strikes which wrecked the Industrial Relations Act. In May 1974, under the new Labour government, the AUEW faced the sequestration of its funds by the courts because the union refused to pay £47,000 compensation to the Woking engineering firm, Con-Mech, where two stewards had been sacked and the union was fighting for recognition. The court froze the AUEW's entire assets. The AUEW called an indefinite national strike—and within hours £70,000 had been anonymously paid into the court. The money was fairly certainly provided by Fleet Street newspaper bosses, who found it a relatively cheap way out.

So both the attack on individual trade union members and the fining of entire unions came up against a wall of solidarity.

Tory View

From the start, Tory theoreticians on union power have concentrated on making unions as a whole legally responsible. This is the case even in publications dating from the 1950s. In 1968 the Tories' fancifully-named *Fair Deal At Work* took the view that sanctions against unions would cause members to avoid taking unofficial action. The Industrial Relations Act's *Code of Industrial Relations Practice* stated in its section 11 that unions were supposed to take all reasonable steps to ensure officials, including stewards, observed agreements and used agreed procedures. The intention was that employers could nail militants by identifying whether they were obeying the rules and then force the union either to take action against the rank and file or face punitive damages in the courts.

The National Industrial Court spelled out in some detail the way the Tories wanted the *Industrial Relations Act* to force unions into the role of policeman. In a 1973 case involving the T&G and a company called Seaboard World Airlines, the court said that union officials 'dissociation' from unofficial blacking action was not enough. The union was expected to go even further and tell its members. 'We are now telling you to perform your contract'.

As the best-informed commentary on the working of the Industrial Relations Act says:

'The effect of the legal doctrine of union responsibility was that where registration had failed to impose new duties on unions to control members, courts could say that such duties were legally extant anyway.'

(Industrial Relations and the Limits of Law by Brian Weekes and others).

Now of course the Industrial Relations Act was swept away following successful defiance of its terms: first unions refused to register under the Act (with a few exceptions)—a crucial decision; secondly, railway workers voted massively to go out on strike in a NIRC-imposed ballot in April 1972; thirdly, the dockers blacking campaign in the summer of 1972 enabled a head of steam to be built up; fourthly, the AUEW refused to recognise the Act, NIRC or anything else involved with the legislation; finally, there was the overwhelming response of engineers to the national strike call on 7th/8th May 1974 over the Con-Mech sequestration.

But even despite this splendid history of defiance, the union bureaucracy was wobbling all over the place. The T&G paid out money in fines—'compensation'—awarded by the Court. And after the Lords' ruling reversing Denning in the *Heatons* blacking case, the TUC issued a circular (TUC Bulletin, September 29th 1972) stating, among other things, that rulebooks could be changed:

The T&G in its advice to members stated that 'no individual member will, in future, have any right to organise others to take strike or similar action.'

What then of Con-Mech? The case when a union did have its funds seized ('sequestered') called an indefinite strike, and won in eight hours. There were a number of peculiarities about the Con-Mech case. First of all the Industrial Relation Act was by that time utterly discredited; there was a new government, pledged to its immediate repeal. The employers were also heartily sick of the whole thing. The AUEW had on several previous occasions defied the law—refusing to appear etc. On October 22nd 1973 the NIRC fined the AUEW £75,000 for contempt of court—there was a one-day national stoppage on November 5th. There was thus a considerable head of steam behind the AUEW stand on the issue.

What was important, however, was the AUEW's principled position of refusing to recognise the NIRC or the Act.

Whether the Tories have forgotten Con-Mech in their concern to exorcise the ghost of the Pentonville Five; or whether they feel that the struggle against sequestration could not be mounted over a simple fine is not clear. They are determined to try and avoid putting stewards (or officials) in jail, but widening the scope of the 'Employment' Bill to cover blacking and solidarity action other than picketing means that they bring the law into 'normal', 'non-violent' trade union affairs.

Dave Beecham.

NEWS & ANALYSIS



Exemplary Cuts

With threatened redundancies of anything between 150 and 300 jobs North East London Polytechnic (NELP) appears at first sight to be just one more casualty in the Tory squeeze on public expenditure. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that, because it hardly competes in sale with redundancies in steel, coal and the docks, and is less dramatic than cuts in the health service, what is happening at NELP is relatively unimportant. It also reflects Tory thinking on the role of education, particularly post-school education.

NELP has to 'lose' £2.4m—some 18 per cent of its budget—owing to the Government's decision to put cash limits on the 'pool' of money that all local authorities contribute to and draw upon in order to finance advanced further education (ie degree and degree-type courses run by polytechnics, colleges and institutions of higher education, and some colleges of further education). This cut is twice the national average (9 per cent) because of various quirks in the way putting cash limits on the 'pool' operates at the local level.

The overall 9 per cent cut is, however, only the first stage of government policy. The next stage will be to work out a formula for distributing the 'pool' based not on a straightforward percentage calculation as it was this year (the government reckoned local authorities 'overestimated' their requirements by 9 per cent), but on what kind of education the government thinks *ought* to be provided in the post-school sector. The importance of what is planned for the implementation of the cut at NELP is that NELP is going to be the experimental laboratory for government policy.

For there is no intention to spread the cut *evenly* throughout the Polytechnic. The 'rationalisation plan' aims to eliminate subjects that are not regarded as 'useful' or 'desirable': hence the sociology, economics and humanities departments are to close. (Even the maths department is to disappear, presumably because it is too 'pure' a subject!) Just what is termed 'useful

or desirable' in this context can be gauged by the visit a deputy director recently paid to NATO headquarters in Brussels, seeking financial support for courses in counter-insurgency.

This radical recasting of the role of NELP closely matches government intentions about what it wants to do with advanced further education. In this area the government has no statutory obligation (as it has with the under sixteens) to provide universal education. It therefore feels free to apply a kind of educational monetarism: access to higher education will be dependent on the value such education brings to the requirements of British capital. Consequently the state will finance non-statutory education only insofar as it 'earns its keep': the market will become the regulatory mechanism.

Rhodes Boyson, of *Black Paper* fame and now in charge of higher and further education, has made this abundantly clear. He is quoted in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (22 February 1980) as not wanting to lay down what institutions do—merely the framework in which 'rationalisation' can occur. This means, in effect, that colleges should, in the words of *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 'digest and interpret the signals from the world of employment to see that they informed the balance and character of higher education courses.'

The Inspectorate are thinking along similar lines. They, too, want to make higher education much more flexible and vocational so that it can respond efficiently to rapid changes in the economy brought about by technological change. There would also be a new framework of ideas, including correct attitudes to the creation of wealth, the maintenance of law and order, the better use of time in work and leisure, etc.

Some of this is not particularly new. In response to the emergence of a near-permanent pool of unemployed school-leavers the last Labour Government set up the Manpower Services Commission. Funds were made available for the creation of courses, largely in further education colleges, designed to provide the young unemployed with 'skills' to cope with, but never to challenge, the effects of an ailing economy.

All this was intended to change expectations: instead of assuming that there were jobs available to match your training, you were now to expect lengthy periods of enforced 'leisure' punctuated by the occasional job, the requirements of which you would have to adapt to. This 'training' was not so much the acquisition of a 'skill' more a process of deskilling.

What Tory policy now seems to envisage for *higher* education is the training of the future managers of this deskilled semi-workforce. It will take place in institutions from which all traces of critical resistance to the imperatives of the market or the need to 'manage' people have been eliminated.

Hence the disappearance of 'radical' subjects like sociology and economics at NELP (along with their 'radical' practitioners), leaving behind only such application of the subjects that can be 'vocational' or 'useful'.

What we are now beginning to see, therefore, is the creation of a post-school education that abandons long cherished ideals. Gone is the Robbins principle that governed the expansion of this sector from the sixties onwards. Higher education is no longer to be a right for all those suitably qualified who would benefit from such an education. The Robbins principle allowed the 'liberal' ideal of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge (education for education's sake) to be preserved within the conviction that relatively open access to a state-funded higher education would generate new expertise ultimately beneficial to the economy. What we witnessed, in effect, was a kind of educational Keynesianism: free from the immediate pressures of the market the state could develop in a relatively autonomous fashion the kind of education that would provide skills designed to ensure the smooth running of the economy.

No wonder it was beloved of social-democrats. The expansion of higher education in the 60s confused two quite distinct ideas: the requirements of the capitalist economy with general social requirements. So long as it looked as if capitalism could 'grow over' into socialism, the Robbins principle, with its implicit faith in the ability of the state to 'educate' capitalism to satisfy human needs, remained intact. Educational ideals were consonant with the needs of capitalism.

While the Labour government cut at education they did not, except in a fumbling way, abandon that principle—they merely claimed it had to be deferred. The Tories, on the other hand, have both continued to cut and 'realistically' jettisoned any illusion that education is a 'right' under capitalism. Just as, in their dismantling of the welfare state, they are claiming that health care is a 'right' only if the wealth is first created, so they are decreeing that access to further higher education (and so the maintenance of this education sector) is a 'right' dependent on its role in the inculcation of the proper attitude towards and creation of that wealth.

What all this means for socialists is that, while we must continue to protect the education service we have, we must also recognise that defence of the *status quo* demands a socialist reappraisal of education—not a return to the outmoded ideals of the 60s. Of course we exploit tactically the abandonment of the Robbins principle and the outrage this causes, but since the Tories are raising the question of to whose benefit is education we can hardly retreat into the answer that it is to the benefit of itself. To the Tory cry of 'needs of industry', we must respond 'needs of the working class'.

Gareth Jenkins

Afghanistan: Still a Pawn

We will probably provoke howls of outrage from some quarters. But nevertheless, we'll tentatively put forward the suggestion. A lot of people, in Britain at least, must be becoming just a little bored with the question of Afghanistan.

It's understandable. Afghanistan may not be permanent number one on the news bulletins any more, but it's still artificially kept up there night after night. And from media which never previously showed the slightest concern for the sufferings of this desperately poor country, that begins to produce a credibility gap. So too do the contents of the bulletins, night after night (from 'usually reliable sources on the Pakistan border') about the doings of so far faceless insurgents. For not a quarter of them can be true — otherwise the tattered remnants of the Russian Army would have scuttled over their border long ago. Above all, for all the comings and goings on the diplomatic stage, there seems to be little change in Afghanistan itself since the Russian invasion over two months ago.

Have we missed anything? By and large not. The Russians remain, occupying the country with massive force, trying to play it cool, but not having much success in the face of countrywide guerrilla opposition. The insurgents are causing the Russians immense political and military headaches, but, disunited against the Russian military machine, show little prospect of winning.

Only two interconnected developments can be noted with much certainty. The first is that Russia's Afghan puppet Karmal has utterly failed to broaden the base of his regime. And that, remember, was his job. He was installed by the Russians to echo agreement with them, but also to overcome the isolation into which his murdered (and murderous) predecessor, Amin, had dug himself. But from the day Karmal released political prisoners and caused a riot at Kabul jail because he hadn't released enough, he has failed in this job. To put it crudely, Karmal's 'conciliatory' gestures have been lost behind the hostility generated by his dependence on the Russians.

Second is February's riots, and shopkeepers' and civil servants' strikes in the cities, above all Kabul. Again, think back. Support for the April '78 revolution came almost exclusively from the cities. Until the riots it could remain an open question how much of this support still remained. The riots, and the absence of even any attempt at government orchestrated counter-displays in the cities, make it clear that very, very little of this support remains.

What do these developments mean for revolutionaries in the West? In themselves they should (if bald facts are anything in political argument) stop in their tracks those



well-meaning comrades who think that to oppose imperialism it is necessary to make critical apologetics for Russia. It is not the April '78 revolution that is being defended by the 'Red' Army, but a puppet regime that is being propped up in the interests of the foreign policy of the Kremlin bureaucracy. That is why we say the Russian troops should get out of Afghanistan.

But we don't join in the hymns of praise

Left Out in the Cold

Since the defeat of the Union of the Left in the March 1978 parliamentary elections, the political situation in France has seen marked a general disillusionment towards the Left. For instance, nobody seriously believes that, in next year's Presidential election, the candidate of the Left (whoever he might be) will have much chance of defeating Giscard d'Estaing. Most people are convinced that the right wing will be in office for seven more years and that nothing can be done to avoid this.

This disillusionment has propped up opposition both inside the SP and the CP. In the SP, the already right-wing leadership of Francois Mitterrand is threatened by Michel Rocard who leads a tendency opposing any long-term agreement with the CP. As for the CP leadership, it is facing opposition from its intellectuals (people like Ellenstein or Fiszbin — the former leader of the CP's Paris Federation) who are in favour of renewing the honeymoon with Mitterrand and who attack Marchais for his 'sectarianism'.

Another sign of the crisis in the two main left-wing parties is the loss of many of their rank and file activists. This issue is less serious for the SP than for the CP, since the SP's main strength never lay amongst its ordinary member but amongst its MPs and its local and regional councillors. But the CP's influence within the working class is mainly due to the daily activities of devoted, honest and committed members. So a loss of some of these activists would automatically mean a decline inside the working class, and

in the press for the 'freedom fighters'. Would that there were tens of thousands streaming through the streets of Kabul shouting for land reform. The insurgents remain what they originated as: a localist and reactionary movement, fuelled now no doubt greatly by opposition to the Russian occupation, but equally fuelled by the arms and advisers channelled through General Zia's Pakistan. And, given their nature, that must mean that they will ultimately remain prisoners, if not puppets, of Western imperialism.

So, as Western imperialism fights its junior rival for an edge in international kudos at the expense of the people of Afghanistan, our task remains clear: to fight the war mongers in our own camp and to expose their hypocrisy. That means opposing them arming their unpleasant little clients, opposing their Olympic boycott charades, and being ever vigilant against the military adventures for which they are softening up Western public opinion. We believe we are strengthened in that major task by facing up to the facts of what has happened in Afghanistan, and what Russia is up to, and saying that the Russian troops should get out.

the CP cannot just sit back and take this. Thus, in order to keep its grip over its membership and sympathisers, in a situation where there is no prospect of electoral success, the leadership of the CP has decided to adopt a 'tough', 'radical' line in two different fields: in foreign policy and in trade-union struggle.

For its foreign policy, the CP maintains an ultra-nationalistic line on issues like the Common Market, NATO and the deployment of US missiles in Western Europe (it is in favour of French-built nuclear weapon and missiles). It has organised street demonstrations on these issues to convince its membership that the SP, which had refused to join in the demonstrations, was in fact playing into the hands of the French bourgeoisie and US imperialism. Even the CP's recent decision to back the Russian invasion of Afghanistan was mainly used as a way of showing up the SP (which opposed the invasion) as an 'accomplice' of Giscard, Carter, Thatcher and Schmidt.

During the last two years, the trade-union struggle has been fairly active. The strikes and other actions taken by workers over economic issues and standard of living have been threatened by the three successive anti-working class 'Plans Barea'. But the extent of the strikes and the fact that some of them lasted for several weeks was also due to a deliberate policy of the CP-led CGT trade-union.

Unable to offer a clear political perspective to its membership, and more generally to the working class as a whole, the CP

decided to make a left turn in the economic struggles. This mainly consisted of taking the lead in any defensive action of the workers (and not to oppose them, as it did before 1978) and to appear, through the CGT, as the best defender of the working class (by contrast with the SP which has very weak roots amongst industrial manual workers). So, last year, CPers were at the forefront of the steelworkers' struggles in Lorraine and in the North of France and organised 'illegal' actions like setting up road blockades, attacking the riot police's barracks, occupying official buildings, organising workers' patrols in the streets of the steel towns, and establishing a CGT radio broadcasting station (called 'Lorraine Coeur d'Acier'). Not only did the CP leadership support all these actions but 'L'Huma-Dimanche', the Sunday paper of the party, even called one of its editorials 'Long live violence, gentlemen!'

On other occasions, such as during the strike which for two months paralysed the heavy engineering trust of Alstom-Atlantique, the CPers not only spread the strike from one factory to all the others of the company but also organised occupations and pickets. In sectors like the railways, insurance companies, banks and

transport, the CGT did its utmost to appear more determined than its Social-Democratic rival CFDT or the openly right-wing FO. And, to a large extent, the CGT has succeeded in this.

However the left turn of the CP in the economic struggles has very definite limits. The CP is ready to set off, support or spread strikes and other defensive actions, but only as long as these have no chance of 'degenerating' into a national united struggle of all workers against the government.

The CP is leading these actions not to strengthen the working class but merely to improve its own image. So, even in these actions, the CP opposes any move to set up democratically elected strike committees, or any other autonomous body; during the Alstom strikes for example the CP denounced these pickets who were not under its direct control.

As long as the combativity of the whole working class is not very high, (which is the case for the moment) there is no unlikely that this policy will enable the leadership to silence many of its rank and file militants who openly voiced criticisms against Marchais in recent months.

Ray Whiteleaf

arrested on the charge of murdering two mill officials killed during the fighting and fought their cases. It led a city-wide agitation for the nationalisation of the entire Swadeshi combine.

Gradually, through long and patient propaganda, it attracted militants from other industries in the town like Defence, the banks, and other textile mills. It became the central focus for renewed class-consciousness throughout the town. It even succeeded in forcing the nationalisation of the Mills.

The Committee has in effect converted itself into a unified union. It has support from activists who will not join because of pressure from their parties. It has published its accounts - a striking contrast to the attitude of the older unions. It drew up a plant level programme on issues ranging from the ending of corruption in the canteen to resistance to sackings. It has established a Martyrs Memorial Trust which annually organises the memorial for the workers killed in 1977.

It is now known as the Swadeshi Samyukta Morcha and has spread beyond the Swadeshi Mill. It has provided funds for workers in other textile plants fighting for their jobs and took the initiative in organising a general strike in the Kanpur textile mills on 20 August 1978 in protest against a sell-out by the official unions.

Unlike other tendencies, the Committee tries to organise workers as a class instead of simply trying to recruit them to this or that party. It also has a democratic internal structure with elections for representatives from each shift and department.

The influence of the Committee has helped activists in other mills to raise the demand for unifying the unions. They have also started a socialist discussion forum outside the plants to help people clarify their views. It has organised a library and sponsored seminars, plays, etc.

These activities have led to more general political considerations. For example, the Committee now thinks that the unions should help to organise the poor peasants and agricultural labourers to displace the influence of bourgeois parties like the Indira Congress which rely on their control of the rural masses for their electoral base.

The movement today commands considerable support, but it is still in its early stages. The average level of political consciousness amongst activists is very low and they need time to clarify their ideas before making more definite political decisions.

The return of the Indira Congress to power with a huge majority will mean that they will face new battles. Already some of the activists face suspension charges and such attacks are bound to intensify. The movement is still in its infancy, but it has shown what can be done.

Indian Rank and File

Many people in Britain, even some socialists, think of India as a country of peasants. Certainly, the peasantry are the bulk of the population, but there is also a massive and well-established working class. The impact of the world crisis has hit workers there even harder than in the developed countries, and they, too, have begun to fight back. They, too, have encountered obstacles in the complacent bureaucrats in trade unions and they, too, have begun to develop forms of rank and file organisations. In this article *Mobit Seri*, writes about the best developed of these organisations.

On 6 December 1977, the armed Central Reserve Police opened fire on workers from the Swadeshi Cotton Textile Mills at Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh State. They killed 15. The local capitalists hoped that this would crush the rising militancy of the textile workers who had just 'locked-in' their Mill Manager demanding the payment of wages overdue by two months. Instead, it provided the stimulus for a powerful rank and file movement that is rebuilding the unions in the Uttar Pradesh textile industry into a unified and democratic movement.

The existing unions were very weak and divided. The Swadeshi Mills employ about 8,000 workers of whom only half were in unions. These were split into 5

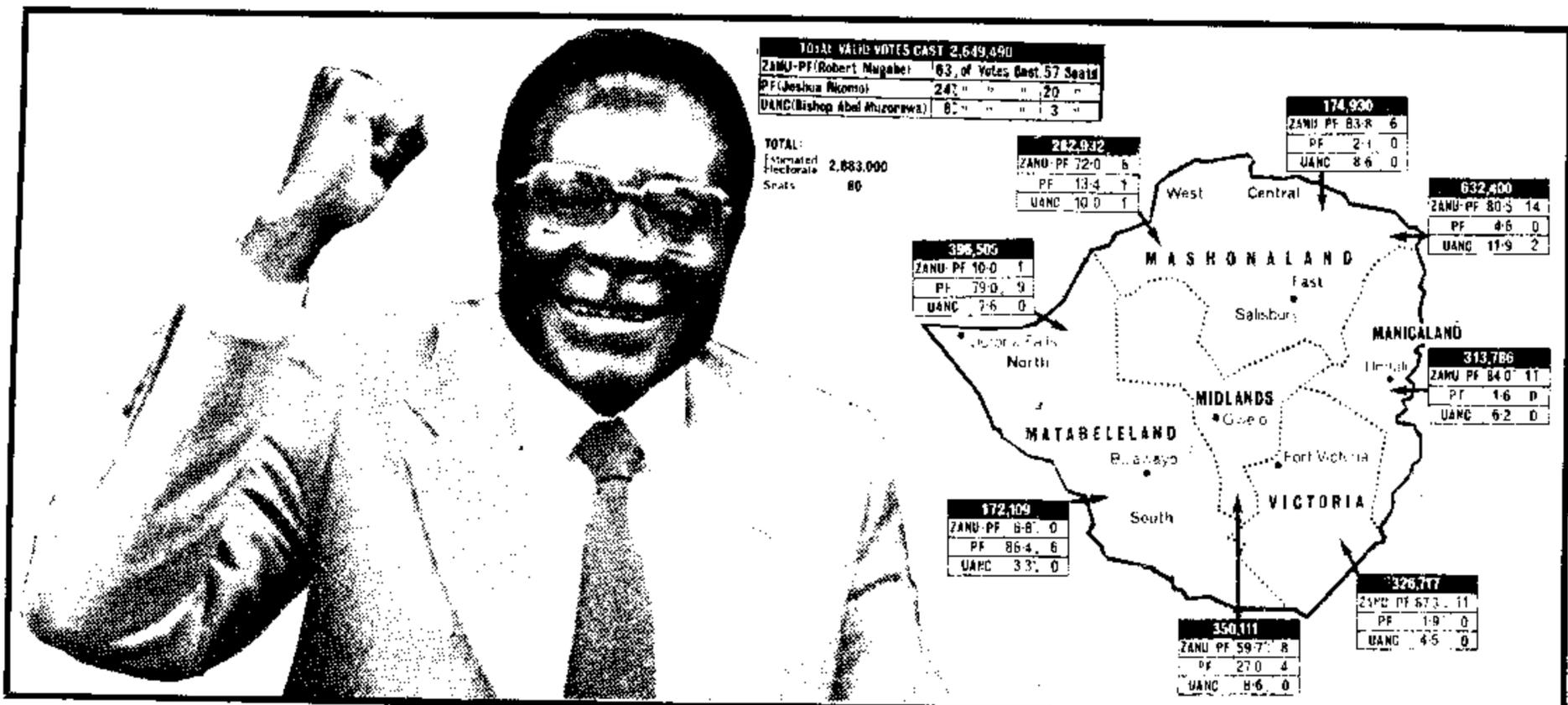
major and 13 minor unions. The major unions are allied with political parties. In the Swadeshi Mills, the big five were those aligned with the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party (Marxist), the Congress Party, the Jana Sangh Party and the Socialist Party.

Even these unions were weak. None of them had a paid membership of more than 700 and no more than 300 of these ever attended meetings. They had organised very few strikes in the last ten years.

They were also very bureaucratised. Many of the union leaders were lawyers and running the unions took up a lot of resources. The majority of their income and energy went to fighting court cases or financing the activities of the parties to which they were affiliated.

In the 1950s and 1960s the industry was profitable and it was relatively easy for workers to keep their wages on a par with inflation. But in the 1970s the owners began a major attack which accelerated under Mrs Gandhi's Emergency in 1975. This involved transferring funds to newer units near Delhi and defaulting on wages. They attempted to victimise militants and increase the work-load. The unions were unable to meet this offensive.

Immediately after the massacre, activists from all the unions got together and formed a local Mill Level Committee. This did what the official unions failed to do. It organised relief for the victims. It stood bail for the 400 workers



Which way for Zimbabwe?

The overwhelming victory of ZANU (PF) in the Zimbabwean general election of 27-9 February 1980 is an event of historic importance. Given an opportunity to vote, the Zimbabwean people elected the most radical of the parties standing, the party most clearly identified with the armed struggle. They did so despite the efforts of the Rhodesian state, nominally controlled by Lord Soames, who in any case made his hostility to ZANU (PF) obvious. For South Africa's rulers 4 March 1980, when Robert Mugabe was appointed prime minister of Zimbabwe, was (in more senses than one) a black day.

The consequences of this election for the rest of southern Africa could be enormous. Zimbabwe has one of the most developed economies south of the Sahara. It also has, outside South Africa, the largest settler population of any former colony (at the end of 1977, 263,000 whites to 6,500,000 Africans). It directly borders on South Africa.

A Marxist Party?

In order to assess these consequences, it is necessary first to examine the nature of the party which came to power at the beginning of March 1980. The *Daily Express* described Mugabe as the 'second elected Marxist leader' the first being Salvador Allende. Leaving aside the accuracy of this statement — parties describing themselves as Marxist have won elections in the past, is ZANU (PF) a Marxist party?

Certainly this is what Bishop Muzorewa's UANC would have had people believe. The main thrust of their propaganda has been the Marxist danger represented by Mugabe. One UANC advertisement declared:

In communist Zimbabwe no man will own land and no man will own his own business. All will be workers of the government. Land will be tilled on communal farms and the fruit of each man's labour will belong to the state. Communism means even the loss of your

beloved children who will be taken by the state and sent to labour on state farms or learn in communist schools.

(*The Herald* 26 February 1980).

Muzorewa's hysterical propaganda boomeranged against him. When people have nothing to begin with telling them that a certain party is against private property is more likely to make them support it than spurn it. In reality, however, ZANU (PF)'s election manifesto was impeccably moderate and social-democratic. It promised to resettle peasants on unused or under-utilised land and land owned by absentee landlords; to make the state a partner in the mining industry; to introduce a free national health service and free and compulsory schooling. Mugabe told *Newsweek* that he planned no immediate nationalisations and the *Rand Daily Mail* that he would not necessarily oppose South African investment in Zimbabwe. Hardly rabid red bolshevism.

The ZANU (PF) manifesto justifies its moderation thus:

'In working towards the socialist transformation of Zimbabwean society, a ZANU government will... recognise historical, social and other existing practical realities in the capitalist system which cannot be transformed overnight. Hence, while a socialist transformation process will be underway in many areas of the existing economic sectors, it is recognised that private enterprise will have to continue until circumstances are ripe for socialist change'.

Only an idiot would argue that Zimbabwe (or indeed Britain) could leap from capitalism to communism 'overnight'. The danger is that, since ZANU (PF) has come to power by parliamentary means, since the settler state still exists intact and since there is no independent organisation of the masses, the transition will be one, not from capitalism to socialism, but from settler capitalism to a weak and dependent bureaucratic state capitalism.

In terms of its history and social composition, ZANU (PF) is less a workers' and peasants' party than a traditional bourgeois-nationalist party. It was founded in August 1963 with Ndabaningi Sithole as its president and Robert Mugabe as its secretary-general as a breakaway from the Zimbabwe Africa People's Union. In part it originated in differences over strategy with ZAPU. The latter's president, Joshua Nkomo, placed much faith in the British government's ability and willingness to introduce majority rule over the settlers' heads and sought to set up a government-in-exile through which to place diplomatic pressure on the British. The founders of ZANU advocated a strategy of organising within the country, and of 'Confrontation rather than Circumvention'. The first guerilla action of any significance was mounted by ZANU near Sinoia in 1966.

Tribal factors also played a part in the split, and continue to underly the differences between ZANU (PF) and PF (as ZAPU now calls itself). Nkomo's base lies among the Ndebele and Kalanga of south-western Zimbabwe, who together form 19 per cent of the African population. ZANU (PF), by contrast, draws its support from the Shona peoples, who make up 77 per cent of the African population. This difference was reflected in the elections: although many of the PF leadership are Shona (for example Willie Musarurwa and Josiah Chinamano), Nkomo won 24 per cent of the vote and 20 seats, mainly in the two provinces of Matabeleland, while Mugabe swept the other six, predominantly Shona, provinces. Here is one evident source of danger for the new Zimbabwe government: tribal differences are closely wound up in the bases of the two main parties.

The African Middle Class

The differences between ZANU (PF) on the one hand, and PF and the UANC on the other, are certainly not simple class ones. A significant section of the African business

classes support ZANU (PF). I travelled with a ZANU (PF) candidate in Midlands province when he was campaigning in Selukwe tribal trust land. The candidate, SE Matiyenga, was an accountant in Gwelo, the third largest city and capital of the Midlands. The local party chairman, T Gandire, was a fat little man who owned a second-hand American car and wore braces. He had owned the hotel at Donga, a township in the Tribal Trust Lands, but now had a couple of stores. Then there was the charming and urbane African businessman who I met in Salisbury. He had just returned to Zimbabwe after many years in exile to set up an import-export business and join the local board of Barclays Bank. He made his support for Mugabe quite obvious.

Support for ZANU (PF) on the part of the black bourgeoisie was not simply tribal—Muzorewa's UNAC is also a Shona party. Nor narrowly economic—under Muzorewa a variety of bodies had emerged to fund black business, notably Febco (backed by the banks) and the government-owned Development Finance Company, run by Basil Muzorewa, the Bishop's brother.

As an economic force, however, the African bourgeoisie is small and weak. According to Eddie Cross, economist with the Agricultural Marketing Authority, the country now has some 20,000 black businessmen. This includes some 5,400 general traders in the Tribal Trust Lands, 5,900 other traders running mills, repair shop services, service stations, butcheries, bottle stores and beerhalls, 4,000 other miscellaneous business enterprises in tribal areas and 5,000 urban businessmen. Cross estimates that the business sector accounts for 10 per cent of gross output of manufactures and commerce, 7.5 per cent of employment in rural areas and three per cent of employment in urban areas. (*Commerce*, magazine of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, February 1980).

The Rhodesian Front regime involved an alliance of white farmers with the white urban middle class and working class. All these groups had a vested interest in denying blacks political power—the farmers because they exploit ultra-cheap black labour, workers and middle class because they benefit from huge wage differentials (in 1977 average European earnings were 6,156 dollars per annum, African earnings 588 dollars*) and guaranteed state employment (in 1969 37.31 per cent of employed Europeans worked in the public sector, compared to 14 per cent of employed Africans). The internal settlement of 3 March 1978 signed with Muzorewa and Sithole appeared to offer the opportunity to preserve this situation while formally handing over power to blacks. For many African businessmen, Muzorewa's regime offered only marginal improvements in their status; a real transformation of their position would depend on the systematic use of state power in favour of the black bourgeoisie. Moreover, the black intelligentsia, from whom much of the nationalist leadership are drawn, remained completely excluded from power.

As in the case of most of the less developed countries, the state is the crucial instrument through which the local bourgeoisie can win its place in the sun. In Zimbabwe it has largely been the settler bourgeoisie which has taken advantage of the state, both to secure and reinforce the super-exploitation of black labour in the mines and agriculture, and to build up secondary industry, particularly during and after the second world war and in the post-UDI period. Now the African bourgeoisie hopes to supplant the settlers and to turn the state into an instrument for *their* advancement.



Most significant sectors of the economy are controlled by foreign capital. In mining, agriculture, manufacturing, finance and banking, hotels and breweries it is South African capital in particular which is dominant—Anglo-American. Hulleths, South African Breweries, although British corporations (Lonrho, Rio Tinto Zinc, for example) and some local concerns (Thomas Meikle and Son) are of significance. There is estimated to be two billion Rhodesian dollars' worth of foreign investment in Zimbabwe.

The Land Question

The problem of foreign capital is closely bound up with the land question. 83 per cent of the African population still live outside the main urban areas. The grossly unequal system of land ownership lies at the heart of Rhodesian settler capitalism. 39,979,963 acres of farming land are allocated to the Tribal Trust Lands, where 95 per cent of the African rural population live. There are 675,000 peasant farmers in the Tribal Trust Lands. There are 38,564,496 acres of farming land in the former European areas (now called the commercial farming areas, although the change is largely nominal). These areas contain 6,682 farms. Thus, African farmers outnumber white farmers 100 to 1 on roughly the same area.

The result is massive overpopulation in the Tribal Trust Lands. There are 2½ times as many cultivators there than the optimum farming conditions laid down by the Rhodesian government recommend.

The African peasants are condemned to subsistence farming in conditions where it is very difficult for them to support themselves and their dependents out of their production. The result is the migrant labour system, whereby people move from the Tribal Trust Lands to work in white-owned farms, mines, factories and homes for longer or shorter periods of time. Between 60 and 75 per cent of all African households depend on wage-labour for their subsistence. Wages are kept low by the existence of the tribal trust lands, which help to support back workers' dependents and provide a social security system for the old and infirm.

Here lies the heart of the problem for ZANU (PF). Any real solution for the agrarian question must involve the expropriation of the big white farms. Yet the ZANU (PF) election manifesto is studiously ambiguous on this matter—it talks, as we have seen, about 'unproductive' and 'unused or underused' farms, and about absentee landlords, but does not state whether a ZANU (PF) government will take over the highly efficient and profitable farms owned by local and foreign agribusiness.

The danger is that, as in Kenya, the establishment of majority rule will leave the structure of social relations in the countryside largely unchanged, merely permitting rich African peasants to supplant the less efficient white farmers. One businessman working for Anglo-American, the vast South African multinational conglomerate, told me cynically: 'Whoever comes to power the peasants will lose out. What we need is a ruthless government to keep them down. Mugabe will be more ruthless, so let's have him'.

Mining and Industry

Zimbabwe is an important mineral producer, exporting gold, copper, asbestos, nickel, chrome and coal. In 1979 the value of mineral production was 314.7 million dollars, nearly twice the level five years previously. The industry is dominated by foreign firms—Anglo-American, Union Carbide, Turner and Newell, Asbestos Investments, Lonrho, Messina. The ZANU (PF) election manifesto promises that 'the need for direct state involvement in the mining industry on a partnership basis will be examined'. This sounds suspiciously like the strategy adopted in Zambia after independence, when the state took a 51 per cent share in the copper mines. The mining companies—Anglo-American and Amax—were provided with generous compensation, left in charge of the actual running of the mines, and given service and management contracts which permitted them to repatriate a large share of the profits.

Compensation for expropriated property owners is one burden that the new Zimbabwean government will be burdened with. The constitution agreed at Lancaster House guarantees the settlers generous compensation. Thus it would cost over 500 million dollars to expropriate 75 per cent of white land at current prices.

Furthermore, mass unemployment dogs the Zimbabwe economy. Under the impact of war and world recession real gross

domestic product fell by 13.4 per cent between 1975 and 1978. It is estimated that African living standards fell by nearly 40 per cent during that period. The Zimbabwean population is growing at a rate of 3.8 per cent a year, one of the highest in the world. By the year 2000 the labour force will have doubled, requiring 95,000 new jobs to be created very year.

To begin to solve these problems would require the implementation of a radical economic programme, and, in particular, confrontation with the settlers and the multinationals. Yet it is not clear that ZANU (PF) is prepared to undertake such measures. Its manifesto and other public statements wobble between a pledge to resolve the land question and measures which seem to aim at supplanting the settler bourgeoisie with its black equivalents as junior partners of foreign capital.

The Zimbabwean working class is large by African standards—a quarter of a million industrial workers, 342,000 farm-labourers. It has traditions of struggle dating back to the very early days of settler rule. The general strike of 1948 helped stimulate the African nationalist movement. Joshua Nkomo first entered politics as secretary of the Railway Workers Association. But in recent years the black working class has been subdued. The trade-union movement is tiny and divided. The larger of the two African trade-union bodies—ATUC—claims 18,000 members. The unions are top-heavy and bureaucratic, with little rank-and-file participation, and tend to organise only the best paid workers. Phineas Sithole, president of ATUC, ran in the general election as a candidate for ZANU, the party headed by his relative, Mugabe's erstwhile leader, Ndabaningi Sithole.

It is as if the African working class became temporarily submerged in the broader national movement. The question is, how long they will remain submerged. Certainly urban workers and unemployed youth will be among the sections of the population whose expectations will be highest.

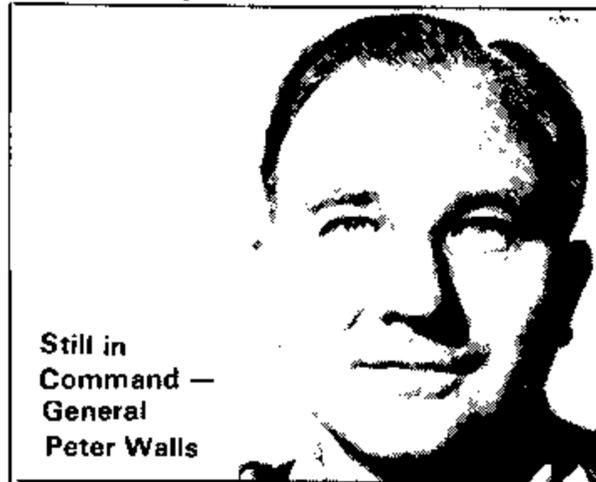
ZANU (PF) claim that they will encourage trade unions and even respect the right to strike in state-owned firms. Mugabe told a delegation of white businessmen he met before the election that he thought the British trade unions were a good example of a strong working-class movement. They were furious: 'That's a very unfortunate example,' they said.

The State

In the short term, the biggest problem facing the new regime is the Rhodesian state. It is a unique situation. ZANU (PF) will assume power under the supervision of the colonial power, Britain. Yet the state machine is one controlled, not by Whitehall, but by the settlers. Furthermore, it is a state against which ZANU (PF) has waged a bitter war. In the case of other settler societies in Africa, the state was controlled by the colonial power—Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Angola. Yet when Lord Soames flies to London, Mugabe will be left facing Ian

Smith and Lieutenant-General Peter Walls, Commander of Combined Operations.

It is Walls who is the crucial figure in the situation. The Rhodesian security forces constitute a formidable military machine, and one never defeated in battle. There is an army of 20,000 (including 14,000 mainly white conscript) and an air force of 1,500 backed up by the paramilitary British South Africa Police (6,000), 35,000 police reservists (mainly white), 6,000 guard force in the protected villages and 30,000 security force auxiliaries, Muzorewa's private army, the hated *Madzajutsaku*.



Still in
Command —
General
Peter Walls

The regular army is 80% black and will probably find little difficulty in shifting their allegiances. Greater problems will be provided by various elite units—the all-white 1,000 strong Rhodesia Light Infantry which provided the helicopter-borne 'fire-force' during the war, the SAS, the Selous Scouts, notorious for dirty tricks such as the recent bombing campaign against churches, and the mounted Grey Scouts. These forces, and groups of armed white civilians (there are 100,000 licenced privately owned arms and probably as many illegal guns in white hands) could provide the base of a white terrorist organisation like the OAS in Algeria.

It is no doubt to counter such a danger that Mugabe has been so conciliatory, for example, putting General Walls in charge of the integration of the security forces and the 22,000 guerillas of ZIPRA and ZANLA. Mugabe's hand is greatly strengthened by the legitimacy he enjoys thanks to his overwhelming election victory. It is very unlikely that South Africa will intervene militarily to overturn a Mugabe government—the pressure on the west to impose economic sanctions against South Africa would be irresistible.

There are other dangers on the horizon, however. If Mugabe proceeds too cautiously he may so disillusion and demoralise the mass of workers, peasants and unemployed that he renders himself vulnerable to a coup. This was the fate of Salvador Allende in Chile. Alternatively, Zimbabwe is very vulnerable to South African economic pressure. As we have seen, South African capital dominates many sectors. UDI and the war bound Zimbabwe closely to South Africa. It will not be easy to break these links. PW Botha's strategy of creating a southern African 'constellation' of states directed by Pretoria relies very heavily on the mechanisms of economic dependence binding many African states to the apartheid regime. Mozambique and Zambia's support for the Lancaster House agreement was

largely dictated by economic necessity.

Mugabe's greatest weapon is the mass support he so evidently enjoys. But ZANU (PF)'s programme, composition and traditions contain little room for the independent organisation of the workers and peasants. ZANU (PF) leaders assured me that they are in favour of grass roots democracy, but the sort of democracy they advocate can take place only within the framework of the party and in the localities.

Independent forms of organisation, based on the process of production, wider than party allegiances, linked together to form the basis of the state apparatus, are not envisaged in their scheme of things. Yet it is these forms of organisation alone that could consolidate a genuinely popular regime in Zimbabwe and enable it both to resist attack and carry through a programme which would meet the burning needs of the African masses.

The attitude of revolutionary socialists to the Zimbabwean elections should, therefore, be a balanced one. It is a triumph for the liberation struggle in southern Africa, one of the most serious blows yet to be struck against the apartheid regime in southern Africa. It has opened the doors to Zimbabwe's workers and peasants, offering them the opportunity to end their exploitation for ever. It is our duty to defend the new government of Zimbabwe from the attacks it will undoubtedly suffer from imperialism.

It does not follow, however, that we should adopt a completely uncritical attitude to ZANU (PF). The experience of radical nationalist regimes in southern Africa is now sufficiently great for us to be aware of their limits. None has gone beyond the attempt to build up a strong native capitalist class based on control of the state. None has permitted the independent organisation of the masses. None has been able to avoid collaboration with Western and South African capitalism. The nature of ZANU (PF) and the conditions under which it comes to power make one doubt that the experience will be any different this time.

This is not a pessimistic conclusion. White power has been further weakened in southern Africa. Western capitalism—which hoped to see a Muzorewa-Nkomo-Smith coalition—has suffered a serious political defeat. Above all, the black working class in South Africa, the most powerful social force on the continent, has been given renewed hope.

There have been stirrings in the South African townships of late. A strike by black workers closed down Ford's Port Elizabeth plants for several weeks. Three guerillas belonging to the African National Congress took over a bank in Silverton, Pretoria, in January and were gunned down by the security forces. They were given a heroes' funeral in Soweto. The South African Defence Force took over northern Natal after incidents involving ANC guerillas. It was MPLA's victory in Angola and Frelimo's in Mozambique which helped spark off the Soweto uprising of 1976. Perhaps ZANU (PF)'s victory will set the South African townships alight once more.

Alex Callinicos

Easy-oozy, wily wobble

'Ten degrees to the left of centre in good times,' sang the late Phil Ochs. 'Ten degrees to the right when it affects me personally... Love me, love me, I'm a liberal'.

Ochs, from New York, was not singing about *The Guardian* newspaper, having almost certainly had the good fortune never to set eyes on the publication.

But he could have been. The quotation's apt. And the type of easy-oozey, wily-wobble political poseur he depicted is the archetypical Guardian-person.

The Guardian prides (it is the exact word) itself on being the journalistic defender of British-liberal values. And so it is. It stands for the poor and the underprivileged—and sincerely regrets that, under present circumstances, there is little can be done about their situation.

It is sternly opposed to racism, and agonises over the necessity, as things stand at the moment, for racist immigration laws. It is willing fearlessly to expose corruption in the police force, while making the point that, taking everything into account and looking at both sides of the question, the police are, on the whole, wonderful.

It counsels against anti-trade union law, while highlighting the importance of taking whatever steps are required to end the distressing scenes of militancy at factory gates. It is genuinely concerned about the likely effects of Thatcher's cuts in public services while recognising that, however unwelcome consequences, a cogent case can, on balance be made for stringent control of public spending (in the light of ongoing economic circumstances). *The Guardian* wrestles daily with its conscience, and wins.

I began reading *The Guardian* when I foolishly went to university because I had gathered somewhere or other that reading *The Guardian*, so the theory ran, you could become incredibly well-informed and impress people at debates. You would know, for example, the name of the foreign minister of Venezuela and casually toss it in.

Up to a point, there was, and is, some basis for this theory. There's quite a lot in *The Guardian*. But I realised after a time that while I had become a dab hand at the facts, I didn't seem to know what the facts meant. The name of the Venezuelan foreign minister, no problem. The reason why things were as they were in Venezuela, no notion.

And, one gradually made the awesome discovery that, for understanding, the high Tory *Daily Telegraph* was much the superior broadsheet and took furtively to toting a copy around hidden guiltily beneath the slogan-festooned combat jacket.

The Telegraph was and is better because it has always had a clearly expressed point of view. This is helpful in two ways. As a general rule of thumb, you can take it that anything the *Telegraph* denounces cannot be all bad. More fundamentally, the fact

that *The Telegraph* is openly opinionated from a class viewpoint gives its coverage of events a clear perspective which, although not ours, can illuminate causes as well as reports on effects. Class warriors like Colin Welch and Robert Moss, in their endless search for socialist subversion on the one hand, and capitalist weakness on the other, actually analyse.

You don't get writers like that in the *Guardian*: *Guardian* persons in their *de rigueur* denims would choke on their real ale at the prospect. *Guardian* writers are objective, their objectivity shrouded in an impenetrable fog of blandness and a vague sense of social concern. Usually it is not at all clear what, if anything, *Guardian* writers believe except that, somehow, things ought to be rather better than they are...

'The Guardian wrestles daily with its conscience — and wins'

To discern *The Guardian's* politics it is necessary to examine where it has stood on issues which affected matters, as it were, personally.

For example: I haven't done any research on this (and don't intend to do any) but am willing to bet a strong Sterling pound against a bent Irish penny that no *Guardian* writer would have been permitted to express, however blandly or vaguely, a view that it was an OK thing for a Western capitalist government to incinerate thousands of Asian workers and peasants... until a Western capitalist government (The United States) began doing just that. At which point (during the bombing of Hanoi) the paper (after much public agonising, mind you, and with heart-felt feelings of regret) decided that (sigh) it was really the only course.

Similarly, a bottle of Jameson against a half pint of shandy says *The Guardian* was totally opposed to closing down hospitals until hospitals began to be closed down.

In good times *The Guardian* is against *The Telegraph's* politics...

(It is, perhaps, worth recalling that in 1926 after the General Strike *The Guardian* in Manchester formed a scab union to get the paper out: thus, no doubt, to report the proceedings from an entirely objective point of view).

None of this is to say that there is nothing good in *The Guardian*.

It employs a very witty, if shallow-minded, television critic called Nancy Banks Smith. A fine, if too-tortured, descriptive writer called Jill Tweedie. Arguably the best

soccer writer in the bourgeois press, David Lacey. A person could, without doing him or herself lasting harm, buy the paper to read these. (There are also, of course, dreadful dingbats like Peter Jenkins, to read whose political column is akin to wading through a pond of thick porridge).

All newspapers are weapons in an ideological war, and different weapons are needed for different spheres of the war. If there was *only*, say, *The Times* and *The Telegraph*, for the 'educated' upper class to read of a morning, a section of that class the section which for whatever reason of class origin or background likes to think of itself as enlightened would feel, well, left out. If *The Guardian* didn't exist they would have to create it. Which, as a matter of fact, they did.

It exists not only to reflect and confirm their own image of themselves, but to remind them at moments when it matters of whose side they really are on.

The most recent blockbuster series carried in the paper was a week-long special on Northern Ireland. No fewer than 19 *Guardian* writers descended on Belfast to attempt to 'stimulate discussion of "Ulster" in Britain again'. Locally, the most obvious effect of the visit has been on the profits of the Europa Hotel bar where scenes reminiscent of the reign of the Emperor Caligula were reported by sometimes reliable sources.

Some of the pieces were not as bad as all that. Polly Toynbee wrote a vivid report on Belfast's Divis Flats, which she described as the worst slum in 'Britain'. Polly's reactions probably had much to do with her inexperience of slums (there's as bad post-war flat complexes in Lancashire, difficult as it must be for Divis people to believe it). Still, not to carp. Jill Tweedie contributed a dewy-eyed piece about the Provos, which—apart from a 'balancing' exit-line—cast them as armed members of the St Francis of Assisi Fan Club. Which is (the truth must be told) improbable. There was an entertainingly daft feature by Stanley Reynolds and a daft article by Richard Gott. Plus unremarkable reports on everything else from punk rock to the tourist trade (!).

The strange (or not) thing was that in a massive series designed to 'stimulate discussion' not one house writer put forward the argument for withdrawing the troops.

That, you see, would be against the line of the class on an issue which affects it personally.

To be absolutely fair, Peter Jenkins did say that he would not weep salt tears if the troops were eventually withdrawn. Eventually. Not, so to speak, *now*, at this point in time when, looking at both sides of the question and taking into account all relevant factors it would—and this must be recognised whatever our long-term aims—be, on balance, and with a view to arriving in the end at a solution acceptable to all right-thinking persons whatever their persuasion mine's a brandy, eventually, things ought to be better and with good will on both sides, in the fullness of time...

Eamonn McCann

The General Strike that never was

Our editorial *Hot Air and Cold Steel* in the last issue earned us the epithet 'miserabilists' in some quarters. We seemed to be deliberately emphasising elements of gloom in what has been the most exciting period of industrial struggle since the demise of the Heath government. That was not our intention. But we did feel it was necessary to cut through the feeling of euphoria that arises as the struggle gets more intense and to point out the dangers of bad leadership as the odds get higher.

Experience since the last issue has shown how correct we were. At Leyland the shop stewards' organisation—and the whole left—were snookered by a completely unexpected move from the right wing AUEW executive. It threw the onus onto the organisation in the factory to get support for what would then be an official strike—and

the organisation in the factory, regrettably, proved itself as abysmal as we painted it in our article of two months ago, *The Rise and Fall of stewards organisation*.

More devastating, because more unexpected, was what happened with the South Wales miners. It was they who provided much of the impetus behind the talk of a Wales General Strike. It was they whose solidarity with the steel workers on the one day strike and demonstration of 28 January created the climate in which even Bill Sirs muttered about 'the beginning of a revolution'. Yet when it came to the crunch at pit-head meetings they voted down their leadership's call for an all-out strike.

Socialist Review went to South Wales the day after the ballot began to find out from SWP members and sympathisers in Cardiff and Pontypridd how this came about.

The feeling for the general strike was real enough in south Wales in the weeks before the miners' ballot. Of that there is little doubt. As one SWP member describes it:

'I've never heard people talk about a general strike before. But in the last few months people in the street have been talking about it. They say, "We've got to take a stand against the Tories, that means a general strike." I've heard it so often. The housewives around here all talk about it.

'The rally in Port Talbot a fortnight ago showed it. That's the first time I've seen a march in the streets with people on the doorsteps crying. A lot of people remember the last general strike and the 1930s and they know what it entails.'

In a pit-head ballot early in January the miners had voted nine to one to take industrial action against the threat of pit closures. The threat came from the Steel Corporation's planned cutbacks in steel making at Port Talbot and Llanwern, and from its imports of coking coal. In a speech the head of the Wales TUC, George Wright, had let slip phrases about a general strike. The miners' commitment against pit closures was soon linked up, both in the speeches of union leaders and in the popular consciousness, with the notion of the Wales general strike.

The *Western Mail* could report on 14 January that plans were expected to be made at the South Wales TUC for:

'Welsh miners, dockers, seamen, railwaymen and transport workers to join steel workers on strike... Other unions with a stake in steel and coal believe that the time to launch joint action against the threat of redundancies is while the steel pay strike is still on. They believe that the chances of bringing out the steel workers again will be slim.

A member from Cardiff describes how the

mood developed

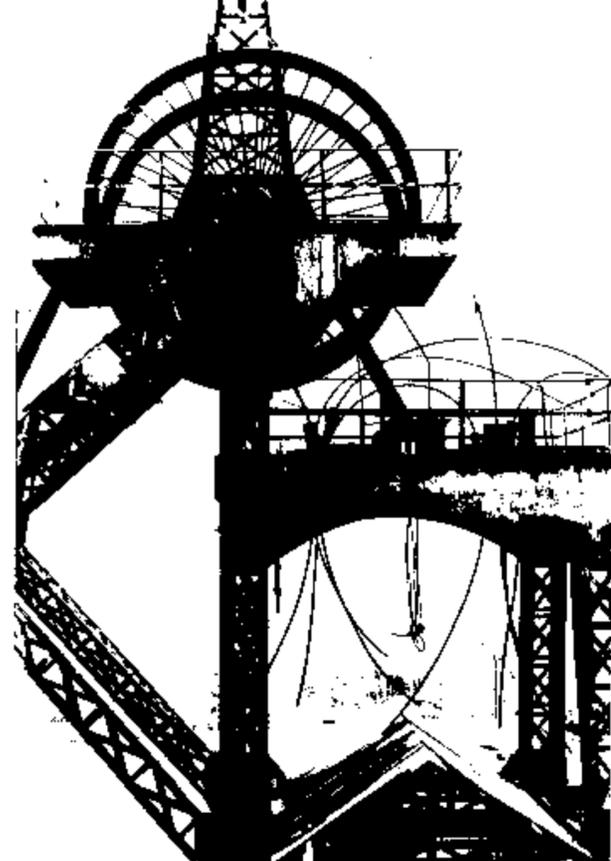
'Just by the question of the general strike being posed at the time it was posed it became a possibility. The steel men were out, and the miners were taking action through the picketing of coking coal imports. The fact that they were both taking action made the call sound much more credible than it normally would.

'If the South East TUC or the North West TUC called a general strike, no-one would take it seriously. But because two major groups of workers were already in struggle, it was taken seriously. And, of course, as soon as you pose the thing lots of people start taking it seriously. Initially there was some hesitation, because some people in the NUM said that a general strike in Wales would be seen to be a nationalist thing. Some of the tactics discussed—like blockading the Severn Bridge—sounded nationalistic. But once it became generally talked about the idea of a general strike seemed to have something in it.'

At the time of the initial ballot of the miners over action against the threat of closures, a call for action would almost certainly have received a solid response. The shock of the steel and therefore coal cutbacks came on top of the excitement of the first few days of the steel strike. Yet no call for action came.

The 14 January meeting of the Wales TUC beat a hasty retreat:

'Yesterday's Wales TUC heard a plea from South Wales miners, backed by overwhelming support in a series of pithead ballots, to go ahead with a strike as planned from 21 January. But the meeting adopted the plan of the British TUC nationalised industries committee to defer indefinite strike action while efforts were made to get BSC to change course over cutbacks and coking coal... Mr George Wright, Wales



TUC general secretary, said of a one day stoppage for 28 January, "We are not seeking to go it alone, but in order to maintain unity in Wales it was necessary for some sort of action to be called" (*Western Mail*, 15 January).

The 'threat to unity' in Wright's mind was, no doubt, fear that the miners might at that stage go out in solidarity with the steel workers without waiting for the Wales TUC. The one-day strike headed off that possibility. Although the miners' leaders were unhappy with the deferment of the general strike—Emlyn Williams urged at the rally on the day of action that the general strike be brought forward—they abstained on the crucial vote. Yet the climate was still one in which all-out action was a real possibility. The following Friday the Steel Corporation announced the scale of the cutbacks at Llanwern and Port Talbot, producing what the senior steel union divisional organiser called 'bitter, blind rage and the decision' (*Western Mail* 18 January). The one day strike was the only channel for this rage.

Almost a fortnight after the one day strike,

'The united front sought by the Wales TUC in the campaign against threatened job losses was apparently preserved yesterday by South Wales miners' leaders—despite speculation that they might launch a go-it-alone policy... (*Western Mail* 9 February).

It was to be another ten days before any attempt was to be made to call action. That was a full six weeks after the start of the steel strike and a full four weeks after the news of the scale of the job losses.

The result, inevitably, was that much of the feeling that had existed was dissipated. As one lodge official for a coking plant—which itself voted for the strike—told us:

The miners have been played around with. First it was on. Then it was off. Then it was on again. Emlyn always seems to be threatening strikes. It's all the dillying and dallying. People didn't know where they stood.

As an SWP member who had just been round the pits talking to miners told us

'The miners we've spoken to have come up with two points—that this should have been a national strike, and the playing with

dates. They had the one-day strike. They had the option to support the demonstration in Port Talbot a couple of weeks ago. They've had the 21st, the 28th, the 10th, the 29th, given them. We were talking to people yesterday who'd actually voted and they were saying, 'Well, this vote for action from Monday is nothing to do with strike action from the 10th'. They were completely mixed up, even though it was them who were voting. It's what we always say in Socialist Worker—you can't play with general strikes'.

For this member, the comparison was with the struggle at Leyland.

'What we saw at BL last week with Robbo is in a miniature scale what has been going on here. Instead of taking action when they knew something could be done about it, they bought a bit of time. When they had all the support of the workforce, they just bought a bit of time, pleased them with a one-day stoppage, a few marches, just keeping people down until the feeling to do something faded away.'

The long delay meant that much of the momentum had already gone out of the struggle. The steel strike was no longer something fresh, itself a new and powerful challenge to the government. And then there was confusion as to whether this was a pure solidarity action in support of the steel workers' action against the two per cent insult, or whether it was really over a job issue that concerned miners.

The coal board moved very cleverly to exploit all these fears. When the news came through that the South Wales executive of the union was to recommend an all-out strike, Weekes, the South Wales coal board director, appeared on television. Weekes is known as the coal board's hard man, ever since he threatened the closure on economic grounds of the whole coal field a couple of years ago. Now he warned that by striking miners would be hitting the viability of the pits and at the one time of the year when there was a demand for their coal. The point hit home—since this is also the time of year when it is easiest for South Wales to get good bonuses.

The intervention of the coal board was repeated on the first morning of the ballot. Pit managers were soon spreading reports that other pits had voted not to strike—even before the balloting had begun.

The local NUM has made much of this interference with the ballot. Yet, to be honest, in the present industrial climate it is quite naive to expect management anywhere not to intervene to influence rank and file opinion whenever they get the chance. The trouble in South Wales was that those who wanted the strike, with very few exceptions, were quite unprepared to counter management arguments.

After the long delay in postponing action on the original nine-to-one mandate, the final call to action was put to the miners at excessive speed. The decision to call for strike action was taken in the afternoon of one day, when the early shift in the pits had finished. It was put to that shift in many pits the next day, as they turned up for work. This meant there was no opportunity for militants in those pits to argue the case properly.

'The delegate meeting didn't end until

1pm on the Wednesday. And the balloting began at 6am the next morning. So there was no way the delegates could organise a good discussion to take place over the ballot. In most of the pits there were no leaflets or anything like that. That's the reason miners were coming out the pits and telling us, 'They took the decision yesterday and expect us to vote on it this morning without knowing what it's all about'.

One of the biggest blows to the strike came that morning when Maerdy, a traditionally militant pit, voted it down. The SWP member, explained it like this:

'Maerdy has a tradition of militancy. That's the pit everyone looks to. And yet they're the one that had very little discussion over this strike action beforehand.'

The reaction of the lodge officials at Maerdy—a stronghold of the CP—was to urge the South Wales executive to call off the ballot.

Yet despite all the delays and all the confusion, it was possible to win miners for the planned strike. We know that because at eight pits it happened.

One of these pits was Penrhiwceiber. The ballot did not take place there until the Saturday. But two days earlier local SWP members who visited it with Socialist Worker found a workforce who expected to be out on strike on the Monday.

One of them explained this to us in terms of the basic attitude to organisation of the lodge secretary.

'Mike knows that of the 700 people he's got in the workforce, there's about 200 of them basically interested in the trade union movement, being to some extent in the old school, with the CP tradition in this area. If a meeting is called, most of them will turn up. But he also knows that the other 500 will kick back on occasions. The only way to stop that happening is to keep them continually informed of what's going on by feeding them information all the time. But if there's a lodge meeting there's no way that all 700 are going to turn up. So what he has to do is to get the 40 odd people from the lodge committee out from every meeting, back into each section of the pit, explaining what's going on to those who hadn't been at the meetings. That's why when we turn up with the papers, it's a foregone conclusion that there's going to be a strike.'

At this pit the vote was 300 to 20 for the strike.

By contrast, in pits where the thing hadn't been argued before, the reaction was very hostile. At one pit, three miners who argued for the decision of the delegate conference were 'howled down'; at another, we were told, 'they said "Bugger Emllyn Williams, throw him out."'

Two sorts of bad leadership.

The most obvious sort of wrong leadership was that provided by the TUC in London and the Wales TUC.

The British TUC never hid their opposition to the notion of a general strike. As the Western Mail reported on 9 February, 'TUC general secretary Len Murray has urged Welsh unions to call off the coordinated strike planned to start from 10 March.'

The Wales TUC under George Wright was hardly any better. It is true that Wright had been the first person to float the idea of

a general strike. But his motives hardly seem to have been the best. The Wales TUC was very much his own creation, in the early 1970s, and he has sought to make it more prominent as his own prospects for advance in his own union, the TGWU, are limited. This had led to him to push for it to have powers more like those of the semi-independent Scottish TUC than of the regional TUCs in England (like the SE TUC or the NW TUC) with which it is formally akin. Cynics ascribe his verbal militancy over the job losses in South Wales to an effort to restore his reputation ever since a tiff he had with the general secretary of his union, Moss Evans, a couple of years back did him damage, when Wright signed a wage agreement to which Evans objected. In the aftermath, TGWU officials hostile to him put it around that he was making nice noises towards Callaghan in return for the promise of a safe Labour seat in West Wales. The call for a general strike was an easy way to present himself once again as a serious force.

Certainly, once he had raised the notion of the general strike, he endeavoured to drop it again as quickly as possible, using the one-day stoppage on 28 January as an easy let out. Significantly, very few members of his own union, the TGWU, were involved in that stoppage. At least half did not know it was going ahead, since the union made no attempt to inform them. At the Cardiff rally on that day steel workers heckled Wright with shouts of 'All-Out' referring to the fact TGWU lorry drivers had been crossing picket lines.

Emllyn Williams and the South Wales miners' leadership are rather different from George Wright.

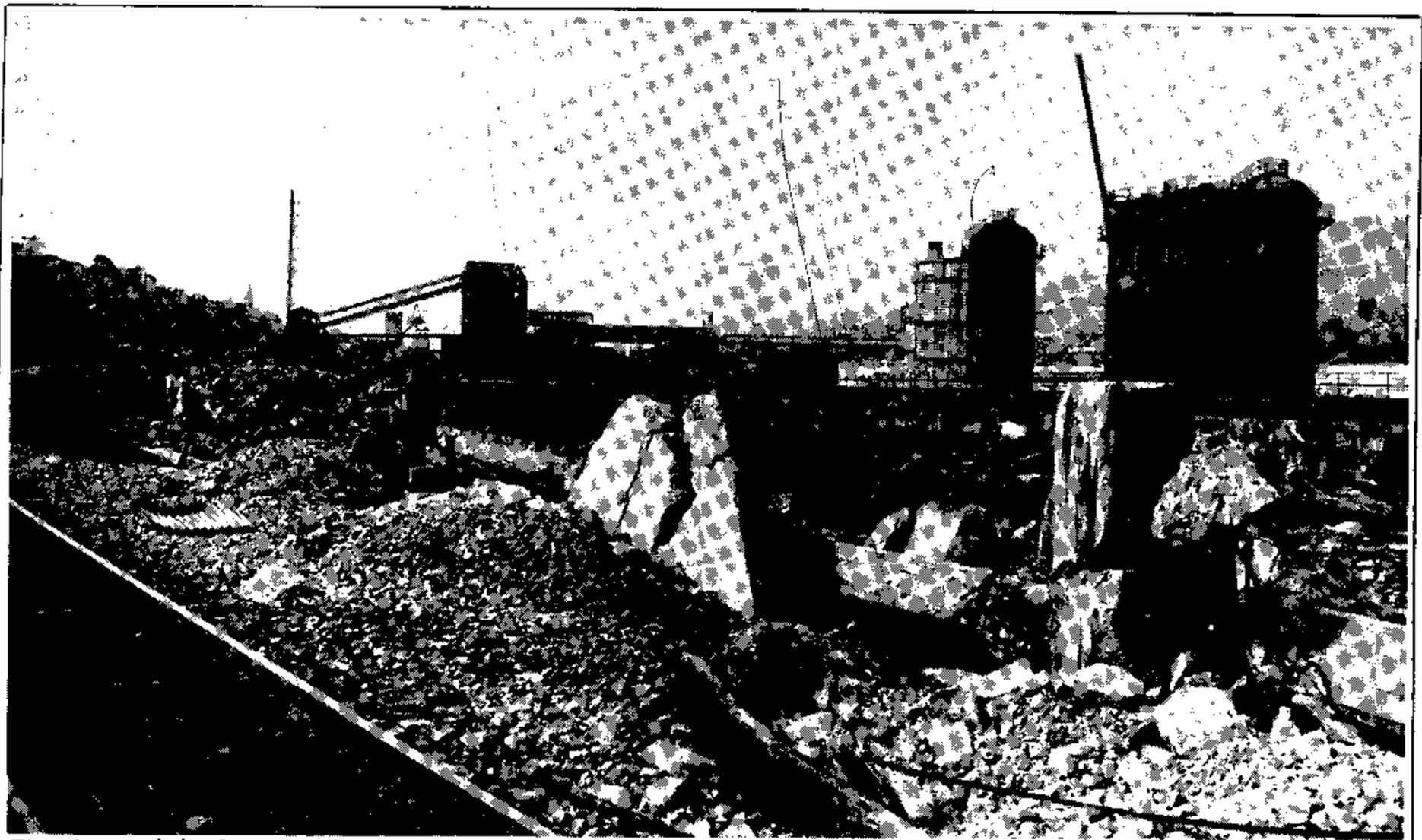
As one of our Cardiff members puts it: 'Emllyn Williams is not a devious man. He's an honest operator who does not organise politically. He has certainly relied on the CP machine to provide him with support—he himself is a left wing Labour Party member. But his own style of leadership has tended to encourage grass roots democracy as far as he can do, with pit-head ballots and so on. In some ways he's closer to the CP tradition of militancy than the CP themselves.'

But the assumptions underlying the behaviour of the South Wales leadership are still very much bureaucratic assumptions. Hence the way in which they allowed themselves to be trapped for weeks in the internal wrangling of the Wales TUC over the question of a date for a strike. Hence too a wide communications gap between them and the rank and file in the pits.

This has been partly because of the very involvement in the internal machinations of the Wales TUC. As our Cardiff member explains it:

'Usually when there have been pit-head ballots or campaigns over wages, Emllyn Williams and his people would have done the rounds of pit heads and so on. But over the general strike argument, he's been too much caught up in the Wales TUC thing. He has seemed to his members on the ground as a TV personality, not someone they can meet and talk to about the strike call.'

The supposition of the South Wales leadership was that meetings of delegates from the pits would serve to communicate between them and the ordinary miners. But it didn't work like that in the long, tortuous



The shape of the future: a deserted steel works in South Wales

arguments over the question of strike action against the job losses.

The coke-works trade unionist makes the same point: 'There's been a lack of coordination between Emlyn Williams and the pits. He gives the lodge secretaries and chairmen good reports. But they don't have to report back to the rank and file. The boys hear what Weekes has to say and believe it, over the question of subsidies, viability etc.'

The point is that at a delegate meeting, anyone can put up their hand for action. But unless there exists an organisation with rank-and-file members operating inside the different pits, there is no compulsion on the delegates to go back and argue each question with the membership. Indeed there are indications that in some pits, delegates did not even bother to argue for the strike action: we know of at least one pit where the pit committee met before the ballot and recommended to the men that the time was 'inopportune'.

All the time the leadership spoke and acted as if it had behind it the solid support of tens of thousands of miners. But each of those miners knew that the issues had not been discussed with them recently. They could easily begin to feel that the leadership was a body acting in opposition to what they themselves might really want.

The problem was made worse by the role of the media not in this case just by distorting the union's case, but by the process of taking up Emlyn Williams and turning him virtually into a television personality, necessarily very cut off and very distant from the people he was supposed to represent. This also led him to make unwary statements that confused the membership.

As one of our members puts it:

'Emlyn Williams has turned into a sort of TV personality. But you can't keep going to the media and making speeches without saying something new. You've got to say

something all the time to keep in the limelight. He ended up trying to stretch the 9 to 1 mandate in ways a lot of miners couldn't understand.'

This was especially true of an interview the week before the call for strike action. What came across was not that miners and steel workers faced a common fight for jobs, but that solidarity was needed with the steel workers because they had been insulted over the two per cent offer. To many miners it seemed they were being asked to fight someone else's battle.

'The union had assurances from the strike committee in Port Talbot and Llanwern that they wouldn't go back, even if pay was settled, without assurances on jobs. But this was not communicated to the mining rank and file.'

The alternative to debacle

The lessons to be drawn from the defeat are not new ones for the readers of this publication. What we've stressed before—for instance in our report on Leyland—is the danger, in a new period of bitter class confrontations, of many of the habits that union activists have developed over recent years, which separate them off from the rank and file. The participation arrangements that grew up under the Labour government encouraged this (for the mines, see the article by Bill Message in the last issue of the Review). The turning of trade unionists into media personalities encourages it. Activists—even the best, most honest, most committed ones—can come to see themselves as important, without worrying about their ability to carry the rank and file with them, all the time.

Managements are themselves becoming very aware of this gap—and are attempting to exploit it with their current fashion for direct balloting.

The exceptions in South Wales—the lodges that voted solidly for strike action—show that this management strategy can be beaten back. But only by building links between the activists and the rank and file that are much deeper than those provided by the media or by routine delegate meetings. An organisation of militants is needed that enables activists at the grass roots to put across arguments to explain the shifting of tactical calls and strike dates, even when the local delegate does not bother to.

In South Wales, as elsewhere, there was a time when the Communist Party, even in a somewhat distorted way, used to provide a network which could do this to some extent. It is no longer capable of doing so: in the South Wales coalfield it has many activists, but they've ceased to be a cohesive force capable of responding to events. The Morning Star in no way provided day-to-day leadership in the battle over the ballot, and as far as we can see, no CP propaganda went out to counter the machinations of Weekes and the NCB. As is too often the situation in such cases, the only printed material that attempted to put the arguments was a duplicated bulletin produced by the relatively few members of the local SWP branches.

Individual setbacks, like that in South Wales or the Robbo affair in Leyland, are not going to smash the working class movement. But a succession of further such setbacks can begin to irredeemably weaken our class, as some militants are weeded out of industry and others lose their faith in the ability of the rank and file to support action. That is why the lesson about organising among and communicating with the rank and file has to be learned quickly, however insignificant such activities can seem at times compared with the televised speech or national negotiations with management.

Chris Harman

Nuclear Power a year after Harrisburg

The second half of 1979 saw a flurry of activity around nuclear power when the Tory government announced its intention to build 20 Westinghouse designed Pressurised Water Reactors (PWRs). In recent months however the issue has slipped from the headlines as the Thatcher government have been forced to reassess their nuclear plans. This article looks at some of the pressures on the government and the nuclear industry, the split in the construction companies over reactor design (ie who gets the biggest slice of the profits), the continuing debate on the safety risks of PWRs, the threat of mass resignations from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, and the discovery that Britain's oldest and most reliable reactors may have to be permanently closed down.

The 1970s were a disastrous decade for the nuclear industry. Britain's first generation Magnox reactors operated steadily if inefficiently, but the second generation Advanced Gas Cooled Reactors (AGRs) proved a disaster. They suffered immense technical problems in construction and operation. Completion dates over-ran (sometimes by as much as 10 years), and the costs rose dramatically. While the industry floundered, with the home produced technology failing, both Labour and Tory governments were unable to decide on the next generation of reactors. The choice was between continuing to back the AGR in the hope that the problems had been cured, or to discard the British reactor (and the massive capital investment that went into it) in favour of the American Pressurised Water, a decision that Arnold Weinstock's GEC company favoured.

The election of a Tory Government gave a boost to the nuclear industry, after a decade in the doldrums. From the outset, Thatcher championed nuclear power; she was photographed standing on top of a nuclear reactor, and she loudly praised France's American-based nuclear programme. At the Tory Party Conference in October, amid ecstatic cheering, Energy Secretary David Howell confirmed Tory plans to build 15 to 20 PWRs at a cost of up to £20 billion.

On his return to Westminster, David Howell quickly realised that the Tory Party conference and reality bear little relation to each other, and by December 1979 Howell was forced to announce a revised nuclear programme. Instead of 15 to 20 PWRs, work was to continue on two new AGRs, and a start would be made on a 'final' PWR design based on Westinghouse technology. The plans were to be followed by a public inquiry into the siting of the PWR. Howell stated construction work should start by 1982. From then on, a new nuclear power station would be ordered each year for 10 years. The announcement was deliberately vague about whether it was PWRs, AGRs,

or both, that would be ordered.

The government publicly stated that it was concern over safety that led to the delay. However behind this there is a deep and bitter divide within the nuclear industry. This division is more to do with business interests and British technology pride than the possibility of a local repeat of the Harrisburg accident. Alongside its new construction plans, the government announced a major restructuring of the monopoly National Nuclear Corporation involving removing GEC from its managerial role. The distribution of shares was to remain the same: GEC 30 per cent, UK Atomic Energy Authority 35 per cent and British Nuclear Associates 35 per cent (of which Babcock International had 12 per cent, Northern Engineering Industries 10 per cent, and Taylor Woodrow and Sir Robert McAlpine 5 and 2½ per cent respectively).

The internal conflict within the National Nuclear Corporation, which *The Times* has described as civil war, resulted in the government being unable to appoint their choice for chairman of the corporation. David Howell told parliament, 'The new chairman... must command the confidence of all the parties and be able to overcome the old rivalries that have held back our nuclear programme'. He added that the new chairman, when they could find one, would not be associated with any of the major shareholders. It appears that the only way the Tories could reconcile the different factions within the National Nuclear Corporation was firstly to appoint an outsider as chairman and secondly to press ahead with building both AGRs and PWRs, again deferring the final decision.

Harrisburg

While the National Nuclear Corporation tried to carry out its faction fight behind closed doors, the debate over the safety of PWRs raged in the press. The Harrisburg accident involving a PWR reactor chilled the whole industry, it brought a moratorium on the granting of operating licenses to nuclear plants in the US, and a number of planned nuclear plants were cancelled. In Britain the Tories loudly proclaimed the safety record of the indigenous nuclear industry and how PWRs would only be built after safety clearance. Very few politicians or newspapers bothered to explain why the American PWR was inherently much less safe than any of the existing reactors in Britain.

The Magnox and AGRs have a separate cooling system and moderator (a substance in the core of the reactor that slows down the nuclear reaction). If the cooling system fails, then the reactor operators need take no action for 30 minutes, they can just sit and

think, knowing that the reactor will not become dangerous. The PWR is however intrinsically flawed because the moderator and the coolant are the same. If the pressure vessel ruptures and there is a loss of coolant, the system is totally dependent on emergency systems operating despite the rupture. Any failure could lead the core to overheat and melt through the pressure vessel—the dreaded China Syndrome. Despite this the British nuclear inspectors told the government in 1977 they could find 'no fundamental reason for regarding safety as an obstacle to choosing the PWR for a British Power station'.

Following the accident at Harrisburg a number of investigations were launched. Two British reports were published in December. The Nuclear inspectorate said that the accident 'did not arise from any serious inherent weakness in the concept or design of the Pressurised Water Reactor'. The Central Electricity Generating Board report added that the accident had 'resulted from weaknesses in detail design, safety analysis, performance of some of the components and above all operator behaviour'. The alternative to blaming the operators was to admit that the safety systems at the Harrisburg plant were inadequate and that the plant should not have been given an operating licence. This is an equally plausible explanation considering that plant after plant was re-equipping with more powerful emergency cooling systems *before* the Harrisburg accident. Even so, as usual, it was easier to blame the reactor operators who could be seen to make mistakes rather than the safety authorities who cannot.

The French Connection

Following on the heels of the Harrisburg accident, the French government ordered the fueling up of two PWRs at Gravelines and Tricastin despite the discovery of scores of cracks in their basic metal components. These cracks could lead to a leakage of primary coolant into secondary cooling systems, a loss of coolant accident and potentially a 'maximum disaster'. Workers at the two plants went on strike to prevent them being fuelled up, but the work was done by management staff surrounded by armed guards.

Andre Giraud the French minister of industries stated that the government didn't expect the cracks to be dangerous for five years and in the meantime they were trying to develop automatic techniques to rectify the fault. He added that the plants had to be commissioned because of the 'energy crisis'. (The government threatened to ration domestic heating fuel last winter). In giving the go-ahead, the French government is ignoring the advice of its own experts and

taking a dangerous gamble. Should the nuclear industry fail to develop techniques to repair the cracks then the plants will have to shutdown after five years instead of the planned 25-30 year lifespan.

The events in the French nuclear industry did little to ease the Tories minds over their own PWR plans. They were further discomfited when in October 1979 the Guardian published an article by Shoja Etemad, a French nuclear engineer. Etemad said that safety calculations in the nuclear industry were based on the assumption that there can be only one failure in an operating system at a time unless there are others consequent on the first. At Harrisburg, there were six independent failures, one following another, but not consequentially. From this Etemad concluded that the whole internationally agreed system of reactor safety calculations was flawed. He accused the industry of ignoring this because they were unable to produce a computer simulation of a Harrisburg type accident, without which it would be impossible to devise techniques to bring a 'run away' reactor under control. Etemad concluded by warning the nuclear industry that to continue to use the old safety calculations was to institute a regression in science.

The nuclear authorities reacted swiftly and tried to undermine Etemad's claims. As they engaged in a detailed debate it became clear that they couldn't answer the technical and organisational issues raised.

After a year of debate on the safety of the PWR the nuclear industry has a number of technical problems. These arise from the Harrisburg accident and the cracks in the French PWRs as well as Etemad's accusations. The problems could severely hamper the British nuclear programme should the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate insist on their solution.

Bother in Britain

In December 1979 a major scandal broke out around the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate. It was revealed that the NII were 20 per cent understaffed and that the commercial power station at Chapelcross was without a site inspector! (Previously a fundamental principal of the NII was that each station should have a full-time inspector). Unfilled vacancies in the inspectorate included posts for experts in reactor faults, control and instrumentation, and fracture mechanics. Without these staff it is unlikely the safety studies of the PWR ordered by Howell will be done in the time required (two years).

In February 1980 the situation had not altered. As a senior inspector explained: 'The difficulties of the inspectorate are increasing both through the ageing of existing plants and the need to evaluate the complex problems of the PWR. We should also be looking very thoroughly at the problems of decommissioning plant. Instead it seems that we are being allowed to run down, being dismissed from a central role in safety assessment, and being relegated to the role of regional general safety inspectors.'

It was again emphasised that the PWR

safety study could not be complete on time. This time Mr John Dunster, head of the Branch of the Health and Safety Executive responsible for the nuclear inspectors said that if the NII couldn't cope with the safety assessment then it would be put out to contract with the Atomic Energy Authority safety branch. Potentially this is the same as asking the police to investigate deaths that occur in their own cells. Fortunately the Institute of Professional Civil Servants with members in both the NII and the UKAEA said they would black any such proposal.

Whilst the nuclear inspectors were fighting to maintain their strength and independence a further disaster struck the British nuclear industry. A number of Magnox stations were found to have serious cracks (up to three metres long) in their primary cooling circuits. So far stations at Bradwell, Dungeness and Hinkley Point are out of action even though only small parts of the suspect cooling circuits have been examined.

It's becoming clear that wherever new ultrasonic detection techniques are being used serious faults are found in the welds of the primary cooling circuits. The CEBG say they will not operate a power station known to be unsafe, but they have no idea which Magnox stations are safe and which are not. A full safety check could take all the

Magnox stations 'off stream' until the end of the year. This would make a mockery of government and nuclear industry claims that Magnox reactors produce cheaper electricity than other types of power station.

The nuclear power industry, then, remains directionless and ailing. *The Economist* described it as 'spending its time leaping hurdles without getting much closer to the winning post'. This crisis has been achieved solely by its own efforts, the anti nuclear movement having had minimal impact over the last twelve months. The Tories planned wind of change in the nuclear industry now sounds more like a dying gasp.

However the government has strong economic and political motives for keeping nuclear power afloat. Firstly Thatcher and Co see nuclear power as their best weapon in cutting the power of the miners—they still have bitter memories of the demise of Heath! The second reason is that for those countries that can maintain a nuclear industry there is the possibility of cashing in on massive reactor sales overseas as the price of oil rises in the future. The government will try to keep the British industry running in the hope that it can benefit from this expected boom. The nuclear industry may be down but it is far from out.

Mike Simons

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The Labour Left's Brightest Star

Rich and powerful people have always cherished their bogeymen. They like to reduce what Marx and Engels called "the spectre of communism" to human shape: to a personality who can be pilloried in their Press and patronised at their table. For the unfortunates who get singled out for this honour, life is hard. The assailants are well-practised in the art of character assassination and blackmail. Every public statement of their prey, however harmless, can rapidly be translated into the language of someone who rapes nuns on Fridays and nationalises a bank every day before breakfast.

Tony Benn has played the role of chief bogeyman for the rich men of Britain for a good time now. He has been treated perhaps more shamefully even than his predecessors in the Parliamentary Labour Left, men like John Wheatley, George Lansbury and Aneurin Bevan. In the past year, the abuse has risen to a crescendo, deafening even his most tenacious attempts to argue back. Yet its effect is not all as intended. For as the society splits wider apart, so the abuse from the halls of the powerful boosts their bogeyman's radical and socialist credentials.

The more the Press yelp at Tony Benn, the more sympathy he gets from shop stewards and workers. This support can be seen not so much in the votes at Labour Party conferences as in the enthusiastic receptions which Tony Benn gets at shop stewards and combine committee meetings. Arthur Scargill, for instance, is very quickly prepared to forget his war of words with Benn over the productivity dealings in the pits in 1977, and has called on all his considerable support to throw their weight behind Benn as the next leader of the Labour Party.

This support will grow still further as the Tories continue their victory march through working class Britain, slashing and stabbing as though they were an invading army. As people get more angry they will turn to the man the Tories hate the most - Tony Benn. The very fury which is vented on Tony Benn in the Press throws him higher and higher up the political spiral.

It is worth saying at once that Tony Benn's credentials for Chief Bogeyman of the Tories are a little difficult to understand. For eleven out of the last fifteen years he has been a loyal and for the most part silent member of a Labour government which has systematically torn up the pledges on which it was elected.

In the first Wilson administration from 1964 to 1970, Benn was counted as a force for the Right in the government. When he was promoted to the Cabinet in a senior post in charge of Technology, he was celebrated chiefly for his observations about the advances of science which were based on the 1963 visions of his leader, Wilson ("the white heat of the technological revolution").

In two areas in which Benn later became known as a hysterical Leftie, he behaved in a

way which can only have brought a smile of approval to the Tory benches. In 1967 he set up the Swallow Committee to preside over the shipbuilding industry, and personally insisted on carving up the shipyards in the Clyde between the old shipbuilding families. When even extreme Labour right-wingers such as Andrew Cunningham begged him to take full notice of an experiment at Fairfields yard in worker participation, Benn had nothing to do with it. Instead, he capitulated entirely to shipbuilding's "old gang".

When, without telling the Cabinet, the Atomic Energy Authority signed a deal for the manufacture of uranium under South African control at Rossing, South West Africa, Benn meekly gave the deal his approval. At that time, no one thought he would do otherwise.

As this issue of Socialist Review is being printed, the contradicting claims of revolutionary socialism and left reformist socialism are due to be argued out in London at what its organisers have called 'The Debate of the Decade'. Leading off for the reformists will be Tony Benn and for the revolutionaries, Paul Foot, of the SWP. As a prelude to the debate Paul has looked at Benn's latest book, *Arguments for Socialism* (edited by Chris Mullin, Cape £5.95).

Nor is the record of his time in office from 1974 to 1979 much more impressive. In the summer of 1975, with the Common Market 'Yes' vote safely in the bag, Prime Minister Wilson bowed to demands in the city to move Benn from the Industry Ministry and push him off to some more harmless area (in this case the Department of Energy). If Benn ever meant a word about the need to fight in the country for what was Labour Party policy, that was the time for him to resign, as, to his credit, his colleague Eric Heffer did, and try to raise rank and file Labour opposition to the Wilson drift (as Heffer, by the way, did *not* do). Instead, Benn accepted the move and, as far as the ordinary Labour Party member was concerned, shut up.

Still, this is all in the past, and, as Tony Benn himself is always saying, he has learnt from his mistakes. If so, there could not have been a better time than the present to publish a clear account of his ideas and his programme. Some people are asking the question: 'What went wrong with Labour?'. Many more are asking, what is the argument for socialist advance and how can we best ensure that things don't go so wrong *next* time? These are the questions which Tony Benn is better placed to answer to more people than anyone else in the country.

And it is here that this little book is such a

terrible disappointment. I did not expect to agree with Tony Benn's conclusions, but I did expect to get a clear and coherent account of where he stands.

But the book is not clear or coherent in anything. It is not even intended to be. Chris Mullin, a journalist for Tribune who edited the book explains in his note at the beginning:

'The first five sections of this book are based on speeches, lectures and articles by Tony Benn taken mainly, but not exclusively, from the last five years.'

Goodbye, then, to the hope that this might be a new account, forged perhaps in the white heat of experience of the last Labour Government. The vast majority of the book is made up of extracts from Tony Benn while still a Minister. And most of these are awful Olympian pronouncements at Ministerial functions. On page 83 (just to let the reader off with one example), while explaining his belief in the future of nuclear power, Benn the Minister says:

'In my view the most powerful argument is the argument about proliferation of nuclear weapons as an accidental by-product of the uncontrolled spread of sensitive nuclear technology intended solely for civil purposes. We are doing everything possible to prevent this by international agreement, supervision and control.'

Now, who is this "we"? It cannot be anyone now connected with Tony Benn. He is doing nothing whatever to prevent anything in the nuclear field. He is a politician in Opposition. No doubt he means, when he was in office, he did what he could. But that is useless now.

The fact is that for most of the last five years from which these extracts were taken, Tony Benn was a cautious Minister making cautious pronouncements. These pronouncements can help us in no way to any understanding or action for the future.

There were once occasions when Tony Benn could make an excursion, for instance, to a conference of the Institute for Workers Control; or to a church at Burford where Cromwell's soldiers murdered Leveller mutineers. Then he could argue about radical forms of change.

He could not, of course, say that the miners or engineers today should act according to the principles of the Levellers. To do so would be to court disaster, and run the risk of being sacked from the Callaghan Government. He could talk about the wonders of workers' control, provided only that they were envisaged in the distant and utopian future.

So the most striking characteristic of this book is the gap between the airy assertions of socialist aims and the dry and half-hearted programmes of a failed Minister. For instance, on page 60, he writes:

'We should be talking about the transfer of power within industry . . .'

in the same mood, on p 162



'We should be moving from a situation where capital hires labour to a situation where labour hires capital.'

But when it comes down to the programme which is going to achieve all this transferring of power and hiring of capital we find (on p. 72)

'The whole purpose of the planning agreement is to introduce that democratic tripartite element into industrial policy.'

The troika which is to make up this tripartite element is of course "government, trade union movement and management". And so we are staring at the familiar pictures of the "two sides of industry" sitting down and making plans under the watchful eye of the benign Labour Minister.

That may or may not have any effect—almost certainly not—but it is a very far cry from the visions of "transferring power" with which Mr Benn excites his supporters at the Institute of Workers Control.

Then there is another contradiction of the

same type which is even more serious. Of all Tony Benn's views, none has been more consistently stated than his belief in a widening democracy, and in more initiatives and control from below.

'I think we will have to be sure' he says (p 73) 'that the impetus for change comes continually from the movement itself.'

And the book ends with a quotation from a Chinese philosopher who says:

'When the best leader's work is done, the people say: "We did it ourselves".'

Other sections of Tony Benn's book are full of praise for the workers at the Upper Clyde in 1971 and in take-overs and sit-ins since.

All this does represent, it seems, a huge conversion from the Tony Benn perched on his peak at the Technology Ministry planning and ordering the workers into position. And the suspense for the reader of almost unbearable. Will he now tell us what sort of "action from below" is needed, how best to "inspire" the "impetus of change" from the "movement itself"? Will he even tell us, however briefly, what sort of organisation is required to further that impetus and that change?

No, he will not. I have scanned his book with a lot of care for any ideas as to new forms of organisation to fit Tony Benn's new commitment to workers' democracy. But I am afraid (apart from clichés such as "progress must be made towards workers' control" - p 39) that we are back with some old simplicities. There is nothing for it but the Labour Party. Tony Benn doesn't mind how many Marxists are in the Labour Party provided only that "they commit themselves to advancing socialism through Parliamentary democracy".

Here at once is another paradox. In one part of the book, Tony Benn states his faith in the "power of the vote". The very welfare state itself, he says, came "directly from the power of the ballot box". And it is that power, he suggests, which is to take us on to the "fully democratic and socialist system" of which he dreams.

And then there are other passages, more sceptical. For Tony Benn knows as well as anyone that the power of the ballot box is open to the most terrible subversion by the rich.

As early as page 17 he is writing:

'I discovered how the immense power of the bankers and the industrialists in Britain and world-wide could be used to bring direct and indirect pressure again backed by the media, first to halt and then to reverse the policy of a Labour government that both the electors and the House of Commons had accepted...'

He knows that from bitter experience. He saw Wilson's pledge for 'no incomes policy' overturned by a run on the pound in the summer of 1975, with Benn's job going into the bargain. He watched helplessly as the bankers moved again, in 1976, through the IMF, to force Labour to cut the welfare state which (according to Benn) the power of the ballot box had first created. He fought a desperate battle with the nuclear industry and the oil companies, without winning either. All in all, his own experience, even as

it is set down in this badly-conceived and woodenly-presented book, shows clear as day that the ballot box and parliamentary democracy are not strong enough to reach even the miserable objectives of the British Labour Party let alone the dreams of Tony Benn.

The problem is extra-Parliamentary—the "power of the bankers". Benn's remedies, however, are parliamentary: a planning agreement here and there, a new hunk of something or other taken into public ownership: a tighter exchange control or Treasury regulation.

The gap yawns on almost every page. And properly so. For it is this gap between aspiration and practical achievement which marks the career and politics of Tony Benn. It is nothing especially new. Two weeks before the general election of 1970, for instance, Press and television headlined a fantastic speech by Tony Benn about Enoch Powell. "The flag which fluttered over Dachau" he intoned to a handful of surprised constituents "is now fluttering over sections of the Tory Party..."

This was the first statement about Powell made by Tony Benn, though Powell's infamous race speech at Birmingham had taken place two years earlier. Moreover, Tony Benn had sat without a second's objection while his Government banned from British Kenyan Asians who had been promised free entry. Once again, the language of the extremist had come from the mouth of the moderate.

As I read this book for the second time, in February 1980, I pondered the effect of Benn's interventions in the past few weeks. There have been scores of speeches, many of them peppered with images as florid as that of the flag which fluttered over Dachau. But in defence of the "impetus from below" which has started to shake "the movement" once again: the steel strike; the sacking of the convenor in Britain's largest plant; the desperate action of men and women threatened with a future which throws them fifty years into the past, where has Tony Benn been speaking or agitating?

More importantly, what of the future? For all the comments here, Benn in person, especially on the television is a convincing figure to many workers. He is so obviously more sensible and more humane than the monster he is made out to be that people come easily round to his point of view. It is by no means certain that he will always be doomed to defeat in Labour leadership election.

The actual proposals will not, I believe, be very much more dramatic than they were in 1974. But the effect of Benn's use of rhetoric will be to make them *seem* more radical by far. But if a Labour government ever is returned committed to such policies, it will be able, since the crisis will be deeper, to deliver less.

Then the gap between Tony Benn's language and what he can achieve by his methods will loom not simply as a logical lacuna in a second-rate book, but as a threat to very parliamentary institutions and trade unions which remain Tony Benn's only instruments of change.

The Politics of Rates

Michael Heseltine must be beginning to regret his cocky pre-election promises to sort out local government finance. So far his attempts to impose cash limits and to push through a Local Government and Planning Bill emasculating local councillors, has produced not only the expected labour movement opposition, but has also provoked paroxysms of rage from his own Tory Supporters.

Amazing scenes of disarray have occurred, with characters like Horace Cutler, Tory leader on the GLC, and Sir John Grudgeon, leader of Kent County Council and recently knighted by Thatcher, organising a campaign against the cash limits scheme. Even 'Tag' Taylor, neolithic Tory leader of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and notorious for his role as chief negotiator for the employers in last winter's Low Pay Dispute has been losing his cool.

Local Government finance is big business. The GLC's budget is larger than all but thirty national governments. The 3m population administered by the West Midlands County Council is greater than that of New Zealand. In 1976 Public Authorities spent £1,500m on construction alone, accounting for 60 per cent of the construction industry's output and 90 per cent of civil engineering's.

At the beginning of the century, when local councils first started to provide services seriously, most of their income came from local sources—the rates, plus the profits on gasworks, tramways and markets.

But as their scope increased to cover housing, education, social services and highways, so the proportion of their funds coming from loans or central government had to increase. In 1979 61 per cent of their finance came from the Exchequer.

This is partly due to the peculiar nature of local taxation, the rates, which are based on property values, not on actual income of the occupiers. Rates are a savagely 'regressive' tax—that is, the poorer you are, the larger proportion of your income they take.

Faced with a resistance to increasing their rate income, local councils have been forced to press for more central government grants, or to raise loans. Local authority loans have traditionally been for long terms—50 or 60 years—with low interest rates. Since the 1960s lending institutions have refused to do this, and loans are now mostly negotiated at high interest for short terms. This has played havoc with the system. In housing for instance, the rents from older properties easily used to cover the debt charges on the loans that financed them and subsidised the newer, higher interest charges as well. Now councils are forced to borrow money to pay back the debt charges on other loans; more and more of their income goes straight out again to the financiers. 75 per cent of Sheffield's housing revenue now goes on

debt charges.

The distinction between private and council housing in this sense is irrelevant. Both are equally mortgaged to the insurance companies and finance houses.

What makes this situation even more desperate for many authorities is that those with the greatest needs usually have the poorest people. These inequalities are supposed to be balanced up by the 'Rate Support Grant', which Heseltine now wants to replace by his 'Unit Grants' or 'Cash Limits'. In practice this equalisation does not happen. For instance the more prosperous households who make their money out of central Manchester (and use many of the cultural facilities like the Halle Orchestra and the Art Galleries) live in Tory suburbs like Trafford or North Cheshire. Last year the City of Manchester, with one of the highest concentrations of needy people in the country, had £1,133 of debt for every person in the borough, while Trafford has a mere £216.

Heseltine is in fact quite consciously fixing limits which will produce automatic cuts and then enshrining this process in law so that it can be more easily done next year. This year's Cash Limit, for instance, only allows for a wage increase of 5 per cent. The global cuts on estimates for expenditure in 1980-81 include Housing £1,186m, Education £506m, Roads and Transport £229m. The Rate Support Grant will fall from 61 per cent of Local Government spending to 57 per cent.

Originally Heseltine's decree was that no authority would be permitted to increase rates above 119p in the pound, and that there would be severe penalties for those that did in the form of a proportional 'claw-back' of rate support. The actual 'clawback' system was not specified.

By February this year he was desperately back-peddling on these threats. Nearly half the 400 local authorities in the country have or certainly will exceed the 119p limit. Rates have gone through the roof, by an average of 30 per cent in big cities and by 20 per cent even in the Tory shires.

But Heseltine's controls also spell a further big loss of independence for local authorities. Hence the violent response of the Grudgeons and Cutlers of this world.

Of course local government is only the local arm of the state, and local councils are no more capable of achieving socialism than is parliament. But local councillors are sometimes more susceptible to the control and influence of their constituents. They have to live and work with them, and councils occasionally lead real fights against national governments as in Poplar in the 20s and in Clay Cross in the 70s.

The potential 'rebel' authorities of 1980, like Lambeth, Wolverhampton, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, face a different situation from George Lansbury's Poplar, but a



Michael Heseltine

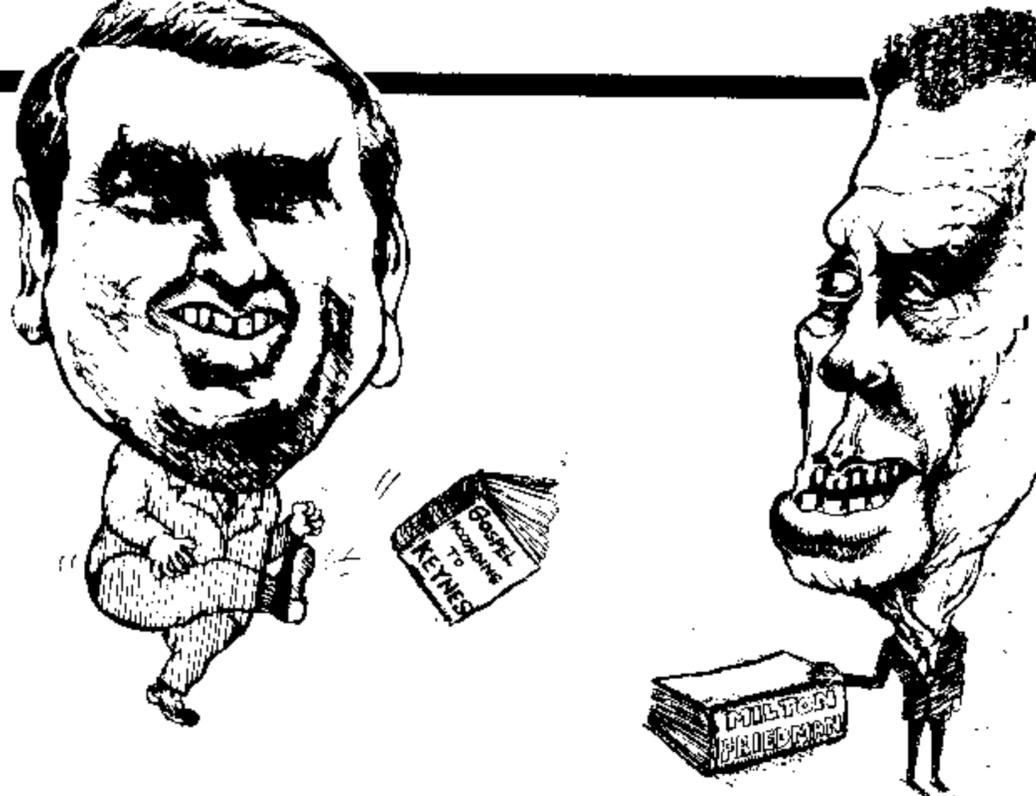
similar act of defiance is still needed. The present level of the campaign may help to get a Labour government returned some time in 1984, but it won't stop the cuts. For instance, Labour councillors in Sheffield and South Yorkshire are leading the campaign against the cuts which produced some impressive rallies and the initiative for the massive 25 November rally. But they have also in the last month announced their own cuts of £10.5m and £8.5m. Labour councillors in Rotherham, led by NUM godfather Jack Leydon, who also appears on anti-cuts platforms, locked out teachers in two schools for taking action against excessive class sizes. And all these authorities have just announced hefty rate rises—a 40.7 per cent increase in the case of Sheffield.

It is common knowledge that the cuts are concerned with transferring wealth away from working people into the hands of investors and industrialists. A rate increase of this does just the same, and is as much a cut as, say, introducing charges for hospital treatment. And the crazy thing is that Heseltine intends to claw most of the increased revenue back as reduced grants.

Arthur Scargill, to his credit, was the only speaker at the rally against the cuts in Sheffield City Hall on 9 February who dared to say, 'Don't put the rates up, go into the red if necessary.' He received by far the loudest applause. 'No cuts, no rates increase' would be a popular slogan, particularly if it was accompanied by a refusal to pay debt charges. Victimising the councillors of tiny Clay Cross after the Labour Party had deserted them was one thing; sending in commissioners to rule a city of 600,000 with an actively hostile trade union movement and national support would be something else.

Simon Ogden

Monetarism for Beginners



At the centre of the rows that have been taking place in the Tory cabinet in recent weeks has been the question of monetarism. This has been the approach underlying government economic policy since the Labour Government abandoned the mildest of its manifesto promises back in 1976 and especially since the Tory victory last year. Yet the increasingly parlous state of the British economy — revealed in the worst ever forecast for Britain by the intergovernmental agency, the OECD — has begun to put a big question mark over the monetarist approach in some ruling class circles. Callaghan and Healey — ever willing to forget in opposition that which they themselves did in power — have leapt in to blame all evils on 'punk monetarism'. But deeper issues are involved. *Chris Harman* looks at some of them, and suggests the direction in which things might go.

What is Monetarism?

The basic argument is very crude and very simple: the price of things is determined by the amount of money divided by the amount of goods. If the amount of money rises, then the price of all goods must rise accordingly. Prices are in fact going up in Britain today; therefore the responsibility must lie with successive governments for creating too much money.

The monetarist argument is by no means new: known as the 'quantity theory of money' it has existed for at least 200 years. It has always been subject to criticism from non-monetarist economists, of both the bourgeois and the Marxist kind.

The central point the critics make is that an increase in the amount of money may be a *result* of price rises occasioned by other factors, *not the cause*.

They point out that it is possible for prices to rise even if no increase in the amount of money takes place. This will occur if some firms have the muscle to push up their prices (because of a monopolistic position). A refusal to increase the supply of money will not stop that. It will merely force weaker, non-monopolistic firms out of business, since they will not be able to increase their prices, but will still have to pay more for what they buy from monopolistic firms.

The result will be a recession, with a fall in the amount of goods produced. Unless the supply of money is actually cut, there can be a rise in the average price of goods — since there are fewer

goods with the same amount of money. But cutting the supply of money to stop further price rises will only lead to more bankruptcies, a deeper recession, a still smaller supply of goods, and higher prices.

The economic crisis will be made worse, without necessarily there being any end to inflationary pressures.

This was one of the points Marx made about the monetarist measures of the Bank of England, writing in the 1850s (in the *New York Tribune*) and the 1860s (in *Capital*, vol III).

It was a criticism repeated (without any acknowledgement to Marx) by Keynes writing in the 1930s.

The monetarist retort has always been that it has only been 'imperfections' in the market that has prevented a reduction in the supply of money having the required effect. If there was 'real' competition, it would not be possible for firms to keep up their prices. Above all, without 'trade union monopolies' any unemployment caused by the beginnings of a recession would cure itself by forcing down wages until firms could afford to take on more workers.

The argument lost favour in the 1930s, when the scale of the crisis threatened fascism on the one side, social revolution on the other. 'Keynesianism' came into vogue with the Second World War and massive government intervention in the economy. By the 1950s the orthodoxy preached by nearly all apologists for capitalism — whether on the Labour left or the Tory right — was that the only reason there had been a great slump between the wars was that politicians had not understood what was wrong with the old theories.

Instead of cutting back the supply of money in a crisis, it was said, governments should have increased their spending. Any increase in the money supply would not matter, since it would go to providing a market for goods which would otherwise not have been produced. Workers who would otherwise have been unemployed would get wage packets and spend them on buying things — and that would mean more employment for other workers and more output. There would be more

goods as well as more money, and so prices need not rise. Only if full employment already existed would an increase in the amount of money be unable to cause an increase in output and instead cause a rise in prices.

The Collapse of Keynesianism

The orthodoxy collapsed in the 1970s. Suddenly both inflation and unemployment were increasing throughout the world, and Keynesian remedies could do nothing about it.

The American economist Milton Friedman had revived the quantity theory of money some years before. Now he came into his own.

Friedman insisted that there was a 'natural level of unemployment'. Government spending based upon an increased money supply could not cut this for more than a short period of time, and in the long term could only lead to higher prices. Inflation would get continually worse, as people began to assume that the amount of money would continually rise. Their 'expectations of inflation' would mean that the same 'natural level of unemployment' was accompanied by ever higher price levels.

To stop inflation, governments had to make the money supply grow more slowly than prices.

In the short term this would, as the Keynesians argued, mean that all goods could not be sold and that unemployment would rise above its 'natural' level. But over time firms and workers would be forced by harsh competitive pressures to end price and wage rises, and the 'natural level of unemployment' would be restored.

The intervening period of harshness was the price that had to be paid for ignoring market forces in the past and having too low a level of unemployment. The answer to it was not to back away from monetarism, but to reinforce it with government measures against 'monopoly' — in particular to end 'trade union monopolies', to do away with things which impeded the free flow of the labour market (like reasonable levels of unemployment pay) and to curtail the government's own 'interference' with the market via controls and subsidies.

The theory was seized upon by governments that had tried Keynesian methods and failed.

But the monetarist argument had obvious deficiencies. It could hardly explain a situation in which unemployment doubled but inflation was hardly affected. To fill the gap in the argument the monetarists had to introduce the peculiar notion that the 'natural rate of unemployment' was growing. They claimed it was attempts by governments to stop this 'natural' process by keeping unemployment 'artificially' down to the old level that had pushed up prices.

In practical terms the pursuit of monetarist policies has created problems from a capitalist point of view. Remember the basic anti-monetarist objection (outlined earlier) that preventing a rise in the money supply will not hit the most powerful firms, who will raise their prices anyway, but the less powerful firms who cannot, and that as these are forced to the wall, the economy will contract without price rises necessarily stopping.

On the face of it, that has been the effect of the measures of the last few years. Inflation is as bad as ever. Restraints on the money supply have reduced the funds available for borrowing, forcing up interest rates. These would only fall if government spending was slashed much further, forcing the whole economy to produce less.

The proponents of monetarism are forced into the position of asking big business to grin and bear a tight squeeze on its markets, its cash reserves and its profits, until the medicine works - but that will take three years if you are to believe Biffen, ten years if you are to believe Howe.

Why Monetarism Fails

If monetarism has any justification, it lies in the historical development of capitalism. In its youth the system could flourish precisely because it was thrown into periodic crises. These wiped out the inefficient, out-of-date firms and allowed their more vigorous competitors to flourish at their expense.

It was on this basis that capitalism expanded to embrace the whole world, as no previous economic system had, in the 100 years between the Napoleonic wars and World War I. That was a time when periods of slump were followed by periods of boom, when unemployment did always seem to fall again after it had risen, when prices went down after going up.

By destroying individual capitalist firms, the crisis made the system as a whole more efficient, it *rationalised* it.

Monetarism as a theory really argues that the same process of rationalisation has to be allowed free rein today. The elements of inefficiency, stagnation and creeping crisis can only be flushed out of the system by a full blown crisis.

However, monetarism fails as one cri-

cial thing. Capitalism is made up of individual capitalist firms, some of which are very seriously hurt - indeed, destroyed - by the process of capitalist rationalisation. And the older capitalism gets, the more anything that hurts any one of the major firms in any country hurts many of the others as well.

In the US today the 200 largest firms control 58.8 per cent of the market. In Britain the largest 100 companies control 42 per cent - twice as much as they did in 1950 and nearly three times as much as in 1910. This means that if any one large firm is forced to go bankrupt, many of the others suffer seriously.

Take the case of British Leyland. The company is too small and its level of investment is far too meagre for it to survive if measured by the standards of competition in world markets. Ford, General Motors, Peugeot PSA, Renault, Volkswagen, Chrysler US, Toyota, all produce more than twice as many cars as Leyland. Yet some of these are losing money, and they all expect to have difficulties surviving unless they are producing more than two million cars a year based on integrated production in half a dozen or more countries. If capitalist rationalisation of the world car industry is to take place, BL should simply close down.

But that would make major sections of British capitalism unhappy. Very large and very profitable firms depend for a sizeable portion of their profits on components they make for Leyland. When politicians observe that as well as the 160,000 workers directly employed by Leyland, there are another half a million indirectly dependent on it, they are measuring as much the effect on *profits* of closing the company as the effect on jobs. 'The stock market still tends to think of GKN as a British company which is over-dependent on the British motor industry. In particular, each new crisis at BL can be expected to knock a few pennies off GKN's share price' (FT 29.2.80).

Capitalism as a world system might benefit from the collapse of BL. But that does not mean that the individual capitalists who run most of British industry would.

Monetarism might provide a nice rallying cry for a country's capitalists when it comes to shifting the burden of taxation from themselves to their workers, to cutting welfare expenditure or to trimming their least profitable operations. But it is not something they are going to allow to destroy basic national industries like steel or motors or chemicals or even textiles. Yet for it to work as a remedy for the ills of the world system, such wholesale destruction is now necessary.

Even the most right wing employers can begin to worry that monetarism might wipe out not just the weak and the inefficient, but also the industrial core of British capitalism. When the Treasury forecast in October that



'motor vehicle production will fall by 21 per cent by 1983, mechanical engineering by 23 per cent and 'other materials' by nearly 25 per cent', the *Financial Times* could report:

'Leading people in the industry have been sufficiently disturbed to seek some explanation from the Treasury. Their feeling is that such a radical decline in these major industries must call for the introduction of new policies by the government.'

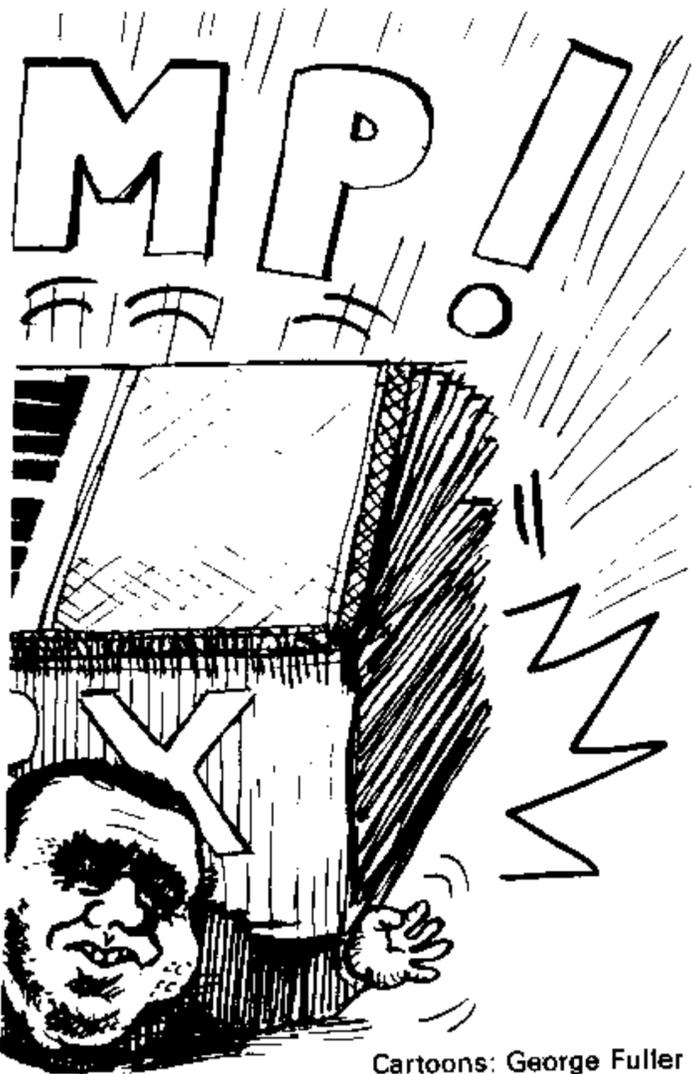
Towards Import Controls?

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that there is a groping in both political and business circles towards some non-monetarist approach which promises an easy answer to the crisis.

Among the older generation of Tory politicians - those who developed politically during the Macmillan era - that means falling back into ad hoc adoptions of Keynesian type measures: state aid to failing industries, blunting the severity of the public sector cuts, looking to collaboration with the trade union bureaucracy to pressure down workers' living standards.

But as an alternative Keynesianism by itself cannot be very convincing. It has already been tried and failed. That is why the growing fashion is to try to tart it up with something new: the call for import controls.

The pioneers intellectually of this approach have been the group of Cambridge academic economists, the Economic Policy Study Group. For several years the group has been arguing that the British economy's fundamental problem is the way in which imports flood in the moment there is any



Cartoons: George Fuller

economic expansion. The result, over decades, has been a slower rate of growth than that of its main competitors, which in turn means lower investment, lower productivity, lower competitiveness, and an even greater tendency for imports to zoom if the economy is allowed to expand even a little.

The way out of the impasse argue the Cambridge group, is for government intervention to 'restructure' Britain's trade. Otherwise, Britain's industrial decline will accelerate and 'in the 1980s when North Sea oil benefits level off... unemployment would rise to 2½-3½ million and inflation would be in the 15 to 20 per cent range...'

Because import controls were taken up very early on by the Labour left and other proponents of the 'alternative economic strategy', the Cambridge arguments are often seen as fundamentally left wing.

In fact, they are designed to have a much wider appeal than that. Like the Keynesianism of the 1930s they aim to draw together all those who dream of a way out of the present crisis which avoids the extremes of socialist revolution on the one side and bloody reaction on the other.

They claim that all classes will benefit if their policies are implemented. Their 1977 *Review* suggested that their policies would achieve by the mid-1980s 'full employment' (800,000 unemployed), average increases in real take home pay of a third, and a rise of nearly 80 per cent in 'income from property and self employment'. The 1979 *Review* promised 'benefits for productivity, profits, and the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement'.

Such arguments have already begun to win over other economists of a decidedly establishment hue, like Wilfred Beckerman and Andrew Schonfield. It cannot be long before right wing Labour politicians begin to move in the same direction. Right wing union leaders like Frank Chapple already call for them. And a few months ago right wing Labour MP Giles Radice let slip that he thought he and his co-thinkers would have to refurbish their image 'by stealing Benn's clothes on import controls'.

However, the most important development in recent months has been the way in which influential, if not yet decisive, sections of big business have begun to move in the same direction.

The leaders of the CBI were unable, at their annual conference, to prevent the passing, narrowly, of a resolution implying import controls. Since then the pressure has grown, as section after section of big business has felt imports hit its sales and profits.

The giant chemical firms like ICI and Unilever have been asking for action at the EEC level to reduce imports of substances like styrene from the US. The textile firms want restrictions to be similarly applied. The footwear manufacturers are demanding prompt government action against imports. And even Michael Edwardes of Leyland has made 'efforts to persuade the government to take action against "unfair competition in world markets"' (FT 26.2.80).

The government has not been able to avoid heeding these voices, despite its public commitment to 'non-intervention' and 'free trade'. The trade secretary, John Nott, recently told the NEDC, of 'the range of import restrictions already in place for steel, textiles, footwear, and consumer electronics which the government has been stacking up since May' (*Economist* 9.2.80).

It is hardly surprising that some commentators reckon the first U-turn the government will make will be back to the protectionism that characterised the Tory Party for the first third of this century.

The Contradictions in the Import Control Strategy

For all their growing popularity, on both the left and the right, import controls are no more capable of leading British capitalism out of the present crisis than are monetarism and Keynesianism.

Modern capitalism has an inherently contradictory relationship with national boundaries. On the one hand, the great firms have most of their production facilities within single states and rely upon the forces of those states to protect their interests against either workers or other capitalists. On the other hand, the same firms increasingly look towards world markets and a world organisation of production. Moves towards import controls by any state can bolster up the national economic base of its great firms; but they can also threaten to dis-

rupt those firms' moves to an international organisation of production and sales.

Hence the proponents of import controls are by no means united on what sort of controls should be imposed and who they should be directed against. The Cambridge group want 'general controls'. The 'Alternative Economic Strategy' usually talks of 'selective' controls. Benn has said in a recent TV interview he wants only to protect new, 'fledgling' industries, not 'inefficient', 'ageing' ones. Trade union advocates of import controls are usually more worried about the destruction precisely of the older industries and the devastation of the lives of the workers in them. The Cambridge group propose controls imposed by both the US and Britain against Japan and Europe. Much of big business wants controls imposed jointly with Europe against America and the Third World.

Above all, there is the problem of what the impact of import controls will be on the international economy. The Cambridge group claim that import controls by Britain will not provoke the sort of retaliatory action from other countries that broke the world into rival trading blocks between the wars and made the economic crisis still deeper. Instead, they argue that the whole world suffers from a 'structural imbalance', that means a Japanese and German surplus on trade and an American and British deficit. The whole world would benefit if Britain and America restricted imports and therefore there would be no retaliation from Europe or Japan.

Such arguments are fantastically naive, at a time when there are continual wrangles between the Americans on the one side, and the Japanese and the Europeans on the other, as the Americans try to keep out European and Japanese steel, while the Europeans try to keep out American textiles and chemicals. Already there are warnings of the dangers of a trade war over steel or textiles. The notion that the Europeans and the Japanese would simply sit back, contentedly, while the US (or Britain) imposed rigorous general import controls is nothing more than a rejigged version of the fallacy that the world economy is a harmonious structure.

Far from import controls leading to a peaceful way out of crisis for the whole world, they could only serve to intensify the problems of certain British firms to the advantage of others, while deepening the contradictions within the world market and the scope of the world economic crisis.

There is one, limited way, however, in which the ideology of import controls could help British capitalism: if it served to tie workers to the system while its problems were solved at their expense - if, in other words, it was to provide the basis for a new social contract even less costly to British capitalism than the last one.

Daughter of Earth

Today the word feminism conjures up an image of a well educated, confident, middle class female, the very model of a modern college lecturer. That image is the result of the modern women's liberation movement rooted as it was in the expansion of state higher education in the sixties. But feminism has not always been confined to such a narrow group. There is a whole history of daring and inspiring women whose experiences are all too often overlooked. Women like Mother Jones who worked to build the American mineworkers union, women like Flora Tristan who dreamed with the Utopian socialists and organised for her dream of one great workers union that would represent workers all over Europe, women like Emma Goldman whose passionate individualism could only find the place in anarchist politics, but whose writings on women are among the most powerful I have read.

Among these women Agnes Smedley also has a place. Her exceptional talent sprang not from a university literature class, but from the harsh realities of the poverty and illiteracy of her childhood. When Virago reprinted her autobiographical novel *'Daughter of Earth'* three years ago its vivid style set it in stark contrast to the easy sophistication of modern feminists novels. It made an impact on those who read it—not just emotionally, but politically too. For Agnes feminism was tough, but not 'professional'. She never made a career of her feminism, rather it provided her with the fuel that drove her to wander the world, fighting, thinking and writing a unique record of the struggles that moved her.

Agnes Smedley grew up in the grim conditions of America's mining camps at the end of last century. She watched young women despairingly forced into dependence on men. She endured the sight of her mother who died young exhausted from constant childbearing, her hands black with overwork. She rejected her feminine role 'I fought boys with jimson weeds and rocks and nothing would make a little lady of me.' And when her mother died she resolved not to replace her as the skivvy of her family. She left home.

Her struggle for education, which her mother had always told her was the key to independence, led her towards politics. She campaigned for birth control with Margaret Sanger. She became involved with Indian nationalist politics, for which she landed in New York's Tombs prison, where her first book *'Cell Mates'* was written.

The break-up of her love affair with an Indian nationalist leader brought on a nervous breakdown. It was a turning point in her life. She wrote *'Daughter of Earth'* as a therapy. And she resolved never again to let a man rule her life. Later she was to write:

'I have always detested the belief that sex is the chief bond between man and woman. Friendship is far more human.

For women marriage is at best an economic investment, at its worst a relic of human slavery.'

Her aggressive feminism, however, was never an overriding theme. It sharpened her observation. So when she visited the Soviet Union in 1928, she commented in passing afterwards

'I listened to many men make speeches from the Tomb of Lenin in Red Square, but only one woman—and that on International Womens Day.'

Although she was associated with Communist organizations all her life, she never joined a party. She explained that was because:

'I could never place my mind and life unquestioningly at the disposal of their leaders . . . I could not become a mere instrument in the hands of men who believed that they held the one and only key to the truth.'



Agnes Smedley in 1929

In 1928 Agnes Smedley went to China. It was meant to be a brief stay, but she fell in love with China, stayed and returned many times. And it was here that her best writing was done.

Her understanding of the situation that had developed in China was limited. The Kuomintang, a nationalist party, had been founded by Sun Yat Sen. Smedley believed that as long as he lived it was a democratic and progressive organization. Like other liberal observers she blamed the degeneration of the Kuomintang into terror and dictatorship on the personality of Sun's successor, Chiang Hai Shek. She never understood the need for class politics, or how nationalist politics rather than class politics would lead inevitably to the horrors of the Chiang Hai Shek regime.

But she saw the consequences and she pitted herself against them. She dedicated herself to telling the world, both in newspaper articles and in books, how the workers and peasants of China were struggling to build an alternative to Chiang Hai Shek, led by the Communist Party.

It was her dearest wish to march with the Red Army. But it was a wish the Communist Party leaders were reluctant to grant her.

In 1937 she asked Chu Teh the Red Army commander if she could go to the battle front. He made several excuses and said if she went to the front she would have to shoot. 'I'll shoot' said Agnes. 'I was raised in the West'. But they objected that she was a woman and she argued vehemently that 'I'm not a woman because I want to be.'

She did get to the battle front—not just writing, but nursing, recruiting doctors for the Chinese army, and speaking to mass meetings of soldiers telling them how their struggle was inspiring oppressed peoples all over the world.

And all the time she wrote—of men and women, of civilians and of soldiers. Her feminism drove her beyond everyday observation, recording pictures of Chinese women that no one else has equalled. But hard work and politics were not all that occupied Agnes Smedley's time. There was a lighter and more endearing side to her character.

'Once during a conference of high military commanders in Yen-an I tried to teach a number of them how to dance. Chu Teh who wished to learn everything on earth and never let pride prevent him trying, led the demonstration. Chou En Lai followed, but he was like a man working out a problem in mathematics. Peng Teh Hwei was willing to watch, but would not move a leg, he was married to the revolution. Ho Lung who was the very embodiment of rhythm could hardly contain himself until he was cavorting across the floor which was made of wobbly bricks.'

It is difficult to do justice to such a fine, wild woman in such a short piece. But her writings on China are really moving. She paints pictures which give an intensely real impression of the vastness and the backwardness of China. In *Mandate of Heaven* Nigel Harris gives a clear analysis of China and where its going. Smedley doesn't do that. But if you want your heart to heave and your imagination to run—if you want to see a woman do things even men didn't do—then read Agnes Smedley.

She was a talented and unusual journalist. Her work is unique in style and content. I only wish some publisher would reprint more of her work—so that more people would understand the exciting breadth of feminism.

BOOKS:

Two books are easily available
Daughter of Earth—Virago
Portraits of Women in Chinese Revolution
Feminist Press
You may find the following in second hand bookshops
Battle Hymn for China and *China Fights Back* both Left Book Club editions
Her major work *The Great Road—The Life and Times of Chu Teh*, is virtually a collectors item—published by Monthly Review Press 1956. So are other books.



Trade Councils: In Action or Inaction

In 1926 during the general strike, trades councils organised the nearest British equivalent to soviets, the Councils of Action. These committees acted as local leaders of the strike and often took over municipal functions and distribution of food and local supplies. It is perhaps with this model in mind that many socialists turn up to their monthly trades councils meetings, sitting through another tedious meeting, with perhaps only one opportunity to overcome the chair's apparent blindness to hands belonging to anyone from the revolutionary left.

Trades councils in Britain today vary a good deal from area to area. Sometimes even in industrial areas they are fairly irrelevant with only a dozen or so delegates attending. Sometimes they are extremely important parts of the local labour movement, capable of organising initiatives which are important nationally.

It is more or less taken for granted amongst the left, including the SWP, that we should fight for trades council delegates. But how interventions should be organised and whether we should try to get onto the executives, or even take a full-time secretary's job, is a matter of some controversy. It is with this in mind that we print the three articles below, from three different areas with different industrial traditions.

There are a number of common problems that flow through all three articles, particularly the separation of trades councils from the workplace and their dependence on union branches. But the conclusion of the authors is different.

It is my view that we should organise our trades council interventions more carefully. We should fight for delegates to trades councils, not just to be able to argue at the meetings but to be able to insist on political discussion in trade union branches when the report backs are given. There is no doubt that trades councils can be very effective vehicles

for calling mass pickets, collections etc, and can clearly make a difference to the winning or losing of a local strike.

However, we should avoid getting involved in the bureaucracy of a trades council when we can't determine the overall direction of the council. In other words we should not be secretaries and particularly full-time secretaries, for trade union organisations which by and large are not prepared to accept the action that we believe should be carried out. To do so is inevitably to compromise ourselves. This effectively means that for the moment I don't believe we should be the trades council secretaries anywhere. Further I think we should oppose full-time secretaries of trades councils.

I have no doubt that this view is controversial. I hope that those who don't agree will write in and say why, for without the discussion we will continue with the rather haphazard policy we now have

Simon Turner



Coventry Trades Council

This article is based on conversations with Gerry Jones, Alan Woodward and Paul Horton.

Coventry is a city dominated by large factories. There is a traditionally well developed shop stewards organisation which is dominated by the right wing. The trades council, however, is much more dominated by white collar workers and as such lacks the same traditions. The Confed shop stewards' quarterlies

are much more important meetings than the trades council.

In the heady days of 72 to 74 the SWP got quite an influence on the trades council, although the trades council was run by the Communist Party. We managed to have quite a good effect. We used to get delegations to strikes - for instance when the BSA motorcycle factory was closed we won a delegation to see the stewards. But the Communist Party used to try and keep the trades council's nose right out of the factories. In fact we used to have arguments about whether to send letters to shop stewards committees even.

At this time the SWP had members on the executive of the trades council. We then had an important discussion inside the SWP as to whether the trades council was sufficiently important to warrant the work we were putting in. Many comrades felt that because the council was based on union branches, many of which were tiny meetings, and because the trades council didn't relate to the workplace, then we should pull back. In the event this view seemed to dominate and we effectively stepped back from trades council work.

About two years ago the trades council leadership was taken over by a grouping of Labour Party and ex-SWP members - a typical 'non-party' grouping of the sort praised in *Beyond the Fragments*. The present direction of the trades council is a good indication of the limitations of the politics of such groupings and of the potential dangers of controlling a trades council without a good workplace base.

The meetings of the trades council have remained boring with about 90 per cent of the business being a total waste of time. This is mainly to do with the fact that the trades council is split up into dozens of sub-committees. Every time an issue comes up a new sub-committee is set up and the issue is hived off to it. Meetings are then dominated by report backs. This has effectively made the trades council incredibly bureaucratic.

The trades council was also instrumental in setting up and is still very closely tied to the Coventry Workshop. This is a very ambitious project, setting up a local workers' education service, which organises research about local unemployment and wages, and evening discussions much like WEA courses. At this level it is highly successful, employs five full-time staff (funded from a local grant as well as donations), and organises useful meetings on health and safety, new technology and so on. It also produces a bulletin which is very much like a trades council bulletin.

In general both the workshop and the trades council are very good, and sometimes useful, left faces, but stop well short of real action. As a result of this 'safe left' approach the trades council and the workshop fail to show

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up the limitations of the local full-time union officers and certainly have not made any attempt to break down the division between the trades council and the shop stewards committees.

Although the trades council does invite speakers (Robinson spoke at the January meeting) and formally supports strikes, no action is ever taken up, collection sheets is about as far as it gets. For instance, during the steel strike the trades council could easily have organised leaflets into the factories about organising blacking and arranged tours for strikers. But in fact nothing more than collection sheets were done, and the only striker to be invited to a workshop/council meeting was invited on the initiative of an SWP member from the Chrysler stewards committee. The Corrie campaign is another good example. The trades council made all the right noises, and the workshop bulletin had all the right articles, but no campaigning inside the factories was organised. Not even a tour of speakers round shop stewards committees.

The trades council in Coventry has a huge potential. It could be used to challenge the right wing inside the factories and organise city-wide initiatives. We could be doing good work building up to the May 14th Day of Action over the Employment Bill, leafleting factories, organising street meetings, arguing for stoppages. We could be booking coaches now and sending speakers to shop stewards committees arguing for big delegations. The trades council could do a lot more to help local disputes by calling for days of action, masspicketing and so on. But for the moment all this sort of work will not be done and the SWP probably needs to put more effort into trying to change the situation.



Brent Trades Council

If you were asked to name the trades council which had 'achieved most' during the last five years you would probably pick on Brent. The trades council leaped to national prominence during the Grunwick mass picketing and is always portrayed by the CP and broad left as a model of what such a body ought to be like. This image is almost entirely an illusion; it rests on a number of fantasies about the North London 'labour movement', chief of which is the notion that substantial local support was won for the Grunwick

strikers. If that had happened, the result of the strike would probably have been different.

Nevertheless, the fact that Brent trades council played a prominent role in the dispute is well known. What is much less well known is that members of the SWP (then IS) played a very significant role in building up the trades council's reputation in the anti-Tory fight of 1973-74. What we did then has quite a few lessons for the present and I think indicates fairly clearly the limitations of work on trades councils.

Brent trades council in 1973 (and since) was a distinctly unrepresentative body. As with all such bodies it had no feel for the workplace, no links with anything going on in factories, offices, schools...whatever. Both the CP and ourselves fitted in well because neither organisation had a real 'shop floor' base either.

What gave it some life was the fact that we used it as a springboard. Not in the sense of trying to strengthen it, which would have been a complete waste of time, but in using its name to campaign for certain things.

The best example was the May Day action call from the TUC in 1973. The general council had reluctantly decided to back strike action on May 1st, but was of course doing nothing at all about it - very much along the lines of its 'call' for action this May 14th. We proposed that the trades council take this call to the workplace activists, and in particular aim at places which were not part of the 'traditional labour movement' but which were newly organised, trying to get recognition or had large numbers of young workers. Basically the kind of areas we were aiming at ourselves!

The result was that May 1st 1973 saw the largest number of workers on strike in North West London since 1926, and trades council initiative was important in pulling out perhaps 2,000 of the 20,000 who struck for the day. We even had a group with a loudhailer going round factories still working during the day, trying to get them to stop.

It would be nice to be able to say how this initiative was built on, what it led to etc. Unfortunately it led to very little. Part of the reason for this was the way in which the CP and Labour left took control of the direction of the trades council and stifled initiative. Another reason I suspect was that we were - rightly - bending all our efforts to trying to build workplace groups, and we failed to use the vehicle of the trades council as a means to that end. The result was that the stamina of the few comrades on the trades council began to flag, because the connections with our most important work were not being made.

In retrospect of course this failure to maintain the routine work was a mistake.

We could have been taking on the arguments about what the trades council should have been doing to get local mass support for Grunwick instead of arguing from the 'outside' - ie a few local trade union branches, Cricklewood UPW, the Desoutter strike committee, Barnet trades council.

To conclude: the problem with trades councils is there is nothing to link them organically with what is really taking place where it matters - in the workplace. There is an enormous danger of resolution-mongering and pretence. There is the fact that most political debate within trades councils is sectarian and represents the worst aspects of union branches.

Against this it has to be said that the trades council can act as an excellent springboard for ideas we want to carry into local branches where we're not represented - the code of practice is an obvious example - of for pushing certain official union initiatives, locally or nationally.

Dave Beecham



Norwich Trades Council

Norwich Trades Council is large compared with many trades councils, some 80 branches representing about 24,000 members, and in the last few years there has been an average attendance of about 50. The SWP have had up to six members, although at the most three active, at these meetings. The political opposition always complains that 75 per cent of the meeting was SWP.

At its peak, attendance at the trades council in 1977 was 80, now it is down to about 45. The drop off coincided with a change in personnel at the 'top-table', which included the replacement of an SWP secretary by a Labour Party member. Meetings became more boring because the new leadership failed to take initiatives on important issues and allowed the meetings to become dominated by all sorts of minor issues.

Eight years ago the trades council was intimately tied up with the Labour Party, to such an extent that the Labour agent was automatically the secretary. Meetings were small, never discussed current industrial or political events other than to give a small donation here and there. The Norwich SWP at the time was able to take small initiatives; inside ASTMS, against the Industrial Relations Act, and through a rent campaign on a council estate. It was difficult to work in an environment

where few strikes took place, but the SWP decided at that time to put two or three members on the trades council to try to win support for disputes taking place nationally.

For the next few years the Labour Party were run ragged with calls of support for action, not just financial but also for meetings, speakers etc, in support of the struggles of 73/73. SWP inspired motions tended to dominate initially, but gradually other delegates put forward motions embarrassing the platform. Eventually the top table changed, SWP members appeared on the executive, and certainly the meetings were livelier. There were even exciting moments when strikers came to the council, theatre groups, film shows of Grunwick. The activists in unions came, the full-time officials didn't – it was too hot for them – but the shop stewards still ignored the council. The trades council for all its activity had no real base in the workplace.

An SWP initiative was a newsletter called *Link*, which despite being popular in several workplaces, lacks real bite. There is also the problem that the work of production falls onto one comrade. We have discussed in the local SWP whether to stick our necks out and make it far more left wing. However, at trade union level it is better than most union journals, it's not academic like some trades council bulletins, but it doesn't really make people sit up.

Another initiative has been to get an Information Centre started with the support of the trades council, but run by a separate committee. It has not yet developed all its potential in terms of being a place where trade unionists run for support, but it has organised some successful evening meetings. There is a large contact list of shop stewards.

This viewpoint is from someone who is an SWP member and one who has been secretary of the council. I don't believe the experience compromised the SWP's politics in any way. The value of the trades council is when it becomes a co-ordinating body for trade unionists, not dominated by full-time officials.

What can the trades council do? Real support for strikes should be foremost, money, leaflets, joining the picket line, and so on. Organising the movement in Norwich where there are few hard convenors may be difficult, but certain issues can be used. General activity can make the council attractive and worth coming to.

It takes a lot of hard boring work to make a trades council viable, to get the press to take up stories, to get people to take it seriously in the factories or to be a place where workers can come along when on strike or with problems at work, but I believe the councils are a forum where trade unionists can find the help they often fail to get within the official machine.

Ian Gibson



Heathrow engineers on strike in 1977. Ian Morris (inset).

The Largest Factory in Britain

The words Derek Robinson seem to be on everyone's lips at the moment, and it's almost becoming a cliché to talk about ailing shop stewards organisation. But there's nothing inevitable about the Longbridge affair – it depends on the quality of organisation and the painstaking work done by stewards and other militants.

London's Heathrow airport is easily the largest concentration of workers in Britain. Of a total 60,000 workforce, 11,000 are engineering and maintenance workers employed by British Airways. They have just won 17 per cent without strings and extra holidays and holiday pay after a campaign, a one-day strike and an overtime ban against a management offer of 12 per cent with massive productivity conditions. The problems of organisation are immense: a widely dispersed membership, a very bureaucratic official union structure and, not least, a very weak, CP-led, organisation in the Overseas Division as opposed to the fairly strong and democratic organisation of the European Division.

Socialist Review talked to Ian Morris, British Airways European Division shop steward, about the problems and how to overcome them.

The industry's supposedly run by a National Joint Council on which full-time officials sit, from every union involved at British Airways. But below that comes a system of panels for all different grades of worker – even the pilots have got one. In many cases even these have been composed of full-time officials with no lay reps at all. The system forms a great big buffer between

the normal joint shop stewards committees – which still exist there, for the industrial grades anyway – and management. Any contact with management is through the panels.

Built into the constitution of the thing there is no way you can really have an official dispute. There are really time-wasting procedures and at the end of it all if you want to do something official it goes to conciliation and arbitration. So everything in terms of action is unofficial by the nature of the thing.

In the old days – before we had the shift-pay strike and big victory in 1977 – it was even worse. The engineering and maintenance sectional panel would meet every three months and the chairman and secretary of the lay panel at the engineering base (which wasn't allowed to talk about anything real at all) would go up and wait about in a corridor while the officials went to the National Sectional Panel. If you were lucky you'd catch them sneaking out and could find out what went on. Otherwise you'd wait two or three months to find out what had happened.

One enormous problem (which still to some extent remains) with the system is that you've got eight unions on the engineering and maintenance panel, all with equal representation: the AUEW with 4,000 people and, say, UCATT with 200. In that sort of situation, with four or five very small unions, the smaller unions are forced to come to secret agreements with management to protect themselves and get the advantages that could be won by the stronger unions. The AUEW was particularly badly off: and it was the union's

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withdrawal from the system, before the 1977 dispute, which threw the whole place into turmoil.

The shift-pay strike was a really terrific breakthrough. What we won snowballed right the way through British Airways and then through all the foreign operators at Heathrow. It was quite a traumatic time for management: they obviously knew something had to change because even when the strike was over the AUEW was still out of the panel machinery.

After the strike we formed a joint committee with the JSSC from the overseas division to agree a new constitution based upon lay representation to the national sectional panel, with the representatives chosen directly by the JSSC. This would have done away with the situation in which people represented only their own unions. But the full-time officials saw that it would weaken their own power, and insisted that the lay representatives had to be chosen union by union. But as regards shop stewards organisation itself, since the 1977 strike a more progressive element has got the positions and at wage time they start campaigning, justifying the claim, explaining it in leaflets and in sectional meetings. The leaflets are most important, because not all stewards are good stewards.

Right from the formulation of the claim, you want to put it down in black and white and justify it, taking it through stage by stage. Then when management starts dragging its feet you've got to explain why you ought to take action. Argue the case quite logically. Get it down in print and then even your bad stewards are pressed because they start getting attacked by their own members. That's the way to counteract bad stewards.

People do refer to leaflets. Every week BA puts out a news thing and they're using that as propaganda, and very clever propaganda too, all the time. There must be something to counter it. You can't just rely on sectional meetings, important though they are. And when people go to a mass meeting most of them have already made up their minds which way they're going to vote. It's just getting everyone together, letting everyone see each other's around especially if it's an action thing, getting their hands up. Once it gets to a mass meeting you either vote yes or no and that's it; I don't think it'd be practical to do otherwise.

Apart from getting the leaflets out and explaining at each stage, you've got to time them quite deliberately. And some people just think 'we should put another bulletin out', but I feel you only put them out when it's needed and to achieve certain specific aims. I have a lot of trouble with people. They think: ...a bulletin's gone out, christ, everyone's read that, they think it's great etc etc - let's put out another bulletin next

week...And there is no need for a bulletin next week; there's nothing to say next week. They'd lose their value if they were full of waffle.

Apart from the bulletins -- which get all over the European Division and even into the Overseas Division because we've got people taking them in -- what we do in my area is hold area stewards meetings. I call a meeting of the 24 or 25 stewards in the area -- engine overhaul -- who represent about 500 people; getting the stewards together at the crucial times when you're asking something from the membership or at different phases. It's done on the shop stewards committee, but on top of that you want your area because you can have a better sort of debate or discussion than you can on a big shop stewards committee. By one means or another you get the stewards together and put over what the situation is at the time. And you get them all to agree more or less by sheer reasoning, so they can see that's the way forward, and then you explain to them:

'We've had a good discussion, a lot of different people speaking; you all know where we're going in this room. But all the membership is outside there. Now all of you go back there and you hold your shop meetings and try and get the same feeling in your shop, get the same ideas home. Now, be honest with yourselves, and if you don't think you have got the ideas home, then I or one of the other stewards will come to a shop meeting and get it across.'

And it's very, very effective. Especially when you get into a situation of a stoppage, because management starts all sort of stunts to cause confusion, doubts etc etc, and when a stoppage is imminent then the doubts start coming thick and fast. And you get to the point when these panic things are going on and someone's saying 'My shop is definitely against it, we're not going to have it. We've heard someone over there isn't going to do it. We're not going to be fools etc.' And you know you've got a bad steward there. And then you can go into that shop and explain it to them and there's not a peep out of the blokes.

When the rumours start going round is the time to get the stewards in the area together again and bolster them up and tell them to go back if they've got any problems and explain to their shop. 'Go back there and if any of you have got problems at your shop meeting, I'll come along or someone else will come along. The area meetings are very encouraging. You go there really a bit down in the dumps because everyone's very pessimistic before the event and think they're going to get overturned at the mass meeting.

And you go there and there's about three people put their hand up against, when it actually comes to the crunch -- if everyone's done their job.



Hospital Occupations

Hospital occupations have emerged over the past few years as an important tactic in the fight against cuts and closures. Bethnal Green, the EGA, Hounslow and Plaistow Maternity all occupied when threatened with closure under the Labour Government. More recently a batch of hospitals -- St Benedicts, St Georges, Hyde Park and Etwell Hospital in Derbyshire -- have decided to occupy in defiance of the Tory axe. As one shop steward at St Benedicts says: 'If you don't occupy, you don't fight.' But occupations aren't easy. Given the nature of work in hospitals and the gradual acceptance by many people of cuts as a fact of life, there can be all sorts of problems.

First of all, rarely are hospital workers in just one union. More often than not there are several unions, all mutually hostile, and a number of workers not in any union at all.

Plaistow Maternity realised the potential danger of these divisions from the start. They were determined their occupation committee would bridge the gaps. One of the leaders of the occupation explained:

'We weren't basically union controlled. When we went into that action committee we weren't NUPE, NALGO and COHSE, we were workers of Plaistow Maternity. If we wanted union help we'd ask for it. The unions were on the sidelines...'

St Benedicts, whose occupation has been going since last November, also met the problem. Their occupation committee represents all the unions in the hospital. At St Georges, however, it is seen as NUPE's occupation and other workers feel they are intruding if they

get involved. St Georges also faces the problem of having nurses who are only based in the hospital part of the time, so they feel no particular allegiance to the hospital, and consequently no particular need to keep it open.

Once any group of hospital workers has decided to occupy the immediate issue that arises is whether they have the strength to kick out the management. St Benedicts realised the importance of the question, but felt that in their case if the management went so did their wages. They decided they needed to establish the work-in on a firm footing before asking other workers to go without pay.

Plaistow Maternity took the decision to throw out the management as their first step. They pinned a long list on the wall of 'the great white chiefs' who were no longer welcome. Their immediate bosses, with the exception of the administrator and the senior nursing officer, had to get out. It was made plain to the administrator that she only remained because of the goodwill of the occupation committee, and all her actions were subject to their ratification. The catering manager had to beg to be admitted. On one occasion three members of the District Management Team turned up 'wanting to talk to the staff'. A mass meeting decided not to

hear what they had to say. This is obviously the position to be in if at all possible. Otherwise, as the St Benedicts people readily acknowledge, management can 'whisper to people in the corridors', threaten to stop the pay of anyone who spends working hours on the picket line and make it difficult for anyone to get out to raise support for the campaign.

There is also the question of outside support. Obviously the only areas where any really significant support can be built are those where there is also some industrial muscle, and so far there has been no hospital campaign in a heavily industrialised area. Although local support committees have in most cases functioned admirably, it still seems true to say that hospital workers have not been hard enough in demanding that other workers support their campaign.

As Bill Geddes, victimised militant at Hammersmith hospital, suggests, hospital workers when eliciting support from other local trade unionists, should make clear demands for on-going financial support and a definite commitment for help on the picket line. Part of the reason why demands have not been posed with sufficient hardness is that hospital workers who suddenly find themselves running occupations have usually had little experience of speaking

in public and fight shy of going out to trade union and workplace meetings. Where support on the outside has been built up, as in the half-day strike and demonstration against the cuts in Hackney last September, little has been done to make sure the support is maintained.

Finally, occupations run up against the problem of doctors. The pattern so far has been that doctors will often initially support hospital work-ins. But there is always some point along the line at which they can be bought off. Whether consultants or general practitioners, as Bill Geddes says, 'doctors are generally not working class people and usually in the end they revert to their class interests'.

It is difficult to see a way around the problem - so much is dependent on doctors maintaining a steady flow of patients to a hospital if it is to remain open. Clearly, support committees can put more energy into picketing GP's surgeries to try to pressurise them into agreeing to keep referring patients. Nurses if better organised could 'black' certain doctors, but none of this seems sufficient to thwart the power doctors wield if they choose to side with the authorities and let a hospital go to the wall.

Jane Ure Smith

THE MOVEMENT

Corrie: Lessons from the Campaign

It is not clear whether the Corrie Bill is dead or not as we go to press. It could still come up in the Commons on 14 March or 4 July. But what is clear is that contrary to all expectations the level of the campaign against it has been higher than previous campaigns against the James White and William Benyon Bills.

The campaign seemed to die away at the end of last year. But it revived remarkably at the end of January and beginning of February. There were the well known demonstrations in London, with 20,000 on 5 January - an astonishing number for a work-day demonstration - and 5000 on the 8th when women stormed parliament and fought with the police outside. Just as significant, but with much less national publicity, were the local demonstrations - 1000 strong in Newcastle, 1500 strong in Glasgow, 3000 strong in Manchester, several hundred strong in Edinburgh, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds - with activity in virtually every town of any significance.

However, as with any such campaign, many leading activists were confused as to how to build the movement. Early on it became clear that some of the leading figures in the campaign thought it had to compro-

mise on its demands so as to get wide support. They argued it could only be successful if it received the support of people like Liberal leader David Steel (who later tried to reach a compromise with Corrie). At campaign steering committee meetings they repeatedly decided against NAC getting involved in any sort of direct action. And when this occurred on the 8th they were thoroughly embarrassed - with Socialist Challenge saying the demonstration in Parliament Square was wrong - even though the action made more impact than anything since the TUC demonstration and was crucial in helping to shift the climate over the Bill.

After the 8th, the majority of the NAC leadership was determined to avoid any repetition of such events, and adhered strictly to police requests not to break the sessional order banning demonstrations within a mile of parliament. This meant subsequent demos have taken place almost unnoticed.

SWP supporters, organised around *Women's Voice*, argued from the beginning of the campaign for a double strategy. On the one hand it had to be taken out to the mass of women, particularly working

women, who do not normally get involved in political activities. Only that could expose how limited was the strength of the anti-abortionists. On the other hand, out of widening mass support a militant campaign had to be built, prepared to take Suffragette type direct action and, if the Bill were passed, to actively defy it. We argued on the basis of the experience of France, Italy and Spain that that would force the authorities onto the defensive and make them very unkeen to enforce an anti-abortion law.

There were a few misunderstandings among revolutionaries involved in the campaign. Early on there was a tendency for some women to react to the passive, parliamentary orientation of the NAC leadership by saying we should leave NAC, and just campaign as *Women's Voice*.

Another mistake was a tendency for some people to see orienting to the working class as meaning a purely passive approach, centred around the passing of resolutions by existing trade union activists.

In terms of working class support the campaign was very successful - witness the TUC demonstration and the degree of opposition to Corrie shown by the opinion polls. But the middle class character of much of the women's movement and the small size of the revolutionary left meant there were limits to the extent to which this passive support could be transformed into active participation in the campaign. We could not

THE MOVEMENT

simply sit back and defer all action until that had happened (by which time Corrie would have been passed); the key to building further active support from women, especially working class women, was the sort of active defiance shown on the 8th, not just resolution mongering.

Finally, there was the question of women-only demonstrations (which even *Socialist Worker* got wrong). Here there was a problem. Marxists argue against radical feminists that the source of women's oppression lies in class society. And that will only be overthrown by the revolutionary activity of working women *and* men.

But we also recognise that as women we are on the receiving end of oppression through things like abortion laws – it is we who will be in the forefront of any fight back. Many of us feel more confident if the fight involves women-only meetings and women-only demonstrations (or women-only contingents on mixed demonstrations). We feel that otherwise we will end up tailing behind more confident men. Hence support for women-only activities is much wider than the ranks of the relatively small number of radical feminists.

In such situations, for socialists the ques-

tion of whether demonstrations should be mixed or women-only is a purely *tactical* question. Within NAC we have usually argued for mixed demonstrations since the more male trade unionists involved in the campaign the better. But when we have lost the argument we have been only too happy to abide by majority decisions and to organise for the maximum turn out on women-only events.

As the Irish revolutionary, James Connolly, summed up the correct Marxist position nearly 70 years ago:

'None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling in their souls and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off, and cheer all the louder if in its hatred of thralldom and passion for freedom the women's army forges ahead of the militant army of labour.'

'But whosoever carries the outworks of the citadel of oppression, the working class alone can raze it to the ground'.

Lindsey German

propose to form a united organisation with us.

My own response to the IMG conference is that unity is not yet on. That is unfortunate, in the sense that even the modest increase in the strength of the SWP that would come from absorbing those members of the IMG who sincerely believe us to be revolutionaries would be some increase. But from their general arguments at the conference, it is clear that they are still so much in disagreement with our fundamental approach to the class struggle

Very much the defining feature of SWP (and before that IS) politics has always been the stress on the rank and file. It is that which has led us to emphasise the need to build in the unions in quite a different way to the various Broad Lefts, with their attempts merely to win grass roots support for 'progressive' officials. It is that which has led us to look with disdain on the purely revolutionary socialism of those who orient towards the Labour left. And it is even that which has led us to insist that *from the point of view of the working class* there is no essential difference between fully nationalised economies of the East and the monopoly capitalisms of the West.

All the groupings at the IMG conference denounced such a starting point to approaching the world as 'rank and filism'. They gave the impression that merely by describing someone's politics with such a term you wrote off what they had to say. To put it mildly, it is difficult to see how they could merge with a party based completely on 'rank and filism' without continual rows that could only militate against the work of that party.

The difference with us over 'rank-and-filism' was reflected in an unquestioned commitment to a number of other questions by almost all the members of the main groupings. Hence they accepted the need to orient very much on the Labour left, even to the extent of seeing it as useful for people to work within the Labour Party—and they accepted that Benn's reformist Labour Coordinating Committee was close to being a 'class struggle left wing'. Hence too they accepted that your position on Afghanistan had to begin from considerations of the 'defence of the USSR'. The ardent fusionists were as much committed to the various shibboleths of the IMG as anyone else at the conference.

The grouping who want unity with us have moved a long way from their earlier, complete dismissal of us as a revolutionary organisation. But they still accept much of the political thinking which led to their earlier appraisal. They will need to rethink their positions on a number of very practical issues before there can be any talk of a unity that does not merely produce a sectarian bear garden, cut off from the real needs of the struggle. Hopefully it is a process of rethinking that some of them will go through in the period ahead.

Pete Goodwin

Any Change ?

Mocking references to the '57 varieties of Trotskyists' or the 'feuding little sects on the left' are an old stick with which to beat revolutionary politics. They are usually made by those who would run a mile if somehow magically we were all united. Today they are part of the repertoire of Tony Benn's supporters, eager to entice some of us into their schemes in the Labour Party.

We in the SWP have never been blind to this fact of political life. But we have always taken the view that it's not going to go away by being obsessed by it

But supposing something could be done about it ... ? That was the main subject of contention at last month's conference of the International Marxist Group, the British section of the Fourth International. What did they come up with?

With a claimed 650 members (a decline from its last conference the IMG is not a very large group, even by the standards of the far left. (Our own SWP, no giant, registered 3600 members at our conference last November). Nor does it make up in muscle what it lacks in numbers – as the strategy document passed at their conference put it 'the major weakness of the IMG is its lack of base in the industrial working class.'

One plan, to which virtually every tendency at the conference paid at least lip service, is the rather bizarrely labelled strategy of 'colonisation'. This means getting students and white collar workers to

get jobs in industry. In our view it's a sure recipe for demoralisation, likely to lead to all sorts of rightist pressures, and above all a substitute for the real changes in organisation, newspaper and style of work necessary to recruit manual workers.

But the main subject of contention at the conference was the perennial one of 'revolutionary regroupment'. And this time the subject under discussion was the SWP.

For many the basic attitude of the majority of the IMG to us was clear and simple. We were 'centrists'—people who spoke in revolutionary language but could be expected to swing to the wrong side in decisive confrontations. So in 1973 the Fourth International described us as 'a formerly ultra-left group evolving towards centrism raising the tactic of the united front to the level of a strategic principle'. And only 18 months ago we got a letter from the IMG declaring we were a 'syndicalist break from Marxism'. That of course meant that any calls for unity with us could only be manoeuvres designed to win a few gullible sympathisers to the IMG.

However, this conference showed a definite shift of opinion. Only one smallish grouping within it thought we were still 'centrists'. The two main groupings (or 'tendencies') accepted what should have been blatantly obvious to anyone a decade ago, that we were genuine revolutionaries. And the largest single grouping, which got exactly half the votes, took this seriously enough to argue that the IMG should

Stuck in the State

Struggle Over The State: Cuts and Restructuring in Contemporary Britain, *CSE State Apparatus and Expenditure Group,* CSE Books, £2.50.

Capitalism and the Rule of Law: From Deviancy Theory to Marxism, ed. Bob Fine et al for National Deviancy Conference and Conference of Socialist Economists, Hutchinson, £3.95.

In and Against the State: Discussion Notes for Socialists, London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, PDC, £1.25.

Over the last decade or so, there has been a revival of Marxist intellectual debate.

One area on which discussion has been focused has been the central political problem of the state. In a first wave, discussion was dominated by the fundamentally barren 'Miliband-Poulantzas debate', both of whose major participants evolved openly towards left-reformist positions. A variety of impulses, however, turned the discussion out of this constricted furrow towards a concern with questions posed by classical Marxism. In their way, the three works reviewed here are all contributions to the 'second wave' of state debate. In different ways, they all reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the present left-academic debate.

Regrettably, *Struggle Over the State* is the least interesting – regret because the authors have attempted to produce a readable, relevant book. Its strength is its inclusion of empirical materials, in a variety of chapters that examine the ways in which the Callaghan government slashed and restructured the 'welfare state' in Britain. The difficulty, perhaps, is that the book emerged from a discussion group whose members had rather different political perspectives, some being left-reformists, others revolutionaries. Some share a commitment to some version or another of the 'Alternative Economic Strategy', others are resolutely opposed. The specifically theoretical and political sections of the book groan under the weight of the group's attempt to blend slops and fire. Still, the book contains useful documentation on a variety of questions of practical concern to socialists, and is 'good in parts'.

Capitalism and the Rule of Law is a collection of essays concerned with the state and law. Of the three books reviewed here, it is the most 'academic'

in tone. Running through this collection is a central argument about 'reform or revolution'. Several authors take up the arguments of E.P. Thompson, who has developed, in several places, a more or less absolute defence of 'the rule of law', which he has posed in terms of an attack on a (partly imaginary) revolutionary left. And an essay by Dario Melossi presents an at-first-sight impressively radical attack on the modern state, whose social relations are presented in terms of the relations of a prison; far from this being the foundation of an 'anarchist' theory, however, Melossi's conclusions are conventionally reformist – he calls for 'an anti-capitalist use of the state'.

In and Against the State is the most accessible of the three works. If only because it is written in a fairly 'popular' style and is well illustrated, it is most likely to gain a significant audience.

The authors' Preface spells out their problem:

'Because parties and trade unions on the whole have devoted little attention to the problem of how a state worker's hours of employment can be directed against capitalism and towards a transition to socialism, we have found that when we join them we are limited to "after-hours" socialism. We spend our evenings and weekends struggling against capitalism, and our days working diligently as agents of the capitalist state to reproduce the capitalist system.'

The authors focus, in particular, on the state's 'welfare' agencies. They write: 'Resources we need involve us in relations we don't.' In the welfare state, those seeking improvements in working-

class conditions find themselves embroiled in all manner of social relations that actively impede their efforts. Left-wing Labour councillors, aiming to better conditions in their boroughs, find themselves acting as employers, stifled by central government rules and demands. Teachers find themselves involved as much in discipline as in education; they must teach children, too, to pass pointless exams, in which many children must – through pre-set pass-and-fail rates – be declared 'failures'. Those who work in the welfare state, in jobs involving care and concern for need and suffering, find themselves being super-exploited for their pains.

Central to the way the welfare state works is its tendency to turn collective class problems into individual cases. *Areas* and *industries* are unhealthy, but the state deals only with the *individuals* who are sick. Health workers themselves are so busy and over-worked dealing with the immediate problems of the individual sick that they have little time or energy left for developing collective solutions to collective problems. After all, these sick individuals' needs are real and pressing, and cannot be ignored:

'If someone comes into the CHC office crippled with arthritis, it is difficult to tell them to join a group to make the NHS change its priorities...It is difficult for people in tight personal circumstances to turn a personal tussle with the state into a political struggle against it. Women with children and without collective support can barely get out of the house for a meeting.'

Teachers who *know* the exam system is irrelevant, that it distorts education, also know their students need those qualifications if they're to get jobs. If they don't teach those hated, competitive exam courses, students and parents will protest.

The dilemmas socialists face arise, the authors suggest, from the very character of the capitalist state. The state is capitalist, not just because of *what* it does (defending capitalist property, limiting workers' rights, fostering racism through immigration policies, etc) but also because of *how* it does it. Certain kinds of social relations are un-

socialist REVIEW

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posed on us by the state.

In capitalism, exploitation is hidden behind a veil. In, say, feudalism, exploitation was transparently a matter of give-and-take (the peasants gave, the lords took). But in capitalism it appears that everyone is equal and free. Each worker is free to work for a particular employer or not, free to live his or her own private life. But the world of the 'free' labour market is not the place where exploitation happens: exploitation occurs in the 'private property' of the capitalist, in the workplace, where it is hidden behind the illusion of 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay'. Employers enter 'fair and free' contracts with workers, and end up with their wealth expanded; while workers end up no better off at the end of the process than at the beginning. The everyday procedures of capitalism disguise and mystify the realities of exploitation.

Similarly with the state. It is not constructed around the fundamental antagonisms of capitalist exploitation, as an agency of open class oppression. But it appears as the state of the 'citizens', of the individual free agents of the labour market, who appear to be equal. The state relates to these 'free and equal' individuals, and reinforces these relations of 'freedom' and 'equality'. The state does not relate to us as members of classes, indeed it does not recognise classes. Rather, it treats us as fragmented, individual roles: as 'voters', 'taxpayers', 'delinquents', 'consumers', 'claimants', etc.

All the procedures the state lays down for dealing with us, and for meeting (some of) our needs and problems, atomise us and conceal the class character of our needs and problems. So, as the authors emphasise, the very form of the social relations imposed on us by the state are quite useless for socialist struggle.

'...the idea that you can achieve socialism through the state is illusory: the state channels and fragments our struggles in such a way that socialism can never appear on the agenda.'

The problem is acute right now. The Tories, following Labour's lead, are launching massive attacks on the welfare

state. We should not forget that Thatcher won millions of votes, in part in a campaign against the state and in particular against the taxation burden. (Not, of course, that the Tories have any interest in cutting workers' tax burden in reality!) Tax has become a significant working-class issue: in 1950 the average male manual worker paid no income taxes; today he pays something like 20 per cent of his wages in income tax, high rates, national insurance contributions, and 15 per cent VAT on a wide range of items.

Also, it is only in reformist circles — more and more removed from working-class experience — that the welfare state appears as 'our' welfare state. All too often, the experience workers have with welfare agencies is of a set of authoritarian, alien institutions, where they are bossed around, spied and checked on, insulted and demeaned, in return for needed but meagre benefits. A high price is demanded for the state's miserable provision of needs.

Are there ways, the authors ask, in which — in the very fight to defend the welfare state against the Tories' attacks we can challenge the existing forms of the state, and begin to advance other, socialist conceptions of how education, health care, social benefits and the like might be organised? Must the struggle be one where we fall in loyally behind reformist politicians, who have no desire to go beyond (at best) restoring the former status quo, or can we raise the question of collective action and organisation, of workers' power?

The authors note that Marxists have tended to ignore the way in which relations between the state and 'everyday life' (the individual, family life, leisure, work, travel, etc) have changed, and in changing have altered the forms and organisations of the class struggle itself. Marxism has tended to be too narrowly focused, insufficiently open to the changing forms of the class struggle, and thus less effective in its interventions. All this is well said, and important.

Up to this point, I think, the pamphlet is first-rate. It provides one of the most acute analyses of the capitalist 'welfare state' yet published. But, I find less satisfactory the comrades'

answers to the problems they pose very well.

The political parties, the comrades suggest, have tended to ignore the problems of workplace activity. Or, they have confined their activity to trade union demands on pay and conditions. Let us acknowledge that there is some truth in this charge. But it needs to be qualified more than they admit. In the first place, they draw no distinction between reformists and revolutionaries here. Yet this is surely crucial: the theory and practice of reformism does not require a challenge to the state form, while revolutionary Marxism asserts the absolute necessity of the destruction of state forms.

The authors' argument slides too easily into two kinds of assertion: first, that revolutionary organisations ignore these questions; secondly, that 'trade union' issues are relatively unimportant. As a result, they clear a space for a turning away from the problems of socialist party organisation entirely. And they ignore the inter-relation between 'economic' and 'political' struggles (where 'political' includes the issues of challenging the state form in daily practice) — a matter on which Rosa Luxemburg's *The Mass Strike* is so magnificent, and whose significance appears confirmed in recent history. Put bluntly: a movement that cannot defend its wages and conditions, that cannot struggle effectively against sackings and victimisation, is an *unconfident* movement, less likely also to challenge the state's definitions and the ways the state structures and divides the working class. Of course, the reverse is also true: a movement that does not challenge the ways the state shapes our lives will likewise be less capable of 'economic' defence.

The pamphlet's authors argue that revolutionary organisations have placed too little weight on the question of struggles against state forms. I'm sure they're partly correct, though they also exaggerate the issue. They, in turn, use this charge as a basis for arguing, in effect, against socialist party organisation altogether.

Thus, in effect, the comrades justify the 'anti-organisation' tendency that currently characterises a section of the left. It is an argument we cannot allow to go by default. 'Anti-partyism' is not a virtue for socialists, but a confession of weakness; and the weakness is not only in the existing organisations, but in the arguments and politics of those who one-sidedly adopt this position. It is, ultimately, a cop-out, and a strengthening of the self-ghettoising tendency of too much of the left today.

I have spelled out my reservations with this pamphlet at some length, precisely because I think it is important, and worth reading and discussing. It deserves to have some influence in the movement. But that influence is likely to be ambiguous and contradictory, because its real strengths are combined with serious weaknesses.

Colin Barker

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Derry's Walls Revisited

War and an Irish Town
Eamonn McCann,
Pluto Press, £1.95

When the first edition of Eamonn McCann's *War and an Irish Town* was published in 1974, it was an immediate sell-out. Within days of its appearance bookshops were turning away would-be purchasers empty handed. Comrade borrowed copy from comrade, and if you got your hands on one, you kept it.

McCann's book was dynamite. Beautifully written, it exposed with irrefutable logic the lies and hypocrisy of Britain's rulers about their bloody war in Ireland, and pointed the way towards the socialist revolution.

The new edition from Pluto Press reproduces the first 120-odd pages unchanged. This is McCann's personalised account of events from the rise of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s to the British army's invasion of Republican 'no-go' areas in the summer of 1972. The raucous narrative is backed by a clear and concise analysis of the changing needs of British imperialism in relation to the Orange state and the Southern bourgeoisie—wherein lies the explanation for the present conflagration.

A new section brings the narrative up to date albeit in a highly condensed account occupying a mere 40 pages. In another new section, McCann offers his reassessment of the Provisionals in light of the last six years' experience and the changes that are occurring within the IRA.

But the book is more than a damning indictment of imperialist mis-rule, reactionary loyalism and the posturing of middle class catholic nationalism. It also offers a self-critical account of the failures of the left primarily their failure to move quickly enough beyond militant campaigns for democratic reform *within* the Northern state to building a movement with a definite strategy for *smashing* that state. The state was, and remains, unreformable, and in recognition of that fact, the Provos came into being and went into action, sweeping the left aside in the process.

Missing from the second edition (and this is a great disappointment), is McCann's masterful treatment of the origins and history of the Orange state, the interdependence of Orange and Green Toryism, and the few and brief—but for Marxists fundamentally significant instances of working class unity across the sectarian divide. Eighty pages of the original have been dropped—for economy McCann tells us. The reader is referred to Mike Farrell's *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* for historical background.

Such are the textual similarities and differences. What about the politics? The second edition, McCann tells us at the outset, 'is intended as a contribution to

discussion on how best to continue the struggle for a free, socialist Ireland'. The first edition ended on a more emphatic note: 'To make the revolution we need a revolutionary party. This book is intended as a contribution to discussion of how best to build it.'

These quotes help pinpoint a major shift in the author's political perspective, away from building an *independent* revolutionary Marxist organisation in Ireland, towards a concentration of attention and hope on the emerging left wing *within* the Provos themselves.

'Exposes with irrefutable logic the lies and hypocrisy of Britain's rulers'

In the first edition we were told 'only the revolutionary left could offer the programme which is needed' and that 'the future in Ireland lies with the small, but at last steadily growing, forces of Marxism.' Six years, and a second edition later, McCann's constructive criticism of the revolutionary left has given way to summary dismissal.

The 'steady growth' of earlier years failed to bear fruit. The left fragmented, and sections of it tied themselves in knots over how to relate to the Provos, which of their bombings and shootings to support, which to condemn. The Provos, unbeaten and unbeatable, just blasted on, heedless of the admonitions of the left.

Compare: 'The Provos, in the North especially, are almost entirely working-class; but . . . many of them have little understanding of the need for working-class politics' (1st edition p254), with: 'Today's Provo activists are not without understand-

ing of the need for working class politics.' (2nd edition p175).

So what has happened between 1974 and 1980 to warrant such a changed outlook? 'As younger working-class militants have come to the fore,' McCann explains, 'the movement has swung measurably to the left.'

Has it? And if it has, does that render the independent revolutionary left redundant?

It is undeniable that a left wing has emerged in the Provos, particularly in Belfast. But their principal spokesman, Gerry Adams, has emphatically denied that they are Marxists, and argues that they stand in the tradition of 'radical Republicanism'. His denials may have been made for tactical reasons, so as not to alienate the traditionalists at a time when the left was still unsure of its ground. But the fact that he felt compelled to make them indicates the vast problems facing the left in trying to overcome an orthodoxy that is steeped in militarism, secrecy, and a reluctance to engage in any form of activity that might detract from the purity of the armed struggle.

McCann is aware of these difficulties, but comes to no definite conclusions as to how, or whether they may be dealt with. He quotes at length Gerry Adams' plea for Provo involvement in working class struggles and points out that 'given the structure and traditions of the Republican movement it would be damnably difficult to put [his plea] into effect', and would require a 'fundamental break' from existing politics. Were such a 'fundamental break' to occur, it would mean an end to the Provos as we have known them, and there is no evidence to suggest that that is the unambiguous perspective of their left wing.

The conclusions drawn by McCann in his first edition, and dropped from the second, are no less relevant today than in 1974, the Provo left wing notwithstanding. Indeed, the struggle to build an independent revolutionary socialist party is itself a vital component in pushing the Provos leftwards.

Despite its shortcomings, the second edition of *War and an Irish Town* is still a valuable source of information and arguments for those not fortunate enough to have a copy of the first. For those who have, it is still worth reading for the updated narrative and analysis of the 'new look' Provos.

Mike Millotte

The Making of the Welsh Working Class

The Merthyr Rising
Gwyn A. Williams
Croom Helm

Among the Bookmarx Club choices for this quarter is Gwyn Williams' *The Merthyr Rising*. We thought it would be worth reiterating some of what Jeff Weeks had to say about it when he reviewed it for us some

18 months ago.

June 1831 saw an 'armed insurrection' in the township of Merthyr Tydfil, fountain head of the industrial revolution in Wales. In early June a rising of workers sparked off a mass redistribution of property, destroyed the debtors' court, the Court of Requests, forced a strike in the ironworks and called for a general revolt in the name of 'reform'.

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A detachment of soldiers was marched into the town and confronted a mass of workers.

In the ensuing engagement some two dozen men and women were killed, seventy wounded—a Welsh 'Peterloo'—but the Military abandoned the town. For four days the rebels held Merthyr, and thousands rallied in the common cause, a 'communal insurrection'. The rising was only to be crushed by troop reinforcements rushed from various parts of the kingdom to restore 'order' (the traditional 'order').

Two 'leaders' were picked out for exemplary punishment. One was transported to Australia; the other, Dic Penderyn, died on the gallows, 'martyred'. His death only fed the fuel of working class energy, and long gruelling struggle followed between the new, secretive union lodges which sprang up within two weeks of the Rising and the employers. It too was eventually defeated. But the struggles of 1831 left their permanent mark.

In 1839, Lord Melbourne, Home Secretary at the time of the rising, wrote to his successor that Merthyr was 'the worst and most formidable district in the kingdom. The affair we had there in 1831 was the most like a fight of anything that took place.' The Rising of 1831 was, as Gwyn Williams puts it, the 'point of emergence' for the Welsh working class: for the first time, as a self-conscious class, it moved into independent political action. Whatever the defeats, containments, partial absorptions that followed, that gain was never lost.

Gwyn Williams' study of *The Merthyr Rising* is homage, celebration and analysis of that crucial conjuncture. The result is both gripping as a historical narrative and illuminating as an account of the complex of factors which obscure class conflicts until the curtains are torn away, revealing the stark reality of class exploitation.

Jeff Weeks

Capital Confusion

Reading Capital Politically

Harry Cleaver

Harvester 1979 £4.95

It had to come—first we had *Reading Capital*, then we had *Rereading Capital*, and now this one. The author lets loose an opening volley with a 70 page introduction attempting to justify the rest of the book. Everyone else has missed the point, it seems, because they didn't realise the working class

was 'autonomous' and so all the previous 'readings' of capital, be they philosophical or whatever, couldn't connect up the structure of Marx's capital to everyday practice like Wages for Housework.

You see, there's this extremely important libertarian interpretation of Marx popularised (!) by C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya in America based on some bits of the Frankfurt School together with empirical work on the daily lives of workers. And this analysis gives us important insights into how the ruling class are responding to the inevitable spontaneity of workers in struggle. Thus capital is the class struggle, all these struggles (students, women, blacks etc!) are the contradictions of capital.

So much for the introduction. When the book actually starts, considering Vol I of *Capital*, the author goes berserk. Harry Cleaver first disentangles the value analysis of the first chapter from what he sees as the philosophical aspects and then produces such an enormous confusion that the reader can't fathom out what the hell is going on. All varieties of struggles are seen as fundamental to the existence of capital, or the class struggle, or value, or both!

But whilst the 'analysis' is nonsense, the purpose is sinister. One more attempt to revise Marx so that the analysis justifies the politics. Cleaver, like so many others, starts from the wrong end. Having started with the superficial, he then tries to make it profound (that's why the intro is 70pp). Having nothing on which to build an analysis, he shrouds his comments in obscurity thus maintaining the illusion that he is saying something important. Unfortunately, it is old hat. This kind of libertarian emphasis on the struggles of workers is no substitute for an analysis—and it certainly offers nothing for people reading *Capital*. Read the book and don't bother with this sort of junk. Of course, you may be able to persuade some gullible publisher to publish a book on *Reading Capital up the Eiffel Tower*—it couldn't be worse than this one!

Bob Lloyd

Coming shortly

Policing the Police Volume 2, edited by Peter Hain, is to be published on March 27 by John Calder Ltd. It contains three major essays: The Politics of Policing and the Policing of Politics by Martin Kettle, a journalist on *New Society*, Society under Surveillance by Duncan Campbell of the *New Statesman*, and the Special Patrol Group by Joanna Rollo of Socialist Worker. The paperback price is £4.50 though it will be available at a cheaper rate through the Bookmarx Club.

LETTERS

Wrong Message

It seems that Bill Message (last issue) is prepared to advocate selective import controls (on coking coal— and according to his argument on the Fiat Strada), provided a few more conventional trimmings are thrown in. No doubt there is immense pressure in favour of the idea, especially from South Wales, but that of course has nothing at all to do with the argument. Leaving aside the question of how deep-mined coal from Alsace would be exempted (suppose they brought in *mixed* coal?) let us look at the central argument put forward in Bill's article. Namely, that the workers employed on open-cast mining are few and badly organised.

Taking the second point first, it is a fact that Korean textile workers are very poorly organised, abysmally paid and work long hours. The task of revolutionaries is to see that they become unionised and fight for improved conditions. Conniving to make them redundant through import controls here is not going to help them do that. The question of the level of organisation of workers abroad is a red herring.

So we are left with the first point—the excavator operators are very few in number—so far, so good. But did God make the 'gigantic machines'—and did he supply the steel? What about the cutters, the hydraulics, the massive tyres? When the coal is cut, does it walk to the railway or is it carried in man-made lorries? What about the railway workers—and how much does a thousand miles of railway track weigh in manufactured steel and concrete (or do they still use wooden sleepers)? And what of the dockers and the seamen and the workers who built the cargo ships (out of yet more steel)? Is it the jobs of all workers that Bill wants to defend—or the jobs of all miners?

Lionel Starling, North London.



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FILM REVIEWS

A Policemans lot

The Onion Field (X)
Director Harold Becker

The Onion Field is based on a book by Joseph Wambaugh. He is an ex-Los Angeles policeman who has made a name for himself writing about his former career. Because he objected to what happened when an earlier novel, *The Choirboys*, was made into a film, he financed and controlled the entire production of *The Onion Field*.

Wambaugh does not write about the corruption and brutality of L.A.'s finest. For him the police have a role similar to the Doctor and Fireman. In *The Onion Field* there is a sequence where a police officer plays the role of psychiatrist. Unfortunately, his idea of psychiatry consists of knocking a prisoner senseless because he was suffering from a 'bad case of homosexual panic'.

You might think that the whole film would be this sort of reactionary nonsense, but you would be wrong. It is based on a true story and is not as energetically right-wing as one would expect.

Two police officers are kidnapped by petty crooks and one of them is then murdered. The film shows the eventual trial of the two crooks, their appeals against the death sentence, their imprisonment for life and their chance of being paroled in 1983. But, during the seven years that this takes, the film also shows the disintegration of the surviving officer and his forced resignation from the police.

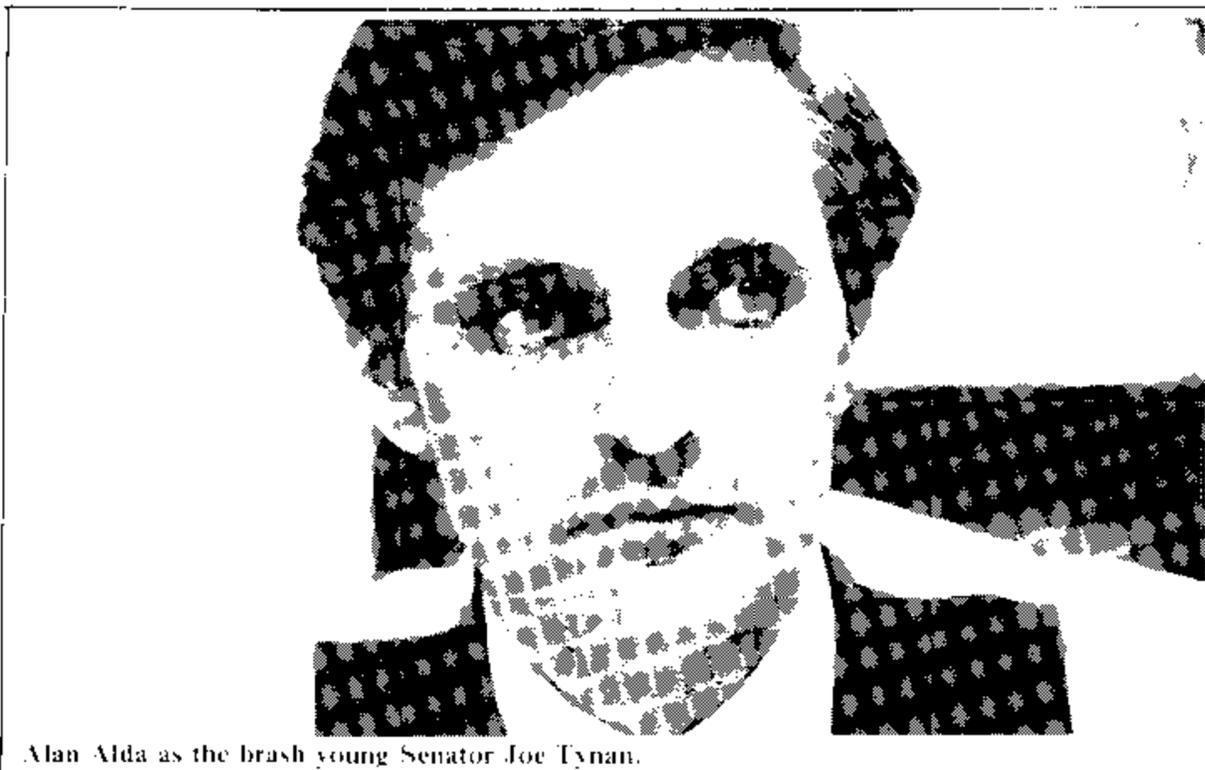
But Wambaugh is not arguing the straight right-wing ticket of swift vigilante justice. The criminals are shown in the context of their backgrounds and aspirations and are seen to develop and change as the legal process drags on over the years. The legal system that allows this comes in for some criticism, but you do not come away feeling that the two men should have gone to the gas chambers. Indeed, it was the complexity of the system that saved them.

In the same way, there is criticism of the way that the surviving officer, Hettinger, is treated by his superiors because he allowed his gun to be taken from him. But that one Wambaugh is careful not to follow up too much.

So, what conclusions does Wambaugh draw from these events? In fact, he avoids drawing any. He simply throws the whole problem into the air by opting for a very glib happy ending. Hettinger is seen to be coming to terms with himself in his new job as a landscape gardener. The two criminals are seen to be almost saintly in their imprisonment.

If *The Onion Field* shows anything, it shows that an interesting story does not necessarily make for an interesting film. But, then again, what can one expect from an ex-policeman who believes in a system he can't understand or justify.

Peter Court



Alan Alda as the brash young Senator Joe Tynan.

Start as you mean to go on

The Seduction of Joe Tynan (AA)
Director Jerry Schatzberg

There's only one trouble with this film - its title. True, it's most definitely about Senator Joe Tynan, youthful liberal Democrat from New York with presidential ambitions. But no way is it about his seduction. His affair with a zany labour lawyer from the New South, which forms the backbone of the film, is most emphatically between two consenting adults. Nor will you find political seduction: Joe ends the film no more - and no less - corrupt than he began it.

And that's the only trouble. Once you've got over the title you're in for a really entertaining evening at the movies. Alan Alda (of *MASH* fame), as Joe Tynan, is superb. He also wrote the script, naturally giving himself a few too many of the punch lines - but, no bother, it is a very good script. Meryl Streep is sensational as his lover. His wife is good. So are his congressional colleagues. In particular, Rip 'Nixon' Torn, who must make a Hollywood 'first' by being anonymously sucked off behind a senatorial desk. It's very, very funny. Most of all about sex, but also about politics, middle class family life, liberalism - the lot.

But beware! A little Dave Spart devil (along with most of the critics) is going to try and spoil your enjoyment. He's going to whisper in your ear "Cop out!" He's going to make a list - the chief "corrupting" influence on Joe is from the black camp, to expose a racist Supreme Court nominee, over whom Joe would prefer to do a deal. Joe's marriage, albeit tattered, survives the film. So do his presidential chances; indeed, he is a lot closer to the great prize. And, above all, Joe, for all his bumbling lack of principle and consciously manufactured image, is really quite a nice guy.

Well, tell Dave Spart to get stuffed. The trouble with him is that he's had too much of the Watergate spoo-ols. You don't need to have your hero end up in the pen to take a stand on Washington wheeler dealing (the tragedy is that most of them don't end up there). Nor does he have to be the devil incarnate. (To my mind the film is all the stronger for showing how the nice guys are prisoners of the system).

So, sit back and enjoy yourselves. It may not be "Battleship Potemkin". But your laughter is definitely on the right side of the barricades.

Charlie Kay



Tony Cliff

Marxism
and the
collectivisation
of agriculture

Reprinted from
International
Socialism
Winter 1964 65

The collectivisation of agriculture is hardly an important issue for industrial Britain, but it is for socialists all over the Third World where peasant farmers form a large proportion of the population. Cliff's pamphlet looks at the lessons to be drawn from collectivisation in Russia after the 1917 revolution.

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K is for Keir Hardie— The Holy Man of Kilmnock

'Who built up the working class fight', says Alex Glasgow's song. Hardie was certainly the crucial figure in building the Labour Party, spending the 1890s establishing the Independent Labour Party, as a body of grass roots activists committed to the notion of labour representation independent of the two established parties of the day, the Tories and Liberals, and then seeing through the negotiations with union leaders which produced in the first decade of this century the Labour Representation Committee and later the Labour Party. But did this 'build up the working class fight?' Ken Montague has other ideas.

No popular movement, however treacherous and cynical it becomes, can begin with cynicism alone. A movement with a mass following must at least *begin* with ideals, with founders that are incorruptible, self-sacrificing and sincere. Christianity has its Christ, Judaism its Moses, the Labour Party—Keir Hardie.

"MacDonald," wrote Hardie's biographer, "like Arthur Henderson nine years later, joined the forces of labour out of cold, self-interested calculation." Not so Keir Hardie. Hardie made it possible for Labour to become a party of careerists, but he himself was its Holy Man, his "sanctity" a legend. The Labour Party (as he said himself) was his "child". He lived for it, and when the outbreak of the First World War exposed it for what it was, he died for it.

Mass movements begin, not with ideals or Holy Men, but with the movement of masses. Hardie himself came to prominence, a young man of 24, in the Ayrshire miners' strike of 1881.

"On Monday, long before dawn, there was a stir on the Ayrshire roads. At two in the morning," recalled an old miner, "the Arnback brass band came playing through Trabboch village and every miner, young and old, jumped out of bed and fell in behind. Away up towards Auchinlech they went marching, their numbers increasing with every mile of the road... from colliery to colliery.

"Here and there there was the occasional breakaway, and the pickets were out, and the police and military, and there were skirmishes and arrests and imprisonments. Hardie toiled night and day directing the relief committees, restraining the wild spirits from violence, advocating the men's claim temperately and persuasively in the local press, addressing mass meetings all over the country and keeping men in good heart."

Inspired as Hardie's leadership was (certainly by the standards of the 'old' trade unionists), it was based on impulses from the upsurge of the movement, the growing initiative and self-confidence of the rank

and file. Hardie's own inspiration was in terms of keeping that upsurge in acceptable bounds—the bounds of leaders and helpless masses—"restraining", "advocating", "keeping . . . in good heart", all done "temperately".

The idea that the Labour Party was created to advance the workers' movement is a lot of eyewash. It was born out of the marriage of convenience (with Hardie officiating) between the bureaucrats of the old craft unions and the young leaders of the New—themselves closer to the surge, more aware of the new political dimension, but often, like Will Crooks, sworn opponents of the "claptrap of socialism".

The Labour Party was never the answer to the workers' prayers. Its mission was to turn the workers' movement *back* to prayer. For Marx the self-realisation of the workers lay in their self-*activity*; for religious movements like the Labour Party it lay in personal identification with Holy Men who will "do something" for them. For Marx the workers grew in stature with their victories, for Hardie "toilsomely . . . with failures". Labour was a religious crusade, a party of mass passivity.

For all his fiery and indignant speeches, his histrionic gestures, his telegrams of support to unemployed marchers attacked by the police, his endearment in old age to Syndicalism, his irrational quixotic devotion to particular causes—from Suffragettes to albatrosses—not *once* in his parliamentary career, from 1892 to 1895 or from 1900 to 1915, did he bring himself to challenge the liturgies of Parliament.

He did, it is true, move a motion for a "socialist commonwealth". But when in 1908 the socialist Victor Grayson was physically dragged from the House for not shutting up about the two million unemployed, screaming at the top of his voice that Labour was a party of traitors, Hardie and his 'comrades' meekly moved an amendment. Labour Representation became an end in itself—its "coherence and credibility . . . more important than socialism."

For it isn't enough for the Holy Man to suffer the indignity of the masses, he must also, in himself, transcend their condition, link them to Glory. Jesus was King of the Jews, Moses Prince of Egypt, Hardie the first man to enter Parliament wearing a cloth cap (actually a deer-stalker).

Parliamentary Socialism was his sacrament. It transcended the divisions of classes, shifted the whole course of development, from daily struggles at work to the political questions of the state. It replaced class-conscious workers (always too uppity) with loyal parliamentary whips.

And short-circuiting the contradictions, Hardie was a mass of contradictions. An internationalist, supporting Home Rule, calling for self-government for India, opposing the Aliens Bill against Jews fleeing the pogroms, he was personally anti-semitic, made scandalous remarks about the Irish "a big shovel, a strong back, and a weak brain" and prefaced every comment on India with: *the natives are not yer fit. He was a defender of an all-white Australia.*

Hardie "sometimes gave the impression of having different opinions for the benefit of different audiences." None of it was insincere—if it were it would never have worked. But all of it, his amorphous religiosity, his erratic conviction, his unswerving adherence to a swerving course, was its own justification for the crudest opportunism.

His socialist party (the I.L.P.) was never to call for socialism, never to "alienate trade unionists by forcing socialism upon them." It could exercise no control over its MPs—and yet the same MPs (including Hardie himself) could lie to the party and bind themselves in electoral pacts with the Liberals. The "compromises" were always to the benefit of the right; the movement in consciousness always downwards, always towards the most backward and weary. Hardie hated all this. But he did it. It was the nursery of Parliamentary Labour, and saw it through a debilitated childhood.

And then, in 1914, Golgotha. Hardie isolated and crushed, believing his life's work was "utterly wasted", Labour MPs and card-carrying millions flocking to support the War. "Although a Socialist," they said, "I am a Britisher". Hardie howled at and spat at by crowds of ferocious jingos. *The chickens had come home to roost.*

"I understand now what Christ suffered in Gethsemane", he wrote his Mount of Olives, the terrace of the Commons. It was appropriate—even if once the slaughter had started, he called for support for "our" troops. Appropriate, because the killing of the Holy Man, his sacrifice, is itself an elevation, itself sanctifies the betrayal implicit in his cause. "Hardie", wrote John Burns—a more forthright careerist—"never won a strike, organised a union . . . or passed a Bill." But that isn't the point. For the mission of the Holy Man is not to lead his people out, but to lead them *back* to the Wilderness.

Ken Montague