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International

Thatcher's war at home

ndrew Gamble on Thatcherism
veet Freedom, Argentina, The Falklands,

Daniel Singer on Poland
The Pope, and ... 40 pages

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Editorial

COMBATING THE FALKLAN

In the same week that Mrs Thatcher invoked the Falklands spirit in the fight against the British working class, the NUR conference, bowing to the pressure of the media and its own leadership, called off the national rail strike, and Sidney Weighell took the Labour NEC's witch-hunt against *Militant* into the ranks of his own union.

The rapid swing from post-Falklands chauvinist euphoria, to the prospect of mass workers' action against the Government, and then, apparently, back again with sections of workers seeming to give way before press hysteria and the waving of the flag, may well have disoriented and depressed many socialists. At the time of writing, with the ASLEF dispute holding firm, the health service unions planning an extension of their action, and Arthur Scargill rallying the miners for war on the Tories while the Labour leaders run for cover or rush to aid Thatcher, the confusion will seem to many to continue.

But there is cause for optimism, if the lessons of the 'triple coincidence' — Falklands, strikes and witch-hunt — are learned in time. The resilience of the industrial struggles of a still-undefeated class; the role of the Labour leadership and the struggle at the base of the party; and the continuing importance of Britain's world role, all point to the same conclusion; the staggering contrast between the industrial strength and the political weakness of the British working class.

NUR members were 'led' into battle and back again by a union leadership which has presided over a constant erosion of their jobs and wages, in collaboration with management. In 1960 there were 515,000 rail workers. Today there are 180,000 and a further 40,000 jobs are threatened by productivity concessions which the NUR has still not spelt out to its members. British railway workers work 25 per cent longer hours than their continental brothers and sisters, and for lower pay, while the system receives less investment and subsidy than any in Europe, and the Tories prepare for privatisation of the profitable parts.

Against this background of demoralisation, the union leadership did nothing to prepare the ranks. As one NUR member put it: 'Weighell did more to sell flexible rostering to the members than he did to sell the strike'. It was remarkable in this context that the normally docile conference registered a 40 per cent vote for continuing the strike.

With only one delegate for five branches, members can do little to mandate delegates or make them accountable, to counteract the pressure of the media and Weighell. In this connection it is significant that Weighell arranged the conference debate on *Militant* to take place before voting on resolutions to democratise the union by such measures as direct branch representation and the election of officials.

But where branch-level activists gave a lead and explained the issues to the members, they met with a response. The same lesson emerges from the health workers' dispute, where the magnificent turnout by miners, gas electricity and council workers in response to the call by the TUC health committee was actually delivered by organisation, propaganda and explanation at rank and file level.

Rail and health show, as did the strikes in support of the People's March last year, and the civil service and steel strikes, that even workers with no tradition will respond to a lead in defence of their unions and conditions. But there is less confidence in the possibility of a successful head-on battle with the Government.

Tasteless

This is not simply an inevitable result of 3 million unemployed and the ideological campaign against all labour movement values, as some fainthearts in the Labour Party and elsewhere argue, drawing the suicidal conclusion that we must rally round the leadership and project a 'moderate' image. Nor, as the SWP argues, is it simply a result of the shift from shop floor militancy to the official union apparatus; crucial though it is to stress the importance of constant activity at rank-and-file level and the dangers of absorption in union or Labour Party machines.

For there is a crisis; and more and more workers realise that the problems they face require a solution at the level of government. A head-on challenge to the Tories, involving as it does taking on the union bureaucracy too, is not lightly embarked on. Crucial in the minds of the rank and file is the question of what political alternatives are available.

Here, all that Foot and co have to offer, as a letter in the new Bennite *Tribune* put it, is the message that: 'The LP is overrun by evil loonies who will destroy democracy and probably send you to slave camps; but vote Labour and we absolutely promise you an action-replay of the 1974 Labour Government.'

Faced with this dismal prospect, we get not so much a shift to the right in the class, as a political polarisation. Given this lack of a lead

OS SPIRIT

on the political as well as the trade union front, a space is created for the Thatcher offensive. But the new layer of militants who have learned from the 1974-79 experience, and who are the driving force behind the solidarity delivered in the health dispute, have drawn a different conclusion.

That conclusion is the need to make the Labour Party accountable so that a future Labour Government can be prevented from going the way of the last. It is against this layer, and its reflection in the constituency parties, that the witch-hunt is aimed.

Weighell certainly sees the connection between the witch-hunt in the party and the drive against the militants in his own union. And it is not entirely accidental that the NEC's decision on a register was followed the next week by moves against the Broad Left in the Inland Revenue Staff Federation.

The Tribune group has been split down the middle by the issue of the register, reflecting a sharp polarisation at the base of the party, where however there is a great deal more clarity that the *Militant* issue is a pretext for an attack on all those who favour any sort of extra-parliamentary action.

The trade union officialdom will back the witch-hunt, not only because they want to square up to activists in the base of their own unions, but because they see the far left, and indeed Labour's present policies, as an obstacle to the election of any future Labour Government. In fact Labour's only hope of turning the tide is to place itself at the head of a joint campaign of Labour and trade union action against the Government. Outside that perspective, there will not be sufficient confidence to hold up the trade union and other extra-parliamentary struggles against Thacherdom. And without the confidence and strength which only such struggles can generate, the seeds of Tory ideological and political attacks will find even more fertile soil in disillusionment with the institutions of the labour movement.

But the NEC meeting which discussed the witch-hunt did not find time to discuss the health service struggle or the rail dispute — despite the fact that defence of our health and transport systems are potentially popular rallying points. Instead Foot declared his 'relief' at the calling off of the NUR strike and Peter Shore has chipped in with a barely-concealed attack on ASLEF.

The Labour leaders do not just fail to understand these things. In fact they understand them very well. They see mass industrial mobilisations as a threat to their position. But the crisis will not permit Labour to coast back to power. Indeed the witch-hunt serves as a cover for preparation for a future possible coalition.

If the organisational strength of the British working class needs a socialist alternative to survive the Thatcherite onslaught, it is no less true that to fight the witch-hunt, the activists in the constituencies must link themselves to the strength of the industrial fight.

This means building left caucuses in unions that take the arguments to the members, and a political current that links the struggles in the unions and in the party. If the fight against the witch-hunt stays confined to the constituencies and wards it will be doomed. And its defeat will strengthen Thatcher in her war on the unions.

In all this the Malvinas and what they stand for will not go away, as some temporary diversion from the normal course of the struggle. Thatcher understands this very well. For with half of British capital's profits coming from overseas — a proportion that rises as capital flows abroad — Thatcher has good reason to tie Britain in even more closely with the world role of the United States as the world cop of imperialism. And the credibility of that role is what was and is at stake in the South Atlantic.

Here Foot's role in making Thatcher's war respectable is unforgiveable — and also inevitable. For the Labour and trade union leadership of the British working class has functioned for three generations as the brokers, enabling British capitalism to retreat before workers' struggles at home by conceding scraps from its world role.

That is the key to the enigma with which we started — the contrast between industrial strength and political weakness. Britain has a trade union movement with a level of membership, a degree of legal freedom, and a tradition of continual economic struggle with little equivalent in any comparable country, and with a unique degree of direct presence in and control over a major party of government. It has also had an absence of mass revolutionary politics for over 130 years. It has a reformist party which, uniquely in Europe, has never been Marxist or revolutionary, and was parliamentary before it adopted its anaemic form of socialism.

It is that contrast which enables Thatcher to attempt, with the help of the bought press, to use the Falklands spirit to turn the flank of British workers' strength.

If socialists are to answer her they must organise in a way that cuts across the division between 'politics' in the constituencies and industrial struggle confined to the unions — and which answers imperialism with a socialist foreign policy and active internationalism.

Photo: GM COOKSON

Labour's anti-warmongers

International Features

ARGENTINA: BEHIND THE WAR

RAFAEL RUNCO

Argentina's defeat in the Falklands has sparked a profound political crisis. Rafael Runco argues that the Argentinian mass movement has its best opportunity since the 1976 coup to struggle against the military junta.

Argentina is facing one of the most dramatic moments of its history. The irresponsible attitude of the government led by Galtieri involved the country in a war which the Argentinian working class and democratic people did not want. Argentina clearly has a rightful claim to the Malvinas islands based on historical facts: they were part of the country during the Spanish domination in Latin America and they continued to be so after independence, until Britain seized them in 1833. For the last 17 years the Argentinian people as well as the United Nations, the Organisation of American States and the non-aligned countries have been pressurising the Argentinian and British governments to settle this old dispute peacefully. Because of these internal and external pressures, taking into account the reactionary nature of the Argentinian government, any sensitive person should condemn the actions of the military junta over this issue; the choice of tactics and the opportunity to fight for national objectives always have to be adapted to the objective conditions (international correlation of forces) and to the possibilities of victory (which is not only influenced by the military capacity but also, and especially, by internal cohesion and a leadership in whom the people have put their confidence).

Who can object to the legitimacy of Panama's claim over its canal, or Cuba's claim over Guantanamo? But do these legitimate demands justify the outbreak of a conflict which would threaten world peace? Or should we consider the Argentinian government to be 'more patriotic' than those who are consistent in their anti-colonialist claims without risking the present and the future of their people?

From this point of view, Galtieri's adventure in the South Atlantic was doomed to be a failure from the start. However, Britain has neither the right nor the moral aptitude to condemn this action. The British Government, posing as a victim, reacted strongly to 'punish' the 'aggressors', but who punishes the immeasurable colonialist aggression of Britain towards the Third World? Her allies, imperialist powers like her?

The Government

The military junta, revealing one of its fascist features (the use of chauvinism as a political instrument) compromised its future in a desperate adventure in order to overcome the difficulties of continuing in power. The economic bankruptcy, the increasingly strong popular struggle, the international isolation and the political fissures in the armed forces had forced Galtieri's government into a defensive position, and it was necessary for him to find a social basis which would give strength to his feeble administration. He and his followers thought that by exploiting the strong anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist feelings of the Argentinians they would get support for all the government's policies. They also thought that the weak, decadent British imperialism would not reply strongly and that the United States would be at least neutral in a conflict which involved Reagan's greatest supporters in the counter-revolutionary war in Central America. A complete failure has resulted from such speculations: Margaret Thatcher, who in the middle of her own social storm also needed to do something to divert attention from British internal problems, realised that she would be able to manipulate the situation to unify Britain behind her unpopular government. The Reagan administration, having to make a decision, did not hesitate to choose its traditional ally, a fundamental gear in NATO's machinery. On the other hand, the Argentinian people stood up not only to defend what has always been regarded as part of their territory but also to repudiate the armed forces.

The Empire

The Argentinian armed forces want to make their country the 'South Africa' of Latin America. Their direct intervention against the peoples of Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, as well as the major role they have been playing in the terrorist co-ordination between the reactionary governments in South America, show that they have put themselves in the position of custodians of imperialist interests in the continent. Considering themselves harmed by the human rights policy of the Carter administration, which they regarded as 'soft', the Argentinian military proclaimed themselves the saviours of 'Christian Western Civilisation'. With Reagan, the bilateral relationship between the US and the Argentinian junta had improved, and the military thought they might have a free hand to carry out their South Atlantic adventure.

The United States has strategic military bases in Patagonia (the southern region of Argentina) and before 2 April Costa Mendez, as Argentinian Minister of Foreign Affairs, had secret talks with the American ambassador in Buenos Aires, Harry Schlaudermann, to negotiate the installation of a US navy base in the Malvinas. This offer and the close ties between Argentina and the Latin American lobby in Reagan's administration made Galtieri think that the United States would look on their actions favourably. This desire was shown by the fact that while the Argentinian troops were landing in Port Stanley, the Argentinian embassy in Washington was giving a party in honour of Jeanne Kirkpatrick, US ambassador to the United Nations.

But the servile attitude of the Argentinian armed forces towards imperialism did not allow them to realise that they were incapable of acting independently beyond the supervision of their masters. Although it is true that there is some antagonism and competition between imperialist countries, in this case the United States and Britain, they are united by the basic idea of their existence, Third World countries, their neo-

the Argentinian armed forces have learned their lesson: being the custodian of imperialism does not mean having an equal share in the great society

colonies, exist to be exploited by the multinationals, to expand their markets, generate profits and control strategic areas. Fundamentally they are united to plunder underdeveloped countries; this is a strategic partnership. Meanwhile the military exist to be the servants of imperialism, administrators of its profits and repressors of the people who fight to be free from its domination. The military and imperialism are tactical partners.

The Argentinian armed forces have learned their lesson: being the custodian of imperialism does not mean having an equal share in the great society. Who could imagine that all imperialist countries would have doubts in deciding whether to support Argentina or Britain? All of them have joined together to de-

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fend the interests of Britain although Argentina had previously been a 'good fellow'.

The People

The Argentinian workers' movement, in an indication of its deepening struggle, has once more demonstrated publicly and massively against the dictatorship. United by the slogan 'Peace, Bread and Jobs' thousands of Argentinians mobilised on 30 March in every main city of the country. They were led by the CGT (the semi-legal Argentinian TUC). Despite the rarified atmosphere in the country because of the worsening of the negotiations between Argentina and Britain over the Malvinas, the Argentinian people did not follow the warnings of the dictatorship to 'show a united country in view of the development of the crisis in the South Atlantic', and they went onto the streets. The victory of the people was categorical; despite the repression (a total of 2000 people were detained and one worker was killed in Mendoza City) it was the biggest demonstration against the dictatorship since the coup d'etat in 1976. It showed that the people are no longer afraid of the terrorist repressive methods of the armed forces and that only the workers have the initiative and are able to lead the struggle against the fascist junta.

In that atmosphere of deep political turmoil the Galtieri government decided to occupy the Malvinas islands. On 2 April a huge propaganda campaign, coordinated from the headquarters of the junta and the Department of the Press Secretary of the Presidency, was unleashed in Argentina. By exploiting a historical claim of the Argentinian people, the reactionary government declared itself the defender of Argentina's sovereignty and tried to unify the country behind the armed forces to give some legitimacy to the dictatorship.

The response was outside their calculations. More than one hundred thousand people went onto the streets of Buenos Aires to celebrate this historical event. But at the same time this demonstration was nothing more nor less than the continuation of the popular repudiation of this dictatorship: the slogans from that very first moment were 'Malvinas yes, Government no', 'The Malvinas are Argentinian, The Armed Forces aren't' and 'The Malvinas are Argentinian, so are the Disappeared People'. What should have been a movement of support for the government rapidly became not only an invaluable experience of anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle but also a move against the dictatorship.

The Argentinian people took the defence of the territorial sovereignty into their own hands but framed it in the context of the defence of popular sovereignty. For these reasons they supported the recovery of the islands, and even its military consequences in the face of the British Government's over-reaction, while at the same time criticising the commanders of the armed forces for not being able to reach a peaceful solution.

The Future

Whatever the military result of the war, the government of the armed forces would have fallen. Now it has happened. Galtieri has gone and the junta has collapsed. The armed forces are divided and for the first time since the coup the army is in government alone. Even the army is divided. General Bignone, the new President, and General Nicolaides, the new Army Commander, are not heading the government because they have managed to unify the army but because they were next in line. There is a layer of young officers, at a secondary level, who have long criticised the economic policy followed since 1976 as a sell-out to foreign interests. They have a more nationalistic project which they want to negotiate with the politicians.

This struggle within the army and the armed forces as a whole over what form of government they should opt for will continue in the coming months. The present government is provisional. The situation inside Argentina will remain unstable because it will be impossible to force the Argentinian people to

Angry mothers of the 'disappeared' protest outside the President's Palace

reverse the process they have put into action. Having taken advantage of the greater possibilities for political organisation in the country, the Argentinian working class and democratic people are now better organised than at any time since the coup d'etat. As they mobilised against what they saw as the continuation of a long series of acts of aggression by Britain against Argentina, the working class initiated a process of recovery of its political and union structures.

Argentina, as a nation, has gained on the international front on this issue, having won support from all the Third World and socialist countries and revolutionary organisations everywhere. The short-sighted attitude of the imperialist countries in trying to punish Argentina has produced a regrowth of anti-imperialist feelings worldwide, even in some capitalist governments such as those of Spain and Venezuela. Internally, the Argentinian people have won a political battle against the dictatorship. The new government has to deal with a higher stage of popular organisation and the strikes and demonstrations will continue. The death squads will keep working too but the people are now in the streets and won't be easy to turn back.

But the lack of a revolutionary organisation which fully represents and leads the Argentinian working class, and is recognised by the workers as their party, prevents this extraordinary situation linking up to a revolutionary situation. The people will support all moves towards democracy. They will support all moves which promise the freedom to allow their organisations to recover, the exiles to come home, and human rights to be restored. The danger at this moment will be that, lacking a revolutionary organisation, the outcome of this popular struggle will be a Peronist/Radical Party front which will gain mass support in elections but will, of course, fail to carry through its election programme.

The Argentinian neo-capitalist model needs the full support of imperialism to survive, and any new bourgeois government — even one with a 'popular mask' — will have to resume the traditional role of Argentina in the world division of labour by suppressing the struggle for freedom and democracy of the people of Argentina. Only a socialist government would be a real challenge to the imperialist domination.

For these reasons it is essential to support any attempt at democratic change in Argentina, but at the same time being aware that only the mobilisation and improvement in the organisation of the working class and democratic people will be the assurance of a real victory of the anti-colonialist and anti-fascist struggle, stepping forward towards the battle for socialism.

RAFAEL RUNCO is a survivor of the Argentinian death squads and currently a political refugee in this country.

International Features

ISLANDS OF DECLINE

MARTIN HONEYWELL

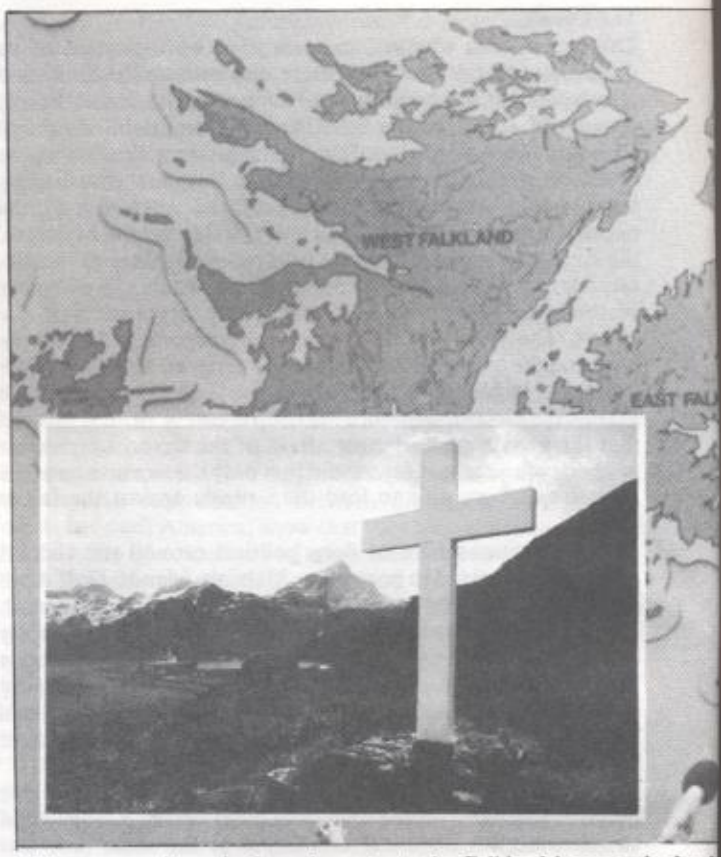
Britain's unjust war against Argentina was supposedly to uphold the rights of the Falkland Islanders. Martin Honeywell from the Latin American Bureau argues that the prospect for the Islanders is in fact one of economic decline and depopulation.

Much has been written in the past few weeks concerning Britain's anachronistic colonial relationship with the Falklands/Malvinas. However, there is no reason to believe that the present Island economy represents a similar anachronism. It contains nearly all the traits of a classic late twentieth century dependent economy, which, were it in continental Latin America, or Africa or Asia we would have no hesitation in calling 'underdeveloped'. It may not have the same levels of grinding poverty that other underdeveloped countries exhibit, but it illustrates the same dependence on the export of raw materials, the same lack of diversification of the economy, the same dependence on foreign capital (that is capital whose owners do not live on the Islands) and the same lack of economic and social infrastructure. This situation is not a legacy from the past. It is a state of affairs that has been developed in the Islands since the late 1920s. The principle actor in the development has been the Falkland Island Company.

The history of the company illustrates a useful case study for analysing the effects that the internationalisation of capital has on vulnerable economies. Formed in 1851 by Royal Charter, the company was given 'absolute right to, and exclusive dominion over, all wild horses, horned cattle, sheep, goats and swine upon the Falkland Islands.' Using capital raised in Britain, and after a somewhat shaky start, the company proceeded to become the dominant land owner, controller of all sea communications (both internally and externally), most retailing and wool marketing, and a major power in the affairs of the Falkland Island Government. Up until 1962, the company's profitability was totally dependent on the success of the local wool production. However, such dependence is not good business. Wool prices illustrate the same characteristics as most other raw material prices, they fluctuate wildly and are falling in real terms.

The response of the company was to diversify its operations and it began to invest in Britain in ships supplies, warehousing and automatic vending machines. At the same time its shares began to be freely traded on the London Stock Exchange, leading to a gradual decline in the number of Islander shareholders. By 1968 it was reported that of the 900 shareholders only 80 lived in the Islands. The 'national' interests of the company, represented by Islander shareholders and local landowners, which were concerned with the development and increased productivity of the local wool industry, were slowly losing out to 'international' interests, which measured success simply in terms of overall profit maximisation rather than from one specific sector and geographical location. The 'international' shareholders were quite happy that profits generated in the Falklands should be reinvested in Britain, and the subsequent rundown of the local wool industry aggravated by this decapitalisation process became less important to the final profitability of the company.

Despite diversification of the company, the rate at which profits were being withdrawn from the Islands exceeded the rate at which they were reinvested. The company became very cash rich and the owner of a growing portfolio of short term investments. Its share price failed to reflect the value of these highly liquid assets and it became a prime target for asset-stripping. In 1972, a Slater Walker subsidiary bought the company and by the time it was resold one year later, nearly one million pounds worth of cash and portfolio investments had been transferred to the parent company. Decapitalisation had taken on a totally new meaning.



Military expenditure is the only route to the Falklands' economic devel

In 1973, the company was unloaded by Slater Walker and bought by Charringtons Industrial Holdings. In 1974, the Falkland Island Company accounts listed seven companies as being wholly or partly owned, most bought during the diversification phase of the company's history. By 1976 four of these companies had been transferred to the parent company leaving the Falkland Island Company with only those subsidiaries that related to its interests in the Islands. In under three years, therefore, the company had been reduced to a shell and the profits accumulated from years of sheep farming had been taken out of the control of the Island's 'national' elite. The company's subsequent take-over by Coalite in 1977 merely confirmed this process. It became less than 2 per cent of the new parent's total investment and merely the source of profit for investment in Coalite's other areas of interest.

Not only have the Islands 'national' interests lost control of the company that monopolises their economy, but as of 21 April 1982 they have also lost the right to even examine its accounts or know who are its shareholders. At an extraordinary meeting, called on 26 February, it was decided by Coalite that the Falkland Island Company would no longer be registered as a public limited company. It is therefore no longer required to meet the disclosure requirements of British company law.

It is in this context that the tentative plans now being canvassed to develop the Islands must be judged. There has been talk of 600 people ready and willing to settle in the Falklands to bolster the rapidly declining local population, of the formation of a Falklands Island Bank backed by funds from the City and

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Photo: JOHN HARRIS

of course the dusting off of the 1976 Shackleton Report. However, the factors that have stunted the development of the Islands have not disappeared as a result of the war. They have been intensified and it is safe to predict that no peace time economy will develop on the Islands in the near future.

Scepticism at development plans

Any future development of the local economy would require two changes: the nationalisation of all farming land on the Islands and the concluding of an agreement with Argentina on the political future of the Islands. It is obvious from an understanding of the control that the absentee landowners wield and the type of development model that they are following that the Islands are destined for continued economic decline and eventual depopulation. New economic initiatives cannot be grafted onto this base as the decapitalisation and subsequent depopulation that accompanies it are contradictory to the development of a local economic and social infrastructure and the stimulation of local demand and production. This has been clearly recognised by Coalite who have expressed scepticism at the news from the Falkland Island Committee that they plan to encourage emigration to the Islands. The main industry on the Islands is already shedding labour and the local labour force is emigrating in large numbers. There is no land available for new farms to be set up. So what would they do? It is only in the context of an alternative development model that the Islands can support a larger population.

As far as new economic initiatives are concerned, Lord Shackleton made it quite clear in 1976 that no new investment would be attracted to the Islands until the sovereignty dispute was settled. What was true in 1976 is more true in 1982. 'Fortress Falklands' will not attract new private investment and in fact what local investment was underway, most notably in offshore oil exploration, has now ceased. The only counterweight to this situation will, paradoxically, come from military spending on the Islands. Military infrastructure, an extended runway and some all-weather roads for example will be built. The military presence on the Islands will also stimulate some local economic activity, especially in the service sector. But this will hardly form the basis for future developments and is much more likely to distort the local economy making it more vulnerable in the future.

The chances of any agreement with Argentina in the near future look remote. For Britain, this may not have a great deal of political relevance. The interests represented by the Thatcher Government are not concerned with Latin America. However, the interests of her closest ally, the United States, have been thrown into conflict by Reagan's support for the British task force. It is undeniable that US interests in Latin America have suffered considerably as a result. The concept of Inter-American solidarity as illustrated by the Rio Treaty (the regional defence treaty) has been fatally breached. Any question of continuing Argentine support for US policy in Central America must now be dead. The majority of Latin American countries have lined up squarely behind Argentina, and the Organisation of American States reflects that support. In supporting its NATO partner, the US has clearly shown that it considers its prime concern to be supporting the West against threats from the East. For Latin America the issue is a North/South conflict and the US position has merely re-emphasised the nature of the relationship that exists between the industrialised north and the dependent south.

The Latin America Bureau's latest publication, **Falklands/Malvinas — Whose Crisis?** will be published at the end of July 1982. Price £2.50 (including p&p) from LAB, 1 Amwell Street, London EC1. The Latin American Bureau is an independent non-profit making organisation which aims, through research, publications and publicity, to raise public awareness of social, economic, political and human rights issues in Latin America. Write to our Amwell Street address (above) for more details.

British Features

THATCHERISM & THE CRISIS

ANDREW GAMBLE

What are the roots of the present crisis in Britain? Andrew Gamble responds to the recent discussion in International.

In three recent articles *International*, one of which takes the form of an extended review of my book *Britain in Decline* John Ross has developed an important analysis of Thatcherism and the nature of the present crisis. I would like to respond to some of the criticisms he makes of my work as well as discussing some of the wider issues his analysis raises.

On the basic approach to the study of the British crisis there is little that separates us. Ross argues that the crisis of British capitalism has to be understood historically, firstly in terms of the role Britain has played in international development, and secondly in terms of the character of Britain's own internal political evolution. This is the precondition for an accurate identification of the balance of forces between capital and labour and the internal composition of these forces, and for avoiding either unfounded pessismism or optimism about short-term industrial and political trends.

I am in broad agreement with this perspective. It is not possible to grasp the character of Britain's economic crisis and decline without undersanding the way in which capitalism as a world political and economic system has developed. The very notion of British 'decline' only has meaning in relation to this larger whole. To concentrate on innate causes of decline within Britain — to believe that it is all a matter of Britons' reluctance to work, or British culture and traditions — is to start from the wrong end and miss out what is most important: that Britain's national development is an aspect of a much wider process of uneven and combined development in the world economy.

Nevertheless the internationalist perspective is not without its problems and its pitfalls . It can encourage a tendency to ignore what is specific and unique to particular national economies and states, and to attempt to reduce them to mere instances of some general theory of crisis. This is to collapse the different levels of abstraction that are involved in political analysis. What is necessary is to grasp the dialectical interrelation of the development of capitalism as a world system and the specific political developments within each nation state.

This is the great merit of John Ross' analysis. The approach is one I share but there are a number of differences between us. In his review Ross makes a number of specific criticisms. Some of these are minor and not really at issue. I did not intend to suggest that Britain's geographical status as an island was sufficient to explain the rise of British imperialism. It was a contributing factor, no more. Far more important undoubtedly was the organisation of a strong state power. I too emphasised that there was nothing 'inevitable' about Britain's career of overseas expansion and contrasted Britain's historical experience before the sixteenth century with the centuries that followed it. Nonetheless, factors of geography are important: Holland may have successfully resisted Spain; it was less successful in resisting Napolean. England might have been no more successful had there been a land frontier with France.

Ross also criticises my discussion of ideas current among Radicals such as Cobden and Bright about how to discourage the working class organising as a class and defining its interests in opposition to those of the bourgeoisie. Ross argues that such a perspective was totally excluded in reality. In practice it was, but I was describing an ideological project, not a political programme, and I think Ross underestimates the size and potential of the Radical movement, particularly in Wales and Scotland, and in the industrial areas in England. The history of imperialism, the collapse of British Liberalism, and the consolidation of Tory Britain, we know. But there was throughout the nineteenth century the possibility of a very different kind of political development.

An Unfinished Bourgeois Revolution?

There is, however, a much more substantial point of disagreement between us. Ross argues that in my overall analysis of the course of British decline I do not give proper weight to the internal development of political and social relations, specifically that I underestimate the effects of the unfinished character of the bourgeois revolution. (He is certainly right to say that the starting point for discussion of this question is the essay by Anderson. My omission of reference to this was not intentional — my book leans heavily upon it as indeed all work in this field must do.) Ross does not regard this as a question of historical interpretation alone. This error in analysis lead to errors in the assessment of political strategy, and in particular in the evaluation of Thatcherism.

Perhaps it would be useful at this point to set out and enlarge upon what seem to me the main elements of Ross' analysis. He argues that an appreciation of the unfinished character of the bourgeois revolution in Britain is crucial for understanding the contemporary crisis. He describes the effects of this 'unfinished revolution' as follows:

'Despite the fact that the British bourgeoisie achieved an overwhelming development of the capitalist economy, it failed from the mid-nineteenth century onwards to bring about the necessary changes in the political structures and class relation of forces, both inside the ruling class and between the ruling class and the working class, that could have maintained this development.' *International*, January 1982, p.23).

What this passage refers to is the continued predominance of landed commercial, and banking capital, the survival of many archaic political forms, the containment of radicalism and republicanism, the conservation of many institutions in civil society in their traditional form, as well as the grudging tolerance afforded to the labour movement and its acceptance as a corporate interest in the state.

The subordination of industrial capital within the British ruling class and the increasing industrial and potential political strength of the organised labour movement created the opportunity for the ascendancy of the Conservative Party in the mass democracy after 1885. The party had seemed at one stage in the nineteenth century set to wither away, but it adapted skilfully to the requirements of electoral politics and proved itself capable of attracting mass support. Its nucleus was reactionary sections of the landowners and sections of the state apparatus, particularly the military and the judiciary, but its electoral coalition stretched far beyond this, taking in Ulster Protestants, and important sections of the new middle class, the petit-bourgeoisie, and the working class itself. This was achieved by the party's ability to mobilise support around national themes — Crown, Church, Empire, and the Union. The accession of the Liberal Unionists after 1886, following the split over Irish Home Rule in the Liberal Party, and the Boer War were particularly important in consolidating this image and appeal, and establishing the Conservative party as a mass party of the Right, which was heavily dependent upon working class votes.

Before 1914 the Conservatives competed with the Liberals as the main alternative ruling class party. Ross argues that it was at this time that a 'specific ruling class orientation came to be embodied in the party, that of international banking operations, high exchange rates and concessions to the working class internally to maintain its firm political base.' (*International*, May 1981, p22) From this perspective the ascendancy of the Tory party in the era of mass democracy is an expression of the

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Photo: MARK RUSHER

Saluting the 'Falklands Spirit'

failure of the industrial bourgeoisie to carry through a modernising revolution, to complete the changes brought about by the civil war. But it also proved a successful instrument by which Labour was contained at least cost to the overseas military, commercial, imperial, and financial interests of the leading sections of the British ruling class.

This was, however, a holding operation; a very successful one, but one whose foundations were sure to be eventually undermined, because in Tom Nairn's phrase, the consensus that was erected was a consensus against modernisation. The enormous political, financial, and ideological assets which the British state had accumulated in three centuries of expansion were gradually used up once Britain's world power waned, yet so long as they existed they helped postpone any drastic restructuring of the economy or confrontation between the classes.

The Crisis of the Tory Party

This is why, as Ross argues, when Britain's relative economic decline finally precipitated a series of political crises in the 1970s, one of the chief ways in which the crisis was expressed, was through a loss of support for the Conservative Party and the disorientation of its leadership. The traditional political and economic perspectives of the party no longer added up to a coherent policy. This is the basis for Ross' interpretation of Thatcherism. He sees it as the last attempt to keep together the historical Tory bloc, but regards its failure as inevitable: 'This will be the last government of the Tory party in its present form' (*International,* May 1981, p23).

The reason for this, he argues, is because the Tory party in general and its Thatcherite wing in particular does **not** represent the 'decisive forces' of the British domestic industrial bourgeoisie, who on the contrary are represented by Heath, the Liberals, and the SDP. Two important conclusions are drawn from this. First, the Heath wing is no less anti-working class than Thatcher — particularly in its advocacy of wage restraint. Secondly, Thatcher's policies are, in the present relation of forces, against the interests of the most decisive sections of the bourgeoisie.

The crisis of the Tory party reflects the exhaustion of the strategy which has traditionally preserved the interests of the dominant sections of the ruling class and contained the demands of Labour. The crisis threatens to become a general one for the ruling class because although Thatcher's economic policies lack rationality, the 'rational' policies of Heath and the Liberals cannot be implemented because they have no way of dealing politically with the working class (Ross cites the events of 1970-74 as evidence of this).

This analysis abounds with insights but there are a number of criticisms that can be made of it. In his latest article (March 1982) Ross makes many of them himself, at least implicitly. In May 1981 he argued that Thatcherism was doomed because it comprised:

'An economic policy incapable of decisively shifting the class relation of forces, and one pushed increasingly towards pragmatism, together with an insufficient reactionary mobilisation to protect her from the unpopular consequences of her economic policies....In its inability to find a coherent combination of an economic formula and a political one it is creating a major political crisis for the ruling class.' (*International,* May 1981, p24)

But in March 1982 he argued that Thatcherism was perfectly rational and coherent for the ruling class given one set of assumptions concerning the political relation between the classes in Britain; a possibility of inflicting major defeats upon the working class.

Thatcher, argues Ross, in the later article, understands that it is politics which is the key to the internal economic problems facing the British ruling class. Deflation and unemployment are intended to destroy the militancy of sections of organised labour and draining the will of any group to resist permanent cuts in living standards. Such a strategy has high risks and this is why certain sections of the Tory party have been so critical of it; it imperils the foundation of the great Tory coalition. Nevertheless, so long as the policies appear to be working, the bulk of the Tory party and of organised capital, both banking and industrial, has stayed loyal. Banking capital, as Ross points out, has had fewer reservations than some other sections of capital, but overall the degree of acquiescence has been considerable.

This does not mean that Thatcherism can necessarily succeed. But what Ross now registers is that while Thatcherism may look economically irrational, in the short run it may still be politically rational in the longer term. But it is a high risk strategy. The slump of 1979-81 which was largely due to the policies of the Thatcher Government, actually put the British economy further behind its rivals. The gains in productivity and the reductions in strikes which accompanied it would have to be continued throughout the upturn and beyond it before this policy can be judged a success. This as Ross says is the real test of Thatcherism. Of particular interest and importance is the stress he lays on the pattern of industrial militancy and the need to guard against excessive pessimism in the downward phase of the economic cycle when militancy and pay settlements are falling, and excessive optimism in the upward phase when they are rising.

This seems to me to be right, because it does allow Thatcherism its own internal coherence and rationality. It does not mean as the earlier articles suggested that Thatcherism is necessarily doomed. The odds against it succeeding are still high (although considerably reduced by recent events) but there remains a chance that Thatcherism can win through.

This changes the significance, too, of the SDP. Ross stresses the seriousness of the crisis of representation in Britain. He is quite right to argue that the introduction of a system of proportional representation would have major consequences. It is cer-

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tainly not a technical or peripheral matter. It would change the nature of alliances and the way in which coalitions of social forces are organised and expressed politically. Also, discounting the possibility of an Alliance government, he suggests that the manner of Alliance participation in a future government will be determined to a considerable extent by what happens to the Thatcher experiment. If during the upturn it fails to meet substantial resistance, then the way will be clear for the continuation of Thatcher's policies or an Alliance/Conservative government which would broadly maintain social market policies. But if the Thatcher Government's policies suffer major reverses during the upturn, making it appear that the years of hardship were for nothing and that Thatcherism offers no escape from the cycle of decline, then the role of the Alliance might be a coalition with the Labour party supporting a programme of incomes policies and direct intervention to raise demand and investment.

This is much closer to my own reading of current developments. But I would go further than Ross in certain respects. The notion of economic rationality and ruling class interests are extremely complex and difficult to define at the level of political programmes and policies. There is a constant process of defining interests and testing ideas, discovering what constraints on policy exist in practice. It is dangerous to attribute too much rationality and intention to political leaders. There is little doubt for instance that the Thatcher Government was caught quite unawares by the depth of the slump. It made the best use it could of it, but it was certainly not planned that unemployment should double and output collapse in the dramatic manner they did. Governments have a very insecure control over events and the Thatcher Government is no exception. The thinking of its key group of economic ministers has been shaped by the debates on the social market strategy, but the implementation of policy has been influenced by numerous other factors as well. The government has been engaged in a long war of position in which it has advanced when it could, but occasionally has been obliged to retreat.

There are also problems about reading policies as expressing interests. It is not clear how Heath and the Alliance 'represent' industrial capital while Thatcher 'represents' banking capital. As Ross himself argues in his latest article, it is more correct to say that different policies may find support from different interests at different times. The particular context is all important. Policies cannot be unambiguously defined as rational or irrational independently of different groups' perception of their interests and the changing economic situation.

Modernisation or Decline

This leads to the heart of our disagreement. In assessing the predicament of the Conservative party I do not believe that the unfinished character of the bourgeois revolution, important though it is, is the only or even the principal factor. I think there are two errors in the way the concept is sometimes used. First, it implies that Britain still has to undergo a particular kind of modernisation, that Thatcherism is doomed because it is no more than the latest expression of the 'consensus against modernisation', and that the Alliance and the Tory wets have rational policies that will at last establish the ascendancy of industrial capital in the ruling class bloc. But there is no obvious reason why this should be so. That kind of industrial regeneration looks increasingly unlikely. Certain kinds of deindustrialisation that are now taking place, are never likely to be reversed. A purely service and rentier economy may be a pipe-dream, but it does reflect some important changes that are occurring in the British economy and in Britain's place in the world division of labour. There is tremendous scope for modernisation of the British economy but this does not mean that political power will be delivered into the hands of a new industrial bourgeoisie.

The second error is a related one. The hundred years' decline should not be treated as though it were a single process, as though everything that has happened in the last hundred years can be traced to the 'failure' of the industrial bourgeoisie to complete the bourgeois revolution. If that were the case the remarkable progress of the British economy in the last hundred years of its relative decline would be hard to explain; particularly the very significant modernisation that took place in the 1930s and 1940s which equipped Britain with modern mass production industries in such fields as cars, chemicals, and electrical engineering.

These mistakes in analysis flow from a failure to see how dramatically internal political developments have been shaped by external development. The role of the Conservative Party has not been constant in the last hundred years. Before 1914 the Conservative Party was **not** a representative of banking capital. Its programme of social imperialism was rightly seen as inimical to the City's interests. Only in the 1920s with the general reorganisation of the Right did the Conservative Party emerge as a somewhat grudging upholder of free trade and the gold standard. Protectionist and imperialist sentiment, however, remained strong in the party and the party did not let slip the opportunity to pursue protectionist policies in the 1930s. Only after 1945 did it emerge fully committed to the orthodox foreign economic policy of the British state.

But this was not simply a triumph for banking capital. It also reflected two fundamental changes. The first was the Atlantic Alliance; the final surrender of Britain's role as dominant world power to the United States, and the reconstruction of a liberal world economic order which took place under the American aegis. This not only removed the possibility of an independent imperialist economic policy, it also laid a crucial foundation for the long boom which saw major new developments in the world division of labour, and the rise to prominence of multinational companies. Secondly, the fusion between banking capital and multinational industrial capital in Britain makes it difficult to speak of a major rift between an industrial and a financial bourgeoisie. It makes the identification of a specific 'national' bourgeoisie in Britain difficult — the 'decisive sections' of both banking capital and industrial capital have been internationalised, they are detachments of a wider army. The major problem of the most recent phase of British decline has not been Britain's absolute technological backwardness and stagnation; Britain's industrial companies have been among the world's top companies. The problem has been the direction of investment, research and innovation, and the growth in the international operations of the leading industrial companies.

All this makes Thatcher and Thatcherism a rather less irrational policy for the 'decisive' sections of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless Ross is right to describe it as a high risk policy. At the end of last year it did look doomed. The obstacles to rebuilding support sufficient to win a second term, and carry through the second phase of the programme, appeared formidable. The Alliance was emerging as a real alternative, and a potent threat to the Conservatives' mass support.

The obstacles to the long-term success of Thatcherism are still formidable and its achievements to date are still modest. But the Falklands war has transformed the immediate political prospects. It has breathed new life into the old Tory coalition and reestablished the party's credentials as the authentic **national** party. If the Conservatives can hold onto some of this upsurge of support, then a second term is within their grasp. But the underlying weakness of the British economy remains, as does the political problem of reversing its decline. The Falklands war may give Thatcher the second term which the monetarist management of the economy might otherwise have denied her. But it does not in itself solve the problem or remove the crisis of representation; it merely puts off yet again the day of reckoning.

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BREAKING THE MOULD?

RICH PALSER

Thatcherism is a coherent strategy for the British ruling class to defeat the labour movement. The SDP/Liberal Alliance can only play a major role in bourgeois policy after such a defeat argues Rich Palser, presenting another view of the British political crisis.

In a series of articles[1] in recent issues of *International*, John Ross has argued that the rise of the Social Democratic Party (SDP)/Liberal Alliance marks a major watershed in British politics, and that its roots lie within the very structure of British capitalism. 'To understand what is happening in Britain today is impossible without grasping that the Tory Party, and above all its Thatcherite wing, does *not* represent the decisive forces of the British domestic industrial bourgeoisie who, on the contrary, are represented by Heath, the Liberals and the SDP'.[2]

Historically, John argues, the economically dominant force in the Tory Party was banking capital, whose interests lay in the overseas financial and investment operations of British imperialism. The interests of this section of the ruling class have often been in contradiction with, and have generally prevailed over, those of the section whose interests lay in domestic industrial investment. Today, however, the ruling class can no longer pursue this course: without a strong domestic economy, even the overseas financial operations of British capital are put at risk. Consequently, the interests of domestic industrial capital represented by the Tory wets and the SDP/Liberal Alliance are coming to the fore.

This view of a structural contradiction within British imperialism is by no means a new one. It was argued at some length, for example, by Glyn and Sutcliffe [3] who cite three main examples of the rivalry between finance and industrial capital: free trade versus protectionism between 1880 and 1913; high versus low exchange rates in the 1920s, 1950s and 1960s; and high versus low interest rates in the same periods. 'Of course, this conflict is not absolute: now and again the interests of the banks and large sections of industry, especially the large exporters, have coincided. However, over the years the divergence has grown bigger.'[4].

The structure of British Capitalism

Whatever the validity of this analysis of British economic history which is debatable, this view seems to me to take little account of structural changes in British capitalism since the Second World War. First, British industry now has a greater concentration of production, investment and employment in large firms than any economy of comparable size or development. In the mid-1970s the hundred top British firms had 62 per cent of the turnover, employed 49 per cent of the capital, and took 56 per cent of the profits of the top 1000. The top ten (Shell, British American Tobacco, Imperial Chemical Industries, Unilever, Imperial Group, BL, Shell Mex and BP, General Electric, The Bowater Group, and British Petroleum) had 24 per cent of the turnover of the largest 1000. The concentration of capital also took place in banking — Nat West and Barclays had greater deposits and assets than all the other banks put together.[5]

Second, by the mid-1970s Britain was a major home base for multinational companies, and a major host for overseas-based multinationals. In 1969 there were 1651 subsidiaries of British companies located abroad, or 23.5 per cent of all multinational subsidiaries. Only the US had more, with 2816 or 40 per cent of the total. By 1977, overseas production by British multinationals was 40 per cent of domestic production.[6] These companies, unlike purely British-based companies, can derive benefits as well as disadvantages from policies which in the past have tended to favour overseas financial operations — for example the appreciation of sterling.

Third, the control of companies in Britain has tended to shift away form personal holdings towards greater direct control by financial institutions. From 1963 to 1969 personal holdings in British companies fell from 54 to 47 per cent and were down to 42 per cent by 1975. Financial interests on the other hand increased their holdings in British companies from 30 per cent in 1963, to 36 per cent in 1969 and 40 per cent in 1975. This, together with the growth in multiple directorships, marks an increased interpenetration of the financial and industrial interests of the ruling class.

To recognise that particular government policies may favour the financial operations of capital over industrial operations is one thing; to suggest that these constitute distinct factional interests within the ruling class (those of finance capital and industrial capital) is quite another. The overwhelmingly dominant sections of the ruling class are those whose interests are tied up with huge financial *and* industrial concerns which are international in character. In the present crisis they therefore face a challenge to their interests on two fronts.

the overwhelmingly dominant sectors of the ruling class are those whose interests are tied up with huge financial *and* industrial concerns which are international in character

Britain has more *direct* investments abroad than any other European country. These interests are increasingly under threat form the colonial revolution, which received a tremendous boost with the victory over US imperialism in Vietnam. This is why Britain has been in the forefront among Western European countries in backing Reagan's war drive and why the whole of the ruling class has united behind Thatcher over the Falklands crisis. Britain has gone to war over the Falklands because it remains a major imperialist power *in its own right*, and cannot be seen to be unable to defend its interests. The jingoism of the British press and the Tory backwoodsmen may well be nostalgia for the empire, but behind it lies the government's determination to defend the huge industrial and financial interests Britain still has throughout the world and in particular in Latin America. The absence of any outcry from any bourgeois politicians (whatever factional interest they supposedly represent) testifies to the fact that the City and industrial capital alike understand their common stake in Britain's international role.

The ability of the ruling class to maintain these interests is, however, increasingly undermined by the uncompetitiveness of British industry at home. In absolute terms the wages of British workers are low. Nor has the rate of increase in wages been particularly high in comparison to Britain's main competitors. However, low productivity, which in the 1960s and '70s increased more slowly than any of Britain's competitors, means high unit labour costs. Alongside its international war drive, the ruling class as a whole must simultaneously inflict a major defeat on the *British* working class if it is to be able to re-structure British industry as a sound domestic base for its international operations.

Who is Breaking The Mould?

Thatcher and her government offered a new and radical programme for the ruling class to meet these problems head on. To

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understand this strategy not only requires looking beyond the jingoistic nostalgia of Tory backbenchers — it also means looking beyond the trappings of monetarist ideology. It is not whether Thatcher achieves her M3 target for the money supply which is decisive, nor in itself the level of public borrowing. It is her total rejection of the post-war consensus whereby government intervention was aimed at maintaining full employment and services. Thatcher threw this out for a government strategy which, contrary to the view John Ross has argued, was simultaneously a political *and* economic strategy. This strategy centred upon deliberately pushing up mass unemployment so as to create the conditions for confrontation and defeat of the organised working class movement. It was a political strategy in that it shifted government priorities and resources towards arming Britain for its world role in imperialism's war drive, whilst drawing the lesson of the Wilson, Heath and Callaghan governments that an incomes policy could only bring lasting results in the context of long-term mass unemployment. It was economic in that it sought to use the recession to force the weakest sections of British industry to the wall so as to leave British industry 'leaner but fitter'. Control of the money supply was the means to carry this out, rather than the strategy itself.

Thus, far from Thatcher's policies being, as John Ross originally argued, 'in the present relation of forces against the interests of the most decisive sections of the bourgeoisie'[7], her policies were a *recognition* of the present relation of forces within the ruling class, and the means by which the ruling class sought to *change* the relation of *class* forces against the working class. Heath and the Liberals offered, and still offer, no solution to that basic problem. That is why in the year of the last general election only one top British company donated money to the Liberals, as against 70 per cent of all political donations going direct to the Tory party.[8] It was Thatcher who chose to break the mould of the post-war consensus and the ruling class was united behind her.

> Thatcher's policies are aimed at opening Britain up to the full effects of the international recession

Is this to say that the ruling class sit around in their West End clubs singing 'One for bourgeois unity and ever more shall be so'? Far from it. But the threat to the unity of the ruling class comes not from their separation into factions based on industrial and finance capital due to the level of interest rates and the rate of the pound sterling. Whilst criticism has been voiced on this by those ruling class representatives most concerned with its industrial and manufacturing operations (for example Beckett of the CBI), nothing ever came of the promised bare-knuckle fight between industry and the Tories, and Tory desertion to the SDP is notable by its virtual absence. As Andrew Gamble has argued: 'The fundamental weakness of the wets' position has been their inability to construct a convincing alternative. What options do exist for those who wish to preserve the rule of capital in Britain? Since they have to acknowledge the failure of the various attempts to modernise the British economy over the last twenty years it is hard for the Conservative critics of monetarism to reject the logic of the Thatcherite case'.[9]

Thatcher's policies, far from being aimed at favouring finance capital at the expense of industrial capital as Tom Nairn has argued[10] are aimed at opening Britain up to the full effects of the international recession, with the aim of re-structuring the economy. Removal of controls on the free movement of credit is not undertaken by the government just to allow capitalists to make a fast buck abroad (though they have) but in an attempt to force British industry to rationalise itself so as to compete for investment on the international money market. Similarly it is not the government's intention just to boost bank profits by maintaining high interest rates, but to ensure that money borrowed by industry finds its way into long term investment and higher productivity rather than into sitting-out the recession till better days. Mass unemployment is the essential backdrop to this, as it not only makes conditions far more favourable for the ruling class to introduce new work practices and technology, it also may in the longer term weaken the ability of the working class to grab back these gains in productivity through big wage increases as any upturn occurs.

So what have they achieved? Manufacturing output per person has certainly fallen more in this recession than in the previous two. Given that the recession was deeper this is hardly surprising. Furthermore the rise in productivity per person-hour now taking place is far more rapid than that following the previous two recessions. If this trend continues, and Thatcher's optimistic view holds to be true (that the working class will not be able to take back these gains through big wage increases), then the government will have made some headway. Alternatively, as the *Economist* points out: 'If the pessimists are right and the old habits return, the Thatcher government's attempts to break the mould of the post-war consensus will have failed. And the decline that these policies produced will continue'.[11]

As John Ross has recently admitted: 'As the crucial test of the upturn has not yet arrived, it (the ruling class) would be foolish indeed to withdraw its support (for Thatcher) before at least the first substantial results become available'.[12] Holding onto the potential gains won by the ruling class during the recession will require taking on workers in battles to impose new work patterns and weaken union organisation; these struggles have already begun in the Fords, BL, British Rail and pit closure disputes, and the trend towards national drawn-out disputes over productivity will continue. It also requires that unemployment is maintained at mass levels even during any upturn in the economy.

It is here that the potential threat to ruling class unity lies, for as Andrew Gamble has commented: 'What the wets fear is that the adherents of the social market strategy are blind to its social and political consequences. They fear that it will unleash a class war and divide the nation. They fear it could make the country ungovernable and precipitate a confrontation which the Conservative Party might not win'.[13]

What is the SDP/Liberal Alliance?

Thatcher's project has no hope of completion during this term of office. This presents the ruling class with an obvious political problem as, not surprisingly, the Thatcher government is unpopular; when it broke the mould it awoke a strong memory within the organised workers' movement, the memory of the 1930s to which we were never to return. A substantial section of the working class, also intent on breaking the mould of the Wilson and Callaghan governments, has fought to drag the Labour Party to the left despite the kicking and screaming of the labour bureaucracy.

The SDP split from the Labour Party was also a split from the labour movement. Despite the involvement of union leaders like Frank Chapple in the Council for Social Democracy, at no time did they threaten to break Labour's monopoly of union affiliation. Alongside the motley crew of Fabian opportunists and careerists who departed from the Labour Party before their positions as MPs and councillors were challenged by the rank and file, the new Social Democratic Party was flooded by professionals and higher salaried workers who long to hold on to the post-war boom and avoid the class polarisation now taking shape in Britain. The SDP's capitalist programme is a programme in the mould of the (now non-existent) post-war consensus. Its electoral base is the middle class and the poorly organised and less class conscious workers who had previously voted both Labour *and* Tory.

If the labour bureaucracy continues to succeed in obstructing any unified fightback against the Tories on the part of the organised labour movement, then it is quite likely that despite the unpopularity of the Thatcher government, the SDP/

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Not much future for me in Thatcher's Britain

Liberal Alliance will win a sufficient vote to ensure that Labour is kept out of office. Consciousness lags behind events, and defeating the Alliance as well as the Tories requires that Labour demonstrates that all attempts to hold on to the post-war consensus are doomed.

The class polarisation is already beginning to do this. The Tories have fallen in behind the Tories over the Tebbit Bill, forcing even erstwhile supporters like Chapple and Weighell to label them as 'pink Tories'. The Falklands crisis has further clarified the willingness of the Alliance to fall in behind the Tories when ruling class strategy faces its biggest tests. High office can only serve to clarify minds still further. The local elections have resulted in SDP/Tory coalitions where the Alliance holds the balance in hung councils. As Ben Pimlott has recently written in *New Socialist*: 'Sir William Harcourt once said that the trouble with centre parties was that they were all centre and no circumference. The SDP is claiming 50,000 members after 4 months. This is a circumference of a kind; but whether its proportions are symmetrical is very much to be doubted. A large, and growing, right wing lop-sidedness seems virtually inevitable'.[14] I would go further. It is in allowing the ruling class more time to pursue Thatcher's strategy, whether with Thatcher in the driving seat or without, that the Alliance is most likely to serve the ruling class.

According to John Ross however the ruling class is cooking up an *alternative* to Thatcher's project in the form of the Alliance. Should the Thatcher government fall 'amid mounting working class resistance' then the SDP/Liberal Allinace can offer a lifeline to the ruling class by forming a coalition with the Labour Party. This will be able to deal politically with the working class in a way that Thatcher cannot: 'Because it would bear the main responsibility for policing the policy (the incomes policy of the coalition), Labour would decline in popularity even more than the SDP in such a coalition, weakening the working class politically as well as economically'.[15] Consequently a main task of socialists today is to campaign against any coalition with the Alliance.

How is it possible that the working class movement, fresh from waging struggles which have defeated Thatcher, could be so disarmed as to allow its leadership to throw away those gains in a coalition with the despised pink Tories of the SDP? It is here that it is necessary to deal with the most dangerous aspect of John's arguments.

A Politically Weak Working Class?

According to John, Britain's imperialist role and the resulting ability of the ruling class to buy off the working class created the conditions for the latter 'to become organisationally the strongest in the whole of Europe while simultaneously one of the weakest politically'.[16] What he means by this is spelled out in his subsequent review of *Britain in Decline:* 'Hatred of the Tory Party is far deeper in the working class than either positive support for the Labour Party or any commitment to socialism'. It is this 'fact' which gives the Social Democratic Party its usefulness for the ruling class: 'The role of the SDP is precisely to fill the gap between the massive working class distrust and hate of the Tory Party and the much smaller section which actually supports Labour. By splitting the Labour vote, reducing it to a party with no perspective of forming a government, the SDP has the project of politically breaking up the traditional historic perspectives of the working class and opening the door for "Healeyite" economic policies to be pursued as the only alternative to Thatcher'.[17]

This view of working class support for Labour is quite astonishing. It has nothing in common with the traditional position of our movement which views the creation of the Labour Party as a historic gain for the working class. It was the product of the desire of workers organised in trade unions to form a new party — independent of the capitalist Tory and Liberal parties — to represent their own class interests. This required a long and hard struggle to break the class collaboration of the emerging trade union bureaucracy who sought to pursue a 'Lib-Lab' political alliance against the Tories. The fact that the bureaucracy was able to determine the character of the Labour Party and impose its own reformist bourgeois programme and orientation in no way negates the tremendous gain in political consciousness the party represented.

Time and time again this political consciousness has reasserted itself: in the 1920s the bureaucracy only managed to assert its overwhelming dominance of the Labour Party *after*

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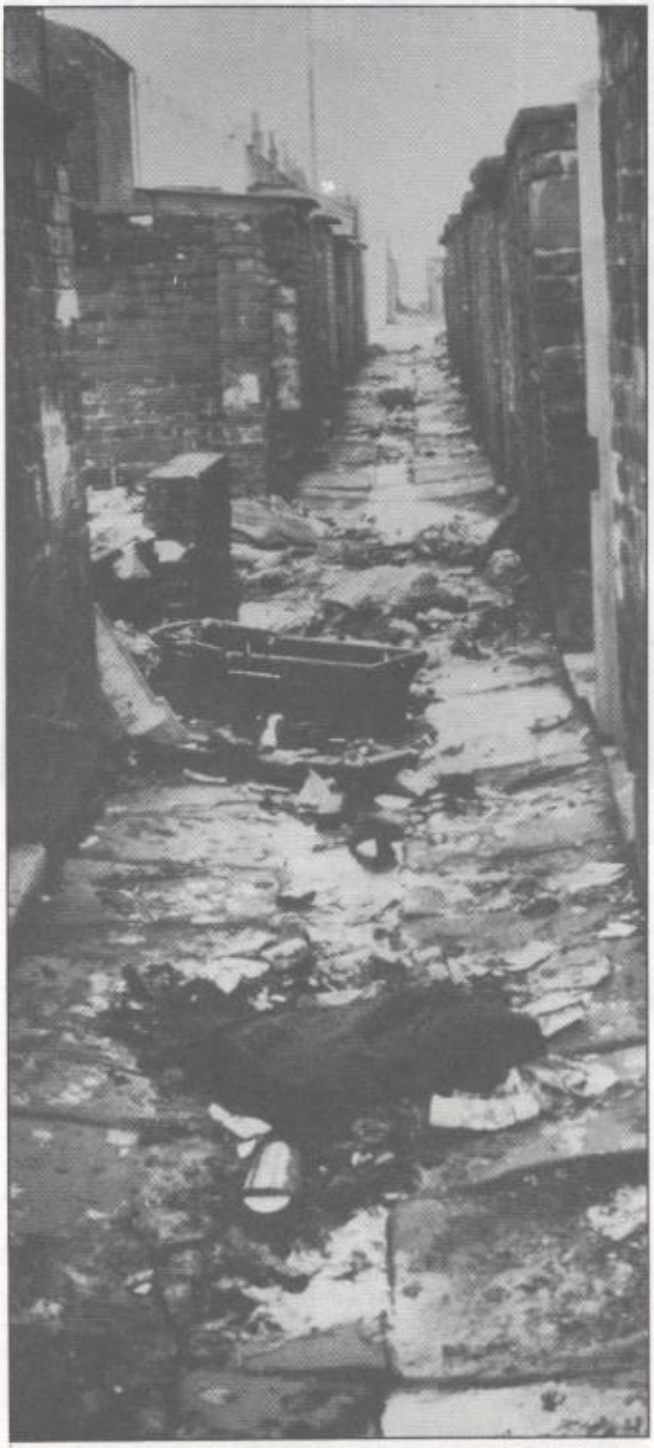

the defeat of 1926, with the final introduction of the individual membership structure and far-reaching bans and proscriptions. Even then, the road to direct collaboration with the capitalist parties in government was not open. Macdonald's split to form the National Government was met with a stone wall by the trade union bureaucracy who feared the consequences of endorsing such a policy with their own rank and file. Despite the wartime coalition and the leading role seen to be played in it by the Tories, the working class turned once again in 1945 to *its* party to provide an independent programme for government to ensure there was no return to the 1930s. Even at the height of the post-war boom, attempts to abandon Labour's specific constitutional commitment to socialism (Clause 4) were blocked by the union bureaucracy, again fearful of rank-and-file anger at any departure from the original objectives for which the Labour Party was built by the organised workers.

Perhaps these huge gains have been eroded during the period of post-war boom and prosperity. If this is John's view, where is the evidence? Far from there being a tendency towards disaffiliation from the unions, the fight for new affiliations especially among white collar unions is increasing. Nor can the Lib-Lab pact of the last government be said to signify acceptance within the labour movement of coalitionism. Rather than being seen as a pact to keep the Tories out, it was accepted as an agreement to keep Labour in — pursuing the same programme as it had embarked upon in 1975/6. Far from the working class moving to accept coalitionism, it began to struggle against Labour's programme in practice, resulting in the 'winter of discontent' and the massive upturn in strikes aimed at restoring living standards lost under the Social Contract.

> Labour has never won all working class votes any more than the unions have organised all wage and salary earners

Nor should we be misled by the decline in Labour's vote from 40.3 per cent of the electorate in 1951 to 28 per cent in 1979. First, it must be noted that this 40.3 per cent was Labour's highest ever share of the vote; Labour has never won all working class votes any more than the unions have organised all wage and salary earners. Secondly, the picture looks somewhat less dramatic if we look at the actual *number* of votes cast: at its high point in 1951, Labour won just under 14 million votes; in the last two elections it has registered just above and below 11½ million votes respectively. The Tories, on the other hand, won in 1979 with 13½ million votes — almost the same as 1951.

How is Labour's electoral decline to be explained? The voting figures themselves give us a hint. At the last election, the Liberals and other minor parties won over six million votes accounting for 14.9 per cent of the electorate; their electoral support has increased dramatically since the beginning of the 1970s. In my opinion, this is not to be explained by a weakening of class political consciousness. Rather it is to be found in the alleviation and obscuring of the depth of the crisis of British capitalism during the post-war boom. The British economy did grow far less than its competitors, but grow it did and with its growth came the post-war consensus of full employment and welfare provision. Not until the 1969 — and more dramatically 1975 — recession, was the ruling class forced to face up to the task of restructuring British industry and assaulting the working class.

Labour has still not come to terms with the passing of the post-war consensus although a growing minority of organised workers have drawn the lessons of the Wilson and Callaghan governments and are seeking to propel the party to the left. The SDP in alliance with the Liberals hope to launch themselves into office on a wave of fear, hesitancy and nostalgia: they hold out to the 'middle ground', the illusory promise of a return to the old, prosperous, and safer days of the boom. However, a short-term or even medium-term success in elections based on shifting, or rather polarising, electoral sands would not constitute a reversal of the historical gains of the working class, represented both in the strength of union organisation *and* in the adherence of the organised workers to a political party built and financed by themselves.

Proportional Representation

Proportional representation is offered as the means whereby the deep-seated distrust of coalitionism in the labour movement could be overcome. Under PR, Labour could not hope to win an outright majority of MPs whether it won 11½ or 14 million votes. It would *have to* enter coalitions, the argument goes, if it wanted to form a government. Furthermore, since the Alliance is almost certain to hold the balance of power in a hung parliament after the next election, and since the introduction of PR will be made by them a condition of any coalition, it is almost

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certain to occur. Through a neat constitutional and electoral trick, the gains of 80 years of working class political struggle can be wiped out!

In reality, it would require a transformation of the relationship of forces inside the working class movement for the labour bureaucracy to enter a coalition with the SDP to carry out anti-working class policies. The historical memory of 1931 is still strong; the memory of the Lib-Lab pact equally so. The bureaucracy's witch-hunt is proving incapable of stemming the demand for a shift to the left coming fom the ranks. Unable to split off to the right for fear of walking into a political wilderness like MacDonald, yet unable to turn the tide in the party, the bureaucracy is increasingly divided within itself. Only a defeat of the workers' movement in open combat with the ruling class can reverse this process. *Without the success of Thatcher's strategy, the SDP and PR can not be used to split the workers' movement with any success.*

All this is not to say that PR will not be introduced. However, we must be aware that in and of itself it can not provide a substitute for the present Thatcherite strategy of the ruling class. Nor, for this very reason, is its introduction inevitable. The ruling class has many ways of preventing it, not least the House of Lords and the courts. They will be concerned which of the 57 varieties of PR is on offer; the *Economist* has already voiced concern that the Alliance may go for a system 'more likely to give Britain coalitions of the depressing Italian sort rather than the sober German sort.'[18] Any proposal for PR will be judged according to how well it enables the ruling class to maintain a strong government to continue the strategy embarked upon by Thatcher, which also requires keeping Labour out of office.

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the introduction of PR today would be nothing other than a manoeuvre to keep Labour out of office

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A change in the pattern of two-party government established after the war is certainly on the cards. But the tendency to move in this direction is not conditioned by the failure of Thatcher, still less by the desire of the ruling class for 'flexible' government to carry forward the assault on working class rights and living standards. This tendency has already been seen in the government's response to the youth rebellions in the inner cities and the demands of leading police officers for better equipment and freedom from 'community control' in order to confront the rioters. It has been seen in the increased use of the courts to attack democratic rights — whether of councils to introduce cheap fares, or of the black community to organise for its rights. It has been seen in the use of departmental directives to undermine rights won by Act of Parliament by the women's movement, and in demands for increased press self-censorship during the Falklands crisis. The breaking of the post-war consensus requires the ending of the two-party system of alternating governments operating within that consensus. Strong governments, with increased powers for those sections of the state essential to carrying through an assault on the working class are essential to creating a new consensus out of the defeat of the working class movement.

It is yet to be seen whether the Tory Party can weather the strain of electoral unpopularity on the one hand, and the internal tensions of consolidating a leadership with this new orientation on the other.[19] Whenever in the past the ruling class has turned to coalitions (the post-First World War years with the Liberals) or National Governments (1931 with MacDonald), the Tory Party has been able to swallow its partners and return to the helm as the party of government. Today, however, the stakes are far higher. Should the strain on the Tory Party prove too great, then coalitions/National Governments, not of the centre ground variety but of a new strong and reactionary

Photo: JOHN HARRIS

character, may well be the outcome of the breaking of the mould.

For someone who puts great store by the capacity of PR to split the workers' movement, it is astonishing that John Ross not once offers any proposals as to what the response of socialists should be. In my opinion, we must reject the approach adopted by Tariq Ali in the *Guardian*, and echoed by others, which sees PR as the route to a 'New Model Labour Party' as the right wing jump overboard into coalition with the SDP. The suggestion that out of such a defeat — the working class divided by coalitionism — there can be a step forward for socialism in a new and more socialist Labour Party, is itself quite false. A look at MacDonald's defection of 1931 and the inability of the Independent Labour Party to overcome the demoralisation *even within its own ranks* should be enough to make us wary of such get-rich-quick schemes. But worse still is the suggestion that we should ourselves campaign for PR: the introduction of PR today would be nothing more than a

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manoeuvre to keep Labour out of office. It would certainly not be a step towards a more radical parliamentary democracy. Taken together with the continued role of an unelected House of Lords, the strengthening of the direct political role of the Courts, and the strengthening of police powers, it becomes obvious how hollow is the democracy of PR's Alliance supporters.

The Labour Bureaucracy

'If there were not a bureaucracy of the trade unions, then the police, the army, the courts, the Lords, the monarchy would appear before the proletarian masses as nothing but pitiful and ridiculous playthings. The bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British imperialism. It is by means of this bureaucracy that the bourgeoisie exists not only in the metropolis, but also in India, in Egypt, and in the other colonies.'[20] To Trotsky's list of pitiful and ridiculous playthings one might add the Alliance and PR, though they would appear right at the very bottom, well below all the other paraphenalia of bourgeois democracy.

Today the bureaucracy maintains its position as the backbone of British imperialism by its capitulation in the face of Thatcher's offensive. Hoping that Thatcher will somehow collapse of her own accord, or that her unpopularity will secure her downfall at the next election, they hope to out-moderate the SDP in clinging to the post-war consensus. 'The Tory Party could still shoot their fox by dumping Mrs Thatcher. Only then would the Social Democratic parallel with Orpington man be complete; but the need for the Labour Party to pre-empt consensus would then be even greater', argues Denis Healey.[21] The more the bureaucracy hold back from a fight (and in turn hold back the rank and file) the more workers become confused by mass unemployment and the ferocity of Thatcher's assault. The more they cringe before the government, the more the government drives forward — leaving them to find that their 'statesmanlike' bootlicking over the Falklands was a helping hand to the Tories in the local elections.

It is this, rather than a coalitionism which at present is no more than a twinkle in Callaghan's eye, which must be challenged in the labour movement. Mass Labour Party and trade union action to kick out the Tories remains the chief task of the day. Furthermore, it is this mass action, and the demands and policies thrown up in its course, which will shape a working class alternative to the post-war mould of Callaghan and Wilson and offer the reply to Thatcherism so sadly lacking from the bureaucracy. It is the movement against the missiles which has clarified the minds of those in high office in the labour movement — whether of Benn towards unilateralism, or of Foot away from it. It has been the limited but increasingly numerous factory occupations which have won broad acceptance of a woman's right to work and the need for a reduction of the working week to defend all jobs. So too, it will be out of the mass movement that the left will find the strength to repel the witch-hunt which will displace the phoney peace of Bishop's Stortford in the Labour Party — just as the unofficial movement against flexible rosters has crumpled Weighell's witch-hunting plans in the NUR. It is from the rebellious black youth that policies for positive discrimination and guaranteed jobs for school leavers will come. At the forefront of the mass movement beginning to fight against Thatcher will be — and already are — industrial workers and youth. It is to these forces that socialists must turn to resolve the present crisis of perspective in the labour movement.

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Industrial Features

'IF THE LASSIES CAN DO IT'

ANN HENDERSON

Lee Jeans, Lovable Bra, Plesseys — these manufacturers suddenly found themselves notorious inside the Scottish labour movement during 1981 and early 1982. Not for the goods they produce, but because of the successful fightback led by the women workers against closures and redundancies. Ann Henderson spoke to the women who became the spokespeople for their disputes — Ellen Monaghan at Lee Jeans, Ina Scott at Plesseys and Sadie Lang at Lovable Bra.

This article aims to record the experiences of these women's struggles and to draw out some common features of the sit-ins whose impact has been far reaching. Any conclusions drawn are my own, and not necessarily those of all the women involved or those quoted here.

The backdrop to all these struggles is one of rising unemployment and factory closures. In Bathgate where Plesseys is situated unemployment is fast approaching 30 per cent. The overall figure for Scotland in 1981 shows that under three years of Tory misrule unemployment has risen from 8 to 13.6 per cent. There are regional variations of course, with Strathclyde reaching 16.9 per cent.

With the general decline in the heavy industries, particularly in the West of Scotland, 'men's jobs' are disappearing more rapidly, but jobs in those industries which traditionally employ women, now some 42 per cent of the Scottish workforce, are disappearing too — tobacco, food, clothing and textiles are all being run down. Multinationals invest in Scotland for a few years to reap the benefits of government development grants, and then take their business elsewhere. The industrial estates in the towns around Glasgow show the signs — factories and warehouses to let, factories not running to full capacity and so on.

So given the prospects faced by these workforces at Lee Jeans in Gourock near Greenock, at Lovable Bra in Cumbernauld, and at Plesseys in Bathgate, it is not surprising that they decided to put up a stand. Ellen Managhan from Lee Jeans explains: 'Women's work, there was just nothing in Greenock. It was just one place closing after another. We knew that some of us might not have worked again for the next ten years. So it was a case of you had to fight for the right to work.'

We knew some of us might not have worked again for 10 years

Women's jobs are not something secondary, there was no question for any of the Lee Jeans women that they were working for pin money: 'Even when your husband is working, with the price of everything these days you are needing the two wages. Quite a lot of them in here, their fathers don't have jobs, and they are the breadwiners. There's widows too. You find a lot of hardship in here,' said Ellen Monaghan.

With such high stakes the predominantly women workforce at Lee Jeans went into occupation when the VF Corporation announced the factory was closing. Eleven years before, when Ellen Monaghan began to organise the union, management sacked her, only to reinstate her after the workers walked out

Photo: GM COOKSON

forcing recognition of the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers. This time too the bosses had underestimated the determination of the workforce, with an average age of around 20, to fight for their right to work. Again Ellen Monaghan led the workers' struggle, and seven months later under the new management of Inverwear, all 140 women who had stayed with the sit-in were back in full time employment at union-agreed rates of pay.

That commitment to fight for their right to work spurred on the women at Lovable Bra and at Plesseys. 'To me the days are gone by when women are out for the cream on the cake,' Sadie Lang insisted. When the receivership was announced at Lovable Bra the factory had full order books and the workers had been working overtime at weekends to keep up. So when the receivers came in the workers began a night time sit-in and picketing to make sure that £1.5m worth of stock as well as the equipment was not moved from the factory. Sadie Lang explained: 'The main thing to me was to get the factory opened.' Several weeks later the factory was reopened and 100 workers are now in full time employment.

At Plesseys the closure was announced at the same time as the Plesseys Group recorded another rise in profits, and as

'to me the days are gone by when women are out for the cream on the cake'

redundancies were going through at the nearby British Leyland Bathgate plant where many husbands of the Plesseys women worked. Some of the skilled male workers at Plesseys accepted their dismissal while most of the women fought back. After a 55 day sit-in a new multinational firm, Arcotronics, took over and 80 out of 220 jobs were saved. The women, some of whom wore 'Plesseys Suffragettes' badges during the dispute, were adamant that their fight was to save jobs not simply for themselves but for the community as a whole. Many of the women had been there over thirty years. Ina Scott explains: 'It was to keep the factory open, for jobs for people, so that there were jobs for the youngsters, everyone understood that in Bathgate. We had everyone's support, the shops and that. The butchers gave us stuff and Maise from the fruit shop sent stuff up here.' At Lee Jeans too there was considerable local support from the community, like the free bus rides for occupiers given by the local bus operator.

The workers' deep awareness of what was at stake in times of such high unemployment led to a definite attitude to redundancy payments, namely that despite often appearing as a short term solution, they really were not the answer. 'Redundancy money over the last few years ... people take it and don't realise what they've done. But I realised before it was done ... once a

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job is gone, it's forever. Once a working class man or woman realises that, I think they would all have the same attitude, but they don't stop to realise. Because it seems like an awful lot of money, but it isn't really if you look in front. It's like a carrot. You've always got the possibility at the back of your mind that no matter what you do you might not win, and you know when we took it on, we gave up the right to the redundancy money,' Ellen Monaghan reported.

For some women employees, the levels of redundancy payment may not be significant anyway, given the nature of the industries with low wages and high workforce turnover. But at Plesseys, as an engineering factory, some of its older workforce had been there for thirty years and was therefore entitled to larger sums. One of the demands of the workforce there, which the sit-in succeeded in achieving, was a commitment that management honoured the redundancy payments for those who did not get their jobs back. In all three cases the occupation tactic was the key to success and to the impact on the labour movement. Even the media took it up. After the Lee Jeans victory the *Daily Record* editorial praised the women's efforts and asked: 'Who now can say that sit-ins are a futile gesture?' Ellen Monaghan described the occupation as follows: 'It was the key. Because if you think about it these multinationals, if we had went out on strike they would just have emptied the factory and that would have been that. Even so we knew what was here was a drop in the ocean for them, but it was everything else. The publicity was killing them. They wanted us off their backs. Without the occupation it would never have been possible.'

And at Plesseys, Ina Scott said: 'Well I expected to cause them enough trouble and embarass them. I think sit-ins are the only way. At least you're in and they're out. It's because you've got something they want. They could leave you outside the gates and just let the weather take it course.' The workers found an additional benefit from sitting in during the cold Scottish winter months: 'We were in a good position because capacitators need to be heated, and so did we. We knew they couldn't switch off the heating in here, because if they did, it would spoil their products,' Ina explained.

Extensive organisation went into the sit-ins, which for the vast majority of the workers was their first experience of industrial action. Finance committees were established, to deal with donations and hardship cases, and the Action Committees ensured speakers were sent out to raise support. Regular shifts were organised to ensure the sit-ins were effective, also enabling the maximum participation of the workforce. Ellen Managhan summed it up in July 1981: 'The girls at the factory have imposed a discipline on themselves that's amazing.'

> 'the girls at the factory have imposed a discipline on themselves that's amazing'

The Plesseys occupation had an important consequence too in the ruling from the Court of Session that the Plesseys workforce was within its rights to occupy the Bathgate factory in furtherance of an industrial dispute. Previously employers have always felt secure in the idea that the rule of law was on their side against the sit-in. In Scotland at least the women's action has changed all that.

While none of the women leaders was keen to draw particular differences between organising men or women in this sort of action it was obvious that more attention had been paid to child care arrangements than in other industrial disputes. At Lee Jeans for example, specific child care arrangements were made for a woman who had been on maternity leave at the start of the occupation to enable her to play a role in the dispute.

All three women, having achieved the difficult job of a large degree of unionisation in their workplaces of predominantly lower paid women workers, showed a strong commitment to the trade union movement in general, despite any problems they had encountered from the union leaderships in their own disputes. As Ellen Monaghan put it: 'Without the trade union movement we just couldn't have done it. We had the guts to sit here, but they made it possible.' In all the Lee Jeans workers recieved financial help from the labour movement to the tune of £100,000. Ellen Monaghan continues: 'We sat in here on the Thursday night and on the Friday morning the shop stewards from the local yards came in and handed in money and told us that we would want for nothing. That was from the first day, and they never stopped. For seven months the shipyard men, Upper Clyde and Lower Clyde, they sent us in more than £3000 a week. They helped to form our action committee, they helped us with ideas, they got us to the Scottish TUC, and from there we got onto the miners. You've got no idea ...'

The shipyard workers went so far as to insist that their order for two pairs of work jeans a year be transferred to the new Inverwear company. 'I'm pleased we've got that order, and the men's pleased too,' Ellen added. The UCS workers went on to organise a weekly levy for the Plesseys workers, and today they have a weekly commitment to the health workers.

It is clear that despite some severe defeats the traditional militancy in the West of Scotland founded on strong workplace organisation in the key industries continues to play a vital role. Indeed it was the network of industrial solidarity which forced the hand of the reluctant official trade union leaders. None of the women were enthusiastic about the performance of their union officials. But they are not keen to make a fuss about it. As Sadie Lang says: 'I never like to say too much against the unions. Any union is better than no union at all.' It should be pointed out however that the Tailor and Garment Workers Union withdrew official support from Lee Jeans before the occupation was over, and it never officially recognised the sit-in/picketing at Lovable Bra. The workers there are now tranferring their union membership to the Transport and General Workers Union.

Ina Scott delivers redundancies notices at the boss' home

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The trade union bureaucrats see their role as negotiating on behalf of the working class, not educating and encouraging them to think and act for themselves. That much was obvious from talking to Ellen, Ina and Sadie about the Tebbit Bill. Says Sadie: 'You don't even hear anyone talk about it in the workforce. I don't understand why the unions don't put it forward more. It's only the management who I've heard talk about it.' This is echoed by Ellen: 'We were meant to be getting a course on the Tebbit Bill, to give you all the information about it, but it's not come up yet. Nobody's — well, we haven't anyway — been clued up about it.' And both women were talking *after* the TUC's much heralded 'Union Day' against Tebbit on 10 June!

The same was true of the Labour Party Women's Festival last month which the women had not heard about. That is not to say that the Labour Party and the LPYS were not important in generating solidarity during the disputes. At Plesseys the Labour Party organised three demonstrations of solidarity in Bathgate and printed all the publicity and stickers. As Ina Scott recalled: 'My MP, Tam Dalyell, was great, he was down here a lot. And we got telegrams from all over — Tony Benn, Michael Foot, Ron Brown, Gavin Strang.'

Small groups of workers determined to fight can often influence to a much wider degree the way the labour movement looks at itself and acts. Lee Jeans is a classic example in the way it inspired and helped to advance other struggles for jobs. As Ellen Monaghan put it, it's very much a question of 'getting it through to working class people that you'll not be alone if you take something on.'

Lee Jeans correctly showed that in the response it evoked. Without Lee Jeans, neither Lovable Bra nor Plesseys would have been so effective. As Ina Scott says: 'They really set us on the road ... we got all the pitfalls, what not to do.

'For a start they told us we had to get publicity out right away. They told us loads of wee things ... we didn't realise a lot of things that were going to happen to us, but they put us wise: who to avoid, where to ask for help, the struggle it would be. I would reckon they must have saved us about five weeks.' Ellen Monaghan has the same impression: 'Before Plessey took on their sit-in they came and met me one night. I think the help we gave them beforehand did help them a lot.' The same process of consultation and advice took place between Ellen Monaghan and Sadie Lang before Lovable Bra went into action.

The repercussions are still being felt because Lee Jeans not only fought, but they won and now they're still there, part of the trade union movement and involved in its continuing struggles. Says Ellen Monaghan: 'I've been asked to that many things since I came back to work, I've had to turn a lot of things down. I'm working 40 hours in here and overtime, and then there's home too.' The Plesseys workers too are spreading workers' solidarity. Ina Scott explained: 'We just want to help people who helped us. There's an occupation on in Ayr just now and I'll be approaching our finance committee with a view to sending them some money. Since the occupation, with some of the money we've got left, we've financed the Unemployment Centre, the new one opening in Bathgate. Since then we've sent money to finance eight students at the college, lots of things ..'

The continuing impact of these disputes is perhaps best summed up by Ellen Monaghan when she says: 'When you went to meetings, these men told you right out that you put them to shame. One of the yards had a meeting, I think there was talk of redundancies ... I remember it was put to the men that if the women could do it, then the men could do it. I think a lot of the men say that "if the lassies up there can do it, I can do it".

'It made me realise that it can be done, and I really do think that our sit-in did inspire a lot because before that they wouldn't have done it. Sometimes you get a wee bit shy about saying that, but I think it's true. Now they know it can be done.'

The experiences of these three struggles showed that it is possible to fight for and save jobs. They challenged the pattern of redundancies and factory closures which still continues in Scotland today. The issue was jobs, but Plesseys, Lee Jeans and Lovable Bra brought the question of women's jobs, of a woman's right to work, to the forefront of labour movement struggles. Yet this was not in a divisive way, it was always clear that a victory for these groups of workers, predominantly women, was a victory for the trade union movement as a whole. However, the very fact that it was women leading these struggles, despite all the traditional barriers, challenged many of the assumptions made about women's place in the labour market and the trade union movement. The women at Lee Jeans led the way in firmly rejecting any idea that women's jobs were secondary or that women were not active trade unionists, and the message from all the disputes was to say decisively that it is a woman's right to work.

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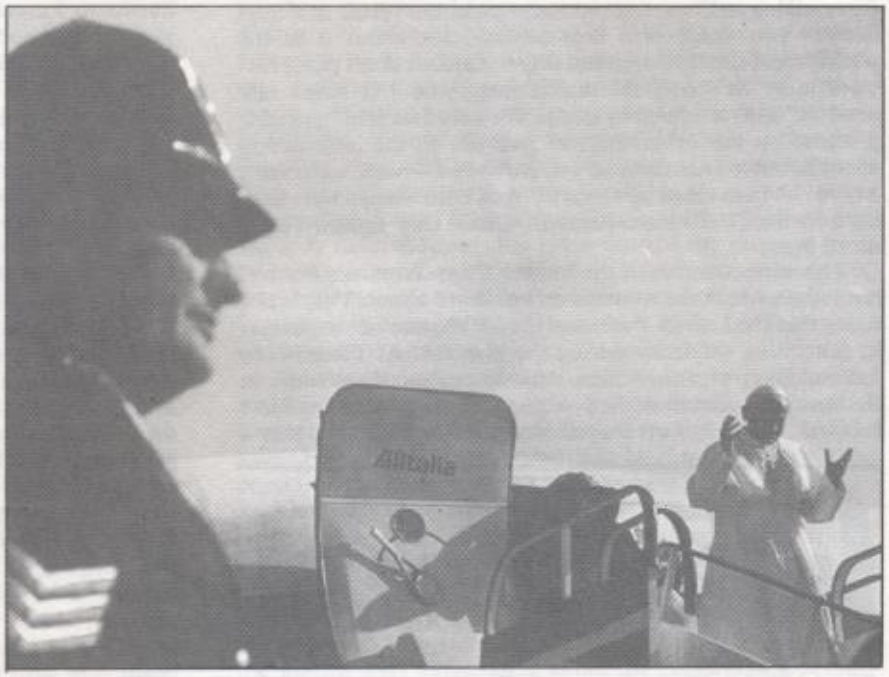
Feature

JOHN PAUL: GOD'S POPULIST

CLARA MULHERN

Traditionally anti-Catholic Britain gave the Pope a warm welcome during his recent visit. Clara Mulhern looks at the reasons for this papal popularity and some of the long term effects of his visit on questions such as contraception, marriage and the family.



The reception accorded to the Pope during his recent visit to Britain must have caught many socialists and feminists by surprise. The admiration almost universally expressed in the media as well as by large crowds of the 'faithful' was striking in a country which, for historical reasons, could have been expected to be hostile or at least indifferent to a visit by the Bishop of Rome. It was all the more remarkable at a time when Britain was in the throes of the nastiest and most irrational war hysteria of recent times — an issue on which the visitor expressed his disapproval from the start.

So, the visit served to confirm what his worldwide excursions have proved — John Paul II's claim to be the most popular Pope in recent history not excluding John XXIII, the first Pope to travel widely, who publicly befriended Communists and met Khrushchev, and who convened the reforming second Vatican Council of the early sixties. What is the significance of this phenomenon and what will be its effects on Britain?

The idea of a popular Pope is itself a paradox. Until recently, 'popularity' was an almost unheard of, even vulgar, and anyway irrelevant status for Christ's vicar on earth, whose task was to rule a rigidly centralised and hierarchical body in a spirit of divinely revealed and unchangeable law. It was only with the Second Vatican Council, which attempted to loosen hierarchy, widen the scope of moral discretion, and vernacularise the liturgy, that popularity became a conceivable condition for the papacy. The paradox is compounded by the fact that this most popular of Popes is also the most conservative in two decades, recalling in his positions much of the spirit of Pius XII, the last of the remote absolutist pontiffs.

The Previous Popes

A brief resumé of the careers of the last four Popes will serve to highlight the particular character of John Paul's papacy. Pius XII was the last of the old regime — a conservative, remote and scholastic, immured in a Vatican fortress at odds with the modern world. John XXIII, the reformer with the common touch, opened a period of unprecedented debate and discussion within the Catholic Church, which had some genuinely democratic moments. His concern was to ensure the Church's survival by its ability to respond to or at least to recognise, a changing world. The abolition of the old Latin liturgy to allow fuller participation of the laity in church ceremonial, went hand in hand with some encouragement to individuals to begin to use their initiative in questions of moral practice.

Paul VI, who physically resembled Pius XII more than his predecessor, was a cautious pragmatist who set himself the task of stabilising the Church after its recent upheavals, without completely reversing the 'process of renewal' started by the Vatican Council. For example his most severe criticisms were reserved for the traditionalist Lefevre, and he presided over the process of laicisation (or leaving orders) by thousands of priests and nuns. His two main encyclicals are indicative of his ambiguity: on the one hand *Populorum Progressio* (The Progress of Peoples) went further than any previous papal statements on social questions, conceding possible legitimacy to revolution in the third world. But *Humanae Vitae*(Of Human Life), to the surprise and intense disappointment of many Catholics, formalised the Church's implicit rejection of artificial methods of birth control. In this way Paul VI attempted to set limits on internal debate while remaining loyal to many of the Vatican Council's decisions.

But John Paul II is a thoroughgoing conservative. His concern is to restore the discipline of the pre-Vatican II days. His summons to the Vatican for a dressing down goes not to Lefevre and his followers but to dissident liberal theologians. He has revitalised the Church's traditional apparatuses of censorship and has stopped the flow of laicisation. His views on sexual morality reflect the old simplicities; he has been known to remark that 'there is no sex in heaven'. His modernity is confined to his mastery of the techniques of popularisation offered by the modern media. Whereas his predecessors merely acknowledged the existence of this technology, he exploits it. His uniqueness lies in the fact that alone of the recent Popes he mobilises the faithful in an unending succession of superbly crafted mass rallies of the kind usually organised by populist politicians and rock stars. And this mobilisation is the cause of his fundamentalism, not radical change. The content of his message, so enthusiastically received by the bedazzled crowds is simply this: 'You will have to be content with fewer individual freedoms than you have been led to expect.' John Paul is, in sum, a conservative populist.

A key element in his success is his Polishness. It is fundamental to his popular appeal that he is not an Italian, a prisoner of the Vatican but a vernacular Pope with an impressive command of the languages and cultures of many countries. Equally important however is the fact that the Polish Church is the most reactionary in the Catholic world. And it is this church which has acquired an identification with national resurgence against an oppressive regime. Polish Catholicism with its particular flavour of conservatism and popular vigour is a symbol of the present papacy.

The Pope's visit to Britain illustrated both features of his personal style — his media mastery and his conservatism. The eloquently televisual gestures — the now familiar one of kissing the ground as he emerged from the plane given a new twist by his repeat performance in Scotland and Wales, his embrace of his 'brother in Christ' Runcie in Canterbury. his blessing of the sick in Southwark — all worked hard to create the image of a man sensitive to the passions and concerns of ordinary people. On the other hand, the central theme of each of his big masses was one of the seven sacraments. This included baptism, the recruitment ritual and sign of apartness from non-Christians, and confession, which underlines the authority of the ministry and the limits on the individual's 'freedom of conscience'. Most importantly it included marriage. In ringing tones the Pope emphasised the indissolubility of marriage denouncing sexual permissiveness and what he termed 'a contraceptive and anti-life mentality'. Commentators remarked on the fact that he hesitated to offend Anglo-Saxon sensibilities by denouncing contraceptive *methods* outright, but his phrasing indicated that he

placed the question of contraception alongside that of abortion, which every Catholic knows is outside the bounds of discussion. The public gestures of conciliation were accompanied by a firm reiteration of traditional Catholic dogma, none of which, he indicated, was up for negotiation. Any 'problems' must be met with prayer (ie submission).

What lasting effect, if any, is his visit likely to have on Britain? British Catholics are a religious minority, organised on the whole in minority ethnic communities, such as the Irish and the Polish, and are working class or petty-bourgeois in social character. This gives them a sense, particularly in Scotland where they are surrounded by sometimes hostile Protestants, of being a morally beleaguered minority, at odds with the dominant culture. The populist style of the Pope is perfectly calculated to appeal to their communalism. The visit of so charismatic an international figure to the first European state to break with the Church of Rome, and the reception (varying in warmth but uniform in its respect) given to the self-proclaimed successor of Peter by representatives of various national churches, is bound to be a tremendous boost to collective morale among British Catholics.

And it is the most reactionary elements within the Church that will benefit most, notably the parochial network organised around church and school — which has proved so effective in transporting, assembling, and stewarding the crowds at the mass rallies around the country. This is the same network which forms the key organising cadre for anti-abortion militancy, as illustrated in the big SPUC mobilisations in the past. One effect of the Pope's visit to Ireland was a concerted and it seems successful attempt to commit the major political parties to a constitutional ban on abortion — and this in a country where abortion has never been seriously considered. Their English equivalents will never make their peace with the 1967 Act.

Moral Reaction

Another negative effect and one not confined to Catholics, will be on the inevitable renewal of moral reaction. His denunciation of modernity with its 'false set of values' and 'anti-life mentality' will strengthen the puritanism manifest in Britain in recent years. This 'moral majority' does not resemble its American equivalent in strength and resonance, but it can only benefit from the support of a man so much more formidably attractive than for instance Mary Whitehouse. Secondly, his emphasis on the centrality of the family as a social unit will cheer those who wish to see women further subordinated in the home, and will lend solidity to the justifications offered for the increased burden placed on women by the economic recession. It will also strengthen those elements of the 'law and order' brigade who believe that one of the solutions to last summer's disturbances is increased control by parents over their children.

And what of the areas where his visit might have been expected to have less objectionable or even beneficial effects — church unity and the Falklands war? Prospects for reunification of the Christian churches in England, however fascinating to some, are of comparatively minor interest to socialists, but it is worth remarking that the Pope is known to have little interest in this project anyway, preferring the prospect of unification with the Eastern orthodox churches, which are more to his conservative taste. His references to the non-negotiable core of Catholic doctrine will hardly have helped.

Certainly his unequivocal expressions of concern about the Falklands war and his desire for peace in the area were for many the saving grace of his visit. But they served only to underline the remarkable silence of church figures in this country on the question; after all he confined himself to reiterations of a rather abstract supra-national pacificism that is commonplace in the Vatican and familiar to any Catholic. He was careful not to allow any criticism of Britain's adventurism to pass his lips nor did he comment on Britain's claims to sovereignty over the islands. His remarks, exceptional because so few are prepared to say even that much in public, have had absolutely no effect on the conduct of the war either in Britain or Argentina. No, the enduring effects of his visit will be felt rather by those intoxicated young people that we saw in Scotland affirming their commitment to a narrow and restrictive discipline, and by those women who will be told by born-again priests in the confessional of the efficacy of self-control as a substitute for birth control.

I want to thank Shelley Charlesworth and Francis Mulhern with whom I discussed the ideas in this article.

CLARA MULHERN is a member of the editorial collective of *Feminist Review*.

International Features

WHICH ROAD AFTER GDANSK?

DANIEL SINGER

Daniel Singer's *The Road to Gdansk* is perhaps the most widely acclaimed book on the background to the Polish crisis. Following publication of the new paperback edition, with a postscript written since martial law, Davy Jones interviewed the author on the strategic lessons of the Polish experience

The theme of your book is that the Polish events are in many ways a foretaste of and the key to future developments in Eastern Europe. In the light of the events such as the military crackdown since the first draft of the book was written, what do you think was the significance of Solidarnosc and how does it point to the future in Eastern Europe?

One can look at it in different ways. In a gloomy fashion one can recognise a great chance, an opportunity, with a vast social movement and an upheaval which had an effect on the party itself, and yet which led to nothing: that when the party finally had the choice between sharing power with the workers and military dictatorship it chose the latter. But I think there is another more optimistic side to this story and I want to insist on it.

What did the events in Poland show? That in certain circumstances a movement which, due to the stench of Stalinism was not led by people with socialist convictions, in a country where socialism is so often associated with the people in power, with the injustice, exploitation and the corruption that are associated with the regime, nevertheless this movement did develop in what I would consider a progressive direction. In a country where the means of production have been nationalised the problem of who is to be the master in the factories and in the economy as a whole arises very rapidly. Even in the Polish context, despite the prejudices that existed against what people thought was socialism, they were beginning to reach the answer, that it must be run by the workers themselves. That I think is something that was not apparent from the beginning.

So, first there is the extraordinary rise of the workers' movement. What happened in Gdansk in August 1980 has to be one of the highlights in the history of the labour movement throughout the world. I personally claim that seldom have you seen the workers representing their own interests as the superior interests of society as a whole as you did in Gdansk, in the sense of Marx's phrase: 'That the working class will represent its own interests as the superior interests of society as a whole'. In that sense it was fantastic, and yet obviously we know that this was not led by revolutionary Marxists, for all sorts of reasons that we also know. That was the first encouraging thing.

The second was that the workers were moved and directed towards the problem of workers' councils and self-management by the objective conditions of the country, not by theory. For example, when I was in Poland immediately after the events of August 1980 I met most of the leaders of what was subsequently to become Solidarnosc and their experts and advisors. It was people like myself who were asking what form of society they envisaged and how great a role did they see for the workers' councils. At that time the answer was rather discouraging. Despite the extraordinary discipline of this movement it had no vision, no projects. It was only when one went back last year that suddenly everyone was talking to you about 'samorzad, samorzad, samorzad', that is self-government or self-management. Here again one has to keep in mind that there were different theories on self-management.

The idea was born, in my semi-cynical opinion, because everybody knew that the workers would have to accept a certain austerity, would have to tighten their belts, and nobody could impose that except the workers themselves. Since then, of course, Jaruzelski has tried to impose it in a different way. Everybody wanted to put into that word self-government something different. Some said since we can't have a market economy, the nearest thing is independent autonomous units, and others saw it as a chance for the workers to really take their destiny into their own hands and to run their own factories. There was a difference, which would require much longer study, between what was called the 'Network' of the leading enterprises, which was started by graduate engineers with a technocratic conception, and the people of the so-called Lodz and Lublin group on the other hand, who were thinking more in terms of the workers shaping the decisions. But with all these projects the difference with the government and the party turned out very rapidly to be over the nomenklatura, that is the nomination of the directors.

So, I would not exaggerate the optimism of my conclusions for one reason, because I'm not sure whether the next confrontation does not run the risk of being a bloody one. If there was ever a hope of a peaceful, if unstable compromise, and perhaps that was only a very small hope, it may well have disappeared with Jaruzelski's coup. And in that sense there is a certain gloom. The other danger is the risk of explosion. Solidarnosc acted, if anything, as a moderating influence on the rank and file and it's easier to do that when you are a well-organised body with offices and so on. It's much more difficult to do it when you're underground. Certainly there is a large section of the young generation which is spoiling for a fight, and there may be an explosion that would lead to nobody knows what.

I am fundamentally optimistic because the Polish events showed the strategic importance of the working class in our society, the fact that history quickens when the workers come onto the stage and become actors in their own drama, not just for Poland but for the whole of Eastern Europe. The dilemma lies in the fact that the final and decisive battle will be in the Soviet Union, and what do you do in the meantime?

On exactly that point, it's obviously true that in the post-capitalist societies of Eastern Europe the immediate demands round democratic, social and economic questions have an inbuilt tendency towards challenging overall for power. That immediately raises the strategic possibility and inevitability of confrontation between two counterpowers. Could you outline how you think the confrontation might have been avoided or if it could have been avoided at all, and if not how could it have been prepared for?

I don't know whether it could have been avoided. I can just venture what was the glimmer of hope and how it looked at one stage. Everybody was aware of the fact that there was some kind of a Rubicon, a line that it was difficult to define but which you could not cross. Let's take an extreme example, if they had begun hanging the party people on the lamp posts, the Russians would have intervened. But nobody knew exactly where this line was, though one knew that it was there. In fact there was an interesting discussion in July 1981 at the National Commission of Solidarnosc attended by its advisors. It's an interesting text because they let their hair down and everybody was talking about the future. This is the one where Bujak from Warsaw Solidarnosc says we don't want to be a trade union of seamen on a sinking ship. In that discussion it was clear that everybody was aware of this Rubicon. Maybe Rulewski from Bydgoszcz was the least aware, but even he knew that there was a point beyond which there would be a catastrophe and one wasn't ready for that.

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Solidarnosc confronts the armed might of the state

So the problem was: does one give up? Doesn't one ask for anything? Obviously not. The real problem was whether one could find some way to make that transition of power. When I say gradual process I mean one doesn't seize power in one go, but one has a transitional period in which there is dual power, institutionalised in such a way that under the pressure from below one progressively seizes certain powers, consolidates them, then moves a little further, and so on. In other words I use by analogy what was called the 'creeping May' in Italy, the hot autumn after the French May '68, a sort of creeping revolution rather than an instant, immediate revolution.

In Poland there were in fact suggestions of a certain institutionalised form for this, that is the two chambers of parliament, one of which would represent 'the imperatives of geography', and the other would represent the workers' councils on a national scale. For all economic decisions there would have to have been an agreement between the two. Such an arrangement ensured that because of 'geography' the Communist Party was still kept in power, but it needed the support of Solidarnosc for certain economic reforms, and to retain that it in turn conceded certain other things. I'm saying in the *best* of cases that it would have been extremely difficult because I can see immediately the objections that can be raised.

The problem of nomenklatura and therefore of power was raised immediately, which would have meant permanent conflict, because in the long run there is no room for compromise between power from above and power from below. But there are special circumstances because of the proximity of the Soviet Union and the risk of Soviet intervention, because everybody knew that even if one won in Poland there was a risk of Soviet intervention.

The people who maintain that this scenario was not possible have to say that there was a moment when one should have made a bid for power. There was one moment when this did arise, at the time of the Bydgoszcz crisis of spring 1981. The problem was whether after a warning strike there should have been an unlimited general strike, which is in fact a bid for power. A compromise was reached at the last moment, and Walesa and his advisors were criticised on democratic grounds that they reached the agreement without properly consulting the base or even the council that elected them. But officially and even in private nobody has ever said we disagree with them because we should have gone on this general strike. But I'll grant you that for some of the people who talk about that period the glimmer in their eye shows that they felt that then they were so strong that they could have made a bid for power.

People who say there should have been a bid for power have logic on their side, but I think that if that had happened, they would perhaps have won power, but even so there would have been a Soviet intervention. Now if I thought there was any chance of that Soviet intervention precipitating a crisis in the Soviet Union, if I thought that the Soviet army would have begun to disintegrate under the influence of what it was doing in Poland, then I would have understood them making that bid. But unfortunately that was not the case.

I still think that the only hope for the Polish revolution as for other countries is its expansion, but I think one has to take into account the time factor. Some of those who now talk of such a bid for power talk sometimes as if they were dealing with a very organised, very ideologically developed and politically conscious movement which was not the case in Poland. None of the people who talk about it now came to the Solidarnosc congress last September in Gdansk and made a speech about a socialist seizure of power, nobody did. My reproach is that if one had a clear vision then I think it would have been possible to talk in those terms to the workers and say to them: 'Let's consolidate power in the factories, let's see how far we can go,' you could talk like that. The problem was that there were not many people in Solidarnosc who really had a clear picture of what they wanted. The only people who talked about conflict were right wing people, and they were not talking in terms of socialist transformation or consolidation of the workers' movement. They talked about national independence and to hell with it. One climbs on a horse and rides to Moscow.

I'd like to pursue this point, because both within the Solidarnosc activists and among people in the labour movement in the West who look at the situation in Poland, there is a real debate without an easy answer, about whether one can make a revolution against the bureaucracy in Poland or another East European state. Is it not also true that one factor in the period up to martial law in Poland was a lack of any real strategic vision other than that of the self-limitation strategy which by then was beginning to wear thin ..?

I'm sorry to interrupt but if we are talking about after November 1981, by then one would have had to be blind not to see that this was a confrontation. Let's not even talk about the seizure of power, but even defensively one should have talked about workers' councils, one should have prepared workers' defence mechanisms in the factories. During that period it was obvious what was developing. At the Radom leadership meeting of Solidarnosc which the other side quote so much, Walesa made a public admission of the bankruptcy of his policy because the other side had let him down. By then the idea of compromise was finished, and a movement with a project and a strategy would have been ready to act. If compromise was not possible one would prepare oneself defensively. I'm not saying one should not have done more work in the army and the police, I'm saying that I don't think personally that there was a possibility for a bid for power. At the risk of appearing moderate I think one would have had a bloodbath and after that it would have been like the French movement after the Commune, or Hungary after 1956. Whereas today you still have a certain stalemate, they have driven the movement underground but not defeated it.

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Solidarnosc leaders: from left round table Jurczyk, Switon, Walesa, Lis and Gwiazda

You are right to insist on the point because it will arise again. It is still part of the discussion even now. Kuron, who is interned, now is saying that he is for a popular rising. He is saying prepare for a popular rising to force them to negotiate, because otherwise there will be an explosion. Whereas Bujak, who is still at liberty, says let's not have anything centralised, let's continue with the resistance all round the country. But I think since May it will be going Kuron's way because everybody sees the risk of explosion any minute. So this problem has not disappeared, it depends on what strategy one has, on what one says to the rank and file. The Polish movement was full of democracy, it showed great capacity for mobilisation, a great capacity for self-discipline and so on, but I think that ideologically, and it's not so surprising, it didn't invent very much nor did it have a very clear strategy. Maybe it needed more time.

One other aspect is that surely in Poland or any other East European country, even in the context of the strategy you have outlined of an escalating series of compromises trying to eat away the power of the bureaucracy, another vital factor has to be a political appeal from the labour movement both to other labour movements in the East and to the labour movement in the West. This would aim to build a movement which in some way could politically attempt to stay the hand of the Soviet bureaucracy. I ask that also to assess what lessons you think have been drawn by the workers in the rest of Eastern Europe of the Solidarnosc movement, and to what extent the question of internationalising the movement will be understood by the next generation of struggle in Poland or in Eastern Europe?

You raise very important questions and I will be frank and say from the outset that I do not think I have clear answers. I agree with you entirely that it all depends on the capacity to go beyond the national frontier. How to do it? Is it through an appeal, through the attraction of what one is doing? I must say that I was in two minds myself when they launched their appeal to the workers of Eastern Europe at the first round of the Solidarnosc congress, not that I disagreed with anything in the appeal. But it came at the same time as what looked like a bid for free elections, which everyone in Poland knew meant not dual power but a bid for total power. I went back for the second part of the congress and I remember a friend within the Solidarnosc movement who wrote the appeal telling me that it had an educational and pedagogical effect within Solidarnosc and that was a factor I hadn't thought of.

I don't think there has been a great impact immediately in Eastern Europe. On the other hand one hears things occasionally, like from somebody in Hungary who wasn't on the side of the workers, but when asked about the reaction of the Hungarian workers to Poland said: 'They are all on the side of Solidarnosc.' This was a party man. I think that the seeds are sown there but it will take some time. We have to remember how the movement in Poland matured and developed. The students in '68 were on their own and in '70 the workers asked in vain for the students from the Gdansk Polytechnic to come with them. It was only in '76 when one had the beginning of that link between the workers and the intellectuals.

And there was the ripening of the movement. At the start in Gdansk the strikes were not even asking for genuine independent unions. Ten days later the idea proved so powerful that it swept everything aside. That's something which is encouraging. We have to realise how in certain circumstances a movement matures and quickens suddenly.

The problem of relations with the Western labour movement is much more complicated and there are difficulties there for us as well as for them. When I say that we should learn that the enemies of our enemies are not necessarily our friends, that applies both ways. I've had this experience in Poland as I have had it in the United States. Thus people in Poland prefer to see about Reagan only that he's against the Russians. Similarly the Nicaraguans who wouldn't accept a Solidarnosc delegation for the same reason. They are wrong in both cases and it's our duty to say so. This is one of the important things that we can explain to the actors in the drama: the extent to which their battle is a common battle and to show how it is linked. The anti-nuclear movement for instance cannot develop without the progress of some kind of movement from below in the countries of Eastern Europe as well. This is where we can play a part, though obviously not as teachers from the outside.

We don't have to idealise Solidarnosc we don't have to invent things, we have to console ourselves with the thought that considering the previous 35 years of that country the fact that the movement which emerged, whatever its ideology, *moved* in the direction of the surge for workers' councils, for some kind of a self-governing republic is quite progressive. This rebirth of the labour movement is I believe historic.

Socialist Policy

GAY LIBERATION AND SOCIALISM

PETER PURTON

In the ten years since the launch of Britain's first gay paper *Gay News*, issues of gay rights have been either ignored or misunderstood by the labour movement. Peter Purton argues for gay liberation to be integrated into socialist strategy.[1]

The struggle for the liberation of lesbians and gay men from their oppression has rarely been seen as a fit topic for discussion in the labour movement. If only for this reason, therefore, the publication of the Labour Party National Executive Committee's discussion document, *The Rights of Gay Men and Women*,[2] is welcome. Gay activists and socialists should press for it to be discussed throughout the labour movement. At the same time, however, the NEC paper contains very serious weaknesses which make it inadequate for its task.

Gay people are oppressed by the law. The 1967 Sexual Offences Act places gay men in a half world between legality and crime which is frequently exploited by the police. Lesbians although not specifically criminalised also suffer severe repression from the state, most noticeably in the denial of custody to lesbian mothers. All gay people suffer discrimination and persecution in some way, whether it be in housing, services, employment or immigration.[3] The Labour Party document takes up these issues strongly and recommends a reduction in the age of consent for males to 16 and the extension of the anti-discrimination laws (Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts) to cover gays.

In this way, the NEC paper follows in a long historical tradition. The German SPD was involved in campaigns for gay rights from the 1890s, based around an attempt to repeal anti-homosexual legislation.[4] The Bolsheviks abolished all such repressive legislation in the Soviet Union after the revolution. Certainly, socialists should concentrate their efforts on such campaigns. But it would be entirely wrong to think the oppression of gays can be ended by a few legal reforms, any more than women were liberated by gaining the vote. This article aims to demonstrate that sexuality is not solely a matter of 'private life' and democratic and human rights. It is rather a question for the working class movement, and needs to be made a part of the revolutionary socialist programme. The Fourth International made an enormous stride forward when it started to incorporate the question of women's liberation into its programme[5]. We will show here that the liberation of lesbians and gay men is an inseparable part of this process.

What is sexuality and why does it matter?

If homosexuality or other forms of sexual expression not conforming to the heterosexual standard were inherited, genetic, biological or medical 'defects' as is often argued, gays would indeed be another disadvantaged and fixed minority whose democratic rights would be defended alike by liberals and socialists, but whose concerns would not be recognised as occupying a central place in the class struggle. However, if one uses the Marxist method pioneered by Engels in his *Origin of the Family* (although not actually applied by him to homosexuality in that work) one reaches a different conclusion. Sexuality is *not* predetermined biologically or in any other way. In the process of evolution human beings have developed a capability unknown in the lower animal orders, where sexual activity is limited to periods when the female is able to reproduce. Human sexual activity takes place at any time and is not restricted to the reproductive cycle. Sex and sensuality for their own sake is a significant development in human evolution. At the same time as human beings achieved this liberation, women and men both developed the capacity for pleasurable sexual activity with members of the same sex. Neither female nor male sexual arousal is biologically dependent on the presence of the opposite sex. The specifically reproductive function of sex must therefore also be determined by non-biological factors — especially the form of social organisation and the material forces working in or on it. This has continued to be the case with the development of ever more sophisticated class societies.

The first conclusion is therefore: sexual behaviour and sexual orientation are not in some way laid down for us, they are determined socially and historically and the *capacity* for non-heterosexual sexual activity is certainly not limited to the 5-10 per cent identified in Kinsey[6] as being predominantly homosexual in the late twentieth century USA.

What then accounts for the different status of homosexuality in different societies? There is a crucial link with the place of women and of reproductive sex. Obviously, the more women have been bound to a reproductive role and their own sexuality denied, the more any forms of non-reproductive or 'deviant' sexual behaviour have been liable to repression. The well-established link between the oppression of women and the class-based organisation of society through the family can thus be extended to include oppression of homosexuality. As we will see, this connection between apparently private questions of sexual preference and the challenge presented to a social order by the struggle for women's and gay liberation has reached a new and potent level in the period of declining capitalism; but a few specific historical examples will serve to show the continuing connection.

It is difficult to make firm statements about unrecorded pre-class societies. But on the basis of the available evidence we can probably state that homosexual activity played a considerable role both in nomadic and in settler-gatherer societies. There is certainly ample evidence of homosexual practices forming a consistent part of religious rites amongst the ancient Hebrews, and their suppression coincided with the development of the Jewish nation. But undoubtedly the best known example is that of Greece.

Homosexual behaviour was both common and accepted in ancient Greece. However, there are significant qualifications which must be made. In this slave-based society, women were banished to a monogamous and purely reproductive role, deprived of civic rights and severely punished for adultery. The sexual freedom of the (free) male was expressed through female prostitution, and through homosexual behaviour which took the form of relationships between adult men and pubescent boys, where the boy was expected to play the passive role which is today demanded of women. There was no such thing as a category of 'the homosexual' because homosexual activity was expected of most men. In these circumstances it is scarcely surprising that we have little evidence of female homosexuality, where women were not considered as having any active sexuality at all. The poetry of Sappho on 6th Century Lesbos is the only clue, and this probably had a religious function which would confirm the restriction of homosexual behaviour to non-reproductive sections of society such as priestly castes.

In feudal society we find the same links. Among the feudal ruling class, where marriage and the family were means to the end of consolidating landed property, emotion became displaced into a ritualised 'courtly romantic love' while for men, including monarchs, homosexual behaviour could be tolerated providing it did not prevent the production of heirs. The free peasant and urban artisan families present a very different picture of a patriarchal family which was however organised around economic production. As a result of their role in this process, women could achieve considerable status and sexual

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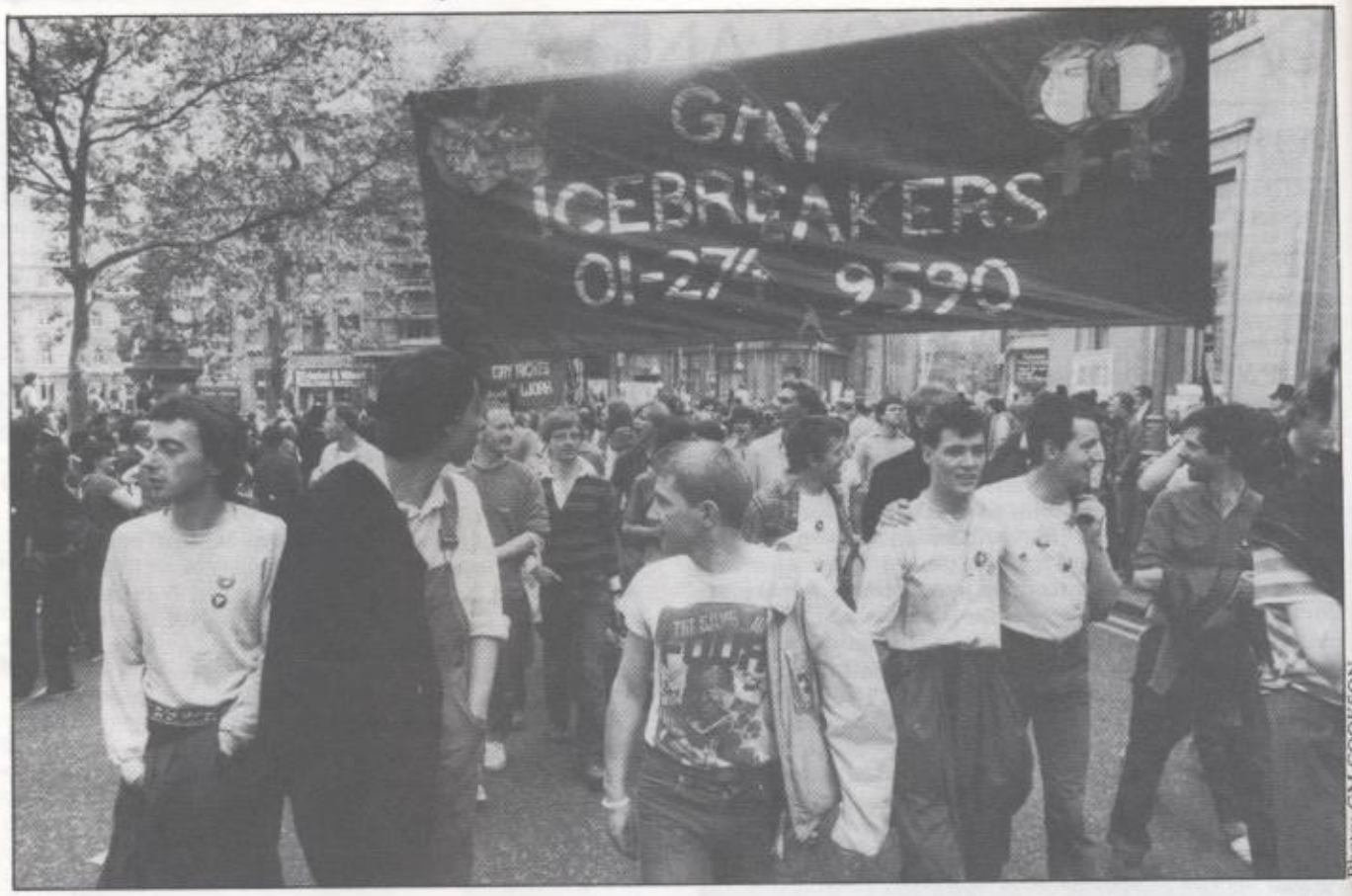

Photo: GM COOKSON

Gay contingent on the Peoples March for Jobs

freedom. The potential threat which this posed to the established order is indicated by the long history of the Church's persecution through witch trials of women who stepped outside of the limits within which the feudal class wished to keep them.

It is significant that the flowerings of ruling class homosexuality coincide with the periods of decadence of that class, from Hellenistic Greece through Imperial Rome and Renaissance feudalism to modern imperialism. The contradictions between an obsolete form of family organisation and the developing forces of production have been at the root of these developments. The working class, as the first oppressed class which can become a ruling class, is also therefore the first oppressed class to be concerned with this process.

Sexuality, family and capitalism

The triumph of capitalism brought about gigantic transformations in social organisation which determined the form both of the ruling class and the proletarian family. The consequences of these changes were dramatic and it is only now, in the era of the decadence of imperialism, that the apparently eternal and natural forms of social and sexual organisation established in the nineteenth century are being challenged and broken down.

The main features of this process are well documented. The bourgeois family became established with the woman in the role of child-bearer and home-maker, a representative of a natural, emotional sanctuary away from the vicious cut-throat competition of the male capitalist's outside world. The proletariat became organised after the same fashion. The initial incorporation of men, women and children into the workforce in the early burgeoning of the industrial revolution had very nearly destroyed the old family forms, as Marx and Engels vividly described. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, this process was reversed and women began to be expelled from the factories. In addition to important economic reasons, including the slumps which triggered off the age of imperialism, the necessity of establishing a social cohesion and stability was prominent among ruling class anxieties. The working class family which ensued was a reflection of that of the petty bourgeoisie, with women in the role with which we have become familiar and with the working class atomised and divided. At the moment it ceased to be progressive, capitalism achieved a social order among its gravediggers which has played a central part in its continued preservation.

Simultaneously, of course, heterosexuality expressed through individual emotional attachments became of necessity the only 'natural' form of sexual activity. A legal seal was placed on a social and political necessity with the series of laws passed in 1885 in Britain against prostitution and homosexuality, while similar laws were passed at about the same time in Germany and the other developing imperialist powers. Thus, *for the first time*, the creation of the category of 'the heterosexual' produced its opposite, a homosexual identity which began to take root during the second half of the nineteenth century and laid the basis for the first gay movements, in Britain, Germany and the USA, around the turn of the century.[8]

It has become a common analysis of Marxists and many on the Left that this form of family structure has come to play a central role in the social and economic organisation required by capitalism. What follows is that any struggle by women and gays against the chief agent of their oppression must be seen as a vital component of the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism itself.

But it is only part of the story to look at the economic and political functions of the family within capitalism. It has been one of the great strengths of the women's and gay movements to have developed a broader understanding of sexual oppression. In capitalist society women's sexuality is repressed to the point of invisibility. All non-heterosexual sexuality is suppressed by the state, discrimination and a pervasive ideology which condemns 'deviant' sex to a world of degradation, self-deception and misery. Lesbian sexuality in particular through its double contradiction of the idea that women have no active

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Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (REPORT)

sexuality, let alone are capable of sexual and emotional satisfaction without a male, has been either an unspeakable subject or else the object of male violence and pornographic titillation. Just as no country which oppresses another can itself be free, so this repression of 'deviancy' has its reflection in the violence, competitiveness, oppression and anxiety within all sexual relations. As a central part of human life, sexuality pervades all aspects of our existence; and as a corollary of the oppression of homosexuality, *all* human relations remain alienated under capitalism. So why is it *now* a matter of urgency that the struggle against sexual oppression be incorporated into the common struggle for socialism?

The social fabric in danger

For a small minority with little social weight (according to liberals, reformists and many others on the Left), gay people have certainly come under a lot of attacks in recent years, ranging from Mary Whitehouse's prosecution of *Gay News* to Anita Bryant's crusades in the USA, from Ian Paisley's 'Save Ulster from Sodomy' campaign to regular police harassment of gay clubs. This is not of course an accident.

All socialists have absorbed the fact that capitalism is in crisis. All too often, however, this crisis is considered only in its economic aspects. What is left out of the picture is a *social* crisis of massive proportions. The economic crisis may be the motor, but the social crisis which is geared to it is far too important to be left as a material and ideological weapon — a brake on the class struggle — for the bourgeoisie.

The vast post war boom laid the foundations for this present crisis. The drive for profit had as social consequences the drawing of women in every greater numbers into the workforce, the extension of education and the media, and the encouragement of a youth culture which was itself an important market.[9]

As the Right correctly foresaw, the family and traditional institutions began to come apart at the seams: marriages down, divorces up, more sex for its own sake as better contraception became available, youth on the streets, and so on. The possibility that there were valid alternatives to what had always been presented as natural and eternal was no longer an abstract question. The massive eruption of the women's liberation movement throughout the imperialist countries was the clearest and most obvious development. But it was also from these roots that the new gay movement sprang, following a police raid on a New York gay bar in 1969 which for the first time was resisted by the customers.

For a while it appeared that the demands of these new movements could be absorbed by a capitalism in boom without significant structural changes. Thus it was soon almost respectable to make one's money out of pornography, legitimate to exploit the gay market for clubs, discos and the like, and accepted, if not always acceptable, to indulge in the permissive sexual and cultural practices of the youth. Increasing numbers of people discovered that they were not as 'normal' as they had been brought up to think they were, and because of the gay movement and the gay subculture were able to live their lives as gays, at least in the metropolitan cities.

Of course, what capitalism in boom could try to absorb, capitalism in crisis could in no way afford. Thus the onset of economic recession in the seventies led to an attempt to drive women out of the factories and offices back into the home, the reassertion of their traditional role and the re-establishment of traditional family morality as the ideological prop of this counteroffensive and of social stability. This reversal has not of course been easy. In particular, it has stumbled on the opposition of the women's and the gay movements. The social crisis provoked by the boom was intensified by the slump and the youth rebellions which took off with punk and reached a height in Toxteth and Brixton last summer, demonstrating that the contradictions within a decaying mode of production are now sharper than ever. How is it, then, that gay liberation plays its part in this continuing process, and why is it that the resolution of the crisis in the interests of the working class through the seizure of state power has to involve gay liberation? The petty bourgeois right wing, its economic, political and social power at much greater immediate risk than big capital, has shown clearly through representatives as disparate as Chief Constable Anderton, Mary Whitehouse and the fascists, that it sees gay liberation as a direct threat to the social fabric of capitalism. The workers' movement has yet to grasp the connection.

The challenge

The nuclear family is a central material and ideological prop of the capitalist system. It is the direct agent of the oppression of women, gays and youth. The struggle around sexuality is an integral part of the struggle against the family. It is thus a component of the class struggle. Attacks on homosexuality and homosexuals — attacks in which the working class itself participates — have the effect of strengthening the family. The defeat of such attacks is therefore clearly in the interests of the workers' movement as a whole.

More immediately, attacks on homosexuality directly divide the working class. The late seventies in particular saw a wide range of media-led scare stories which effectively blamed the social crisis on lesbians — for example the witch hunt of Maureen Colquhoun, and the *Evening Standard*'s attacks on artificial insemination for lesbians (AID) — and on gay men. The failure of the labour movement to respond to such attacks contributed to a weakening of the class itself, and left working class anti-gay prejudice not merely unchallenged, but reinforced.

At another level, we have already indicated that the struggle around gay rights has demonstrated through the example of millions of openly gay women and men in the imperialist countries that there are alternatives to the nuclear family. The gay

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movement with the social and cultural milieu which it has spawned are part of the evidence of 'the old society pregnant with the new'. This is not of course to suggest that these *are* the alternatives: those living openly gay lives are still caught up in the contradictions of competitive individualism and a hostile outside world which cannot be resolved within capitalism. But the developing breakdown of the old firm sexual categories established in the nineteenth century, indicated by the increasing numbers of people, especially among the youth, who now experiment sexually or define themselves as bisexual, if they admit to any definition at all, is a powerful harbinger.

At the same time, the struggle against sexual oppression is the most effective battering ram against the artificial wall thrown up between those things which are a public concern and those regarded as questions of human nature or psychology. Issues of sexual oppression still produce red faces and downcast gazes in labour movement meetings and the feeling that these things are not 'proper'. The gay and women's movements in their struggles around sexuality are proving that this divide is of benefit only to the ruling class; and that sexual oppression is of as much concern to a miner or a steelworker as it is to a social worker or civil servant; and therefore a fit subject for discussion and action by the workers' movement.

Some strategic conclusions

Lesbians and gay men differ from all other oppressed people in one crucial respect. The vast majority of homosexuals take advantage of the invisibility of their sexuality to remain safely within 'normal' life, at least outwardly. For some men, there is the occasional and risky outlet of encounters in public lavatories (cottaging). For most, there is a lifetime of concealing their true feelings and carrying a burden of shame and misery based on the accepted teaching of school, church, family and society that homosexuality is a sick perversion. It was largely because of the ruling class recognition that blackmail and scandal was bad for their image that the 1967 Act was passed. Revolutionaries have come to understand that an effective fightback against the oppression of women, or of black people, has to be led in the first instance at least by the oppressed themselves. The same is no less true for gays. But for gay people, this involves in the first place the usually very individual decision to 'come out', risking in many cases social ostracism, family rejection, and the serious danger of losing a job, especially for anyone working with young people. For gay women and men to come out and for there to be the chance of a fight against gay oppression, a campaigning and organisationally autonomous gay movement is a prerequisite. It is vital that socialists recognise this and give full support to the campaigns of the gay movement — and yet the NEC document gives not a single mention to the movement!

But an autonomous gay movement has also the crucial function of spearheading the struggle for the labour movement to take up the question of gays rights. Some gains have been recorded here.[10] Through the work and pressure of organised groups of gay trade unionists, progress has been made in a number of unions towards the adoption of official pro-gay rights positions. NALGO for instance has adopted an anti-discrimination position, while NUPE came to the defence of victimised member John Saunders. But these instances are still few to weigh against the frequent indifference or even anti-gay policies (for example, the Labour Council in Clwyd which refused to employ gays in any jobs connected with children) of much of the labour movement. It is crucial that the Left in the unions and the Labour Party pushes forward the battle on this issue. There is certainly nothing automatic about the gay movement's orientation to the labour movement, however much socialists within it have fought long and hard for such an approach. Open gays have stepped away from their origins, they are declassé. Unless the labour movement starts to provide a pole of attraction many gays will look elsewhere for their salvation. Elsewhere can mean anything from utopian dreams of a 'gay community' to, for some gay men, a paradoxical

attraction to the machismo of fascism.

In supporting an autonomous gay movement, socialists must also recognise the specific needs of lesbians. The gay movement has been dominated by the concerns of gay men, and has certainly not been immune from sexism. Lesbians have come into activity as part of a general challenge by all women to the oppression of their sexuality. As such, many lesbians have found it more productive and more supportive to abandon mixed gay structures and work through the women's movement. The Labour Party document pays scant attention to these questions. It is necessary to fight for the right of lesbians to organise separately within both the women's and the gay movements to ensure that their specific concerns are voiced.

Just as women's oppression will not vanish with socialist revolution, anti-gay prejudice will also survive the overthrow of capitalism; autonomous movements of the oppressed will still have a major if different function in that period. We cannot predict what form that continuing struggle will take, nor can we predict what form sexual activity and relations will take under socialism. What we have argued is that homosexuality is part of human sexual capacity, that the repression of homosexuality and the oppression of homosexuals are connected with the oppression of women and will disappear along with the liberation of women; and that therefore the victory of socialism must involve gay liberation.

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References

1 This article is based on years of research by gay supporters of the Fourth International in Britain. It has been impossible to reproduce the evidence for all the statements made, or even to deal with a number of major political questions (such as the roles of Stalinism and fascism or the development of the gay movement and of lesbian organisation).

2 *The Rights of Gay Men and Women*, Labour Party NEC Discussion Document 1981.

3 See *The Law and Sexuality*, Grass Roots Books, Manchester 1978.

4 See *Bernstein on Homosexuality*, (Two articles from *Die Neue Zeit*), Athol books, nd.

5 Published as *Women's Liberation and Socialism*, Pathfinder, London 1979.

6 A Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, 1948; *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*, (1953, Illinois. 37 per cent of Kinsey's male sample had taken a homosexual encounter to the point of orgasm.

7 The best account is K J Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Duckworth 1978.

8 See J Weeks, *Coming Out*, Quartet 1977 and *Sex, Politics & Society*, Longman 1981; Lauritsen & Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, Times Change Press, New York 1974. The term 'homosexual' was invented in 1869 and became current in Britain in the 1880s.

9 See the figures given by Weeks, *Sex* etc, p252.

10 Among numbers of pamphlets etc see *Gay Workers*, NCCL, 1981; *Gays at Work*, Gay Rights at Work Committee, London 1980; *Open and Positive*, Gay Teachers Group, London 1977.

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WILD LILIES: POISONOUS WEEDS

WANG FANXI

Wild Lilies: Poisonous Weeds is a collection of Chinese dissident writings recently published by Pluto Press. We reprint here an article from the collection by Wang Fanxi entitled *Chen Duxiu, Father of Chinese Communism*, introduced by the editor of the collection, Greg Benton.

Chen Duxiu (Ch'en Tu-hsiu, 1879-1942) was not only a founder of the Chinese Communist Party but he was also the main leader of the 1919 May Fourth movement, with which leaders of today's democratic movement strongly identify.

For decades the CCP had nothing good to say about Chen Duxiu, but since Mao's death he has been partly rehabilitated. He is now recognised once again as a founder of Chinese Communism. He is no longer held solely reponsible for the defeat of the Revolution of 1925-27, which is now blamed partly on Moscow. But he is still described as a traitor for joining the Trotskyists, although the charge that he colaborated with the Japanese imperialists has been dropped.

The author of this article, Wang Fanxi (Wang Fan-hsi, born 1907), was a member of the generation of Chinese radicals awakened to political and intellectual life during the late 1910s and early '20s, when Chen Duxiu was still the undisputed leader of the Chinese Revolution. As a Trotskyist Wang worked with Chen in 1930-31 and again in 1938, both having spent most or all of the intervening years in gaol. Wang was more than once Chen's opponent on political and theoretical questions, but on the whole he sees himself as Chen's pupil and admirer. Wang's autobiography was published by Oxford University Press in 1980 under the title Chinese Revolutionary, Memoirs, 1919-1949.

To many younger Chinese socialists the name Chen Duxiu means little, and to most socialists outside China it means nothing at all. Of China's main Communist leaders only Mao, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi and a handful of others have won fame in the outside world. How could Chen, a nonentity, stand alongside these great leaders? But in truth Chen was anything but a nonentity in the history of the Chinese Revolution. If judged not just by what he achieved directly but by his influence over an entire historical period, he ranks not only above Zhou and Liu, but even above Mao himself.

In 1936, in conversation with Edgar Snow, Zhou and Mao frankly acknowledged Chen's influence on them, and Snow reported their remarks in his classic *Red Star Over China*. But Zhou and Mao apparently had second thoughts, for the Chinese translation of Snow's book was withdrawn from circulation in the spring of 1938. Zhou had told Snow: 'Before going to France, I read translations of the *Communist Manifesto;* Kautsky's *Class Struggle;* and *The October Revolution*. These books were published under the auspices of *New Youth*, which was published by Ch'en Tu-hsiu. I also personally met Ch'en Tu-hsiu as well as Li Ta-chao (Li Dazhao) — who were to become founders of the Chinese Communist Party.' Mao Zedong said: 'I went to Shanghai for the second time in 1919. There once more I saw Ch'en Tu-hsiu. I had first met him in Peking (Beijing) when I was at Peking National University, and he had influenced me perhaps more than anyone else.' So Mao was Chen's pupil not just before the party was founded, but for a long time afterwards too.

Chen Duxiu was born on 8 October 1879, 35 years after the Opium War and 15 years after the defeat of the Taiping Rebellion. Outer pressure and inner dissension had already shaken the Qing dynasty to its foundations. The corruption and incompetence of the imperial system and the growing Western threat had awoken many Chinese intellectuals to the need for reform. So when Chen Duxiu was born, China was already in the first stages of political ferment and change.

But Chen was brought up in a strictly traditional way. Born into an Anhui gentry family, he lost his father in the first months of his life, and was raised and educated by his grandfather and his elder brother. They were both classical Confucianists and set out to train the young Duxiu for the imperial examinations which were the sole path to bureaucratic office under the Qing.

Chen had no liking for the Confucian classics, and even less liking for the *bagu* or eight-legged essay, a stereotyped form of composition in which examination candidates were required to excel. However, to please his grandfather and his mother he took the first exam at the age of seventeen, and came top of the list with a *xiucai* degree. The following year, in 1897, he went to Nanjing to take part in the triennial examination for the degree of *juren*. As a result of his experiences there he lost interest for once and for all in the imperial examinations and, more important, began to question the soundness of China's basic institutions.

He vividly described his feelings in his unfinished Autobiography. One candidate, a fat man from Xuzhou who paced up and down the examination pen naked but for a pair of broken sandals, chanting his favourite *bagu*, made a particularly deep impression on Chen. 'I could not take my eyes off him', he wrote. 'As I watched I fell to thinking about the whole strange business of the examination system, and then I began to think about how much my country and its people would suffer once these brutes achieved positions of power. Finally, I began to doubt the whole system of selecting talent through examination. It was like a circus of monkeys and bears, repeated every so many years. But was the examination system an exception, or were not China's other institutions equally rotten? I ended up agreeing with the criticisms raised in the newspaper *Contemporary Events*, and I switched my allegiance from the examination system to the reformist party of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. And so an hour or two of pondering decided the course of my life for the next dozen years.'

The Kang-Liang reformist movement was considered very radical at the time that Chen Duxiu joined it. It called for a replacement of the absolute monarchy by a constitutional one, and it proposed a series of reforms to save China. But just a year later, in 1898, the reformists suffered a crushing defeat, and in 1900 the Qing rulers were humiliated by eight foreign powers during the Yihetuan (or Boxer) upheavals. Chen's outlook on life and politics became more and more radical under the impact of these events. In 1904, in Anhui, he published *Suhua bao*, a newspaper written in vernacular Chinese. In 1908 he went to Shanghai, where he joined an underground terrorist group and learned how to make bombs. By now he had already left Kang and Liang way behind in his political views, and he was advocating the overthrow of the Qing by force.

Even before the fall of the Qing in 1911 Chen was arrested for his political activities in Anhiu. After his release he was driven into exile in Japan. There he collaborated with Sun Yatsen, founder of the republican nationalist Guomindang and chief architect of the Qing's overthrow, but he never joined Sun's organisation. On his return to China during the 1911 Revolution he became political director of the revolutionary army in Anhui. But after the nationalists compromised with Yuan Shikai, representative of the *ancien régime*, he was once again forced into exile in Japan, where he published a revolutionary newspaper. Returning to China in 1915, he founded the journal *Youth* in Shanghai, renamed *New Youth* the following year. *New Youth* was to play a major role in the further unfolding of the Chinese Revolution. In 1917 *New Youth's* editorial board moved north to Beijing, where Chen was invited to become Dean of Letters at Beijing National University, China's highest and most progressive in-

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stitution. Here were gathered many of China's best scholars, including Li Dazhao, who was to become a founder and early martyr of the Chinese Communist Party; Dr Hu Shi, the philosopher; Lu Xun, the essayist; Qian Xuantong, the historian; and Zhou Zouren, the essayist. With their help and that of some students, *New Youth* quickly gained in circulation and influence.

In any case, circumstances favoured its rapid growth. The war in Europe had temporarily loosened the West's economic grip on China, so that a national bourgeoisie was born, and with it a modern working class. At the same time, revolution was brewing in Russia, and in 1917 the Bolsheviks took power in a revolution that decisively influenced modern China's course. Lastly, many ideological and social movements sprang up throughout the world, and especially in Europe, at the end of the war. Thus encouraged, some Chinese intellectuals began to search more earnestly than ever for new solutions to the problems China had faced ever since it was dragged into the world's eddy by Western businessmen and soldiers. At the same time these social and political developments gave these intellectuals a ready-made audience of tens of thousands, and a firm social base on which to realise their ideals.

New Youth did not begin as a directly political publication. In the early days it campaigned on two main fronts: against China's traditional ethics and social practices; and against classical Chinese, which was still used for most written communication. The campaign against traditional ethics was known as the New Thought Movement, and the campaign against classical Chinese was known as the Literary Revolution. On the first front *New Youth*, especially Chen Duxiu, took Confucius as the main target. Confucianism had dominated China for over two millenia and was the ideological mainstay of the whole reactionary system. For Chen and his comrades, China's backwardness was due above all to her ossification under Confucian teaching, and they believed that there could be no social progress until the Chinese people were freed from the Confucian grip.

The Literary Revolution was closely linked to this struggle against Confucianism. Classical Chinese, which was based on the spoken language of over a thousand years ago, differed radically from modern spoken Chinese. It was so hard to learn that mediocre scholars could not write a simple letter in it even after studying it for ten years. So until it was replaced by a written form based on modern spoken Chinese, mass illiteracy would remain and progressive intellectuals would never be able to awaken the people. This was not the first time that Chen had called for language reform. As early as 1904 he had published a newspaper with articles in the vernacular. But it was only now that the conditions for a literary revolution had fully ripened. Now, despite stiff opposition from the literati, daily speech finally won out, and living Chinese replaced dead Chinese as the official means of communication.

Yet Chen Duxiu's main contribution to the New Thought Movement and the Literary Revolution lay less in his constructive achievement than in his destructive energy: in his dauntless urge to discredit, criticise and destroy everything traditional. He was among the greatest iconoclasts and pioneers, he worked not with a scalpel but with a bulldozer. For him the main thing was to pull down the dilapidated house of the past, and this he did to devastating effect. But for a long time he had only the vaguest idea of what sort of house to put in its place, except that it must be in the Western style. So during the first *four years of New Youth* Chen Duxiu should properly be called a Westerniser or a radical bourgeois democrat. He admired almost everything Western, especially great events and people from the past three centuries of European history; these he cited enthusiastically in his writings, comparing them with events and people from the Chinese past. Great names like Francis Bacon, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Auguste Comte, Charles Darwin, Louis Pasteur, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Kant, Hegel, Goethe, Dickens and even Oscar Wilde he introduced indiscriminately as models for Chinese youth to admire and emulate. But he did not know these people well, nor did he have a sound grasp of Western thought. He mastered no European language, so all his new knowledge he acquired through Japanese translations; and his Japanese was not good either. The result was that all he learned from the West were a few broad concepts such as humanism, democracy, individualism and scientific method. Of these he singled out democracy and science as the two surgeons capable of saving China.

The October Revolution of 1917 had an enormous effect on Chen's thinking, but it was not until later that Chen definitively embraced Marxism and concluded that China would never become modernised unless, like the Bolsheviks, it carried out an economic as well as a political revolution.

It was above all May Fourth that precipitated this change in Chen's thinking. On 4 May 1919 a student movement broke out in Beijing and spread to all China's big cities. This movement was in protest against the decision of the Paris Peace Conference to transfer German concessions in China to Japan, and against the Beijing government for acting as Japan's tool. May Fourth was under the direct influence of Chen's *New Youth* journal. It was *New Youth's* first victory, but also its first big test. May Fourth quicky split the *New Youth* leaders into two rival camps. For some time a process of differentiation had been going on among the journal's main supporters. Now, this process quickened. Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao went further left and plunged into revolutionary work, while Hu Shi and others moved further right under the pretext of 'retreating to the study'.

As a leader of May Fourth and its chief inspirer, Chen was the main target for repression. In June he was seized and gaoled for three months. After his release he left Beijing University for good and began a critical review of the doctrines he had earlier indiscriminately adopted. In September 1920 he declared himself a Marxist.

Now that he had committed himself wholly to the revolution he began to work towards the establishment of a Communist Party in China. In August 1920 he set up a Socialist Youth Corps in Shanghai. At the same time, Marxist Study Groups were organised in big cities throughout China. In July 1921 the CCP held its First National Congress in Shanghai. Chen was elected General Secretary, and the following year he represented the party at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow. He was re-elected leader at the next four party congresses, and led the party during the Revolution of 1925-27.

The Revolution of 1925-27 has been called a tragedy by some historians, and it certainly ended in tragic defeats. What was Chen's role in that tragedy? There are various answers to this question, which has been the subject of much heated controversy. The view of the Comintern and (until recently) of the CCP was that Chen was an opportunist and a bungler whose wrong policy led the revolution to defeat. According to this view the main if not the exclusive blame for the defeat was Chen Duxiu's. But not everyone agrees with this assessment. Some of Chen's fellow-revolutionaries and many scholars believe that Chen's mistake was to be too faithful to the directives of the Comintern, which was then controlled by Stalin and Bukharin, and that he was merely Stalin's scapegoat. My own experience of the events of 1925-27, and my later reflection on them, also led me to this position.

> in court Chen behaved every inch like a revolutionary leader, and from the dock he denounced the Guomindang's regime of terror

Chen Duxiu was dismissed as party leader at the August (1927) Emergency Conference of the Central Committee. He was succeeded by Qu Qiubai, who under Moscow's orders switched to an adventurist line culminating in the disastrous Guangzhou (Canton) Insurrection of December 1927. In retirement, Chen wrote several letters to the party warning against putschism and demanding a critical review of policy, but this merely widened the gap between him and the new leaders.

In late 1929 Chen could acquaint himself for the first time with the Russian Left Opposition's views on China through documents brought back to China by Communists who had studied in Moscow. Until then Chen had no true understanding of the differences between Trotsky and Stalin on the Chinese revolution. These documents opened up a new field of vision for him, and helped dispel doubts that had vexed him for years. He soon went over to the positions of the Left Opposition, and wrote to the CCP leaders demanding that the issues in the Chinese Revolution should be put up for discussion in the party

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Mao's death — the end of an era in China

and in the whole world movement. He was promptly expelled as a result, and in protest he wrote his famous *Open Letter to All Comrades* of 10 December 1929 and put his name to the statement *Our Political Views* signed by 81 veteran party members. Needless to say, all were expelled from the party. A few months later, in February 1930, Stalin tried to 'win Chen Duxiu back' by inviting him to Moscow. Chen refused, thus severing all ties with the party he had founded nine years earlier.

Chen then organised his followers into a Left Opposition and published the paper *Proletariat*. In May 1931 four Trotskyist groups merged to form the Chinese section of the International of Bolshevik-Leninists, of which Chen was elected General Secretary. But in October 1932 he was arrested and put before the Nanjing Military Tribunal, where he faced the death sentence. In court he behaved every inch like a revolutionary leader, and from the dock he denounced the Guomindang's regime of terror. His arrest and trial led to a nationwide campaign to free him. As a result he was spared the death penalty and given a thirteen-year gaol sentence instead.

Chen stayed in prison until shortly after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, when he was freed along with other political prisoners. But he was still kept under strict watch, and this prevented him from doing revolutionary work. After a brief stay in Wuhan he was compelled to live in a small town near Chongqing in southwest China, where the Guomindang had its wartime capital. His health had worsened in prison, and on 27 May 1942 he died of heart sickness and phlebitis, aged sixty-four.

Chen spent his last years in great poverty, bad health and isolation. Nevertheless, the Goumindang and the CCP persecuted him to the end. In the summer of 1938 the CCP began a strident slander campaign against him. This campaign was directed by Wang Ming, who was Stalin's personal representative in China. Wang Ming accused Chen of 'collaborating with the Japanese imperialists'. At the same time the Guomindang prohibited Chen from resuming his literary activities. All he could do during those hard times was to think and to exchange opinions by letter with a few old friends. After his death these letters and a few articles from the years 1940-42 were compiled by one of his former pupils and published in Shanghai in 1948. In 1949 Dr Hu Shi, once an old friend of Chen's but later a staunch supporter of Chiang Kai-shek, reprinted this collection of writings in Taiwan, and wrote an introduction to it in which he welcomed Chen's ideas as those of a 'prodigal returned'. As for the CCP, they regarded Chen as a renegade, and even some Trotskyists thought the same, although for different reasons. So what was Chen's new position, and did it represent his final reconciliation with bourgeois thought?

The main themes of Chen's last letters and articles were as follows. First, no revolutions would break out during the war, and only if the Allies defeated the Axis would revolutionary crises happen. Socialists throughout the world were therefore duty-bound to support the democratic Allies against the fascist Axis. Second, there is no essential difference between bourgeois and proletarian democracy, but only a difference of degree. Proletarian democracy is therefore an extension rather than a negation of bourgeois democracy, and it is wrong to say that bourgeois democracy is historically superseded. Third, capitalism is the root of war, which only world revolution can end. Fourth, the struggle for national liberation is interlinked with proletarian revolution in the advanced countries, and the forces behind these two struggles make socialist revolution together. Fifth, the Soviet Union under Lenin was qualitatively different from the Soviet Union under Stalin. The former was socialist, the latter was not. (Chen died before he could elaborate on what kind of regime the Soviet Union under Stalin had become.) Sixth, although Lenin's regime was not like Stalin's, Lenin was partly to blame for Stalin's crimes, since it was he who had counterposed proletarian dictatorship to democracy in general. Seventh, a true socialist revolution is one in which democracy, or more exactly democratic rights, are respected and extended.

Clearly Chen's thinking had changed greatly during the early war years, but his views, however muddled, still fell far short of a reconciliation with his old enemy, the bourgeoisie. Instead, they represented a return by Chen in his old age to the positions he had held as a young man. It is interesting to ask why this happened, especially since in my experience it is not uncommon for intellectuals in backward countries to revert in this way to the ideas of their youth.

China's isolation was broken down by guns and ships. 'Modernisation' stemmed not from gradual change based on evolutions within its own society, but from outside pressures. Development of this sort is inevitably by leaps and bounds, and is condensed and telescoped. In China the transition from democratic radicalism to the founding of a modern socialist movement took some twenty years. In Britain and France the same process took several centuries, and in Russia it took several scores of years.

Moreover, China's progress from democratic agitation to full-blown Communism took place in one and the same person: Chen Duxiu. Chen was China's Belinsky, Cherneshevsky, Plekhanov and Lenin rolled into one. True, he did not reach the stature of these great Russians, but he traversed the entire gamut of their thinking, from the first awakening of individualism to the struggle for socialist collectivism. Thus Chen embodies what Russian Marxists referred to as combined development. However, combined development is both a privilege and a curse. It explains not only Chen's merits but also his defect. Chen rapidly and boldly assimilated an impressive lists of isms, but in none of them did he reach real depth. In his teens he became a 'left-wing Confucianist', in his twenties he was intoxicated by Western democracy, in his thirties he criticised Confucianism, and at 41 he became a Marxist. Inevitably he retained elements of older ideologies among the new ones as he raced from one system to the next. And by the time that he embraced Marxism, he had reached an age where new thinking rarely sinks deep into the soul. It is therefore understandable that in the last years of his life Chen returned in part to his intellectual first love, 'pure' democracy.

But there were of course other factors that disposed Chen to look favourably on democracy. Above all he was appalled by the degeneration of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. It was the Moscow trials that initially led him to rethink the Leninist view of bourgeois democracy.

How, then, should one appraise Chen's life? Despite his political failures and his intellectual limitations, Chen was not only modern China's bravest thinker, but one of history's great revolutionaries. This is not only because of his leading role in the Chinese revolution, but also because of his personal indomitability. He did not hesitate to give up a brilliant career for the uncertain and hard life of a revolutionary. He heroically bore the loss of his family and his two sons (murdered by the Guomindang in 1927 and 1928). He stuck to his beliefs under the threat of imprisonment and death. And during the last years of his life, when he was gravely ill and desperately poor, he refused to accept money offered him by the Goumindang through one of his old friends. All this shows that Chen was a man of revolutionary mettle, and his memory remains that of a great revolutionary. Another appraisal of Chen is that he was 'an oppositionist for life to any established authority', and Chen himself liked this description of his career.

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WORLD POLITICS & THE PEACE MOVE

Phil Hearse

Edward Thompson et al, **Exterminism and Cold War**, Verso edition, 1982, £5.50 pb.

Exterminism and Cold War takes as its starting point the essay 'Notes on Exterminism — the Last Stage of Civilisation' in which Edward Thompson argued that the Cold War, and the military nuclear complexes associated with it, deeply structured world reality, so much so that the self-reproducing and ever-escalating Cold War had become *the* central fracture of world politics. The implication was that the military-nuclear complexes dominated both the USSR and the United States and were out of any *political* control.

He thus hinted that 'to argue from origins' was pointless, as was any historical or structural analysis of what the conflict between the USSR and the USA was *about*, or any comparative ananlysis of the social and class structures of the capitalist West and post-capitalist East. According to Thompson all rationality was lost in a self-reproducing system of nuclear competition in which the original purpose was submerged. The Cold War had just become 'about itself' rather than reflecting underlying struggles. Thus the struggle which faced humanity was the fight against 'exterminism', and all others — class struggles and the like — were subordinate to the central human struggle against the crazy military hierarchies in the USSR and the USA.

The essence of Thompson's new essay, 'Europe — the Weak Link in the Cold War', is that he has in all but words given up the concept of exterminism. He simply succumbs to the huge array of argumentation in the book — notably from Raymond Williams, Fred Halliday and Mike Davis — that his previous position was an abandonment of Marxist and historical analysis in favour of apocalyptic 'save the earth' rhetoric, and simply not good enough from someone who is after all one of the greatest Marxist historians in the world.

His new defence of the *word* exterminism amounts to this: there is something new in the present day world reality which can't simply be explained by concepts like 'imperialism' and 'international class struggle' — namely that the world possesses the ability, which could actually be put to use, to blow itself to smithereens. The point is however that only terms like imperialism and international class struggle *explains* this new reality.

Over a year before this volume appeared, I wrote a critique of Thompson's original essay (international vol 6 no 2). Since Thompson has all but abandoned the notion of exterminism the real interest in this present volume is this: to debate 'exterminism' you have to debate the meaning of world politics today. The dozen or so essays in this book, taken together, provide a wealth of information and argument about contemporary world reali y. Moreover, this debate is informed by a burning question for all socialists: the anti-nuclear movement has become a mass movement of considerable proportions. It is hard to think of any other movement since the second world war which has on more than one occasion co-ordinated demonstrations in Europe and the USA which have involved *millions* of people. What are the limits and possibilities of this movement?

The extent to which the peace movement can alter world reality is in part determined *by* that reality — where the crucial struggles are taking place and where are the weak points of the present world order, which we define as imperialism and its principle prop, world Stalinism. The two contributors who make out a systematic alternative explanation of the world order to Thompson, and the function of nuclear weapons within it, are Mike Davis and Fred Halliday. It is on their essays, and Thompson's reply that a few critical remarks are in order.

Mike Davis' 'Nuclear Imperialism and Extended Deterrence' is a sharp and accurate critique of Thompson's original notion of exterminism and a vehement demonstration of the responsibility of US imperialism for the Cold War. Mike shows how nuclear weapons have played a rational and functional role in maintaining the imperialist world order. In particular he marshalls the *factual* evidence that nuclear weapons and the arms race have been used to economically pressurise the Soviet Union, and how the 'nuclear umbrella' of US imperialism is the essential back-up to the free use of its conventional forces in counter-revolutionary war. The times when the US has come closest to *using* nuclear weapons have been during the Korean War, the Vietnam war and during the seige of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 — in other words against the colonial revolution.

Noam Chomsky provides more evidence of a similar kind: the Cuban missile crisis, the nuclear back-up to the 1954 coup in Guatemala, the sending of SAC bombers to Uruguay in 1947, the nuclear alert by the Western powers during Suez. All this is excellent ammunition in demonstrating the responsibility of US imperialism for the nuclear arms race.

But I would register some secondary differences with Mike's notion of the international order and the world class struggle. It is perhaps best illustrated by Thompson's reply to Davis. Thompson says: 'And as Davis crosses and re-crosses the globe in his seven-league boots ... One episode which escapes his attention altogether is Gdansk: that is the astonishing 16-month life-cycle of Solidarity'. I think that Mike's omission of Poland is linked to a slightly one-sided emphasis of the world class struggle: 'The Cold War in its wider sense is not just an arbitrary or anachronistic feud staged essentially in Europe, but a rationally explicable and deeply rooted conflict of opposing social formations and political forces, *whose principle centre of gravity has for some thirty years now been the Third World*' (our emphasis).

Now there's some good evidence to back up this claim. After all the real revolutions we've seen in the last thirty years have been in the Third World — at least the successful ones. But the operative role that the notion of the colonial revolution as the determining factor in world politics plays in Davis' thinking is explicit: 'Whatever the errors of its "immaturity" the New Left should not be disparaged for having emphasised the dependence of the hopes of socialism in the Northern hemisphere upon the desperate and courageous battles being waged on the other side of the world.'

But if the hopes for socialism *depend* on the colonial revolution, then the consequences for socialists and the peace movement are clear. Everything must be thrown into solidarity with the colonial revolution. Socialists should intervene in the peace movement on the central question of whether it will or will not support the colonial revolution. Even *smashing up the anti-nuclear movement* in the course of such a struggle would be absolutely justifiable.

The struggle of *ten million* Polish workers was the broadest mobilisation of proletarian self-activity and democratic self-organisation since Catalonia in 1936, or possibly even since the Russian Revolution itself. In our view the hopes for socialism in the Northern hemisphere, the hopes for socialism world-wide depend also on the struggle of the workers in the industrial countries. Several years ago, during the height of the Portuguese revolution, Ernest Mandel put forward the thesis that the European proletariat could play a decisive role in unlocking the world crisis. In this optic, the crucial problem for socialism is the relative passivity of the American and Russian working classes which the impact of revolution in Europe could change. Mandel's error, if error it was, was to limit his notion of the 'European' working class to Spain, Portugal, Italy and France. Poland (and Romania tomorrow) have shown us that the *East* European working class can play a crucial role as well. The workers in other advanced capitalist countries and some of the more industrialised colonial countries (Brazil, Argentina etc) also have a crucial weight. But if the hopes for world socialism depend on the colonial revolution alone then we are indeed in real trouble. The bastions of world imperialism and Stalinism cannot be finally stormed without the US and Soviet working classes.

Fred Halliday's more comprehensive essay has its own problems. Fred is a 'Deutscherite' — a term he probably won't object to as editor of some of Isaac Duetscher's writings and as an avid pupil, like all of us, of that great Marxist's writings. In practice this means, despite the complexity and subtlety of his analysis, that the principle source of world conflict for Fred is the conflict 'between the capitalist and post-capitalist worlds'. Despite his stern criticism of some aspects of the Soviet Union, and the way it uses its influence to reproduce its own bureaucratic structure in Third World countries, ultimately he sees the Soviet Union as a force for progress. The Brezhnev epoch is regarded as a time of general progress for the Soviet Union, and as a shift to the left in its world role.

Much of what Halliday says in his outline of the history of the Cold War we can agree with. But to argue that the central fracture in world politics is between the capitalist and post-capitalist worlds is to run the risk of abandoning the traditional revolutionary Marxist view of the struggle between the two major *classes* on a world scale in favour of a struggle between two *camps* — the capitalist and the socialist. Such a view posits the existence of two fundamental camps, imperialist and anti-imperialist, with the latter having at its heart the Soviet Union. The problem with 'campism' is that it fails to grasp the essential mode of domination of the imperialist world

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system, namely that its two principle props are world Stalinism and the colonial and semi-colonial bourgeoisies, which as Trotsky argued 'in the final analysis' defend the *existing* world order and are profoundly conservative social forces. Despite the objections to Halliday's account of world reality, his account of the role that the European peace movement can play is eloquent and convincing.

This brings us right back to the role of the peace movement. Lucio Magri is right to stress that the movement could be diffused and co-opted unless it is given concrete goals to fight for. Nonetheless, the peace movement has become a tremendous political force, a great embarrassment for the 'Western alliance'. Neither the bourgeoisies in the USA nor in Europe have any illusions about the target of the peace movement. The slogan of a 'nuclear free Europe' can only be directed against the NATO alliance and the USA — *they* are the people responsible for the 'nuclearisation' of Europe, not the Warsaw pact and the Soviet Union. Marxists have every reason to build the *existing* peace movement to exert the maximum possible pressure to disrupt NATO.

Of course we must build solidarity with the colonial revolution, above all with the struggle in El Salvador. The longer the peace movement exists, the deeper its understanding of the role of imperialism will become. But any temptation to intervene in CND and its equivalents around an ultimatistic line of insisting above all else as support for the Central American revolution must be bitterly resisted. Any sectarianism to the existing peace movement would be a disaster.

So, finally back to Edward Thompson. Is Europe the weak link in the Cold War? Well, it could be. For the European working class has the ability to make a strategic, world-historic breakthrough against Stalinism and imperialism.

Photo: PETE GRANT

The peace movement has the whole world in its hands

SHORT REVIEWS

Arthur Gavshon: **Crisis in Africa**, Penguin, 1981, £3.95

Gavshon is a seasoned journalist who has 'had access to world leaders on both sides of the Iron Curtain over a period of thirty years'. He uses this access to good avail in exposing the duplicity of diplomacy, East and West, and setting right the record on a number of particularly nasty pieces of CIA misinformation: for example, he provides a useful 'respectable' confirmation that Cuban aid to Angola was a response to, rather than the cause of, South African intervention.

Gavshon is no specialist in African history and makes a number of rather elementary mistakes; however, the real reason for the book's failure is the simplistic framework into which the often awkward facts of contradictory processes of permanent revolution are forced. A hundred years ago, the people of Africa were largely passive observers of a scramble for colonies fought out between the great powers of Europe. Today, their aspirations have created movements and shaped states which, while tightly locked into a subordinate position within the world economy of imperialism, nonetheless are actors in their own right. African politics can no longer be explained simply in terms of super-power rivalry for power, possessions and influence.

Howard Zinn: **A People's History of the United States**, Longman, 1980, £6.95

Zinn sets out to tell the story 'of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees ... of the rise of industrialism as seen by the young women of the Lowell textile mills ... (of) the First World War as seen by the socialists ... (of) the New Deal as seen by blacks in Harlem.' He reports the movements of Indians, workers, women and blacks with sympathy and an eye for the interesting and revealing detail. Zinn's socialism is moral — though not moralistic — and innocent of any hint of strategy: there is nothing in this book to guide the action of even the most reformist of activists. But the book is immensely readable throughout its 600 pages and conveys a rewarding feel of the hidden history of post-Columbus America.

Paul Wilkinson: **The New Fascists**, Grant McIntyre, 1981, £7.95 hardcover only.

Paul Wilkinson is a member of the Conservative Party, a professor of International Relations, and a prominent 'expert' on terrorism whose views are frequently sought by governments and media. Surprisingly, he has produced an informative book on fascism today which gives fulsome (and much deserved) praise to the pioneering work of the journal *Searchlight*, on which he draws heavily, and recommends his readers to collaborate with the Anti-Nazi League: 'There is a real sense', he writes, 'in which the ANL has defended human dignity by standing up to the arrogant obscenity of Nazism parading itself through our streets and intimidating our citizens'.

Less surprisingly, he has no real explanation of what fascism is or why it should have re-surfaced in the 1970s. Despite the book's over-reliance on press cuttings and file cards, and its somewhat naive liberal belief that goodwill and education in civics can defeat fascism, it would do no harm for every public library to have a copy on its shelves.

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ROOM AT THE TOP

Valerie Coultas

The crisis of the women's liberation movement continues. No book has made as big an impact on this crisis since the famous *Beyond the Fragments* as the recently published *Sweet Freedom* by Anna Coote and Bea Campbell. Valerie Coultas argues that it charts an articulate but reformist perspective for the women's movement.

Anna Coote and Bea Campbell: **Sweet Freedom**, Picador, 1982, £1.95

Sweet Freedom is at its best in its account of the birth of the modern Women's Liberation Movement and its changing fortunes over the last decade. It captures the spirit of the early 1970s — the 'elation of sisterhood' — and analyses the influence that movement has had among women, trade unionists and on politics in general. Feminists, unsure about exactly how to fight back against the Tories, will no doubt look to it for solutions to the question on so many women's lips today — what can be done?

The answer *Sweet Freedom* gives is one that would not have been popular 10 years ago. Search in this book as hard as you like, nowhere will you find the call for a socialist or even a feminist revolution. 'As feminists,' say Coote and Campbell at the very end of the book, 'we are concerned with disturbing consensus.' The consensus they wish to disturb is that between men and women. The consensus that they accept is the existence of the capitalist system. This book codifies a process which has been going on for some time now. It represents the crystallisation of a professional, reformist feminism — a layer of women who have entered the media, the trade union bureaucracy's research department and the higher professions, and who see the economic crisis as a threat to their continued social mobility. Pessimistic about the prospects for radical change they no longer focus on social transformation to achieve women's liberation, they simply want more jobs for the girls.

This will appear a harsh judgement to many feminists. They will point out how the book is useful in describing the ideological backlash against feminism. They will note the detailed analysis of how women's responsibilities in the home have caused a segregation within the labour market between women's and men's jobs. They will applaud the analysis of the toothlessness of Labour's equality legislation. And they will welcome the pluralistic approach of the book to lesbianism and heterosexuality.

But to acknowledge that *Sweet Freedom* is good at describing the issues and dilemmas of feminists today is not to agree with its solutions. Women have learnt over the last decade that sisterhood is powerful but that it cannot hide political differences among women about strategies for the future.

Reformist Feminism

Anna Coote and Bea Campbell identify the central problem facing the Women's Liberation Movement as follows: 'Despite the spread of feminist influence into publishing, into TUC debates, into the language we use and into strong feelings of solidarity among diverse groups of women, there has not *been a redistribution of wealth within the family.*' (my emphasis).

The book documents how the pattern of low pay for women has maintained despite government legislation because of women's domestic responsibilities and because women's voices are only rarely to be heard when bargaining takes place. Demands by feminists that were geared to an expanding capitalist market have not fared well under the present recession. Trade unionists don't admit it but the 'fight against female disadvantage is no longer a top priority'. It is in this economic context, the authors argue, that the ideological and cultural backlash against feminism has to be understood.

But to identify a lack of redistribution of wealth *within* the family as the major problem is quite wrong. Coote and Campbell locate the unequal earnings between women and men as *the* key problem, urging men in the trade unions to become 'more active parents and homemakers' in order to 'alleviate women's domestic responsibilities'. Redistribution of wealth, real wealth this time rather than wages, across society (ie between social classes) is only mentioned as an afterthought. Bea and Anna's argument is for a feminist incomes policy to be added into the Alternative Economic Strategy.

Indeed the very idea of social transformation as a strategic answer to women's continued subordination is ridiculed: 'Some argue that profits are the rightful source of extra pay and benefits that are due to women'. In principle the authors agree but dismiss the idea in practice because 'women will not wait till the revolution'.

The sentences are the key to the reformist strategy of the entire book. For revolutionaries there is no contradiction between the goal of socialist transformation and the fight for democratic reforms today. Indeed the fight for reforms today — for women, tax reforms, increases in child benefit, nursery provision, fertility control — is vital to lay bare the reality of the class system under which we live. It is not the lack of legal rights but the social, class-based institutions like the family which are the real *source* of women's oppression. We can see this clearly today as women's role as mother and wife is glorified by the Tory politicians in order to justify women's loss of jobs. Marxists reject the Coote and Campbell method that we should fight for a few peripheral changes now because socialism's a long way off. What we fight for now must be informed by our strategic goal of a socialist revolution.

The caricaturing of the arguments of revolutionaries in the book is quite deliberate. Coote and Campbell wish to sneak a social democratic perspective in through the back door. Who says you have to 'wait till the revolution' to attack the profits of the employers? What's so terribly 'wild' about suggesting that equal pay and positive action programmes, including quotas to break down job segregation, should be paid for by the employers in the context of creating more jobs for *all* workers? How many times have women got up in trade union meetings and argued that they were not fighting over the size of *their* slice of the cake, that the struggle was about taking over the whole bloody bakery?

The assumption that there should be transfer of wealth from men to women runs throughout the book. Coote and Campbell talk of the 'patriarchal bonus', the fact that men are far more likely to receive bonuses in their wage packets because of the pattern and discontinuity of women's employment in contrast to men's. They make the point that even in professions like teaching the philosophy of the 'family wage' means that women without any family responsibilities are confined to the lower scales and paid less than men.

a false enemy — men — becomes the main target in the book while the ruling class and their allies in the unions get off scot free

It is, of course, true that the idea that the man is the *real* breadwinner and that women only go out to work for the 'extras' is strongly held among many trade unionists. It is equally true, as *Sweet Freedom* points out, that the trade union and Labour Party leaders have been more willing to mobilise against attacks on social issues like abortion — in alliance with groups like the National Abortion Campaign — than to take a stand on job opportunity, pay and promotion. Centuries of discrimination over women's pay and job opportunities are real problems and few socialists deny that they need to be tackled *now* through positive action policies if women are to begin to enter the struggle on a more equal basis with men. But socialists also have to say why women are in this position and who is responsible for this discrimination.

Anna and Bea are crystal clear about this. Men's interests conflict with women when it comes to pay and promotion. Trade unionists

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Photo: JOHN STURROCK

No room at the top for these North London cleaners

would need 'pure altruism' to champion women's cause wholeheartedly and this has no 'part in the tradition of British trade unionism'. 'For if men see themselves as breadwinners-in-chief, how are they to view the prospect of women gaining equal opportunity and equal access to all jobs, with equal pay and job security? *Especially at a time of recession, when jobs and money are in short supply, they will probably conclude that there will be less to go around for themselves.*' (my emphasis).

This is the voice of Eurocommunism gone wild. Male workers do not always look at things from the point of view of men. Sometimes, just sometimes, they have looked at things from a class point of view. That probably explains why thousands of men from the East of London demonstrated week after week in support of votes for women just before the outbreak of the First World War. It's also why many male trade unionists have supported strikes for equal pay and regrading by women workers over the last ten years. It also accounts for the solidarity the NHS workers are receiving today from many trade unionists. Isn't it just a bit too cynical to suggest that men support the demand for abortion for selfish 'male' reasons as *Sweet Freedom* implies?

Class consciousness has been known to cut across the divisions within the labour movement and propel the movement, as a whole, forward. This has nothing to do with 'altruism'. Marxism is not a utopian world view, it is a scientific one. If working class men really had a vested, *class* interest in the oppression of women you'd never win them to fight for women's demands by moral exhortation.

Bea and Anna say it would require 'self-denial' on the part of men to support women's liberation, 'without hope of future gain'. What nonsense. Don't working class men ultimately gain from proper day nurseries and equal pay because the family income goes up and women can't be used as cheap labour by the bosses? Doesn't the class as a whole move forward when it fights for the demands of the most oppressed groups within that class? Women, the group most directly affected, will lead the fight for their demands but in the process they must and will win men to see where their real class interests lie.

Of course it's difficult to see this if you accept that in a recession there are only a few jobs to go round and the nasty male trade unionists are grabbing what they can and leaving women out in the cold. But why should we swallow the argument of the employers that there are only limited number of jobs available? The struggle for women's liberation is an anti-capitalist struggle. It challenges the capitalist state's use of women as a source of cheap labour and free domestic labour. It is part and parcel of the broad movement for social change in our society. Women don't want to take jobs off men. They want to see a fight against unemployment as a whole and within that context an extension of opportunities for women.

> the solution to the sexual liberation of women is intimately tied up with their social and economic liberation.

Coote and Campbell are pessimistic in their view of men and of the prospects of achieving liberation for women because they make no distinction between the traditions of the leaders of the British labour movement and of the ranks. In fact they share a common framework with many of these leaders and the 'social contract mentality' is never challenged throughout the book. The authors give little coverage to struggles that show the bureaucracy up in a bad light and when they do, as in the case of the NUPE dispute at the end of the last Labour government, they use the excuse that workers are sexist to get the bureaucracy off the hook.

British trade unionism was craft based in its origins, its leaders are timid, conservative social climbers who are unlikely to put themselves out for their most-oppressed members. But, despite anti-women prejudices, you can't place the ranks in the same bag as their leaders. Chartism, the New Unions in the 1880s, the Shop Stewards' movement before the First World War, the battles around regrading and equal pay in the early seventies, and the fight for jobs today represent quite another tradition.

Campbell and Coote reinforce the popular prejudices that many have towards the rank-and-file of the trade unions giving male workers a much more hostile treatment than either the employers or the bureaucracy. A false enemy — men — becomes the main target in the book while the ruling class and their allies in the trade unions get off scot-free.

A False Record

No historical record of the Women's Liberation Movement will ever be non-controversial. A movement that involved such diverse and broad-ranging ideas will always contain different understandings of its own history. An attempt to draw a balance sheet is a bold and useful project in itself.

But the lessons that *Sweet Freedom* draws reflect the concerns and orientation of the layer of professional feminists mentioned earlier. They do not look at the past or present of the women's movement from its point of contact with the mass of women and their solutions are not ones which encourage mass self-confidence and self-activity. An introspective record produces introspective conclusions. After explaining that despite women's 'guerilla warfare' against it, the institution of the family is still as strong as ever, they announced (with an extremely witty footnote) that the issue of sexuality 'holds within it a fundamental challenge to Patriarchy'. It's as if there is a Chinese Wall between the experience of the family for the mass of women and the experiments with sexuality of the feminist elite. 'What distinguishes this movement from others is that women have begun to confront the political implications of the physical and psychological aspects of human life and to challenge conventional notions about sexuality.'

They see these notions coming under threat in an alliance with the labour movement because of its ideological backwardness. According to *Sweet Freedom* this is the reason for the urgency behind demands for more feminist full-time trade union officials, researchers, MPs, editors and heads of schools and colleges. Consciousness has to be raised on a grand scale by capturing the citadels of ideological power.

The problem here is that our eyes are constantly being focused on the top of these institutions. We're never allowed to look down into the ranks, where the mass of women most definitely are. Because a small layer of women within the broad movement for women's liberation have had the economic independence and the cultural leeway to challenge conventional notions of sexuality and begin to make inroads into previously all male enclaves, this is projected as *the* way forward for everyone else.

But the vast majority of women are not in this position. Single parenthood for most women means poverty, real poverty. That's

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why marriage lives on in our society and even when women divorce, they usually remarry. It's why women go back to men who beat them up. The rise of a 'lesbian culture' is a symbol of women's greater choice today about how they live their lives but it is not a choice that the mass of women can openly opt for. Again economic dependence as well as cultural factors mediate against this.

Experiments in free love — as the women's movement has always understood — are open to male manipulation. The solution to the sexual liberation of women is initimately tied up with their social and economic liberation. It is true that many women's personal lives are being transformed by the political struggles women have engaged in over the last decade. But the ultimate solution to the sexual, psychological and social oppression of the mass of women in our society does not lie in changing lifestyles as a strategy. It can only be based on the overthrow of capitalism and full economic independence for women.

The political impatience that working class women have often expressed about the obsession of modern feminism with sex has some validity here. Challenging traditional views about female sexuality is, of course, an important part of modern feminism. But there are objective constraints on this process and if these are not faced up to a feminist lifestyle can become a substitute for political campaigning, an escape route away from the direct action and militancy of the feminist movement.

This brings us to the real meaning of the slogan 'the personal is political', so often put forward by feminists. It does not mean that changes in lifestyle and participation in 'consciousness raising' is the top rung of feminist political activity, a pre-condition for membership of an elite women-only club. Thousands of women have gone on strike for equal pay, argued in the office or factory about insulting pin-ups on the wall, demonstrated for nurseries, free abortion, and higher family allowances who have never been part of a 'consciousness raising' group.

The real significance of the slogan surely lies in the shared understanding of thousands of women that what were previously conceived of as private, personal issues — rape, abortion, divorce — are public, social issues; that through collective action women can force their concerns into the centre of the political arena. They can hold governments to ransom as they did in Italy over the divorce referendum. This was how modern feminism come to life, building on the experiences of the struggle for the vote a hundred years ago. The books, the magazines, the women-only bands, the newsletters, the 'discovery of the pleasure of other women's company' were all part of a fighting movement. This was why the anti-Corrie campaign was such an inspiring victory — because it showed women's collective power and their collective strength in action.

Sweet Freedom does not grasp the radical traditions of modern feminism. It ignores its anti-capitalist, anti-establishment traditions. It wants women to 'engage with power'. It attempts to steer them into the respectable channels of traditional politics, headships and editorships — the old middle class women's roles of 'educating' the great unwashed and making a career for yourself as you do it.

For socialists, however, the kind of power that women need to engage with is the power of the working class movement. If our aim is to achieve the total abolition of capitalism we must line up with those forces who have the power to overthrow it, not simply pursue cosmetic changes. We need more women shop stewards, more women's committees in the unions, more women with louder voices at the TUC and Labour Party conferences, and more action around women's demands. Of course, socialists and feminists will urge women forward as trade union officials, councillors and MPs, but these women must be judged on their commitment to the class as a whole not just their record on women. We want positive discrimination so that women can play an equal role in the struggle to change the status quo in society, not to be co-opted into it.

Feminism does need to be revitalised in Britain today, but inspiration will not be found sitting around bemoaning the demise of 'consciousness raising groups'. Certainly a new phase of the struggle for women's liberation is opening up. But the autonomy of the Women's Liberation Movement is a political concept, not an organisational fetish about women-only groups. It means women fight for their demands and don't subordinate them to the needs of the capitalists or the bureaucrats. *Sweet Freedom* says go for piecemeal reforms, get access to the citadels of power and make the best of a bad deal. Revolutionary Marxists have a different answer — that it is not possible to defend women today if we don't get rid of this rotten system. Our goal is revolution not reform. If women today can't see that capitalism will never concede their demands than they must be blind.

'Those who fight most energetically for the new are those who suffer most from the old', wrote Trotsky in *Women and the Family*. It is among the ranks of the most oppressed women today that feminists will find inspiration for the struggles of women as a whole: from the school leavers, the immigrant women, the women workers. It means continuing to learn about and support the struggles of women world wide — in Ireland, in the Lebanon, in Nicaragua and El Salvador where women-only militias fight death squads armed and trained by American imperialism.

These are the women whose voices are not raised in the pages of *Sweet Freedom*. The debate is sharper among women today because the options are fewer. Women can line up with the bourgeois individualism of the SDP and advance themselves at other women's expense or they can stick with the mass of women. There is no room today for the shady utopian compromise that *Sweet Freedom* offers. Do Bea and Anna really believe they can persuade Len Murray to negotiate a feminist incomes policy anyway?

Revolutionary Marxists fight for a mass, campaigning orientation for the women's movement. A visible active public profile on the key issues of concern to the mass of women. We take the demands of feminism into the mass organisations of the class, into the ranks, onto the shop floor. Moral exhortation will not change men's attitudes towards women. Political action has always been the means whereby consciousness has changed and it will continue to be the best way to take women forward. The citadels of power — Parliament, newspapers, schools — are not the source of all knowledge and action. The politicians — male or female — will only be moved when they are pushed from the base. More pressure, not less, from within the labour movement is needed today than was needed 10 years ago to make them move for women.

To opt for the reformist road of *Sweet Freedom* — more *Room at the Top* for us please — would take our energies in a different direction. It would decapitate the women's movement at a crucial time. This book should be widely read but equally widely opposed.

VALERIE COULTAS is a regular contributor to Socialist Challenge and an activist in the women's liberation movement

Reviews

WHOSE NEWS?

Geoffrey Sheridan

Glasgow University Media Group: **Really Bad News**, Writers and Readers, £2.95 pbk.

A Ministry of Defence official, commenting on journalists' complaints about their treatment on the Falklands, remarked: 'It's important that the attitudes of journalists are re-educated to operational controls' (*Observer*, 13.6.82).

There are presumably rules that journalists lacking experience in a war zone have forgotten or perhaps never learned, although there has been precious little in the Falklands coverage to suggest it. Back home, the mass media are filtered by the 'operational controls' on everyday life and events, nowhere through such a fine mesh as is applied to much of TV's news and current affairs output.

The achievement of the Glasgow University Media Group is that it has had the stamina to scrutinise segments of this television output over the past half dozen years; and more, that its deciphering of the codes of bias now comes with a basic interpretation of the economic facts and political avenues the codes are designed to obscure.

Really Bad News, the latest in the group's 'bad' series, reviews some old ground and examines some fresh, concluding with chapters on the general features of media in a class society, and suggesting demands to put the 'mass' in media by providing us all with access to TV.

The main new critique is of Labour Party coverage in the period when the left's battle for party democracy and accountability brought the gains of the 1980 annual conference, and consequent matters arising.

The analysis reveals numerous 'operational controls' at work, from the way in which 'threats' always seem to come from the left, never from the right; the counterposition between socialists and 'realists'; the questions which never get put, such as: 'Mr Healey, can you deny that your calls for unity are no more than an attempt to avoid criticism of the last government?'.

When the group re-treads previous ground, such as the coverage of the Glasgow dustcart drivers' strike in 1975, it is framed in a broader political context. Thus we had a number of our friendly neutral newscasters and reporters vigorously upholding the Labour government's incomes policy.

Their devices included monitoring pay claims for their 'acceptability', dropping comparisons of wage and price rises when the latter got too steep, and describing various government moves as 'reinforcing its determination to stand firm in the face of mounting pay claims' without a hint of other interpretations or options. TV economics was reducible to: wage demands = inflation = unemployment.

If for a moment Mr Callaghan had entertained the idea of letting up on his living standard reducing policy, the screen mandarins were always there to insist he did no such thing.

The Glasgow group's books bite, as evidenced by the fraught discussions held by top-level BBC personnel (and could the secret ENCA minutes please be published in the *Radio Times*, so that the licence payers can find out what they're really paying for). The group's analysis aids the handful of dissidents cautiously at work in the newsrooms. And not least it arms us, since even the most alert and radical viewers will otherwise certainly miss a trick or two.

GEOFFREY SHERIDAN is business manager for *New Socialist*.

AN AFRICAN REVOLUTION

Tony Southall

David Martin and Phyllis Johnson: **The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War**, Faber, 1982, £3.50.

In his approving foreword, Robert Mugabe, Premier of Zimbabwe, correctly points out that a book written by observers not participants cannot tell the full story of the liberation struggle. Anyone looking for a detailed account of the guerilla war and the process of mass mobilisation in the vein of Che Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* will be disappointed. This is, however, an extremely well-researched account of the period 1972-79, which should be required reading for every South African revolutionary who retains any illusion that one can rely on unconditional support from the surrounding black states.

The core of the book is an account of the exercise in detente initiated by Kaunda of Zambia and Vorster of South Africa, both desperately fearful of the repercussions of continued mass upheaval on their borders, in the period 1974-6. Their bargain involved Vorster's reining-in Ian Smith while Kaunda shackled the freedom fighters. Predictably only Kaunda delivered. Using as an excuse the murder in Lusaka in March of ZANU leader, Herbert Chitepo, he closed all operational bases, put more than 1100 guerillas in detention and charged nearly the whole leadership, including commander Tongogara, with being accessories to the killing.

The result was to delay the development of the war for at least twenty months. ZANU could only resume the operations that finally toppled the government after its cadres were liberated as a precondition of the abortive Geneva negotiations set up by Kissinger in late 1976.

In Zambia, throughout this episode, we were told daily by press and politicians that all our economic problems were caused by ungrateful Zimbabweans who preferred killing each other in tribal conflicts to dealing with Smith. Martin and Johnson show this to be a nonsense: no important difference within ZANU took this form. They also show the supposedly international commission of inquiry into the murder was designed simply to take the heat off the government which itself manipulated its deliberations and report. Throughout its deliberations it refused to countenance the obvious explanation that Smith's agents killed Chitepo.

The problem that runs through this book is well illustrated here. While it is brilliant investigative journalism that uncovers a wealth of new evidence, it never tries to explain why Zambia's government behaved as it did. All judgements are value judgements. Kaunda, Smith, Vorster, Sithole, Muzorewa etc are the baddies; Mugabe, Chitepo, Tongogara etc the heroes. Nowhere are the motivations and class positions of the actors examined.

Nor was it only Zambia that interfered. For a whole period Mugabe and Tekere were detained away from the war zone by the new FRELIMO government in Mozambique. Later a number of leaders, the most prominent Hamadziripi, were in jail there for up to three years because ZANU leaders, backed by Mozambique's President Samora Machel, saw them as 'ultra-leftist'. Martin and Johnson skip quickly over this affair.

More fundamentally they never make a substantial assessment of ZANU's political functioning inside Zimbabwe nor confront the critical related question of the relative passivity of the urban working class during the war. Nor do they ever examine ZANU's own internal decision-making process, which was certainly not in any way democratic. And as the book ends with the February 1980 elections, it never begins to look at the government and policies that emerged from the war.

For South Africans the lesson of Zimbabwe, where 'detente' nearly wrecked the struggle, is that a guerilla struggle that depends on support from surrounding states can easily be derailed. For socialists it is that only mass political mobilisation can ensure uninterrupted continuation to the overthrow of capitalism.

TONY SOUTHALL has written widely on Southern Africa and lived and worked in Zambia for several years during the 1970s.

Reviews

PSYCHO POLITICS

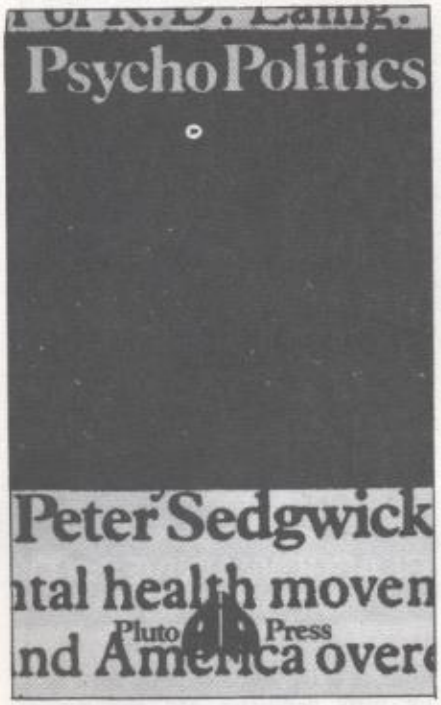
Tuki Zutshi

Peter Sedgwick: **Psycho Politics**, Pluto Press, 1982, £4.95.

I can still see Ellie clearly, even after nine years. In her mid-twenties, she had already had numerous admissions to psychiatric hospitals, mainly for attempting suicide. When I knew her, she had been admitted yet again, after another attempt. She was bright, very unhappy, obviously insightful about her situation and, equally obviously, not psychotic. During an afternoon's discussion, when she described her fairly horrendous childhood, I asked her why she rarely talked about her feelings. 'Oh, you never tell psychiatrists how you feel', she said, 'You only tell them what they want to hear.' Over the years, various experiences in psychiatry have reminded me of this comment. Reading Peter Sedgwick brought it to mind once again.

Some twenty years ago, Enoch Powell, then Minister of Health, talked about the coming demise of the asylum. A new Mental Health Act had been introduced, as an attempt to safeguard the rights of the mentally ill, and the era of community psychiatry was nigh. The intervening years were to see many things, from the defeat of the United States in Vietnam to the emergence of Thatcher, Reagan, Friedman and Co. The asylums, however, are still with us, a grim reminder of society's response to the mentally ill. Traditional psychiatric practice continues unimpeded in most of them. Electric Shock Treatment (ECT) is still prescribed, perhaps with less gusto than before, but prescribed nevertheless. A few papers have been written by psychiatrists suggesting that the effects of ECT are at best transient and possibly valueless, even damaging — a couple of recent ones caused near riots at the Royal College of Psychiatry. Ever increasing numbers and quantities of drugs are being prescribed for an ever-growing number of conditions; and more and more cases are reported of iatrogenic diseases (ie illness caused by the treatment itself). Finally, the last few years have seen the return of brain surgery, previously discredited, this time under the cover of 'more accurate' neurological diagnosis.

These trends had long been integral parts of psychiatric practice by the time the anti-psychiatrists caught the public imagination. Here at last were a group of people who really identified with the mentally ill, who were exposing the rigidities and the dehumanisation inherent in the system, who even went so far as to see insanity as the only sane response in an insane world. Their ideas influenced popular conciousness to a surprising degree. Even today they underlie many of the concepts of the radical critique of psychiatry. From the destruction of the individual in the institution to psychiatry as social control, from McMurphy's rebellion to Mary Barnes' journey through madness, many of the key symbols have been provided by anti-psychiatry. Yet, despite all this the situation of the mentally ill has remained, at least



overtly, quite unchanged. For Peter Sedgwick the answer to this is clear. He blames the ineffectiveness of anti-psychiatry squarely on the anti-psychiatrist.

Sedgwick finds their message dangerous, the more so because it was so uncritically accepted. His severest criticisms are reserved for Laing, but he hardly leaves the others unscathed. Foucault's notion of a 'golden age of permissiveness towards insanity' is rightly challenged. So is his idea of the triumph of Reason exemplified by 'the rigid sectarian rules of the institution.' It would, however, have been well to consider his argument that 'the shame formerly applied to society on the leper has been to this day 'awoken and applied afresh on the deranged minds'.

Sedgwick shows Szasz to be an elitist and a reactionary behind his liberalism. The comparison with Herbert Spencer is particularly apt. Yet surely socialists of all people must come to terms with Szasz's idea of a psychiatric practice based purely on consent. Goffman's essential conservatism and his inability to offer a critique of the macro-social organisation in which the asylum is located are rightly exposed. It is hardly true, however, that the asylum is so dismally compelling *only* 'because it symbolises an ancient, indefinitely renewed tradition of neglect whose liquidation, in the face of many entrenched moral and material interests, will require a large and concentrated effort' (p 62).

As for Laing, he is given two chapters, in the course of which he is quite completely demolished. His later conversion to mysticism, his recanting of his earlier ideas on the family processes in the genesis of schizophrenia, his distancing himself from his previous collaborators are all held up for our attention. The Laing of *Facts of Life* is undoubtedly a quite different creature from the Laing of *Politics of Experience*. Yet how does his later interest in Buddhism devalue his initial work on schizophrenia? That some, or even many people on the Left saw him as some sort of a revolutionary, reveals as much about them as it does about him. And his later conversion to Le Boyer childbirth and 'umbilical shock' does not invalidate his earlier ideas about family processes.

For Sedgwick, the insidious effect of these theorists' work was to establish a New Left fallacy that mental illness was simply an artefact of capitalism and one fated to disappear with its demise. This caused trade unions to pursue selfishly sectarian policies. The rejection of the medical model confused and distracted the consumers/patients with the result that they often stayed away from the one place where adequate help was available — the psychiatric hospital. The concern with civil liberties in the final analysis led to 'an all-round condemnation of the psychiatric enterprise itself'.

For Sedgwick, this is a matter of some importance, for throughout the book runs the assumption that mental illness is indeed an illness. Well, this may be so. If it is, however, the nature of the illness/es, has been poorly defined and even less well understood by psychiatrists. And even here, the occasional moves away from physical treatments to other modalities, the attempts to tighten diagnostic criteria, were at least partly their responses to the pressures generated by anti-psychiatry. Psychiatry remains a confused and confusing field. Most often we are still told what we want to hear and all too rarely what 'they', the patients, feel. Every new diagnostic criterion in the final analysis serves to blur the boundaries even further. Every fresh 'insight' from Neurology, Genetics, Psychology or whatever, compounds the confusion. Mental illness *may* be illness, but perhaps the medical model is not the best means of studying it.

As for prescriptions, Sedgwick suggests something along the lines of the Belgian village of Geel where 58 per cent of the population of Belgium's mental institutions live. They are strictly selected by the medical authorities and live as boarders with various families. The hospitals screen them, organise their outings, their work and hobbies, and readmit them if it becomes necessary. The hospitals also provide them with precise instructions for their host household, which include whether they may walk in twos unaccompanied (apparently two-thirds may not). They are strictly forbidden all sexual contact and are fairly widely discriminated against in bars and public places, 'but not stared at'.

Sedgwick sees this as a major step forward, but from his description the transition to the community does not seem to have changed their experiences much; indeed, many patients have more sexual and social freedom in some British psychiatric wards. Although they are rarely on drugs or in contact with doctors after placement, the initial selection and screening is strictly in medical hands. In fact all the freedoms they do (or don't) enjoy are under medical control. Ironically, this exercise in community psychiatry shows the degree to which medical control extends over patients' lives. And that, above all, was what the anti-psychiatric movement was all about.

TUKI ZUTSHI is a psychiatric registrar who has worked in a number of mental hospitals.

Answerback

Soviet bureaucrats undermine defence of workers' states

There is no doubt, as John Ross argues in his article 'For a Nuclear Free Europe' (Vol 7 No 3) that the possession of nuclear weapons by the USSR has been a factor in preventing nuclear war. The kind of pre-emptive attack on the Soviet workers' state that Washington dreamed of in the late 1940s became impossible once the USSR could threaten retaliation with its own bomb.

However John is right to stress that this 'in no way implies acceptance of the policies of the Kremlin bureaucrats.' As he notes, their 'guiding policies of peaceful coexistence and socialism in one country entail total reliance on a framework of *military* defence against imperialist aggression', rather than basing themselves on the struggles of the international working class.

It is important to emphasise this because Soviet policy *undermines* the struggle for unilateral disarmament in Western Europe and the USA, as well as struggles for national liberation in the semi-colonial world. Most important, it cuts across the defence of what has been achieved in the workers' states — the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the state ownership of the means of production, laying the basis for a planned economy.

This has been true throughout the post-1945 era. The bureaucracy's stress on deals with imperialism through international negotiations meant, for instance, that the Communist Party initially *opposed* the demand for unilateral disarmament in Britain in the late 1950s. In 1961 the Soviet Union seriously disoriented nuclear disarmers in the West by breaking a moratorium on above-ground nuclear tests, on the grounds of 'shocking' Washington into negotiating a disarmament pact.

Today the bureaucracy still treats the peace movement in the capitalist countries as levers in its diplomatic initiatives to which it has no obligations in return. But the expansionist warmongering nature of imperialism is such that 'negotiations' on arms 'limitations' have always meant an *increase* in the nuclear weapons held by both sides.

The American socialist Joseph Hansen pointed out a few years ago that this has nothing to do with bolstering the military defence of the USSR: 'On the issue of nuclear bombs, what constitutes an adequate number? It appears to me that a stockpile large enough to obliterate humanity *once* marks a natural quantitative limit so far as use values are concerned ...

'But the fact is that each side possesses a stockpile much larger than needed to wipe out all human beings at once. Both have stockpiles sufficient to obliterate humanity many times over. The figure may be hundreds of times over to believe some estimates.

'To me it appears quite clear that the Kremlin, by participating in this mindless race, is dealing terrible blows against the defence of the Soviet Union. For no matter how huge the Kremlin's stockpile might be or how accurate its delivery system, the Soviet Union cannot escape the fate of the rest of humanity once the bombs begin to be exchanged.'

The level of military spending by the bureaucracy — producing severe distortions in the Soviet economy, a point not unnoticed by Washington, reflects its political approach: what the Soviet constitution called 'safeguarding the interests of the USSR', which has come to mean the safeguarding of the bureaucracy's own material privileges. This of course includes a policy of fierce repression against all those who question this setup.

The extent to which the Soviet Union has been forced onto the *defensive* by this policy was shown recently when US President Reagan addressed the assembled Houses of Parliament in London. His speech contained the following challenge: 'I am prepared to offer President Brezhnev an opportunity to speak to the American people on our television, if he will allow me the same opportunity with the Soviet people.' He threw down this gauntlet knowing full well that the Kremlin bureaucrats — unlike say Fidel Castro — would be petrified at the prospect.

There can be no greater condemnation of the Soviet leadership than the fact that they can make Ronald Reagan appear to be a champion of free speech and international dialogue. Their policy of military buildup plus summit negotiations with Washington only aids imperialism in waging war and threatening to destroy the world with nuclear weapons. Socialists must approach the question in a totally different way: through consistently championing the struggles of the exploited and oppressed in a way that leads to the world wide extension of the post-capitalist property forms that we defend in the Soviet Union.

Martin Meteyard, Glasgow

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