

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

INSIDE:



Rosa Luxemburg and the Spartacus uprising

see centre pages

Lawson's boom goes bust

The days are short this time of year: but hardly shorter than the span between the dawn of the Tories' much-trumpeted economic miracle and its dusk.

As the *Financial Times* puts it: "The euphoria about the British 'miracle' and its architect, the 'brilliant' Chancellor of the Exchequer, has suddenly turned into doubt about the former and savage criticism of the latter... The UK has entered the braking phase of a 'go-stop' cycle with depressingly familiar features..."

"Unless [Nigel Lawson] is lucky, he will face a choice between allowing the core rate of inflation to rise and accepting a period of very slow growth".

Increased interest rates have pushed up payments on a £30,000 mortgage by £70 a month in the last period. More profits for financiers; hardship and threat of homelessness for millions who have strained their budgets to get in on the house price spiral.

Retail prices have gone up over 6 per cent in the last year, and at a rate of 9% a year over the three months September to November. These price rises mostly reflect increased profits taken by British capitalists.

World prices of raw materials have increased (on average); and most workers in jobs have kept their pay rises ahead of inflation. But the cost per unit output to British manufacturing capital of labour and materials has risen less than four per cent over the last four years, while output prices have risen 18 per cent.

For most of the 1980s, income from North Sea Oil has provided a large and luxurious cushion for the Tory Government. Now that cushion has collapsed.

British manufacturing industry crashed in the early '80s. Dozens of factories shut. British industry simply stopped making lots of products. As a result, Britain now consistently imports a lot more manufactured goods than it exports. For several years, the oil money stopped this imbalance producing a balance of payments problem.

The oil money also helped the Government's own budget. But instead of investing that money in economic basics — education, research, public transport, roads, railways — the Tories used much of it to give tax cuts to the rich.

Now the oil income is decreasing fast. The North Sea produces less oil, and the price of oil has gone down. Result: the underlying imbalances come to the surface. British capitalism has a big balance



Turn to back page

Corruption and collapse

Greece's 'Socialist' government in chaos

Ian Swindale reports from Greece

With general elections only six months away in Greece, the 'Socialist' government of Andreas Papandreou is facing its biggest crisis since the Socialist Party, PASOK, first came to power in 1981.

The crisis is centred on the activities of a Greek businessman, George Koskotas. Since coming to Greece from America three years ago, Koskotas has become the owner of the Bank of Crete, three daily newspapers, a radio station, a major football team and a number of smaller enterprises. The origins of his wealth are not at all clear. His name has been linked with the Mafia and his is on the FBI's 'wanted' list.

The centre of his operations was the Bank of Crete. He claimed he imported \$103m into Greece to buy the bank, but it is now being proved that the receipts and cheques he presented are all forged. It is possible he falsely proved that he had money by borrowing from other Greek banks, through connections he had created. He then exported this money and deposited it for a few days. When he imported it again, he had both the proof of a high deposit and the proof for importing money.

Having bought the Bank of Crete, Koskotas offered higher interest rates than the other Greek banks and in this way attracted enormous deposits from many of the state and semi-state companies and from workers' health and insurance schemes. (The managers of some of these state companies and insurance schemes are now suspected of themselves pocketing the extra interest offered by the Bank of Crete, thus creating yet another scandal for the government.)

With all this money at his disposal Koskotas used the Bank of

Crete as his own personal bank account. The scale of the embezzlement is variously estimated at between 30 billion and 45 billion drachmas (£115m to £170m).

The fraud was revealed when government controllers asked for proof of the Bank of Crete's financial backing with international banks, in particular Merrill Lynch and Irving Trust, and found that the proofs were forged. As government controllers went in to investigate further, Koskotas sent via two leading members of PASOK an envelope to the then Justice Minister, Agamemnon Koutsogiorgas, containing a photocopy of a bank statement showing very large dollar deposits in an American bank in the names of George Papandreou (Education Minister and son of the Prime Minister, Mr Petsos, the Transport Minister, and Mr Livanis, a leading member of PASOK).

The photocopy was quickly proved a forgery and with new evidence against Koskotas emerging daily, the public prosecutor laid charges against him. Koskotas was given 11 days instead of the usual 48 hours to prepare his initial reply to the charges, partly on the grounds that a lot of the documentation was in English and would have to be translated. Koskotas, however, fled the country.

Exactly how he left is not yet known. He was first located in Brazil by a Greek Sunday newspaper. He had arrived there with his family in a private jet belonging to another Greek businessman. From Brazil he flew to Jamaica and then to Massachusetts where he was arrested by American police. He has been in prison ever since, while the Greek government prepares its case for his extradition from the USA.

Meanwhile, in Athens, two investigations are taking place into the Koskotas affair. The first is an investigation into the affairs of the Bank of Crete which is being carried out by the central state bank, the Bank of Greece. The second investigation, into the wider implications of, and responsibilities for, the affair, is being carried out by a



Papandreou returns to Athens — to meet a crisis

special parliamentary committee.

This committee has been taking evidence from the head of the Bank of Greece and will soon be questioning Mr Koutsogiorgas and Economics Minister Mr Roumeliotis. It is reported that some PASOK members of this committee are trying to hamper its work in order to protect leading members of the party and the government.

Members of the Greek government are widely suspected of being either directly implicated in the Koskotas scandal — a scandal which has been the main daily talking point throughout Greece for many weeks now — or at the very least of having turned a blind eye to it.

27 months ago Greece's largest circulation newspaper 'Ethnos' started a campaign against Koskotas. They claimed that he was a front for the Mafia and that he had far too much money to be a "straight" businessman. They demanded to know where his money came from.

Five months ago other newspapers joined in. Many newspapers and magazines have levelled quite specific accusations at members of the government, from Prime Minister Papandreou downwards, that they were directly involved in the Koskotas affair. Writs have been flying around like confetti, but nothing seems able to stem the tide of accusations.

The main target is Mr Koutsogiorgas, who is suspected of trying to frustrate attempts to get at the truth of the Koskotas scandal. When the Bank of Greece first attempted to investigate the Bank of Crete is directors stopped them. A special law had to be passed to enable the central bank to carry out its investigation. Koutsogiorgas took two months to prepare this Bill.

In the meantime, it is almost certain that a lot of documents that the Bank of Greece wanted to see were removed from the files of the Bank of Crete. Koutsogiorgas is also thought to have opposed George Papandreou's decision to make public the forged bank statement sent to Koutsogiorgas by Koskotas.

The response of the government to the string of accusations is to insist that the appropriate bodies are investigating, that the truth will be found and that the guilty will be punished, whoever they are. At the same time, the government is claiming that the whole matter is a conspiracy by internal and external forces to destabilise the govern-

ment.

The government also responded to the attacks launched on it by demanding from Bank of Greece investigators a list of names of those who had received money from Koskotas. Top of the list was the pro-CP paper 'I Protis', which has been conducting a strong campaign to expose the role of government ministers in the scandal. It emerges, however, that on the initiative of the Bank of Crete, 'I Protis' took out a perfectly legal loan from the Bank, all of which had been repaid by the time the government published its list.

In fact, most of the names on the list were not people who had been "oiled" by Koskotas but people who had borrowed money from the Bank of Crete quite legitimately.

While the unprecedented scandal rolls on from day to day, other, lesser, scandals are occurring with such regularity as to create a permanent sense of crisis. Papandreou himself caused a sensation not long ago when he deserted his wife for a former air hostess half his age. She accompanied him to London for his heart operation and the affair seems to have caused a rift not only in the Papandreou family, but also between Papandreou and a number of prominent members of PASOK.

But it was on Papandreou's return from London that his problems really began.

PASOK had planned to exploit to the full any sympathy that the Greek people felt for their sick Prime Minister. His stage-managed return to Athens was due to be reported on Greek TV as the return of the gallant victor over death, the ceaseless fighter for peace and so on. The scripts were based on an account of his return written by PASOK in advance. Three TV presenters refused to read the scripts and were suspended from their jobs, provoking lightning strikes by TV journalists.

This was followed by the arrest of Koskotas and his illegal flight from Greece which resulted in the resignation of the Minister of Law and Order from the government and of Mr Koutsogiorgas from his position as Minister of Justice, but not from the government.

A much-heralded government reshuffle soon followed, which did little to change the complexion of the government but which did reinforce the position of the by now very discredited Koutsogiorgas within the government.

Within ten days of the reshuffle, a minister without portfolio resign-

ed because he was unhappy with the reshuffle and a few days later two junior ministers were sacked for making outspoken public statements.

One of these ministers is responsible within PASOK for its trade union wing, PASKE. He announced that recent elections in PASKE and in the GSEE (the Greek TUC) had been corrupt and fraudulent.

The PASKE majority leadership was imposed on the GSEE in 1985 after a majority of the then leadership came out against Papandreou's austerity measures. Since then PASKE on the one hand and the opposition groupings within the GSEE on the other, have been unable to agree on a procedure for recognising delegates to the annual conference or electing the leadership of GSEE.

Consequently, none of the other groups participate in the annual conference or the leadership elections. One of the smaller groupings is currently appealing to the courts to rule null and void the decisions and elections of this year's GSEE conference which took place last month.

With all these scandals resounding around the heads of the government, what are the prospects for a PASOK victory in June? A recent opinion poll concluded that only 20% of the voters would vote for PASOK in elections were held now. And with the Koskotas scandal rumbling on and all the opposition parties issuing almost daily calls for immediate elections, the whole political scene is pervaded by a sense of permanent crisis.

The CP and the Greek Left (EAR — previously the majority wing of the CP Interior) have come to an agreement on a joint programme for the elections. But their response to the Koskotas scandal has been to demand "katharsi" — cleansing or purification — "presumably of the capitalist system. They are not demanding the participation of workers in investigating the Koskotas scandal, even where workers own health and pension funds are involved.

Whether PASOK can win back enough lost support by June to win the election seems unlikely. The left are hoping that a government will be formed based on left sections of PASOK and the CP-Greek Left alliance.

If, however, the conservative New Democracy party wins, Greece could well be in for a dose of Thatcher-style policies.

12 December 1988



Out now!

The new issue of *Workers' Liberty* includes Max Shachtman's key articles on Stalinism (in print for the first time for decades); Zbigniew Kowalewski on super-exploitation in the Eastern Bloc; Bob Fine on civil liberties in Britain; and articles and reviews on 'post-Fordism', modern architecture, Ireland, Palestine, Thatcherism, the Greens and much else. £1.50 plus 22p post from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

PR, democracy, and socialism

EDITORIAL

Democracy is one of the most abused and prostituted words in the political dictionary.

Mrs Thatcher is a great 'democrat' in her speeches and demagoguery — the self same Mrs Thatcher who has done more in the last decade to increase the element of autocratic state control in our lives than any prime minister since the end of World War 2. The same Mrs Thatcher who works as the relentless agent of the economic tyrants who control British finance and industry, and therefore rule our lives, completely outside any democratic control or accountability.

People like Mrs Thatcher give democracy a bad name. And there is far worse, in a world where even the totalitarian states of the Eastern Bloc call themselves 'People's Democracies'.

Nevertheless, the socialist who is not a democrat is not a socialist. There can be no socialism unless people democratically control their own society, at every level, from overall governmental administration down to the affairs of their own factory or office.

True, the Thatchers of this world have helped the Stalinists to convince lots of good socialists that democracy is and always must be a lie and a sham. Working-class socialists look around them in Britain, and see that whatever about the legal equality of all citizens when it comes to voting, in fact people like Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell are a very great deal more equal than others.

Whatever about formal equality, formal free speech, and so on — and even those formal rights are very important in themselves, and worth defending until we can do better — in reality the wealth and power of the bosses, in industry and in the media, give them massive advantages. They can manipulate and dominate the lives of millions under the cloak of a formal democracy which is thereby neutralised and emptied of content.

The programme of democracy which the early British labour movement, the Chartists, fought for as long ago as the 1830s and '40s — annual parliaments, for example — has not yet been realised. The limited democracy and comparative liberty we have now is better than any form of police-state dictatorship. But it is, nevertheless, very much of a sham.

The socialist who concludes that democracy must always be a sham is not only giving up on democracy, but on socialism itself. Without democracy 'socialism' becomes a lying label for one or another form of dictatorship by a new ruling class elite.

Socialists must be consistent democrats. That does not mean that we make a religion of the forms, methods and institutions of the half-sham bourgeois democracy we have now. It does not mean believing that we can get socialism peacefully and legally by way of the existing institutions: the whole of history teaches us otherwise.

No ruling class gives up its power and wealth peacefully; a ruling class threatened by real socialism will smash up its own legality and its own democracy and use violence to crush the socialists. Look at what happened in Chile — with the active support of the US government — in 1973.

The army smashed what had been one of the oldest democracies in the world, in order to overthrow a legally-elected Socialist government. They would try to do the same thing in Britain if socialism threatened.

But socialism must include a fight for consistent democracy. Consistent democracy throughout society — the original idea expressed in the name the workers' parties of Europe chose for themselves 100 years ago, Social Democracy — can only be achieved when private ownership of the means of production is replaced by a democratically-controlled collectivist system. To fight for socialism is to fight for democracy — every inch and every millimetre of the way.

The discussion on proportional representation now getting under way in the labour movement can only be taken to sensible conclusions if these considerations are fully taken into account.

Proportional representation is normally a far more sensitive measure of registering electors' opinion than the system we now have in Britain. It allows each vote to have roughly the same weight, while the first-past-the-post system gives many votes no weight at all. In a word, PR is more democratic.

On the level of principle, socialists cannot be opposed to improving and extending bourgeois democracy, however small the extension may be. Therefore on principle we must declare ourselves for proportional representation.

The arguments against this are weighty but short-term and narrowly empirical. Yes, proportional representation is being argued for by Labour's right wing. Yes, it is used by those who think it will ensure that there will never again be a majority Labour government. Yes, it is now linked to the half-hidden programme of that section of the Labour Party leadership who want to go for a Democrat-SDP-Labour coalition.

But to come out in principle against a bettering of the electoral system is not the best way to fight the right wing and the coalitionists. It is more likely to discredit the left.

In fact there are some prominent left-wing advocates of PR — like Arthur Scargill — and some prominent right-wing opponents of it, like



Labour front-bencher Robin Cook welcomes the sponsors of Charter 88, a democratic reform manifesto including Proportional Representation

Roy Hattersley. In any case, *how can PR be argued against outside the quite narrow circles of the left itself?*

We are against bettering democracy because we think it will be bad for our party? Isn't that what Thatcher and her labour movement understudies say about us anyway, that we are against democracy? Isn't that, also, just another way of saying what the faint-hearts and coalitionists say: that Labour can't win? The left version is that we can win — but only with the rigged electoral system that the ruling class set up long ago...

Yes, we can win! Yes, we can get an overall democratic majority! *We can win with socialist politics and a crusading labour movement.*

That's what we say now to Kinnock and the other fainthearts and trimmers. Or should we amend it to say: Yes, we can win — provided the ruling class doesn't marginally extend democracy?

The idea is absurd. Yet that is what we would have to say in honesty, and if we don't say that all we are left with is mumbblings and private intra-Labour arguments about which system is most advantageous to us — arguments we could not possibly use generally.

A parallel — a limited and partial one — is perhaps useful here. In the early years of this century, there was quite strong resistance among socialists in countries like Belgium and France to votes for women. Women got the vote in France as late as 1945.

Why? Because some of the socialists calculated that women were more backward and conservative, and more likely to be under the influence of the Catholic Church, than men, and that to give them the vote would massively strengthen the parties of the status quo.

At any given moment, that might have been an accurate calculation. Socialists like Rosa Luxemburg nevertheless championed votes for women, arguing that if the socialists could not break through to the women then socialism was going to be impossible anyway.

So too with us. We want to kick

out the Tories as soon as possible. Any Labour government would be better, if only because it would be weaker (whatever its leaders might want) under pressure from the labour movement.

But if we argue in principle against an extension of democracy because we believe the less democratic system is the only one under which we can win, then we put ourselves in an invidious position.

That, in our opinion, is the position in principle. There is more to it, of course.

As we have argued above, what we have in Britain and similar countries is a feeble and in many ways sham democracy, in which the ruling class has massively unfair advantages. That democracy needs more than tinkering with before it will be anything like real democracy. It will take a socialist revolution to make the qualitative leap from what we have to the democracy the working class needs.

Socialists cannot in principle oppose PR; but here and now there is nothing that compels us to make a religion of it — nothing that compels us to support the Labour right wing's campaign for this small improvement in a grossly deficient system and say to hell with the con-

sequences.

PR is now the cry of the coalitionists in the labour movement. The coalitionists must be opposed and defeated. They must be told: yes, PR is good, but there are more pressing things before the labour movement — the battle to kick out the Tories and to ensure that the labour movement has real alternative policies and is not dominated by pink Thatcherism.

They must be told that their campaign for PR not only detracts from the main question of fighting for a working class alternative to Thatcherism, but gives immediate advantages to the ruling class and its parties.

That — rather than untenable and (from the point of view of consistent democracy) unprincipled opposition to PR as such — is the way to answer the coalitionists.

On that basis the left should say to the right-wingers who want to distract us now with a campaign for a little bit of democratic tinkering — no, not now, not this campaign. Right now, the labour movement must fight to get rid of the Tories and to put in a government based on the working class and committed to secure its needs. *Labour must contest every parliamentary constituency.*

'The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'

Karl Marx

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Never-never TUC

GRAFFITI

Union members will be pleased to hear that the TUC will soon be offering a new service.

Worry no more those of you working in naff, low paid jobs. Forget banal worries about pay and conditions. Good old Uncle Norman has come up with a little treat.

Yes, it's the new TUC credit and discount card. So impressed was Norman on his return from the States with the AFL-CIO credit card that he's looking to launch one over here.

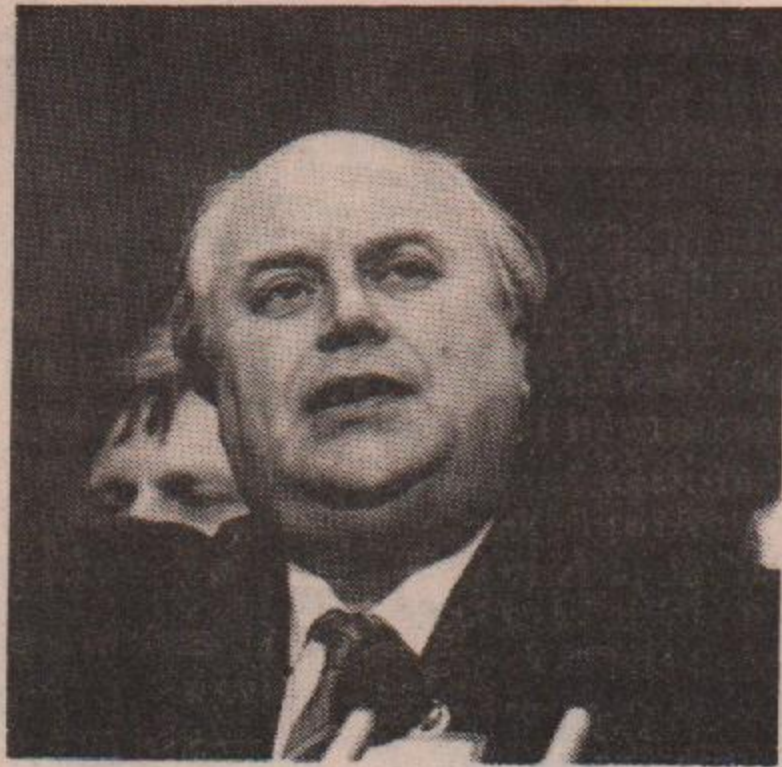
The US union federation's leadership told Willis that their card had halted the decline in union membership. Beseated by similar problems, the TUC reckon that their own credit card could work wonders.

The card would not only be a credit card but would give 20% discount on a range of consumer goods. Already several major stores, including Selfridges, have expressed an interest in the scheme.

Perhaps someone should tell Norman and his TUC pals that he's got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Instead of turning the TUC into a credit company he should start coming up with the goods himself — leading workers in the fight for decent pay and conditions.

Eccentric Rumanian despot Nicolae Ceausescu has given the Rumanian people a Christmas present.

Electricity restrictions have been in force in Rumania for the past six years. However, Ceausescu has just announced a new bumper liberalisation. Yes, from now on your average Rumanian will be allowed to use one 40 watt lightbulb for an extra 10 minutes a day — a typical apartment is at present lit for 2-3 hours a day. Rumanians will still have to do



without fridges, washing machines or electric heaters — all eat up too much power to be permitted.

Food-wise, the Rumanians have to exist on fairly basic fare, as virtually all fresh food is exported. The only available meat, after hours of queuing, is pigs trotters and sheep's brains. Indeed, pigs trotters are commonly known as 'patriots' because they, at least, do not have to leave the country.

Some of our readers may have been lucky enough to watch 'An Audience with Dame Edna'.

For those of you too stuffed on turkey or tipsy on sherry to have watched, the show took place before an audience of 'celebrities' who were invited to question Dame Edna, or to make witty comments.

One of those present was everyone's favourite champaign socialist, Derek Hatton, complete with ill-fitting Italian suit and over-brylcreemed hair.

His comment to Edna? 'I've always wondered why I fancy you so much Dame Edna. I used to think it was because you remind me of Mary Whitehouse. I was wrong. It's because you remind me of Margaret Thatcher.'

Suffice to quote Dame Edna's response: "That explains a lot, dear boy."

Post goes bust

PRESS GANG

By Jim Denham

The closure of Eddie Shah's *Post* just before Christmas hardly came as a surprise. It was a miserable, uninspired product, that failed to meet even the modest 375,000 break-even circulation that Shah had set for it. At its close, sales were around 100,000 and dropping.

Editor Lloyd Turner (formerly of *The Star*) had promised a tabloid with all the "breeze" but none of the "sleaze" of its rivals. Even this laudable aim was not fully realised, as *The Post* churned out a relentless diet of showbiz tittle-tattle and sexual innuendo. Perhaps Turner's idea of a "decent, uplifting", etc., tabloid was reflected in the apparent policy of featuring Ms Kylie Minogue at least twice in each issue throughout the paper's eight weeks on this earth.

What was surprising about *The Post's* demise was Shah's explanation for its failure: "The basic thing was that there was no market there..." This from a man who prides himself on his intuitive understanding of the silent majority and who spent a couple of million on pre-launch market research.

Shah has apparently realised that he's "not really a newspaper man" and has sold his entire *Messenger* operation to Reed International for £25m. He now intends to concentrate on making television programmes, presumably in the expectation that the forthcoming TV revolution will open up a whole new

market for his kind of trivial rubbish. Meanwhile, the unfortunate staff of the late *Post* still await news of the redundancy payments. It could be a very long wait.

Wendy goes too far

The week *The Post* folded also saw the downfall of Wendy Henry, the first woman to edit a national newspaper. To be fair, Ms Henry lasted rather longer than *The Post*, managing nearly 18 months at the helm of the *News of the World* before being called into the Digger's office and given her cards.

The precise reasons for Ms Henry's departure may never be known, but it must have something to do with the increasingly embarrassing and expensive gaffes that have involved the paper in a succession of hefty pay-outs and grovelling apologies recently.

It is also said (believe it or not) that the Digger's strait-laced sensibilities had been offended by Ms Henry's predilection for *Sunday Sport*-style stories about bizarre sexual practices and people with physical abnormalities. The final straw is thought to have been a centre page spread about a soccer star who likes to dress up in women's clothes. It is an impressive testimony to the strength of the Digger's puritanical streak that Ms Henry's sacking went ahead despite her success in achieving record circulation figures.

Feminists may or may not be pleased to hear that the new editor is another woman, former *Sun* deputy editor Patsy Chapman. Her old job at the *Sun* has now been filled by (guess who?) Wendy Henry.

FACT: Wendy Henry was once forced to admit to having fabricated a *Sun* interview with a Falklands widow. Her punishment? 4 weeks suspension.

FACT: Ms Henry was once a supporter of the International Socialists; "my politics are a million miles more right-wing now, of course," she says.

Taming politics

The humour of TV's 'Yes, Prime Minister', reputedly one of Margaret Thatcher's favourite programmes, is surely that there's more than just a grain of truth in it.

The revelations contained in the latest batch of Cabinet papers released under the 30 year rule does nothing to diminish the idea that the civil service, far from being a neutral institution, has a distinct political interest.

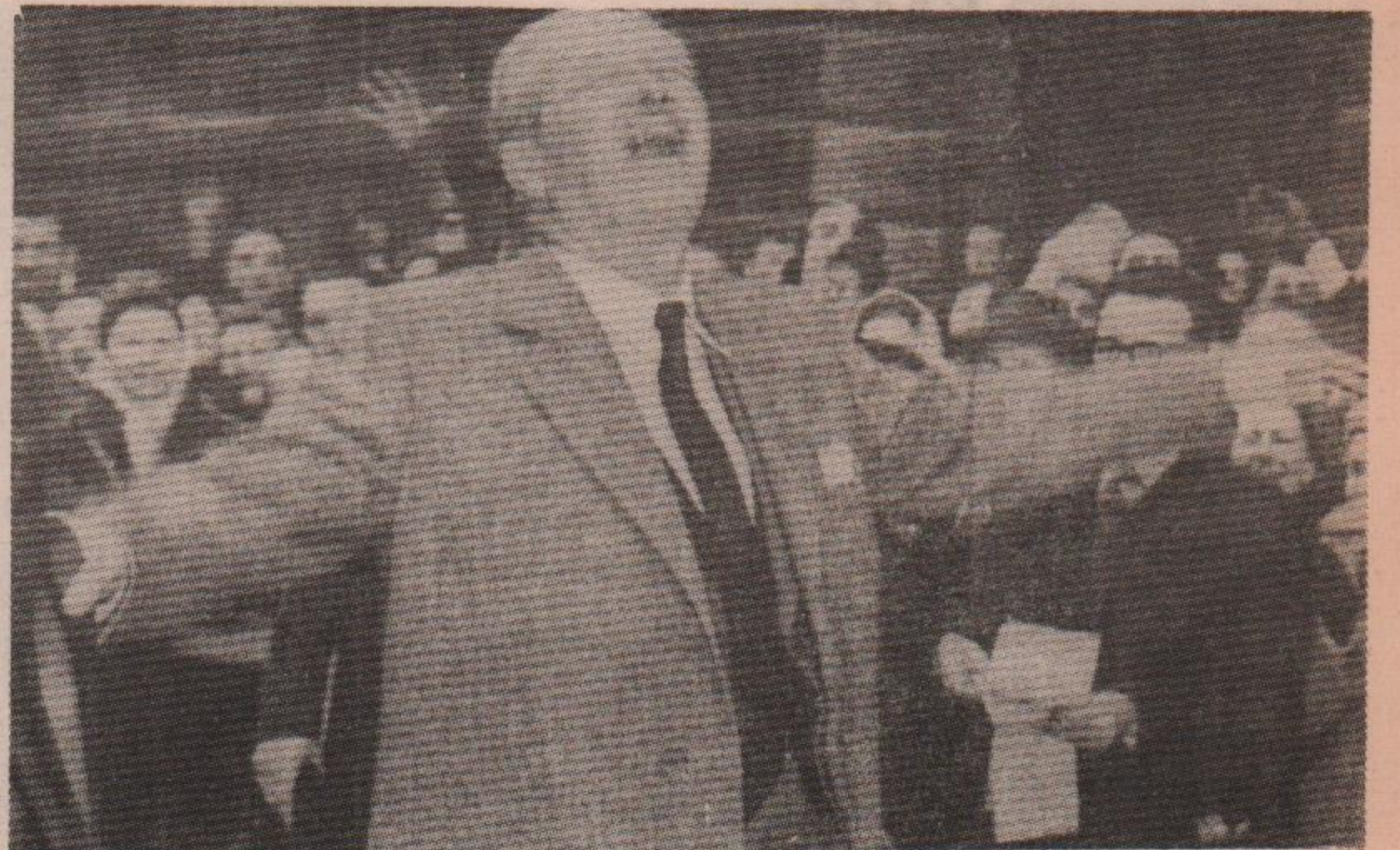
The Cabinet papers from 1958 contain clear evidence that Whitehall was involved in the election of the Conservative Party in the election of 1959. This assistance consisted of the evaluation by senior civil servants of manifesto options as well as a request by Sir Norman Brook, then secretary to the Cabinet, that senior ministers should have their workloads eased, thus freeing them for other work in the run-up to the election.

The present discussion in the Labour Party on constitutional matters, bills of rights, and electoral reform has not as yet touched on the power of the unelected civil servants, but it must do so as a matter of urgency.

We asked Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, who are both ex-Ministers, to comment.

"Nothing in the official papers now released under the 30 year rule should surprise anyone who knows anything about the way Whitehall works.

"When a Labour government is in power the Cabinet secretary and senior civil servants stand aloof from all their election preparations:



Tory Macmillan triumphant — with a little help from civil service bosses

but it is obvious that Sir Norman Brook saw it as his function to assist Macmillan to secure the third consecutive Conservative victory.

"This process is also believed to have taken place in 1974 when Sir William Armstrong worked in double-harness with Ted Heath.

"It is significant that Sir Norman Brook was later appointed Chairman of the BBC and was therefore in a position of great power when Wilson came to power in 1964, and at that time he retained very close links with the Cabinet Office on matters of broadcasting policy which I had to deal with as Postmaster General."

Tony Benn

"When Tony Benn and myself were in the Department of Industry, the first argument you had every morning when you went in was with my senior civil servant. We would

say certain things had to be done: when you asked what was happening there was always a million reasons why they couldn't be done.

"I remember, when we were first put in the positions, they had a party of the civil servants and we were invited along. One woman civil servant said to me: 'Of course, we either tame the ministers or they leave.'

"With us, their attitude was that they did their best to stop us doing things. With the Tories, a lot of them would see it as their duty, because they are basically Tories themselves and defenders of the Establishment, to help them and advise them in a much more positive way. It's not true of all civil servants, but there is a good body of high-ranking civil servants who believe that they are really there to assist the Tories."

Eric Heffer

Mail order brides

WOMEN'S EYE

By Lynn Fergusson

Head the one about the man who offered to sell his daughter for £500? In the tabloids' Christmas silly season this was one of their star 'strange but true'-type stories.

The man was in debt and was offering to marry his 18 year old daughter off to the first bloke to cough up the readies. Apparently (well, according to the loving father) he'd discussed it with her and she 'understood'.

Bizarre. But, really, the only reason the story strikes us as particularly peculiar is because it concerns a white Western man and his white Western daughter. Because, of course, a trade in brides still does exist in many parts of the world. It's when it happens 'at home' that it really shocks.

But consider another Christmas news story: "66 year old pensioner Stan Keycha flew halfway round the world to wed his teenage penpal — and ended up marrying her friend..." So runs a story in January 3rd's *Daily Mirror*.

Stan, apparently, had been corresponding with a young Filipino woman, Marina, for some time. When he arrived on her doorstep in Manila she "wasn't in" (sensible girl). A couple of days later Stan

met another Filipino woman and, surprise, surprise, rapidly transferred his affections.

Just a silly inconsequential story? Well, from the amazingly uninformative *Mirror* article it wasn't possible to tell how pensioner Stan, 66, had got hold of this unfortunate young woman's name and address. What is certain, though, is that the Philippines are the centre of a squalid 'Mail Order Brides' industry.

Young teenage women are put on the books of 'dating agencies' (nice euphemism) by their impoverished parents. The girls' photos, together with a few personal details, are published in a mail order-type catalogue, generally available in the small ads column of Western European newspapers.

Essentially young women end up sold as toys-cum-domestic servants

to men often old enough to be their grandfathers. Such women have very little chance of escape — they are alone, in a foreign country, knowing no-one except their 'husband'.

Meanwhile, back in the Philippines, the woman's family have rid themselves of a mouth to feed, and earned a bit of cash in the process.

But, of course, the real winners are the men who organise the trade, who take their rake off, who turn poverty and deprivation into profits for themselves via a trade in women. It's woman as commodity. In prostitution a woman will sell her sexual services for an amount of time. Here women themselves are bought and sold. Of course, the Filipino women who arrive in Britain like this aren't legally the man's property. But I don't suppose that makes much difference to them.

Israel: 54% say talk to PLO

A recent opinion poll suggests that no less than 54% of Israelis favour negotiation with the PLO.

44% rule out such talks under any circumstances. This is a remarkable shift in Israeli public opinion, if it is a true reflection. The respondents were asked (by a leading Israeli newspaper): "Based on the statement of the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, in Geneva, and on

condition that he renounces terror, are you for or against negotiations with the PLO?"

21% said they definitely wanted talks, and 32% "favoured" them.

Arafat's statement was a clear commitment by the PLO to the "two states" policy, recognising Israel. This has already proved an enormous diplomatic success from the PLO's point of view. Eventhe firmly pro-Israel United States has begun to make serious overtures towards the PLO, to Israel's horror.

Lowest of the low

Payman Rezai looks at a book on racism that caused a major stir when it was released in Germany

Gunter Walraff's book, 'Lowest of the Low', paints a grim but realistic picture of the position of Turkish immigrants in West Germany.

The book has stirred a considerable debate about racism and has been greeted by those it exposes by a series of law suits. It has sold millions of copies in Europe.

The book brings to light what the 'civilised' European societies never admit. After all, it has long been argued on the Right that the social and political costs of immigration are too high. Yet Walraff's book shows that the powers-that-be are quite willing to turn a blind eye to illegal immigrant workers who can provide a pool of cheap, silent labour.

The immigrants are silent because any protest would end their right of stay in the European 'haven'. They are refugees, or asylum seekers, who have left behind civil wars (like the Tamils) or vicious regimes (like Turkey after the coup, Iran, Sudan, Chile, etc.)

Their forced silence allows the operation of the New European Racism. Britain, initially lagged behind other European countries in that its immigrants were originally British citizens with full political rights. On the continent, the system of 'guest workers', immigrants allowed for a specific contract or a limited period, has been operational for much longer. But, since 1971, Commonwealth citizens in Britain have been treated the same as aliens. The Nationality Act of 1981 tightened the definition of 'who is British' even further. Birth on British soil was no longer sufficient.

Subsequently, the criminalisation of immigrants have proceeded post-haste, and this week it was announced that 100 more immigration staff are being taken on to chase 'over-stayers', missing people to be deported, etc.

But the cheap, right-less workers are still needed in Thatcher's slave economy — to run the hotels, catering and cleaning services, jobs which the self-respecting unemployed would not fill. Most importantly these workers are flexible, temporary and casual.

Walraff, a 42 year old investigative journalist, is already



hated by the establishment for having had a career based on exposing injustice and corruption. He created a new identity for himself, Ali Snirlioglu, 'borrowing' the name from a Turkish friend.

In order to pass himself off convincingly as a Turkish worker in his 20s, Walraff trained to become physically fit. For his outward appearance only a couple of changes were necessary — a pair of dark contact lenses and a dark hair piece which he knotted into his hair.

Walraff changed his speech to sound more genuine; he used a more limited vocabulary, spoke slowly and switched the order of his sentences round.

Although any serious attention to Ali's speech would have exposed Walraff as a fraud, these changes were enough to have him accepted as the 'lowest of the low'.

To get work reserved for Turks (and other immigrants) Ali placed the following ad in several papers:

"Foreigner, strong, seeks work of any kind. Including heavy and dirty jobs. Even for little money."

Ali's first experience of working 'black' is for a building sub-contractor, GBI of Dusseldorf. He is promised 10DM/hour (the exchange rate at the time was 3.75DM = £1) for 10-hour shifts, working on the lump on a high-rise in Cologne.

Ali and his gang of six co-workers are sub-contracted to another firm, WTB. WTB are

Germany's sixth largest building firm.

Ali soon finds out that only half of GBI's several hundred workers are ever registered. If an accident happens, the worker is registered with health insurance retroactively. WTB pays its sub-contractor illegally, without declaring it for tax purposes, to a private individual's bank account, who seemingly has no link with the sub-contractors.

Although contract work by the hour is meant to be illegal in Germany, everyone in the industry knows it happens and turns a blind eye. Wages per hour are easily concealed by converting them to sham quantities of contracted supplies (eg. cubic metres of concrete). Officially, the contracted workers do not exist.

Ali's position is made clear to him straight away. His first job is to unblock the workers' toilets, which have been blocked for over a week. He has to work ankle-deep in piss. Plainly the job is given to him to humiliate him. Other German workers find a ready made 'dirty' target to throw racist abuse at.

The foreman picks on Ali continuously, giving him the most physically exhausting work. When a small amount of money goes missing from a German worker's locker, Ali is automatically blamed. But this time a German worker stands up for Ali.

Once, when there's a small fire and the police turn up on

the scene, they ignore the blatant presence of illegal workers. After six weeks of this work Ali and his mates are told that they're no longer needed.

Ali later manages to get in touch with another sub-contractor who's recruiting workers for the Thyssen steel mill in Duisburg. Having sacked 17,000 regular workers since 1974, Thyssen management gave more work out on contract: 400 firms sub-contract for Thyssen. Ali was hired by Adler who in turn hired workers to a largish sub-contractor, Remmert.

Thyssen's payments vary between 35-80DM/hour depending on the job. This shrinks to 5-10DM by the time it reaches the workers. Without any training or documents Ali finds that he has no trouble being taken on.

To protect his cover from other Turkish workers, Ali pretends that he's half Turkish but actually grew up in Greece. When pressed by Turkish workmates to speak some Greek Ali is saved by resorting to his schoolboy Ancient Greek!

Ali's team are constantly kept on the move doing different jobs, in different parts of the huge plant. Without masks, working underground with pneumatic blasters, the workers breathe and swallow coke dust. The dizzying smell of coke gas is no excuse to stop working. Warning equipment flashes 'Gas Hazard!' and 'Breathing equipment must be worn'.

A company engineer gets very angry when he can't 'fix' a safety device which continuously gives warning signals. When pressed by Ali as to whether it's dangerous, he claims that the device is defective. He assures Ali that any gas would get blown away by wind!

Ali has to scavenge for worn out work gloves abandoned by the regular workers as he's not given any gloves, work boots or helmet. Ali's personal hard hat is taken away by the sheriff when a German worker appears who has not got a hat.

Walraff continuously digs up more abuses: the workers are forced to do compulsory double-shifts and overtime and time off for any reason is not allowed. Later Walraff discovers that the contract system extends even to nuclear plants. Immigrant workers are used as temporary cleaning staff, breaching every regulation and confirming that the workers' radiation intake is disregarded — they are disposable.

What's true in Germany is true in every other capitalist country: immigrant workers are used and abused as a battering ram, to get the hardest, dirtiest jobs done cheaply and to get round trade union agreements and labour protection laws. British trade unions need to do a similar investigation of the exploitation of immigrant workers in Britain, and launch a serious campaign against that exploitation.

The Spartacus uprising 1919

At the beginning of January 1919, seventy years ago, the revolutionary left was defeated in a bid for power in Berlin, in what became known as the 'Spartacus uprising'. The effects of defeat were serious — as well as a significant restabilisation of German capitalism, the German workers' movement lost two of its most experienced revolutionary leaders — Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, both brutally murdered.

As World War I drew to a close, German capitalism found itself entering a terrible crisis. Mutinies in the armed forces, strikes, and the formation of workers' councils led to the collapse of the monarchy in November 1918. The Kaiser had gone, never to return; but that was only the beginning of the German revolution.

A majority of the workers who had destroyed the old power so easily supported the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the mass party of the working

class. The SPD held real power: but this was the same party that, in August 1914, had shamefully betrayed all its principles by supporting the Germany ruling class in the war.

Its leaders, as one of them put it, "hated the revolution like sin". The last thing they wanted was to follow the recent example of the Russian Bolsheviks and make a revolution against capitalism. On the contrary: they wanted to use their position of power gradually to undermine the revolutionary movement and thereby help to restore 'law and order'. Bit by bit they began to whittle down



the sources of strength of the revolutionary left.

The ruling class had lost its authority over the armed forces. According to one estimate, the officer class could, by January 1919, count upon their direct control over a mere 10,000 soldiers. Large sections of the army and the police supported revolutionary or semi-revolutionary forces.

The chief of police in Berlin, for example, was Emil Eichorn, who had taken office as a result of mass action on police headquarters during the November revolution. Eichorn was a member of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), a left-wing split from the SPD, from which in turn had come the main part of the recently formed Communist Party (KPD), Luxemburg and Liebknecht's 'Spartakus League'.

It was on Eichorn that the SPD government picked, dismissing him from his post on January 4 1919. Their idea was to provoke the left in Berlin, which they believed could be defeated by forces mobilised outside Berlin, in particular the rabidly counter-revolutionary *Frei Korps*.

A huge demonstration was organised to protest at the Eichorn sacking. Hundreds of thousands of workers flocked onto the streets of Berlin to hear speeches from Liebknecht, Daumig from the revolutionary shop stewards and Ledebour from the USPD. The organisers had wanted a peaceful demonstration, but angry workers stormed newspaper buildings, including that of the SPD's *Vorwaerts*.

The Berlin workers' leaders were discussing the prospects for a revolutionary movement. The Spartakusbund leadership, including Luxemburg, were convinced that an uprising should be avoided: they could see it would be premature and would end in defeat. But the workers were in militant mood, and many of the revolutionary

leaders were too inexperienced to cope with the situation. The Spartakus leadership wanted to put forward slogans focussed on defending the gains of the November revolution, rather than overthrowing the SPD government.

Their slogans were: the reinstatement of Eichorn, the disarming of counter-revolutionary troops and the arming of the workers, the call for a 'proletarian government' was considered useful educationally but not as an immediate agitational objective.

But events were moving quickly, and the inexperience of the KPD which had only been formed over the New Year of 1918-19, and included many impatient 'ultra-lefts', was to

"The initiative was lost. Many workers and soldiers were unprepared to go as far in opposing the government as the Revolutionary Committee wanted"

show. The Berlin USPD, which was not a consistently revolutionary party, declared a 'Joint Revolutionary Committee',

democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

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Children of Arbat

John Cunningham reviews 'The Children of the Arbat' by Anatoli Rybakov. (Century Hutchinson), £12.95.

Anatoli Rybakov reportedly spent some 20 years writing and attempting to get his massive novel, 'Children of the Arbat', into print.

Initially it was to appear in the Soviet journal *Novy Mir* in 1967, but this was stopped. In 1979, the journal *October* announced its forthcoming serialisation, but yet again it failed to appear. Eventually it was published in 1987, to great critical acclaim in the Soviet Union. Now we have a chance to read this work and judge for ourselves.

'Children of the Arbat', like a number of recent Soviet artistic works — for example, Vadim Abdashitov's film 'Repentance' — is an attempt to open up the hidden chapters of Soviet history, in particular the dark days of the 1930s purges.

It is 1934, a watershed year in Soviet history. Stalin, whose cronies dominated the Central Committee of the CPSU and who has complete control of the NKVD (Secret Police) is about to physically liquidate all surviving opposition. Trotsky is in exile, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin are silenced and powerless, the whole country is on the edge of what the revolutionary writer Victor Serge, himself a victim of Stalin, but one who lived to write about it, was to describe as "the long black night".

Unaware of the thunderclouds gathering over their heads, a mixed group of students, from the Arbat, Moscow's artist quarter, leave college and set out to build the new society under the guidance of the 'Great Leader', Comrade Stalin. Most of them are Komsomol (Young Communist League) members. Some of these are careerists. But for Sasha Pankratov, the novel's main protagonist, the Party and the struggle to build a socialist society are his life.

But Sasha is also a growing human being with a sense of fun and an enjoyment of humour. He puts a few innocently mocking rhymes in the college newspaper — and gets three years exile in Siberia for it. If the year had been 1935 it would have meant 10 years in a camp and almost certain death.

Sasha is the vanguard of that generation of Soviet citizens too young to have participated in the revolution. As 'Young Pioneers' or 'shock workers' they gave their sweat and blood to build the steelworks, dams and railways which became the icons of the first Five Year Plan. As a reward they perished in their thousands in the Siberian wastes.

Rybakov's vast, sprawling novel — the book itself is the size of a housebrick — details Sasha's downfall, his arrest, his interrogation, the long gruelling journey into

Siberia and his fate in a remote village on the Angara river. Through sketches of episodes and incidents from the lives of Sasha's mother, uncle and various friends it builds up a composite picture of life in the Arbat — a community of artists, intellectuals and professionals who were one of the prime targets of the first wave of purges.

Stalin feared and loathed Soviet intellectuals almost as much as he feared and loathed the 'Old Bolsheviks'. To consolidate and hold his power he set about their systematic destruction. Rybakov details this process quite brilliantly showing how the intellectuals failed to respond to the threat hanging over them and instead retreated into their 'careers', or worse still, hoped to stay their time of execution by becoming informers for the NKVD.

Sasha himself is let down by his own friends, none of whom speak out for him: even the feeble petition they draw up in his defence is not sent because they fear to implicate themselves. Only the young woman Varya, not a Party member and interested mainly in expensive Western dresses, stands by Sasha and helps his mother in the painful and wearying task of going around the government offices to find out where he is. Standing outside of the system, she alone is able to see through it.

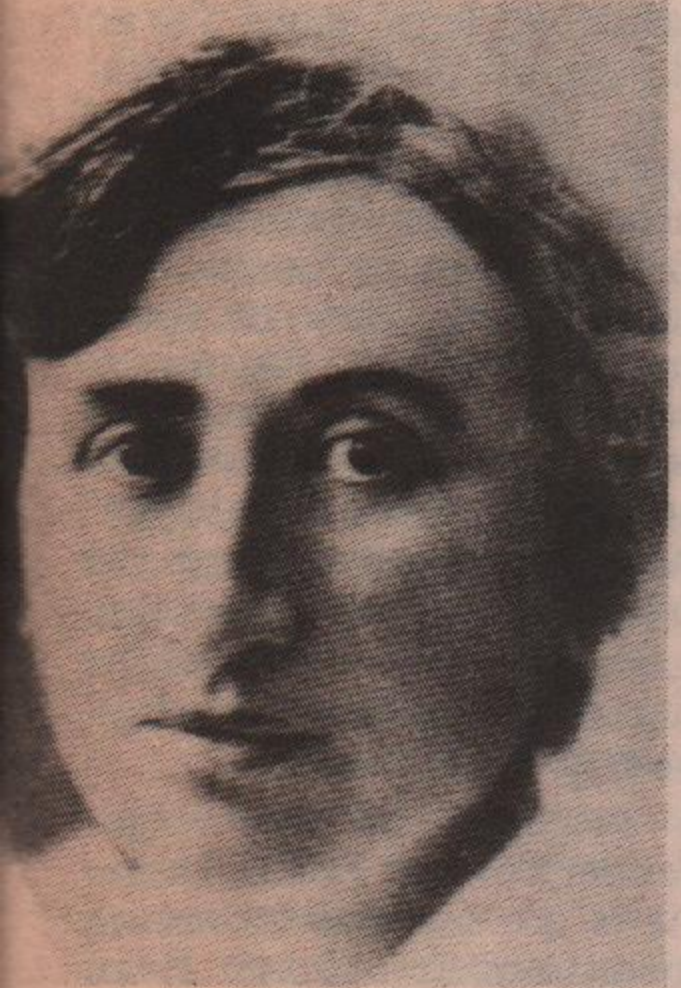
Rybakov's spotlight switches with ease from the Arbat, to a transit prison, to Siberia, and even into the very bowels of the Kremlin itself. Occasionally some detail is lost, but this in no way diminishes the power and sweep of his writing. The chapters devoted to Stalin are exceptionally chilling. Such is the man's power and ability to induce stark fear and terror, that one Central Committee member has a heart attack in a corridor in the Kremlin when Stalin chances on a casual conversation and asks the participants what they are talking about!

The book ends with the assassination of Kirov (who was almost certainly murdered on the orders of Stalin himself), the popular secretary of the Leningrad Party. Stalin was to use the assassination as the signal for the first of his many waves of terror, which by the late 1930s had destroyed virtually all the old Bolsheviks from the days of the 1905 and 1917 Revolutions.

While the news of the killing of Kirov reverberates even as far as the communities of exiles in Siberia, Sasha's friend and fellow exile, Soloveichik, is attempting to escape despite the onset of the freezing Siberian winter. He will almost certainly die of cold and starvation, yet Sasha admires his refusal to meekly accept his fate. As for himself, his fate is uncertain. It is unlikely, even after his exile is finished, that he will be allowed to return to Moscow, to the Arbat. On the contrary, as a fellow exile remarks in the last sentence of the book, "Whoever did it (the murder of Kirov), Sasha, I can tell you with utter certainty that there are dark days ahead."



Armed workers on the streets of Berlin



Luxemburg

gether with the revolutionary up stewards and two Spartakus members, including Liebknecht. It issued a leaflet calling for a mass demonstration and general strike, concluding "Down with the Ebert-Reichsmann government!"

So Liebknecht put his name on a declaration contradicting Spartakus policy. Ironically, the militant fighting has gone down in history as the 'Spartakus uprising'.

At first things went well. The demonstration on January 6 was enormous, and the general strike immensely successful, involving even SPD workers. Printing offices and railway stations were taken over and the Minister of defence Gustav Bauer fled to the suburbs.

A week later, the uprising was defeated and its leaders were arrested. It was true, as the Spartakus leadership feared, the whole project was premature. Berlin was isolated. But once the government was underway, the revolutionaries threw



Liebknecht

themselves into it. A central problem lay in the Joint Revolutionary Committee.

The Committee never acted decisively during the January events. They entered into negotiations with a government they had already declared deposed, and prevaricated helplessly. The workers out on the streets were given no clear lead — either politically (why were the leaders negotiating? To achieve what?) nor strategically (which buildings should be taken to best resist the counter-revolutionaries?)

Paul Levi, a Spartakist leader, described the scene:

"The masses were standing from nine in the morning in the cold and the fog. Somewhere their leaders were sitting and conferring. The fog lifted and the masses were still standing. Their leaders conferred. Noon came, and in addition to the cold, hunger came. And the leaders conferred..."

"The fog came again and with it the dusk. The masses went home sadly. They had

wanted great things, but they had done nothing. Because their leaders conferred. They sat the entire evening and the entire night and conferred. When dawn came they were still conferring or were conferring again." (Quoted in Chris Harman, 'The Lost Revolution', p.80).

The initiative was lost. Many workers and soldiers were unprepared to go as far in opposing the government as the Revolutionary Committee wanted; they just wanted Eichorn reinstated. The government could play on their fears.

Social Democrat soldiers were organised in the Reichstag building as early as January 8 to 'restore order'. Then on January 11 the notorious *Frei Korps* began to march into Berlin, reinforced by their main force 36 hours later. They were now in a position to drown the uprising in blood. The SPD's paper called openly for the death of the Spartakist leaders.

On January 15 Liebknecht and Luxemburg were arrested. After questioning, Liebknecht was smashed in the skull with a rifle butt and later killed. 'Bloody Rosa', as she became known, was likewise smashed in the skull, then shot through the head and thrown into a canal.

So the 'Spartakus uprising' of seventy years ago was a bloody defeat. The German revolution was still not over, however. Between 1919 and 1923 other opportunities presented themselves for revolutionary action. The loss of Luxemburg must surely have cost the Communist Party dearly, and contributed to later defeats.

The USSR: a transitional

By Vladimir Derer

This article is intended as an attempt to clarify the exact meaning of the concept of the 'transitional regime' as it was used by Trotsky in the 1930s in his analysis of Soviet society.

To begin with we have to ascertain what were the assumptions on which Trotsky's analysis was based and then see what follows from their acceptance. More particularly, we have to ask whether the concept of the 'transitional regime', as used by Trotsky in relation to the Soviet society in the 1930s, can still be meaningfully applied to the Soviet society of today, i.e. whether this is consistent or indeed compatible with the way Trotsky used the term.

Trotsky treats the Soviet social regime as 'transitional' in two different senses. The first sense places it structurally between a capitalist and socialist society. No longer wholly capitalist and not yet socialist, a mixture of capitalist and socialist elements as well as of institutional structures peculiar to the transitional stage proper.

When using the concept of the 'transitional regime' in the second sense, Trotsky introduces the dimension of time. The regime is not just an amalgam of contradictory elements. For this very contradictoriness, constituting as it does the underlying dynamics of the regime, also circumscribes the regime's duration. The conflict between the antagonistic elements, temporarily 'contained' by the state, must be resolved one way or another. The diagnosis of the regime thus also becomes its prognosis.

The immediate reason Trotsky discusses the characteristic of the transitional regime in the first sense is to differentiate it from a socialist regime, i.e. in order to counter the assertions of the official soviet ideologues and those of the Soviet regime's Western apologists.

Soviet society is not a socialist one, nor can it become socialist until its economy becomes linked with the economies of advanced industrial countries. Trotsky insists:

"There is not an ounce of pedantry in (his) concern for terminological accuracy." (The Revolution Betrayed, p.52)

and he restates the classic Marxist assumptions about the conditions necessary for the existence of communism and socialism.

"Marxism sets out from the development of technique as the fundamental spring of progress and constructs the communist programme upon the dynamic of the productive forces." (Ibid, p.50)

"The material premises of communism should be so high a development of the economic powers of man that productive labour, having ceased to be a burden, will not require any goad, and the distribution of life's goods, existing in continual abundance, will not demand...any control except that of education, habit, and social opinion." (Ibid, pp.50-51)

"By the lowest stage of communism socialism Marx meant...a society which forms the very beginning stands higher in its economic development than the most advanced capitalism." (Ibid, pp.51-52)



Hitler and Stalin

"The lowest stage of communism, to employ the term of Marx, begins at that level to which the most advanced capitalism has drawn near." (Ibid, p.61)

And he quotes from Marx's German Ideology:

"A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise (of Communism), because without it want is generalised, and with want the struggle for necessities beings again, and that means that all the old crap must revive." (Ibid, p.60; Orig. Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology' p.46, 1965 ed.)

Having defined in these broad terms the material base needed for socialism, Trotsky goes on to deal with the claims of the Stalinist bureaucracy and their Western Echos:

"The present Soviet Union does not stand above the world economy, but is only trying to catch up to the capitalist countries. If Marx called that society which was to be formed on the basis of a socialisation of the productive forces of the most advanced capitalism of its epoch the lowest stage of communism, then this designation obviously does not apply to the Soviet Union, which is still today poorer in technique, culture, and the good things of life than the capitalist countries." (Ibid, p.52)

Trotsky dismisses the argument that the existence in the Soviet economy of state trusts in industry, the collective forms in agriculture, the state and cooperative enterprise in commerce constitute proof that socialism has been reached.

"It is exactly for the Marxist that this question (of socialism) is not exhausted by a consideration of forms of property regardless of the achieved productivity of labour." (Ibid, p.51)

"Juridical forms themselves have an essentially different social content in dependence upon the height of the technical level. 'Law can never

be higher than the economic structure and cultural level conditioned by it.' (Marx). Soviet forms of property on a basis of the most modern achievements of American technique transplanted into all branches of economic life — that would indeed be the first stage of socialism." (Ibid, p.64)

And Trotsky concludes:

"Soviet forms with a low productivity of labour mean only a transitional regime whose destiny history has not yet finally weighed." (Ibid)

From the point of view of socialist development, the difference between a 'transitional regime' and a socialist regime lies in the fact that the future of a socialist regime is 'materially assured', whilst that of the 'transitional regime' because of the absence of the necessary material base is uncertain. As Trotsky himself says:

"The strength and stability of regimes are determined in the long run by the relative productivity of their labour. A socialist economy possessing a technique superior to that of capitalism would really be guaranteed in its socialist development for sure — so to speak automatically — a thing which unfortunately it is still quite impossible to say about the Soviet economy." (Ibid, p.52)

For unlike in a socialist economy the social development in a 'transitional regime' must proceed in contradictions. And

"economic contradictions produce social antagonisms, which in turn develop their own logic, not awaiting the further growth of the productive forces, (therefore)...it is impossible at present to answer finally and irrevocably the question in what direction the economic contradictions and social antagonisms of Soviet society will develop in the course of the next three, five or ten years. The outcome depends upon a struggle of living social forces — not on a national scale, either, but on an

international scale." (Ibid, p.53)

With the rejection of the proposition that socialism can be built with the resources available to a single country, let alone an industrially underdeveloped one, the question of the duration of the transitional regime becomes of crucial significance. For in the absence of international help for an isolated workers' state industrial growth is possibly only by paying the same price as that which has enabled the development of productive forces in all class societies, i.e. through the appropriation of the surplus product by a minority class which controls the means of production. And how long, in the event of its continued isolation, can a degenerated workers' state distribute the social product according to 'bourgeois norms' whilst at the same time retaining its 'socialist' character (in so far as it defends social property in the means of production)?

Nor is the state itself here a constant factor: it is in the continuing process of degeneration. An economy which lacks the level of development of material forces of production necessary for a socialist growth, and can in consequence develop only 'in contradictions', i.e. by increasing social antagonisms arising out of a pre-socialist mode of production must, of necessity, be reflected in the continued degeneration of the 'workers' state'. A 'workers' state', however, cannot continue to degenerate indefinitely.

For to say that the material conditions for development towards socialism are absent, is merely another way of saying that the preconditions to the creation of a class society are present. Hence, under adverse conditions, a proletarian regime, even in a degenerated form, cannot survive indefinitely. The absence of conditions favourable to a movement towards a socialist development sets definite limits to the period of duration of a proletarian regime. The impossibility of socialism in one country means by implication also the impossibility of a long life for an isolated proletarian revolution.

Hence the acceptance, in fact if not in theory, of the existence of 'degenerated workers' states for an indefinite period of time, is tantamount to the abandonment of Marxist premises regarding the relationship between the material base and social structure, in favour of a 'gradualist' Fabian view of social development. In effect, this means the acceptance of the 'theory of socialism in one country' by stealth, i.e. bringing it into a 'Trotskyist' conceptual framework through the back door. Trotsky dealt explicitly with the first question — that of the possibility of a 'gradual' development towards socialism.

"A majority of the vulgar defenders of the Soviet Union as it is are inclined to reason approximately thus: Even though you concede that the present Soviet regime is not yet socialistic, a further development of the productive forces on the present foundations must sooner or later lead to the complete triumph of socialism. Hence only the factor of time is uncertain...However triumphant such an argument seems at first glance, it is in fact extremely superficial. Time is by no means a secondary factor when historic processes are in question. It is far more dangerous to confuse the present and the future tenses in politics than in grammar. Evolution is far from consisting, as vulgar evolutionists of the Webb type imagine, in a steady accumulation and continual 'improvement' of that which exists...It is exactly because the Soviet Union is as yet far from having attained the first stage of socialism, as a balanced system of production and distribution, that is development does not proceed harmoniously, but in contradictions." (Ibid.)

As to the second question — that of the duration of a degenerated proletarian regime in the USSR — Trotsky was no less emphatic. Holding on to the 'probable' perspective of a victorious pro-

regime?

letarian revolution in the West, Trotsky's predictions of the inevitable downfall of the degenerated workers' state were coupled with the prediction of a political revolution in the USSR. Only in the event of absence or another defeat of a European proletarian revolution would continued isolation of the Russian revolution also mean the final liquidation of the 'conquests of October'.

Throughout the Thirties Trotsky kept returning — it might be thought almost obsessively — to the theme that, given its continued international isolation, the proletarian regime in Russia is doomed. The danger of this happening in the not too distant future was never far from Trotsky's thoughts. The absence of the material base for socialist development meant an inevitable progression towards capitalist counter-revolution. "At the core of (Russia's) economic difficulties," wrote Trotsky in 1931,

"lie a number of contradictions of diverse historical origin... (a)... the heritage of the capitalist and pre-capitalist contradictions of old Tsarist-bourgeois Russia, primarily the contradiction between town and country... (b)... the contradiction between the general cultural-economic backwardness of Russia and the tasks of socialist transformation... (c) the contradiction between the workers' state and the capitalist encirclement... These contradictions are not at all of brief and episodic character; on the contrary, the significance of the most important of them will increase in the future." (Problems of the development of the USSR, 4.4.1931; Writings 1930-31, p.206)

Left to its own resources, Russia will move steadily away from a proletarian regime towards increasingly arbitrary rule by the bureaucracy. The latter, in turn, will further undermine the proletarian foundations of the Soviet regime and thus, incidentally, prepare its own destruction as a privileged and parasitic social stratum.

"The correct policies of a workers' state are not reducible solely to national economic construction. If the revolution does not expand on the international arena along the bureaucratic spiral within the national framework. If the dictatorship of the proletariat does not become European and world-wide, it must head towards its own collapse." (The Class Nature of the Soviet State, 1.10.1933; Writings 1933-34, p.102)

"The further unhindered development of bureaucratism must lead to a terrible social crisis and to the downward plunge of the entire society... this would imply not only the collapse of the proletarian dictatorship but also the end of bureaucratic domination." (Ibid, p.115)

The completely inadequate material base for socialism, Trotsky argued, could not be significantly altered so long as Russia had to rely only on her own national resources. The adoption by the Soviet government of policies aiming at rapid industrialisation, however desirable these might be in themselves, does not mean, Trotsky kept reiterating, that the danger of a counter-revolution had receded. The economic successes which were possible within the limited Russian framework could not achieve the level of development of the productive forces that would be required for the establishment of a secure

socialist base.

"Absolutely false is the official doctrine of fatalistic optimism prevailing today, according to which the continued speedy growth of industrialisation and collectivisation is assured in advance and leads automatically to the construction of socialism in a single country." (Problems of the Development of the USSR, 4.4.1931; Writings 1930-31, p.205)

"The economic successes of the present transition period do not... liquidate the basic contradictions but prepare their deepened reproduction of a new, higher historical foundation." (Ibid, pp.207-8)

Starting from the premiss that the stability of the Soviet government depended on an alliance of workers with the peasantry, Trotsky saw the underlying trend towards the counter-revolution primarily in terms of a break in this alliance.

"The petty-bourgeois counter-revolution which genuinely thinks it is revolutionary, which does not want the domination of capital but inevitably prepares it — that is Thermidor..."

"In the Soviet Union only the peasantry can become a force for Thermidor..." (The Danger of Thermidor, 11.1.1933; Writings 1932-33, p.77)

Apart from such economic institutions of the transitional period as collective farms, becoming agencies for capitalist restoration:

"...the peasantry has acquired from the Soviet state an organisation for the resistance in the form of the kolkhoz." (Ibid.)

"With a shortsighted leadership, declaring a priori that the collectives are socialist enterprises, capitalist-farmers can find in collectivisation the best cover for themselves, only to become more dangerous to the proletarian dictatorship..." (Problems of the Development of the USSR, op cit, p.207)

Trotsky saw the break in the alliance finding its main form of expression in tensions and conflicts within the party and the apparatus. The sharpening of class antagonisms would thus take the form of a crisis of the regime, a threat from within rather than from outside. "Why do we speak precisely of Thermidor?" Trotsky is asking.

"Because, historically, it is the best known and most complete example of a counter-revolution which is masked, which still retains the outer forms and the ritual of the

revolution, but which changes irreversibly the class content of the state..."

"One should not see the picture as if the break follows a very clear social line: on the one side the peasantry, on the other the workers... The peasant masses surround and envelop the proletariat from all sides... the obvious falsity of the leadership, the wreckage of the bureaucracy's adventurism, the complete stifling of workers' democracy — all this makes even the genuine workers susceptible to petty-bourgeois ideas..."

"Nor should one imagine that the line of the break passes somewhere between the party on the one side and the peasantry and a part of the working class on the other. No, the line of Thermidor inevitably cuts through the party itself... it passes through the apparatus itself... Everything depends on the relation of forces outside the apparatus. It only needs a sufficient blow from the petty-bourgeoisie for the Thermidorian bureaucrats to recognise themselves and to jump over the wall separating them from the class enemy..." (The Danger of Thermidor, 11.1.1933; Writings 1932-33, pp.76-78)

"...with the weakening of the party or with its degeneration even an avoidable crisis in the economy can become the cause of the fall of the dictatorship (of the proletariat)." (Problems of the Development of the USSR, op cit, p.211)

"The bourgeoisie could come to power in the USSR in no other way than with the aid of counter-revolutionary upheaval... Yet with the maintenance of the Stalinist regime, the contradictions accumulating within the framework of the official party, especially at the moment of the sharpening of the economic difficulties, must lead inevitably to a political crisis, which may raise the question of power anew in all its scope."

"For the fate of the Soviet regime, it will be of decisive significance whether the proletarian vanguard will be in a position to stand up in time, to close its ranks, and to offer resistance to the bloc of the Thermidorian-Bonapartist forces backed by world imperialism." (Ibid, pp.230-31)

continued next week

What Trotsky meant by 'workers' state'

LETTERS

SO.382 saw a contribution to the discussions on the Eastern Bloc from a supporter of the USFI, Phillip Ward.

While accurately pointing out flaws in our discussion, Phil failed to clearly explain Trotsky's position.

For Trotsky, Marxists had a duty to defend the remaining gains of the 1917 Revolution while opposing the Stalinist bureaucracy and building a new revolution to regain workers' control. What is there left to defend? Only the post-capitalist property relations. Defended against what? Capitalist counter-revolution, imperialist aggression, Stalinist attacks on workers living and working conditions and rights.

Phil is clearly confused on the question of Afghanistan. While correctly supporting the withdrawal of Soviet troops he says "their continued presence may be in the interests of the Afghan masses"! It's hard to see why, when you consider they napalmed villages, made millions into refugees and built thousands of mosques!

Indeed, Phil is to the right of the USFI majority who recently stated the Soviet troops were "...contrary to the right of self-determination of the Afghan people, and also the real interests of the exploited and oppressed throughout the region."

The USFI condemned the use of Stalinist troops (eventually!) but quietly, rather like some tiresome chore. It used the same 'Trotskyist' rhetoric when Vietnam invaded Kampuchea, even though the situation was totally different! In contrast, Socialist Organiser correctly refused to condemn the Vietnamese invasion which was welcomed by the masses as liberation from the genocide of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

The USFI's chanting of 'Trotskyist' slogans while ignoring their content is not Marxism. Trotskyism isn't a series of statements learnt by heart. The scientific method isn't like a heap of tinned food you store



Fidel Castro: workers' leader?

up in the hope you have enough. It is the method of discovery and re-evaluation used by Marx, Lenin, Trotsky. To merely repeat their words — ignoring their meaning — is to betray their spirit. For all the USFI's talk of "analysing the dynamics" of the Stalinist states, they have betrayed the Trotskyist programme time after time. Most sharply by refusing to call for political revolutions when the Stalinists took power in China, Vietnam and Cuba.

For the USFI, the force for socialism is Stalinist formations like the ANC, NLF and FSLN. Against that, Socialist Organiser argues the real Trotskyism — the irreplaceable role of conscious communist activity organised in a revolutionary party that leads the working class. To militants angry at the USFI's vulgar evolutionism we say join us in building that party — sell Socialist Organiser!

Duncan Chapple
Nottingham

What would Trotsky have said in 1943?

You state rightly that none of the people who pay lip service to the degenerated workers' state position hold anything that Trotsky could have recognised under that label; you do not bring out that it was in the immediate post-war years that the division came.

One side trying to keep alive the content of Trotsky's analysis, found itself forced to discontinue using the label. The other side dogmatically insisting on the label, abandoning Trotsky's own criteria as to what it meant.

I suggest one question to illustrate this. What do you think — had Trotsky not been assassinated — would have been his reaction (and consequently that of the Fourth International majority, since it is inconceivable that had he been alive a majority of the organisation would have voted against him) to the liquidation of the Third International? Would it not have caused him to modify his previous conclusions (not his reasoning methodology), at least to the same extent that the 1933 electoral victory of the Nazis did?

If in the years that followed 1933, Trotsky abandoned his previous insistence that Russia did not need another revolution and that neither in Russia nor elsewhere could there be alternative communist parties, is it

reasonable to assume that he would not have made an at least comparable modification following this further milestone in the degeneration of Stalinism?

The victory of Hitler, or rather the marked failure of Stalinism to prevent it, made him see an Hegelian leap (Quantity/Quality) in the attainment of bureaucratic power over the workers' state. While he insisted that it remained a workers' state, and while (agreed) he rejected the previous Thermidorian analyses. This was sufficient to make him say that his old analyses were no longer valid and to break with those many Trotskyists who were not able to follow him in this new departure.

Is it really to be claimed that Stalin's action in relinquishing the last semblance of proletarian internationalism (in order to placate the western bourgeois powers) and the consequent conversion of the world Communist Parties into either openly peasant (petit bourgeois) military machines, or into mere agencies within the Western working classes, to advertise the interests of the soviet bureaucracy would not have caused an at least comparable reworking of Trotsky's theories? That is not of course to say that he would have necessarily adopted the theories of the previous bureaucratic collectivists; any more than he previously adopted the earlier Thermidorian analysis.

Laurens Otter

REFORM OR REVOLUTION IN EASTERN EUROPE?

A SOCIALIST ORGANISER PAMPHLET 80 PENCE

A Socialist Organiser pamphlet. Available from PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, for 80p plus 13p postage.

Joking about Nazism

By Mick Ackersley

Capitalism long ago turned the old religious festival of the birth of Jesus Christ into our commercial Xmas. Even our image of a white-bearded Santa Claus clad in red robes, etc. was created by Coca-Cola's advertising agents a mere three quarters of a century ago.

Now television increasingly turns the commercial Xmas into our annual festival of old movies.

Something like a hundred old movies went out over the four channels this Xmas, filling a big proportion of transmission time. Some were truly awful, and a few so good that they gleamed hard and bright like gem stones set in papier mache and tinsel, providing a standard against which to measure TV's normal fare as well as its Xmas offerings.

It so happened that I watched the long-running and very popular 'Allo, 'Allo' for the first time just before Xmas. This is a sort of 'Carry on Gestapo', about a comic French Resistance group centred around a cafe/brothel forever outsmarting the political police of the occupying German Army. The Nazis strut, but comically; they are oppressors, but ineffectual with it; altogether they are just too stupid to be taken seriously.

I laughed here and there, but I found the mixture deeply disgusting and offensive.

How can people with even a dim idea of what the Nazis did in the lands they ruled — including Germany — bear to watch such miserably insensitive rubbish? Or is that the point — that today there are so many people who don't have even a dim idea of what the Nazis were or of that they really did? The sort of people who buy and wear T-shirts jokingly itemising 'Adolf Hitler's European Tour 1940-45' in the sartorial junkshops of Oxford Street?

On New Year's Day — after midnight unfortunately — Channel 4 showed Fritz Lang's 1943 piece of wartime Hollywood anti-Nazi propaganda 'Hangmen Also Die'. Partly-scripted by Bertold Brecht, the well-known Stalinist playwright, this is a fierce diatribe, in the form of a fictionalised account of the assassination in 1942 of Heydrich, the Nazi overlord of Occupied Czechoslovakia, and the Nazi terror that followed. It was crude and very powerful, but, essentially, just and true.

I don't know what it says about the world we live in, that a piece of propaganda produced on behalf of one of the contending imperial blocks during World War II should be more truthful than an 'entertainment' produced in Britain during capitalism's present patchy Indian Summer. Maybe: in war, we get the truth — about the enemy. Part of the truth, sometimes.

A few years or a decade from now we may have a TV series, 'Carry On, Joe', or 'Hello, Hello, Comrade Beria'! Come to think of it — we've been there once before.

The same Hollywood system that produced 'Hangmen also die' churned out whitewash jobs on Stalin's regime at the same time, as a service to the US bosses' wartime ally. Hollywood even produced a movie justifying and glorifying Stalin's Moscow Trials of the thirties, the publicly visible part of the great purges during which the remnants of Lenin's Bolshevik Party were murdered for the crime of 'Trotskyism'.

A tale of free enterprise

Belinda Weaver reviews 'Tucker: the man and his dream'

The story of misunderstood, unappreciated genius is an old favourite in Hollywood. The plot has whiskers on it by now. What's surprising is that Francis Coppola has suddenly discovered it, and given it the full treatment in 'Tucker: the man and his dream'.

After 'Greystoke: the legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes', I turned against films with colons in the titles. Seeing 'Tucker' has convinced me I was right.

It's a nauseating, nostalgic recreation of the life of the 'visionary' car manufacturer, Preston Tucker, who was drummed out of business in the late 1940s. According to the film, Tucker wanted to design safer, better cars, but was beaten because powerful lobbying from the Big Three (Ford, GM and Chrysler) forced the government to withdraw his backing.

Tucker's innovations including placing the engine in the back, padded dashboards, pop-out windcreens, an aerodynamic shape, disc brakes and improved headlights. Many of these are now standard in Big Three cars, after considerable consumer pressure (and years of automobile deaths). In one scene, a bureaucrat opposes the use of seat belts in the Tucker cars, because he believes the public will then view the cars as unsafe. This scene is in the movie just to show the bureaucrats are uncaring and inhuman, the very opposite of good ole Tucker.

The film has the kind of black/white morality that characterised early westerns. Tucker should be wearing a white hat; he's the Jimmy Stewart character. Everything Tucker does is supposed to be good, which is a shame. He's so abrasive and unlikeable (despite his 'I'm loveable' grin), that he gives good a bad name.

Geniuses generally get a bad script in Hollywood, and 'Tucker' is no exception. Most geniuses are shown as behaving badly, with only their genius for an excuse (see 'Amadeus' and other big bio pictures). Tucker's form of bad behaviour (apart from the ever-present boyish grin) is to live constantly beyond his means, to give way to insane and misplaced optimism, to get other people to do all the work, and to turn constantly deaf ears to anyone trying to tell him anything that might puncture his daydreams.

This is the kind of picture where people pick up phones so that they can talk to anyone at all but the person on the other end. This is meant to convey bustle and excitement; it's simply irritating, like all those meals you never see eaten on TV shows.

To spite Tucker, the Washington bureaucrats dream up a fraud case that will finish Tucker commercially. They aim to prove he never intended to build cars, but to raise the money for his own use. In an expansive gesture, Tucker shows up with the fifty cars he has produced, the fruits of his \$26 million investment. And his is acquitted!

Belief became uninged here. Even in the post-war boom, \$500,000 for a car seems pretty steep, innovations notwithstanding! But his little boy grin wins the jury over. He's out of business, but he can still walk tall. Yuk!

The film is really very confused.



In his speech to the jury, Tucker defends the free enterprise system passionately, but then complains that bureaucrats have tied it up so much it isn't free any more. Like all good geniuses, he whines that he was born out of his epoch. Basically, he wished he'd been Henry Ford.

But these free enterprise advocates never get past the first paragraph of what the system is all about. They hear 'free' and assume that they can do whatever they want. What they completely ignore is the trend in 'free' enterprise towards monopolies. Tucker simply couldn't compete on the scale of the Big Three. But in America today, even the Big Three are getting squeezed, by competition from abroad, primarily Japan.

In his speech Tucker throws that in. "If we don't back the man with ideas, folks, we'll lose our place at the top, and end up buying cars and radios from our former enemies!" (ie. Japan). The jury titter at such absurdity, of course.

Coppola is a great fan of the free enterprise system, and he's very concerned at America's slipping world stature and growing debt crisis. So the film is his exhortation to the USA to get back on its feet again and show those Japs a thing or two. It's that kind of reactionary film.

But it's also a defence of the tormented artist in society, the unsung genius, so it must stand in as a portrait of Coppola himself. After his monumental flop with 'Heaven's Gate', director Michael Cimino made a 'misunderstood good guy' film, 'Year of the Dragon' (though the hero was more repellent than 'good' to many audiences). Now it's Coppola's turn to justify himself artistically and to weep at length on celluloid about the philistines against him and his fellow 'visionaries' and geniuses.

It's all rather sickening. Coppola and Cimino have the biggest toys in the world — millions of dollars, hundreds of assistants and all the movie equipment they need. And all they can do is put their own paranoid fantasies up on the screen and call it art. What a waste!

'Tucker' has less romance than a Coca-Cola commercial. It hasn't got a single character in it; everyone has become a cartoon. Tucker himself, his senselessly adoring family, his loyal team (whom he thoroughly exploits) and the Washington bad guys are all utter cardboard. And the glossy presentation just underlines the falsity.

Ironically, Coppola rolls the closing credits over photographs of the real Tucker's life, and it's a riot.

The real Tucker is older and slightly chummy, Mrs T is comfortably plump, the Tuckerettes showing off the car are plainer and fatter, and no one has Hollywood-new clothes. Coppola can't resist piling money onto his films until they simply sink under the weight. The closing photographs show the real Tucker with a mad sparkle in his eye. There's more story in that one photograph than in the rest of the picture altogether.

The tide behind Gorbachev

Nick Allen reviews 'The Gorbachev Phenomenon' by Moshe Lewin. Radius (Century Hutchinson), £12.95

Moshe Lewin expects more from Gorbachev than I would. But I think the difference is more one of viewpoint than of assessment.

Lewin is an academic — probably the most perceptive of the academics writing about the Soviet Union today, and one whose sympathies are not far from ours — but an academic nonetheless. Thus he looks mostly at the shifts within the system, rather than the possibility of revolution. Even though he defines Gorbachev's aim as "a new authoritarianism", he comments philosophically that "most regimes in history have been authoritarian."

But he warns, "We don't know enough about the bureaucracy or the working classes and their perceptions of what is at stake." And the basic theme of his book is not so much what will happen as what Gorbachev's moves for reform show about what already

has happened in the USSR. Since the Stalinist terror of the '30s and '40s, "civil society" has grown enormously in scope and depth.

65% of the population now live in cities, as against 18% in 1926. The number of university graduates has risen from 2.4 million in 1941 to over 15 million today. Of men born in the 1950s, only 17% are in 'unskilled' manual labour, while 50% of their grandfathers were 'unskilled'.

The USSR has developed a predominantly urban, skilled, educated population. Aided by the limited liberalisation of Khrushchev, "urban reality is breeding a variety of groups, cultural trends, and institutions that are increasingly able to voice their opinions and press for their demands. The societal maze finds new ways to 'keep private' what it wishes to have remain private, and to 'socialise' what it does not wish to have fully subject to statism..."

There is "an emerging civil society in the bosom of a system that is statist par excellence...The coalescence of a civil society...marks the start of a new age from which there is no turning back."

Gorbachev himself may indeed "turn back", clamp down, strike viciously against the popular rebellions his reforms unleash. But the Soviet people will not turn back.

1988: year of the lost opportunity

By Paul Woolley

The battles of 1988 in the NHS offered a great chance to take on and topple the Tories. They also presented the best hope in years of building a rank and file movement in the health service.

With the outcome of the Tories' "review" of the NHS still to be announced, there will be more struggles in health in the near future. What lessons can be learned? Back in February and March last year, what was the shape of things? How did the left respond?

In January, through limited industrial action, nurses and blood transfusion workers won small victories. Confidence was boosted. The Tories' insistence that there was no money for the NHS fuelled anger too.

Thousands of nurses struck (many for the first time) and took to the streets. There were days of action across cities and regions. Other groups of workers, in the car industry, local government, the mines, buses, engineering, the post office, civil service and more supported these actions — often with (illegal) solidarity strikes.

A movement began to swell by the week, itching to square up to the Tories. An opinion poll showed most Tory voters backing the protest. The bosses' government began to fret.

They were not alone. For different reasons, the leaders of the health unions and the TUC were troubled too. The action was being pushed from below.

These nuisance nurses were demanding strike action. Many initial walk-outs were spontaneous and unofficial. Worst of all for the bureaucrats, these upstarts believed it possible to beat the Tories over the NHS, contrary to the bible of "New Realism". Sacrilege!

The union fat cats fought to regain their poise. Local full-timers stymied strikes where possible. Where pressure from below was too much, they made action official. Nationally, CoHSE and NUPE leaders excelled themselves.

As Budget Day, 15 March, drew near, large sections of the upstarts were demanding a general strike.

The TUC responded with a demonstration in London. CoHSE and NUPE each announced a day of action — CoHSE for 14 March, NUPE for the 15th. This divisive stunt was backed up locally.

In South Yorkshire, where the NUM was to strike in support, health union officials toured the coalfield to tell miners their support was not wanted. The TUC health services committee promised a "campaign" — individual lobbying of MPs, winning media coverage and so on. '2p for Health' pleaded CoHSE. 'Have a Heart, Prime Minister' blubbered the GMB.

But there was another factor here. In major areas, rank and file health workers were organised. Many hospital Joint Shop Stewards Committees had been revived and in some places city-wide stewards' committees and action committees had sprung up.

The levels of militancy and of organisation varied. Some, in London and Manchester, were at times able to organise local action without the officials. In many others, the confidence to fight without a lead was lacking. Yet the building and drawing together of rank and file structures was necessary and possible.

It was clear that the sporadic action could not go on forever. Even without the bureaucrats' sabotage, demoralisation and exhaustion would sooner or later set in. Equal-

ly clear was the need to make the leaders fight — organise united, national action, naming a day for indefinite strike with emergency cover throughout the NHS. A national network of the rank and file committees could "combine demands for action on the TUC and national officials with consistent and serious organising of the base." (SO 350).

Socialist Organiser supported the calling of a national conference on this basis, "not magically to create an alternative leadership to that of the official health unions. Rather, a national shop stewards' conference would be a step along the road of building a national network of health shop stewards...able to exert real pressure on the union officials. It would also be able to form a realistic picture of what kind of action could be called without official backing." (SO 350).

What did the rest of the organised left have to offer the workers? The Militant tendency hailed a "new generation of union activists straining at the leash to take action" as "millions of trade unionists have been just waiting for the call to take action alongside the health workers." (Militant 883). This gung-ho optimism went hand-in-hand with rank sectarianism.

Militant supporters who were health workers played little or no role in building the stewards' committees, instead using their front organisation, the Broad Left

Organising Committee, to try to capture the movement. When a stewards' conference was held on 26 March, Militant supporters proposed that a national machine be created, paralleling the official unions and complete with bureaucratic constitution and structures — no doubt with Militant in charge.

The ultra-leftists of Workers Power and the Revolutionary Communist Party differed a bit. Workers Power insisted on a national strike committee. This did not take account of the widely varied levels of militancy. It was also an alternative to making the leaders fight, based on the mistaken idea that the leaders always, inevitably, sell out. The RCP wanted a campaign solely for health workers' pay and conditions, since the NHS was a product of the capitalist system and therefore not worth defending. 'Revolution or bust — but only around the issue of NHS workers' pay and conditions!'

What each of these sects (wrongly) thought they were doing was trying to develop and advance the movement that had sprung up. If that movement were a river, they were trying all kinds of engineering feats to divert it, steer it uphill, dam it up, squeeze it into pipes and so on. But one sect, the Socialist Workers Party, curiously mirrored the bureaucrats, were reluctantly carried along by the current, bob-

ing up and down.

They knew that the "down-turn" and "New Realism" had just about triumphed in the health unions, as elsewhere. They saw the attempt to build national rank and file organisation as pie-in-the-sky antics. They argued that the rank and file could not organise action independent of the officials.

Yet they said the rank and file should hold out against "tail-ending the bureaucrats" — for instance against CoHSE's day of action on 14 March. They said health workers had been deeply infected by "New Realism", save for a "militant minority". Yet the business of a national stewards' conference must wait until the spontaneous struggles reached a sufficiently high level! The SWP were at sea, much as they had been during the 1984/85 miners' strike.

It is true that in many hospitals basic union organisation needed to be built. But the SWP counterposed that low-level work to a wider strategy and to a national stewards' network. The point is that a national stewards' network could help reach out to those less organised, less militant hospitals. If it could press the bureaucrats to call national strikes, those could surely give confidence to the less organised, less militant places.

Socialist Worker partly acknowledged that the "thin layer of militants on the ground can have a powerful effect in building organisation...However this can only be done if militants take account of the pace of the dispute — and this is overwhelmingly determined by the union leaders." (SW 1075).

Such arguments, apart from being a thoroughly mechanistic view of the class struggle, offered no answers to health workers. No answers except propaganda against the bureaucrats and an invitation to the "militant minority" to join the SWP.

In short, the would-be Marxist left, as well as the union bureaucrats, failed that tremendous, spontaneous movement. The fantasies, defeatism and sectarianism of these "revolutionaries" ensured that no national network of health stewards yet exists. It is arguable, had a national stewards' network been created, whether it would have carried enough clout to stop the bureaucrats. But it could have affected events nationally, could have continued to build and be able to play a useful role in the current nurses' pay dispute.

Without such a rank and file organisation, workers will always be dependent on the bureaucrats — and the bureaucrats will always feel able to sell out. The left has still to learn this simple lesson.

Press branch quits EETPU

The London Press Branch of the EETPU has voted to leave the union and join SOGAT. In a workplace ballot 70% of the branch's 1,500 members voted to join the print union.

Historically the Press Branch has been one of the most militant branches in the union. In 1982 the Fleet Street electricians struck in support of the healthworkers — closing down the national press for a day and defying both legal threats and a TUC instruction not to strike. The courts eventually backed down imposing a derisory fine.

There is a long history of conflict between the branch and the EETPU leadership. In 1983 the branch voted to join SOGAT but was prevented from doing so by the TUC which ruled that such a move would break the Bridlington

agreement.

The decision of the Press Branch may make sense from the point of view of in-

dustrial unionism in the print, but it won't help the left in the EETPU defeat Hammond.

IN BRIEF

Christmas post in some areas of London was disrupted by an overtime ban. Tony Clarke, deputy General Secretary of the UCW, has warned of further industrial action over management plans to privatise Crown Post Offices, and the issue of local pay supplements.

Miners in the NUM voted narrowly against an overtime ban over the issue of NUM representation at all

pits. Pay negotiations between British Coal and both the NUM and scab UDM are still unresolved.

Manual workers at British Gas have voted overwhelmingly against changes to working practices in a ballot. The deal had been recommended by union negotiators.

Management at ICI is negotiating far-reaching changes in working practices.

With inflation rising the government is casting anxious glances at this year's pay rounds. Around one third of pay reviews are settled in the next few months.

In the car industry manual workers at Jaguar have refused management's two-year offer. Talks are still on at Peugeot-Talbot and IBC van plant, London.

In the engineering industry, pay talks resume later this month which will affect the pay of two million workers throughout the sector.

Stop the merger!

By Gerry Bates

All the signs suggest that the proposed merger between the engineers union, the AEU, and Hammond's EETPU is definitely on.

This will come as a surprise to many. For the last few months it has been fashionable to dismiss the possibility of an EETPU/AEU link-up. It was said that the right-wing in the engineers union wouldn't be able to push through the merger because of opposition both within the executive and

from the lay delegate-based national committee.

So what's the evidence to suggest that the merger is back on?

Talks have been continuing apace despite the EETPU's expulsion from the TUC.

In the middle of last month, Bill Jordan was quoted in the *Morning Star* as saying "there were still major difficulties to tackle, but still would not rule out an earlier target date of March 1989 for bringing the two unions together."

The *Financial Times* has said that Hammond is so mad keen on a merger

that he has offered to give up his claim to an important position in the new amalgamated union. However, this is mainly a ploy to embarrass the AEU's Gavin Laird who wants to hang on to his job as general secretary after amalgamation.

The AEU leaders no longer say that all officials must be elected in the new union. Jordan and co. have come up with a formula that would allow for the election of officials in the future but existing officials of both the AEU and EETPU could hold onto their positions. That means the great bulk of EETPU officials — who are all appointed — can keep their jobs for life in the new union.

It is necessary to oppose the kind of merger that Jordan and Hammond want. It would mean an end to the democratic structures of the AEU, the AEU's national committee would probably be abolished and conference would lose its power. The result would be the consolidation of a powerful right wing super-union dominating engineering.

If Jordan and Hammond now decide to go for the merger then they will have to move fast. March still makes a lot of sense for them as a target date — it is before the lay delegate-based national committee meeting in April which could attempt to block the link-up.

Those who want to stop the merger need to move equally fast.

Stop the AEU/EETPU merger!

Saturday 14 January

The Star Club, Digbeth, Birmingham

meeting starts 11am

speakers include John Tocher

All AEU and progressive EETPU members

welcome

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SOCIALIST

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Why we lost the pit overtime ballot

Yugoslav government falls

By Lynn Ferguson

Last Friday, 30th, the Yugoslav government under Branko Mikulic resigned.

Yugoslavia is in the midst of a deep economic and political crisis.

Last May Mikulic made a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reschedule Yugoslavia's \$21 billion foreign debt. The IMF's conditions were an austerity plan, massively cutting social spending, and a drive for thoroughgoing free-market reforms.

The attacks on wages and workers' living standards led to strikes and demonstrations, with workers refusing to accept that they should be made to pay for the bureaucrats' crisis. The economic reforms also fuelled simmering ethnic tensions, particularly in Serbia.

The government was forced to back off, and printed money to pay small wage increases. Inflation increased again to 250%, and is predicted to rise to 500%.

The final straw for Mikulic came last Friday when his latest budget was rejected. The budget would have meant spending cuts and a drive towards greater economic centralisation.

This went down badly with regional party barons, who see centralisation as a threat to their own power. The Croatians even threatened a general strike should Mikulic's budget get through. The



Yugoslav women fight over scarce bread

conservatives in the Assembly have thus been able to posture as the defenders of workers' living standards while in reality protecting their own entrenched privilege.

Mikulic has also been caught up in scandal over allegations of siphoning off regional development aid to buy land for his family. He is accused of having an apartment in London, which is illegal under Yugoslav law.

Several years ago, while he was

Bosnian party chief, Mikulic was forced to give away a luxurious house in Sarajevo, which was known popularly as 'The Carrington Estate', after the 'Dynasty' tycoons.

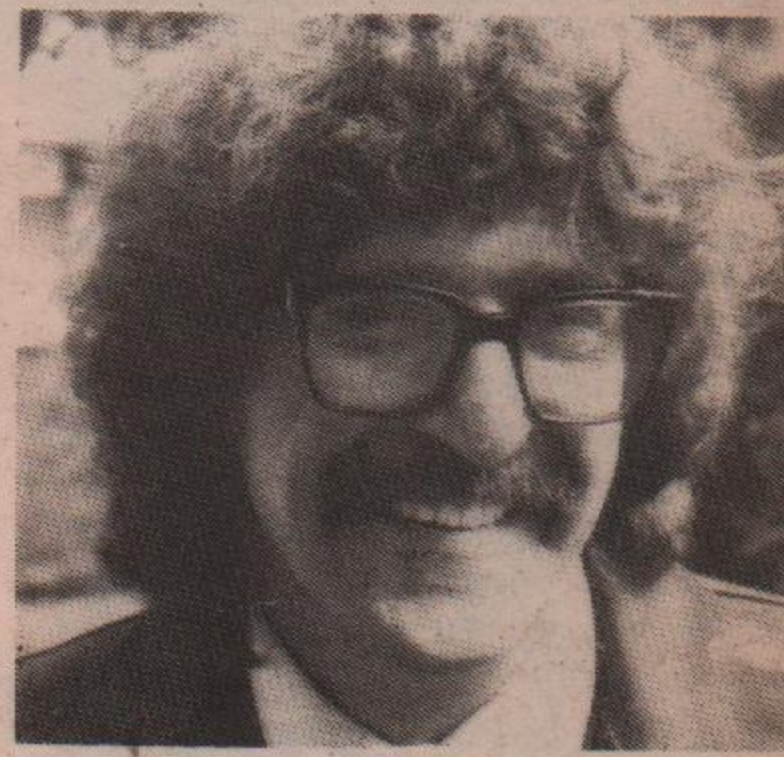
In his resignation speech, Mikulic blamed many of Yugoslavia's current economic problems on mismanagement by the long-dead leader of the country's revolution, Tito. Tito managed to keep Yugoslavia at an artificial level of relative prosperity by massive bor-

rowing. Now the chickens have come home to roost.

The 'communist' conservatives may have had their sacrificial lamb in Mikulic, but it's unlikely that any of them will be rushing forward to take on his job. Within the bureaucratic state-monopoly system there is no way out of the crisis — the system cannot be made to work.

In the East, as in the West, only the working class can show the way out.

WHETTON'S WEEK



A miner's diary

We lost the ballot for an overtime ban against British Coal's conciliation machinery, which doesn't allow NUM representation of its members in UDM majority pits.

The vote was 49.3% in favour, 50.6% against; the main areas for were Yorkshire and Durham, the main ones against were COSA (clerical) and South Wales, where the Area leadership campaigned for a No vote. I was very disappointed with the result, although given the campaign in some areas for a no vote I didn't find it surprising. We still got nearly 50%.

Maybe now those who campaigned for a no vote will re-raise the issue of accepting the conciliation machinery. If they do it will be a sell-out of the NUM loyalists in Notts, South Derbyshire and other minority areas, and an acceptance that they have no representation. It would be a very retrograde step. Just at the time when it seems we are beginning to win the battle, slowly but surely, against the UDM!

It is so transparent the way the UDM just dances to the bosses' tune. Their own membership has twice thrown out, against the leadership's recommendation, British Coal's latest pay deal. Now is the worst possible time to start weakening our stance. What will bring UDM members back into the fold is seeing the NUM being prepared to stand up and fight.

I think the decisive thing in the ballot was the campaign against action by some area leaderships. There was support in the rank and file for taking a stand. At my own pit, Manton, reckoned to be one of the most moderate in the Yorkshire coalfield, there was a good response to the call for the overtime ban.

It is not clear what will now happen to the pay deal. British Coal say they will impose it on the NUM, but it's not clear what is happening with the UDM. One of the lessons out of this is that, as long as the NUM and UDM members remain split, we won't be able to get what we both want.

In my last diary before Christmas I made a special call to remember the still nearly 200 sacked miners, who seem to have been forgotten by many people. But it is not only at Christmas that the labour movement and socialists need to stand by them — it's all the year round.

I saw bits of the Frost interview with Thatcher. She said vengeance had no part in it, it had to be justice. The case of the sacked miners makes her out as a dirty two-faced liar. That was vengeance for having taken part in the strike; the last thing we had was justice.

Why the Tories dumped Currie

So, amongst a flurry of appalling newspaper headlines ('Egg on her face', 'Curried Eggs'), Edwina Currie has been forced to 'resign'.

Good riddance, you might say. After all, for us Currie embodies all the worst aspects of Norman Tebbit-style Toryism, with her astounding ability to say the most outrageous things without even a hint of embarrassment.

But this time it seems Currie was probably right. Evidence of an alarming incidence of salmonella in eggs has been around for some

time. The government's chief medical officer has been presenting reports to the Junior Health Minister for the last two years saying that the high risk of salmonella from eggs must be exposed. The government told her to sit on it, not wanting to anger the powerful farming lobby.

The government's response to the egg crisis — a newspaper advertisement "Eggs — the facts" — which advised that eggs should be well cooked, and that old people and children should avoid eggs, echoed Currie's advice. Yet the Tory ranks have uttered hardly a word in her defence.

Of course, the vested interests of the egg producers has a lot to do with it. The Tory farming lobby is still very strong, as witnessed by the governments unprecedented pay out of £19 million in "compensation" — so much for the Tories' exhortations for industry to stand on its own two feet. Currie paid the price for once attacking the pockets of the powerful.

But something even nastier was going on. According to reports, her fate was sealed after the chair of the Tory backbench 1922 Committee visited the Chief Whip and insisted "she has to go".

For Currie didn't just make

enemies on the left. Her upfront publicity seeking made her extremely unpopular amongst many Tory MPs. That she is a woman made it worse. That she is, though now a practising Anglican, a Jew, made her intolerable. Anti-semitism remains a nasty thread running through the Conservative party. A mouthy Jewish woman was simply intolerable to them.

The whole affair highlights the seamier side of Tory politics. Preventative medicine, health consciousness is fine, so long as it serves as a rationale for health and welfare cuts, but not when the finger points at big business. Currie could be sacrificed because "she's not one of us" — there was no old boys network to rally round her. Interestingly, the last person the 1922 Committee stuck the knife into was Leon Brittan — another Jew.

We all know the Tory party to be the party of vested interests. The unlikely alliance of the egg industry, the anti-semites and the misogynists has proved this yet again.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Agriculture is now proposing that voluntary health checks on poultry and eggs should be made statutory. But all very quietly, through the proper channels. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours

Lawson's boom goes bust

from front page

of payments deficit, and instead of new industrial capacity to revive its exports it has a yuppie consumer boom and bosses grabbing quick profits.

The Tories' answer is to raise interest rates. The base rate of interest in London has risen from 7.5% last June to 13% today. This operation has two aims. It encourages international capitalists to hold their cash

in pounds rather than dollars or yen or marks (because they'll get a better rate of interest); and thus it stops the pound losing value against other currencies. And it makes borrowing more expensive, therefore cuts back credit, and therefore cuts back consumer demand.

Already this policy is hitting hard at millions of people on mortgages — many of them the same people who voted Tory in 1987 because they thought Thatcherite economics

would provide them with quick gains and 'people's capitalism'. It is to the Tories' policy of selling off council houses what the October 1987 stock market crash was to their sell-offs of state enterprises.

The policy can work only by cutting back demand enough to create a slump, or at least very slow growth. That is what high interest rates did in the early '80s.

The Tory New Times look more and more like the Bad Old Days.