

Up against the bans

In the last issue of *Socialist Review* we took a calm look at the recent spate of police bans on demonstrations and posed the question 'banning the nazis or bashing the left?'. Within a fortnight the police had confirmed our answer with yet another four week ban on demonstrations in London.

Now we need to ask another question—how do we beat the bans? And we need an answer urgently because the situation has now got beyond either academic argument or minor irritation.

This can be seen simply by looking at the statistics. The Public Order Act was used to impose an almost continuous ban on marches in London from 1947 and 1951. But in the thirty year period from 1951 to 1980 there were only nine bans (five in London, four outside).

Now turn to March 1981. During that single month there were the following bans:

- London—One month from March 5
- Wolverhampton—Two weeks from March 20
- Leicester—One month from March 20
- Leeds—Four weeks from March 21
- South Yorkshire (four districts)—One week from March 22
- Glasgow—Three months from April 1

The new four week ban in London from April 25 provides very rapid proof that March was no aberration.

The effects of these bans in preventing the left from mobilising are already real:

The Leeds ban prevented a mass send off for the Easter CND Trans-Pennine march.

The London bans have twice prevented the solidarity movement with El Salvador launching itself onto the streets.

And the second London ban enabled the police to criminalise solidarity with the Irish struggle at its most critical hour.

It is no use pretending that a demonstration can quickly be turned into a rally and little but pride is lost. If we wanted rallies we'd have rallies. We want demonstrations precisely because they can mobilise more people and enable them to voice their anger. In each of the cases we give above there can be no doubt that the ban not only harmed

the morale of the protesters but also seriously diminished their numbers.

Nor can we pretend that a demonstration can be put off for a month with little harm done. You cannot have an Easter CND march a month later, nor can solidarity with a dying man be calmly rescheduled until after his death.

The simple facts of the matter are that the bans are already seriously harming our ability to organise, and that the police show every intention of turning the screw even tighter. The simple conclusion is that the bans must be challenged—and soon, before they become accepted as a fact of life.

The National Council for Civil Liberties have done a good job in providing information on what they describe as 'a sinister change of strategy' by police and government. And they have exposed the legal hypocrisy of imposing blanket bans on the pretext of banning fascist demonstrations, because in fact the Public Order Act of 1936 does provide for a ban to be limited to 'a class or classes of processions'.

Legal redress?

Indeed, a specific ban has once been imposed. But when you look at what it was then the limits of this argument become clear. It was in September 1961 to ban 'any public procession organised by body of persons known as the Committee of 100'. In other words it was against the radical wing of the CND movement—against the left! That should be enough warning against countering 'blanket' bans by pleading for 'specific' ones. In any case the present mood of the courts holds little hope for legal redress.

So challenging the bans means breaking them. A lot of people on the left will agree with that but with a rider 'beware of adventurism'. There is, however, a serious danger that the rider will be writ too large.

Of course if you have a hundred rather sheepish demonstrators faced by a hundred police the dozen would-be Bolsheviks who proudly step forward will be onto a hiding to nothing, apart from large fines and a guar-

antee that at least fifty of the sheepish demonstrators won't turn up next time.

Every effort must be made to get wide ranging commitments to defy the bans. But these mean nothing unless they are put to the test. There is no escaping the fact that someone, somewhere, sometime has to make that 'adventurist' step toward the police cordon.

Whether they get through can never be one hundred per cent guaranteed. It will depend on the numbers and anger of the demonstrators and the degree of support for their cause, and it will depend on the numbers and organisation of the police and what they feel they can get away with. Some luck will also be involved. All that is certain is that the longer it is put off the harder it will be.

The few hundred H-Block demonstrators who attempted to break the London ban on April 26 judged well. They sensed that despite their relatively small numbers the mood of anger over Bobby Sands meant that their defiance would not be felt as foolish heroics. They may only have got a few hundred yards, but as one senior police officer commented in an unguarded moment that 'was not bad for a banned demonstration'. The thirty or so arrests was a small price to pay for not only thrusting solidarity in Britain with the Irish struggle into the news but also providing better propaganda for defying the bans than a hundred public meetings.

Breaking the bans will require that where similar circumstances occur the same decision for action is made.

But it will also need the big battalions. Not the never-never land big battalions that will eventually come at some time after a 'Labour movement campaign'. But the ones we have already got lined up. Two of these are of particular importance. The first is the People's March. Given the present workings of the Martin Webster—Sir David McNeen public order double act, that could well be threatened by bans when it enters London at the end of the month. The second is the CND march from Faslane to Glasgow on June 6 and 7 which is covered by the three month Glasgow ban. On these two we must be quite clear. No copping out at the top. We demonstrate, bans or no bans. Peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must.

Pete Goodwin



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Edited by Chris Harman

Assisted by Colin Sparks, Simon Turner, Pete Goodwin, Norah Carlin, Sue Cockerill, Stuart Axe, Jane Ure Smith, Dave Beecham, Gareth Jenkins, Jill Poole, Jon Bearman, Christine Kenny, Jim Scott, Andy Durgan Peter Court.

Films: Jane Ure Smith

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BOBBY SANDS MP 1954-1981

The Tory government has followed a path in the last few weeks that could only end in bitter confrontation on the streets of Northern Ireland. They allowed Bobby Sands MP to starve to death. They did so rather than concede the principle that he was a political prisoner—despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Catholic population had expressed their support for that principle in the ballot boxes of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. With wooden insistence Thatcher repeated 'a criminal is a criminal is a criminal', even though she knows very well that what has driven thousands of young men and women in the six counties to take up the gun and to face long years in prison is not the search for illicit gain, but the desire to fight back against a state built upon discrimination and sectarian hatred.

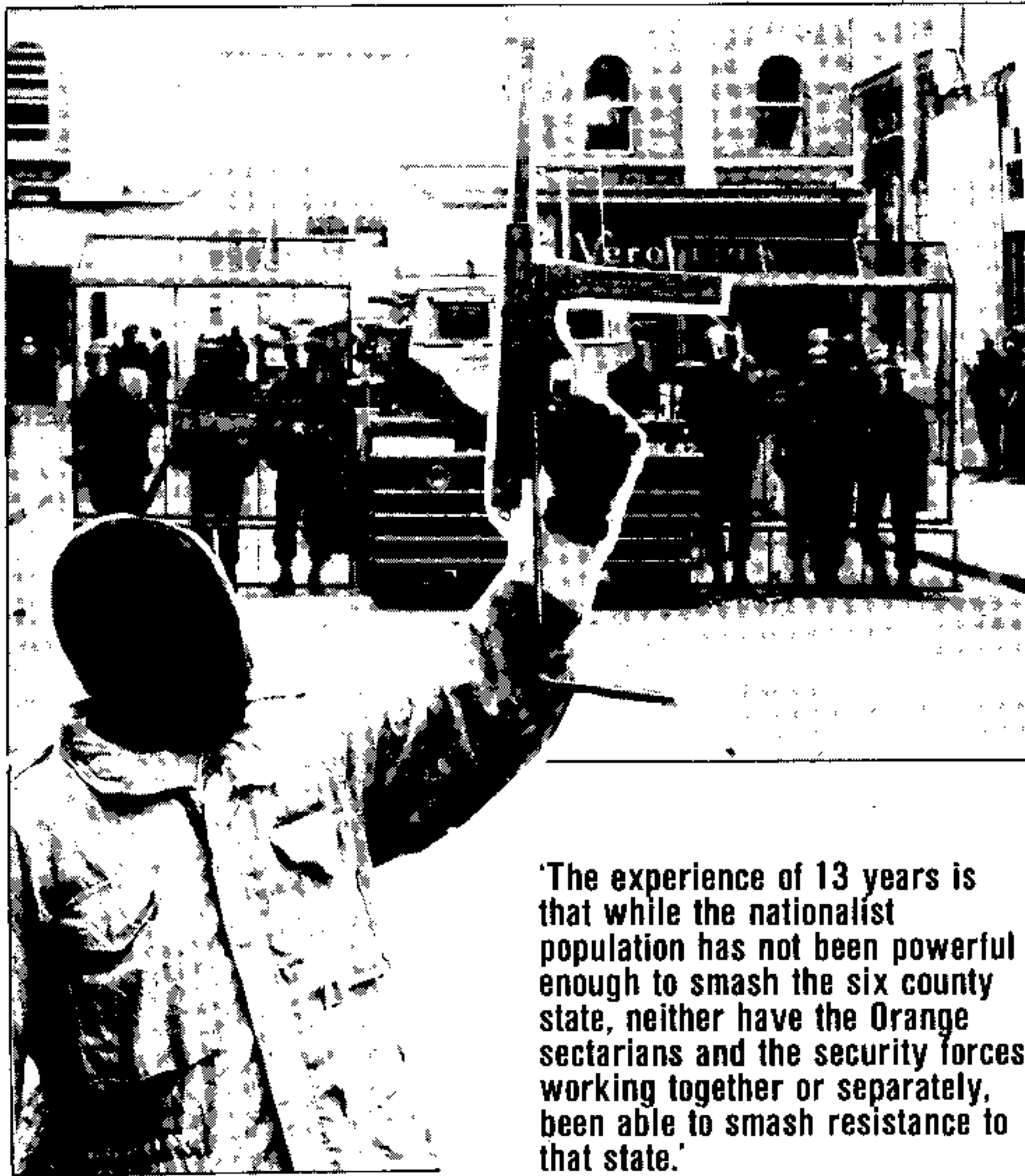
That this is a *political* motivation was recognised by a government of which Thatcher was a member back in 1972 when it conceded 'special status' for republican prisoners. Bobby Sands himself was a beneficiary of this recognition during his first term of imprisonment. It was only with his second term for the same offence (possessing arms) that he became 'a criminal'.

The reason for the change which led to death—and which may well have led to many more deaths on the streets of Belfast and Derry by the time you read this—was a conscious, political decision by a British government.

In 1972 an attempt to subdue the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland through wholesale repression had failed. The internment of hundreds of anti-unionists in the summer of 1971 and the massacre of Bloody Sunday, six months after, only served to increase the scale of resistance, and to produce a huge groundswell of anti-British sentiment across the border in the Republic. After the British embassy in Dublin went up in flames, the Tories did a U-turn, pushed

for further reforms of the Northern Ireland state and even negotiated with the Provos. Special Status was a by-product of this turn.

But Britain's rulers were not prepared to go beyond a certain point in their attack upon the inbuilt sectarianism and discrimination of Northern Ireland. After the Republican population resisted attempts to maintain the pattern of discrimination by handing over to Protestants houses that had been allocated to Catholics, the Tories stopped treating the Provos as negotiators and started to talk of them as terrorists once again. And when, in 1974 the Protestant population moved en masse in defence of their privileges (the 'Loyalist strike') a Labour government did another U-turn,



'The experience of 13 years is that while the nationalist population has not been powerful enough to smash the six county state, neither have the Orange sectarians and the security forces, working together or separately, been able to smash resistance to that state.'

and abandoned the attempt to impose a reformed governmental structure on Northern Ireland. A by-product of *this* turn was the ending of special status and the treating as criminals of everyone who fought back against the state.

It is the logic of this turn which is now being acted out. The present Tory government is treading the path prepared by Labour, and is insisting that it does not matter how great a proportion of the Catholic population object to their oppression and align themselves with Republican demands. These demands, it insists, are criminal demands, and crude force has to be used to repress them.

What that meant was shown even before Bobby Sands' death. First an army landrover drove straight at a crowd of stone throwing youth, knocked down two of them, and then deliberately drove backwards over their bodies, (see eyewitness reports in *Sunday Times* 25 April) And then the security forces lifted 60 people whose only 'crime' was being active in the H-block committees—little more than a rerun of internment.

No wonder people in the nationalist areas are fearing a repetition of the repression of 1971-2. No wonder they believe that, under the protective eye of the British army and the RUC, Loyalist murder gangs are preparing an onslaught designed to beat them into submission. No wonder they are stocking food and organising defence committees.

All this takes place as Ian Paisley is making a bid to assert his control over the Loyalist population in the local elections, boasting that he is prepared to do a repeat of 1912 and use force to get his way.

The British government has shown few signs of relenting in its turn to naked repression. It believes that the death of Sands is of immense symbolic importance. If the nationalist and republican population of the North is incapable of forcing concessions after the bitter climax of the hunger strike, then it is incapable of forcing concessions at any point in time. In Tory eyes that amounts to the defeat of the the republican movement and lays the ground for a 'political' solution in the six counties based upon massive concessions to Paisley.

Not inevitable

But it is not inevitable that the government succeeds in this strategy. The experience of 13 years is that while the nationalist population has not been powerful enough to smash the six county state, neither have the Orange sectarians and the security forces, working together or separately, been able to smash the resistance to that state.

Over recent weeks there has been a resurgence of the movement on the streets of the Catholic areas. The youth are prepared to go beyond just marching and to show their resistance with the brick and the petrol bomb. The Provos still have the military capacity to take on the British troops. There

is a possibility that the combined efforts of these forces will be sufficient to maintain public disorder long enough for it to be damaging to the present Tory strategy and force concessions for the remaining hunger strikers.

However, the lesson from 1972 has to be remembered. It was what hapened in the South, as much as what happened in the North, that broke the Tory offensive then. European capitalism does not like to see the stability of that small, but highly profitable, state endangered by hamfisted actions by British security forces across its borders.

This does not mean putting faith in Charles Haughey the Southern premier. During Bobby Sands' dying days he managed to face several different directions at once, while doing nothing. He hid behind the ineffectual gestures of Sile De Valera, he gave John Hume's initiative a gentle prod from a safe distance, he misled Bobby Sands' sister Marcella about the likely outcome of the European Human Rights' Commission initiative, but worst of all, he put no pressure on Thatcher, with whom he claims a 'special relationship', to save Bobby's Sands' life.

Action from below

No, it is action from below that is needed in the South, the same sort of action that lit up the streets of Dublin nine years ago.

The key, North and South of the border, is strike action. This has already been organised in those sections of industry of the North with a majority nationalist population workforce. In the South nothing would embarrass Haughey more than strike action in solidarity in the North.

But strike action cannot be won on any widespread or sustained basis just by banging out the nationalist slogans taught in the southern schools as part of national history. The links have to be drawn between the everyday interests of workers in the South and the struggle in the North, between trade union rights and unemployment on one side of the border and wholesale repression on the other side of it.

Class politics have to be pushed to the fore, otherwise, defeat is indeed a possibility.

Of course the H-Block campaign does not represent the whole of the struggle in Ireland against the last vestiges of British imperialism; even if the issue of political status was won there would still be the British army of occupation, there would still be repression through all channels of government, there would still be discrimination against the catholic population in all areas of life. But it is important that the prisoners campaign is seen for what it is: the symbol of all these other issues, the symbol of British oppression and Irish resistance and the symbol of the fact that the struggle will continue until Britain gets out of Ireland once and for all. Even the *Daily Mirror* in a recent editorial recognised that the present crisis was nothing more than a symptom of the wider problem and it repeated its call for the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. It is up to socialists inside the trade union movement on both sides of the Irish Sea to ensure that this call becomes a reality.

Run down to a new civil war?

Peter Clarke analyses the situation in The Lebanon

The conflict in Lebanon is now seven years old. But it is on the brink of erupting into a new Middle East crisis as the sporadic fighting between the numerous protagonists reaches a new pitch.

Several factors during the last year had led to this situation. The first is the way the Gulf has diverted the attention of Jordan and Syria away from the Palestinian question. These two countries have been involved in a continuous sabre-rattling exercise as they have tried to exploit the unrest in the area to settle old scores. The pressure has been on the Syrian government to decrease its 'peace keeping' force of 25,000 troops in Lebanon in case they are needed against Iraq or Jordan.

The second factor, Israeli insurgency in Southern Lebanon, has been stepped up since Syria and Jordan became involved in their own dispute. The Israelis work very closely with, and arm, the 'Free Lebanon' forces of renegade Christian Phalangist, Saad Haddad. Haddad has controlled the ten-mile wide strip along the Israeli border for several years and has allowed the Israelis free access through the strip to attack the Palestinian strongholds just north of the Litani River. Last year there were 81 such attacks.

The third factor is the resurgence of the right wing Christian Phalangist forces in Beirut and Central Lebanon. The initial conflict between the Palestinians and the Phalangists reached its height in early 1976, when the Phalangists cleared the Palestinian refugee camp of Tal al-Zaabar. This led to the Syrian intervention, in face of which the Christian forces fragmented. Now the Christians are united again under the leadership of the extreme right wing Bechir Gemayel. Since recently eliminating the other Christian leaders in a week of bloody fighting, Gemayel has become the sole driving force in the Phalangist Lebanese Front Party.

Gemayel has some 70,000 well trained and well armed men at his disposal. In recent incidents he decimated the Palestinians at Mount Lebanon and drove back the newly rebuilt Lebanese army at Ain Rummaneh. Gemayel's aspiration is to 'liberate the rest of Lebanon from the Palestinians and the Syrians'.



The guns captured by this Palestinian fighter from Christian militia are Israeli.

The fourth factor is the one million strong Shiite population of Lebanon. These have always been oppressed by the Sunni Muslims and the Christians alike. For years they attempted to work for democratic reform within the old Lebanese political framework. But with the coming of the conflict and the success of their sect in Iran they have taken on a much harder edge: with the help of the Palestinians they have built up a military force and a strong political party, Amal, led by the very shrewd Nabih Berri, and the old feudal leaders of the Shiites have been eclipsed.

The Shiites mainly inhabit the Southern area of Lebanon and have been hard hit by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Some 300,000 have left their homes and moved to Beirut as the fighting has escalated. This exodus has built up a resentment against the Palestinians - a resentment which

Gemayel is trying to exploit by courting right wing and disenchanted elements within the Shiite community in an effort to get them to join him in a crusade against the Palestinians. He has said publicly that he cannot beat both the Palestinians and the Syrians without Shiite help.

The final factor is the so-called 'CIA plan' recently revealed in *The Middle East* magazine. The plan goes along the following lines: The Phalangists now in control of Mount Lebanon could drive the Palestinians out of West Beirut, clear their main camps around the airport and push them south. The Israelis would engage the Syrians in the southern area around Mount Hermon and up to the Karoun dam with the help of Haddad's Christian forces. This would leave the Palestinians by the Litani River surrounded as the Christians moving south and the Israelis moving north decimated them.

The CIA feel that the deteriorating relations between Syria and Jordan plus the Iraqi involvement in the Gulf War would prevent Jordan or Iraq helping the Syrians out.

The plan is not in favour at the US state department, but the CIA apparently are trying to get Reagan to adopt it. According to sources in Beirut the recent clashes between the Syrians and the Phalangists in Zahle and between the Israelis and the Syrians in southern Bekaa are a prelude to the implementation of the plan.

What of the left in the Lebanon? Unfortunately, it is in tatters. Amal is split by internal disputes regarding the Palestinians, while the Baathists of Syria and Iraq, the Progressive Front of Walid Jumblatt, the Nasserites, the *Partie Populaire Syrien* and the Palestinians spend most their time fighting each other instead of the Phalangists and Israelis.

Reagan recently called Syria the 'Cuba of the Middle East'. If he adopts the CIA plan, the future for the Lebanon looks even bleaker than at present.

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Losing her grip

Barry Pavier looks at the difficulties besetting Indira Gandhi

Margaret Thatcher would have been well advised to have taken a close look at the pickle that Indira Gandhi has got herself into, during her visit to India last month. Mrs Gandhi's predicament reveals the dangers of trying to impose a solution on your own class.

1) Since January 1980 there has been a violent racist campaign in progress in Assam in the north-east. This is led by the local petty bourgeoisie, and aims to repatriate hundreds of thousands of Bengalis who migrated there from what is now Bangladesh.

2) In Gujarat in the west there has been a similar movement in progress for three months, aimed at untouchables. This was sparked off by a dispute over reservation of medical school places for untouchable students. It is also led by the local petty bourgeoisie.

3) In large states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, independent farmers' movements have emerged which have mobilised tens of thousands in militant campaigns over prices, which have compelled the government to back down.

4) Rampant factionalism has appeared inside Congress (I) state governments. One problem is that is constant friction between Gandhi 'loyalists' and people who recently defected to the Congress (I). In Andhra Pradesh for instance, the chief minister had to create a cabinet of 60(!) just to keep all the factions happy. Hardly a week goes by without Mrs Gandhi having to intervene in a party crisis in some state or another.

5) On top of all this there are the workers. A two-month strike of public-sector workers was recently inconclusively settled. Perhaps the most surprising thing is not that it

went on for so long but that it was not smashed up straight away. That is what happened to the last major national strike, the railway strike of 1974, and this time defence industries were out. That's not to say that there wasn't violence, but there was not the repression of previous years. Why?

At independence in 1947 the Indian ruling class was a coalition—a small industrial capitalist bourgeoisie and a large rural bourgeoisie. Large, but splintered. Splintered by region, within regions on caste or sub-regional lines, by differences between budding capitalists and rent receivers, and so on. These splinters had a political life as factions within the state units of the ruling Congress party and were led by regional bosses.

While India benefited from the world boom of the 50s and 60s these factions could be accommodated. There were some goodies for everyone, distributed via the state. When the boom ended (in the case of India, 1965), there was not enough for every faction. Politically, this manifested itself in splits from the Congress, firstly at the 1967 elections, and then intensifying, with a major split in 1969.

All this posed a problem for the ruling class as a whole. At the same time as it was subjected to internal dissension, and so a weakening of the state apparatus, there was a massive and unprecedented upsurge of worker and peasant militancy. A split ruling class made this situation very dangerous, and Indira Gandhi could only temporarily solve it in 1970-71 by a combination of centrally-directed repression, a successful war with Pakistan and an apparent move to the left, summed up by the famous 'garibi hatao' (abolish poverty) election of 1971.

But this did not solve the problem of the inherent factionalism of the ruling class. Indira Gandhi had been given some freedom of manoeuvre by the fact that her major social base was a new element in the

ruling class, created since independence—the managers of state capital. There are hundreds of thousands of these people—running the railways, the iron and steel industries, the defence industries, engineering industries, the nationalised banks and the auxiliary services of state capital like the educational system and the civil service. They tend to have certain political attributes—they despise the local bosses of Congress as corrupt bigots, they support ordered 'progress', they tend to support the USSR rather than the USA.

The Emergency was an attempt by the state capitalist bourgeoisie to solve the problem of ruling class factionalism by rigid centralisation. They had the support of private industrial capital in this. To succeed they had to smash the strength of the regional seats of power. To put it another way, Indira Gandhi had to destroy the old Congress party root and branch.

That is where the appalling Sanjay came in. Mrs Gandhi needed a Congress organisation in every state which would campaign and implement her policy. The local organisations were no use as they were controlled by the bosses. Sanjay's Youth Congress was intended to be a *national* organisation loyal only to his mother, a stick with which she could beat the bosses.

It didn't work, simply because the state capitalist bourgeoisie is not strong enough to fulfil its task. The Emergency collapsed in January 1977 when the biggest boss, Jagjivan Ram, defected to the opposition, and the whole regime fell in. The Janata and Lok Dal governments of 1977-80 only carried the fragmentation further—they were destroyed by factionalism. The Congress (I) won an overwhelming electoral victory in 1980, but one which concealed the truth of disintegration in the ruling class. Mrs Gandhi benefited to a great extent from divided opposition votes, and many of her 'supporters' were people who had just defected from her opponents (in Haryana state, the entire government turned up one morning and said today it had changed from being Janata to Congress (I)!). A sure recipe for trouble.

The policy of centralising the party either means that the leading figures are incapable sycophants, or that people with independent political strength are promptly hamstrung—whereupon they usually move into factionalism. The result is that not only can Indira Gandhi not suppress opposition movements in the country, she can't even suppress them in the Congress (I). The party is in chaos, Assam is ungovernable, farmers are rioting, and she has no remedy. The iron grip is slack. The police still murder, torture and maim, but unlike in the Emergency they do it to no unified purpose. The messages from Delhi are indecisive and confused.

This gives a big opportunity to the working class. The traditional workers' organisations, the two Communist parties and their unions, are still hopelessly sunk in reformism. However, since 1977, there have developed in several important centres independent union movements, fighting militants and often successful struggles. In these movements small revolutionary groups have made significant interventions.

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**INTERNATIONAL
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A class riot not a race riot

The capitalist press were unanimous on two things: condemnation of the Brixton rioting and insistence that it was not a race riot. We don't agree with the first, but the second is undoubtedly true. What all of the evidence shows—eyewitness accounts, photographs, reports—is that the Brixton riot was a rising against property and authority. It was an elemental confused and directionless riot by a mainly working class community against the symbols of oppression and deprivation—it was a *class* riot. Colin Sparks examines the difference between the two sorts of riot.

A brief glance at the evidence proves that beyond doubt. Overwhelmingly the targets were the police and the large chain stores. Photographs of the first incident on the Saturday—the police attempt to arrest a black taxi driver at around 4.45 in the 'Frontline' area—show a crowd of blacks and whites gathering to free him. The photograph of the first attack on a police vehicle shows black and white youths working to-

gether to overturn it. The photographs of the peak of the struggle show blacks and whites fighting the cops together. Even the damage toll demonstrates the enemy: sixty-one police vehicles were damaged, as against only nineteen private vehicles.

A race riot would have had very different dynamics. There have been race riots in Britain since the war, and they are all, without exception, attacks by whites upon blacks. Race riots are something different from the sickening daily toll of abuse, assault and murder which the black community in Britain suffers at the hands of white racists. They involve organised attempts by gangs of people to attack, indiscriminately, people of another ethnic origin. These have happened on a number of occasions.

The best known example is the 1958 Notting Hill riot where white youths, egged on by Oswald Mosely, launched a series of street attacks on the local black community.

There are other, less well-known exam-





Photo: John Sturrock



The targets of a class riot are not individuals of another race, but symbols of the authority and property which oppress. (Above) Chasing a police van in Brixton. (Below) Burnt out bank in St Pauls.

ples. In Dudley in July 1962 a Saturday night fight between a black man and a white man led to the minor injury of the white man. The next day a group of whites 'went on the hunt for coloured persons'. On the Monday at around 10.30 pm: 'It seems that a pre-conceived plan ... was put into effect. They met on Castle Hill, armed with sticks, staves, chair legs, belts, coshes and bottles and made their way from Castle Street to Birmingham Street... their numbers increased as other rowdies joined them.'

The police intervened 'to protect coloured persons from the violence of the mob' and twenty seven men and two women, all white, appeared in court the next day. A mob of about two hundred made an ineffectual effort to free them, allegedly shouting at the police 'You flatfoots' and 'You cowards'. 15 more whites were arrested.

The same weekend there were similar events in Dalston and Manchester, where Oswald Mosely was again active.

In Leeds in July 1969 there was a fight which led to three Sikhs being charged for the murder of a white man. It also led to three nights of rioting during which 35 white men were arrested. On the Sunday lunch-time, crowds of whites gathered outside the pubs yelling: 'We are going to smash Pakistani houses' and 'We want a riot'. A mob marched down the Burley Road, chanting 'Sieg Heil' and 'Get the wogs'. They attacked a small immigrant area, wrecking shops and chasing any black they could find.

Sharp contrasts

These examples stand in sharp contrast with Brixton, St Pauls, and the Carnival riots in Notting Hill in 1977 and 1978, in which there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that the aim of the riots was indiscriminate attacks upon white people. The differences are systematic. In the case of race riots, there are attempts to march into black areas. Class riots are defences of a particular area against the police. Race riots fold up

very quickly when the police manage to notice them and intervene: in Dudley, eight police officers stopped a mob of about 200. Class riots typically are fought with great courage and determination against an overwhelming array of police power. Race riots are aimed at catching and attacking isolated individual blacks. Class riots are directed against an organised police force.

That the psychology and the politics of the two sorts of riots are quite different was proved time and again in the black struggles of the USA in the 1960s. The Civil Rights movement in the South was subjected to a catalogue of atrocities. It was not all peaceful protest, but when the blacks fought back, they did so against their direct enemies. For example, in September 1963 there was a bomb attack on the home of a black minister in Birmingham, Alabama. The protest march was attacked by the police and developed into a riot. 10 days later, white racists bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church during Sunday School. They killed four black school girls and seriously injured another 23.

The following years saw riots in the black ghettos in the North. Watts, Newark, Detroit, Cleveland and a host of others exploded in a wave of Black anger. In 1967 there were 164 civil disturbances. The Kerner Commission investigated them exhaustively and concluded that they were directed;

'Against local symbols of white American society, authority and property in Negro neighbourhoods—rather than against the white persons.'

Even when Martin Luther King was shot down by racists and Washington DC was subdued by 12,000 troops, there were no examples of black race riots.

There is absolutely no doubt that the trigger of the Brixton riots was pulled by the police. The area has notoriously been subjected to intense racist policing. The SPG has invaded the area six times between 1975 and 1979, and Lambeth Council have extensively documented the damage that they and the 'ordinary' police have done to black people.

The Brixton riots erupted at the end of the first week of an operation called 'Swamp 81', in which the area was flooded with more than 100 temporary plain-clothes cops. In two days, they stopped more than 1000 people and arrested more than 100—twice the normal weekly average. On both the Friday and the Saturday, the riots started after particularly atrocious examples of police harassment.

So obvious is this that even some bourgeois journalists have recognised it. Keith Waterhouse, in the *Daily Mirror* (13.4.81), noted the remark by a senior police officer that:

'Nobody rules the streets of London, Brixton, or even Railton Road, except the Metropolitan Police.'

He commented:

'Which could have been more modestly put, given that portions of one

of London's boroughs were ablaze at the time. Or less arrogantly put, given that as a matter of fact the police of this country do not as yet rule anything.'

'But it is the belief of some of them that they do... and their tendency to rule some streets rather more strenuously than they try to rule others, that has brought the seething discontent in Brixton to a head.'

The police, of course, are only the sharp end of a mass of things bearing down on the population of Brixton. The misery of unemployment and bad housing, of the general decay of capitalist system, is something that both blacks and whites rioted against together. But blacks, of course, have more than their fair share of this grim lot, and also bear the burden of everyday racism. That is why it was they who led and dominated the riot and who provided the best and bravest troops.

Riots of this kind are a common result of unemployment and crisis, which is why Thatcher is lying when she tries to blame it on the ethnic origins of the Brixton militants. There were numerous such riots in the 1930's, of which the great united struggle between the Protestant and Catholic unemployed in Belfast against the RUC is the best known. Birkenhead is another good example. There, in September 1932, two unemployed demonstrations demanding the ending of the Means Test were broken up by baton charges. This led to a massive protest meeting which was again attacked by the police. The report in *The Times* as to what happened next could almost have been written about Brixton in 1981:

'During what amounted to a series of pitched battles between the mob and the police nine officers and seven other persons were taken to hospital... The police tried to break up the mob, but were met with a rain of bottles, stones, lumps of lead, hammer-heads and other missiles... Wherever the police were seen sweeping up a street the rioters disappeared into houses, from the windows of which women threw all kinds of missiles... In one street the manhole cover of a sewer was lifted and a wire rope stretched across the street. A number of police fell over this ... One of the motor omnibuses conveying police reinforcements had all its windows broken.'

The fighting went on for three days before the police were able to baton the population into a state of silence.

Brixton, then, was an absolutely typical product of two linked circumstances. On the one hand there is rising unemployment, misery and desperation. On the other hand there is the racism of British society which drives young blacks into implacable opposition to every manifestation of white authority. A logic follows from this: that St Pauls in Bristol and Brixton in London are the harbinger of further storms. The conditions which exist in those places are conditions which exist in a dozen other places. The anger and militancy which burst out there will burst out in a dozen other places.

'It is important to take the initiative'

Socialist Review went to Brixton to interview three SWP members about their assessment of the riot, its origins, development and what has happened since. We spoke to two black workers, Mickey and Tyrone, and a white worker, Tom. This is what they had to say.

Mickey: One of the main factors that led up to it was the police harassment of the youth, which has been taking place for the last three years or so. It has been really heavy. Even Lambeth Council produced a report on the atrocities that the police are getting up to.

I work just up the road and in the last few weeks, just driving around the area, I've seen kids up against the wall, being patted down, cars being stopped. Every single time it was a black kid. You could tell just by looking at the people around that they had seen it all before. It was a common occurrence.

Tyrone: Its not just the kids, its the whole of the people. And not just in Brixton. Coming home from a party, they stop your car and find out if you've had too much to drink. When they can't pin that on you, then there's always something else, like they've missed a car that answers your's description. If you've got a very good car, then stopping you is one of the things the police do when they're on their night out for harassing blacks.

Tom: I am white and living in Brixton and I have it easy compared with black people I know, but even white people are fed up. I know white people who won't go out at night, not because Brixton is some sort of 'muggers' haven' but because they go out and have a pint and then get picked up by the police and taken down the station.

The New Cross Fire cover up and the reporting of the march just proved to people that there was no way they could make themselves heard.

Tyrone: The riot on Friday started when they saw the police put this kid who had been stabbed into a police car. They knew he was going to die in their hands. They remember Michael Ferrara, who was stabbed in the streets of Hackney and taken not to the hospital but to the police station where he died from loss of blood. People haven't forgotten that.

Mickey: The riot itself was mostly youth. On the Sunday it was really young kids—ten to fourteen—just running around getting what they could. It was a fair cross-section of younger people, black and white. I met two older white men, one about 45, another

about 22. They had been in the riot. They said that the police had caught them with about a dozen black kids in a shop doorway and pulled the two of them out behind their riot shields before they started laying into the black kids. The police were only interested in nicking black kids.

Some of the places that went up were racist. I've heard it said that the reason the *Windsor Castle* was burnt down was because it was racist. A lot of the shops that went up did so because the people who run them are right-wingers who want nothing to do with the area.

Tom Its interesting that there's a lot of shops with valuable goods that did not get hit at all. No doubt some of them got hit accidentally, but the shops that got rioted were the ones that had the type of things a young unemployed kid would want but could never pay for.

Tyrone: When you look at Brixton after the riot, its not much worse than it ever was. It always looked that way. The people who saw Railton Road after the riot don't know that it always looked pretty much like that.

On the night itself, I was looking to see who was angry about it all. I was looking especially for white people who were angry and had reasons for being angry. I did not see anything of that on the streets. The only thing that people did not understand was the burning, because fire is a dangerous thing and I wouldn't like it much myself. People were saying: 'It had to happen'—black and white people.

Mickey: After the riot, Rudi Narayan (a black barrister) was the first one to show his head. He pops up everywhere he can get himself a platform. He set up a defence committee with a few of the local race relations bodies. They called a meeting on the Sunday, right in the middle of a riot. The meeting broke up; there was a riot right outside the building with people throwing rocks and screaming, and everybody ran out of the building.

There was another meeting the following day. By that time Narayan had gone around the area and him and the local community relations people had elected each other to different positions on the committee.

But a wider circle of people had found out about it and had gone along. The whole thing ended in total disarray. It wasn't very difficult to see what Narayan was up to—he is after a knighthood, or something.

Tyrone: After two weeks, there still is not a working defence committee set up. We will

get something going eventually, but at the moment there is only the work in the law centre. We don't even know how many people were arrested. There is still a rumour going around that there are fifty people unaccounted for.

Mickey: In London there is a large group of black nationalists, all of whom want to play a part in this sort of thing. They were saying that it should be an all-black committee, which broke up the first public meeting because there were white people in the audience. By having an all-black committee, the nationalists thought they could keep it small and manipulate it. You get the feeling that everybody wants to be a star.

You've got to remember that everybody wants the youth to be involved, but those youth themselves don't want to be involved in any political scene. They've had no real experience of organisation. Down the Frontline, there's no real organisation, there's a 'togetherness' but it doesn't represent any political organisation.

You get various people, like *Race Today*, who think there should be an all-black defence committee, but even they can't control the youth. After they had got rid of Narayan, and Linton Kwesi Johnstone had set himself up as the chairman and had got a few of the youth around him, the meeting ended in total disorder. The kids are very, very militant—at the end of that meeting they wanted to march on the police station they would have supported anything.

Despite the fact that there is no defence committee yet, it is important that we take the initiative and go out and raise some money. You're talking about something like £100,000. No committee is going to raise that if we have a repetition of what we've seen so far.

Tyrone: There has been no back-lash from the older people. For example, we were selling *Socialist Worker* the next weekend at Brixton tube. It was a record sale, and we had no insults from black or white. The police were there, and if the people has been complaining we would have been moved on. The people did not show any anguish at all. People felt that it had to happen.

Mickey: The only place there has been any room to intervene has been at the defence committee public meetings. The white left has been kept out, and if you look at the black left, they are all living off one sort of grant or another. Their politics are geared very much in line with their wage packets.

For example, there are no links being drawn—very little mention of Deptford, no mention of South African miners being shot, no mention of the big demonstration against the Nationality Bill, you look around in general and there are no links being drawn. The black nationalists attempted to isolate Brixton: first you had to be black; then you had to come from Brixton; then you had to come from Railton Road; then you had to come from top end of Railton Road; then you had to come from the Frontline. In the end it excluded everybody apart from the kids themselves.

An all-black committee is all very well,

but it makes it difficult to mobilise a much wider section of the class. You go to any workplace around Brixton and you will meet racists. But just because there are racists there, it doesn't mean that you mustn't organise within them, it's no good saying: 'Their all a bunch of shits where I work'. That lets people talk themselves out of almost any activity. They end up involved in law courts like the Deptford Committee.

Tom: I work in a place with about 1300 people. To tell you the truth, the Monday after the riot it was a hell of a time. We had to work very hard to keep the open racialism down. We had people saying things like: 'They should all have been machine-gunned'. You had to argue with them, show them cuttings and pictures out of the papers, and prove to them that it was blacks and whites. We really had to fight against them.

Bristol one year after St. Pauls

Almost exactly a year before Brixton, the St Paul's area in Bristol was catapulted to prominence nationally and internationally. A small incident, a police raid on a café, led to seven hours during which the police were stoned, cars were burnt, shops were looted and, horror upon horrors, the police had to withdraw, leaving behind a no-go area. While everyone had expected some disturbance at some point, the intensity of the anger and the spontaneity of the local people caught them unawares.

St Paul's has also traditionally been a staging post where people have settled before moving on to other areas of Bristol. So it was here that the West Indian community started after the war, with the settlement of people who had served in the RAF. Today only 5000 of the city's 20,000 West Indians live in the area. However, the recession has put paid to any further movement away from St Paul's.

At the same time the lack of funds for housing improvement has led to it becoming what the locals call a 'shanty town', a description that fits parts of every major city in Britain. Urban deprivation and racial disadvantage exist in all these areas, and all that is needed is the spark of provocation by the police to turn any one of them into the next Bristol or Brixton.

These, then, were the reasons behind the upheaval—unemployment, bad housing and education, discrimination, continual police harassment. A year later, no solution to any of these problems has been presented by the authorities.

Immediately after the riot, MPs, councillors and social workers moved in. Draft reports were produced. It took Avon Education Authority and the Community Relations Executive six months just to thrash out a simple policy statement. A Commons committee investigating racial disadvantage visited the area to take evidence from the

We carried the arguments on the Monday and the Tuesday, and since then it has been alright. The first thing is to win the argument that it is unemployment and the rest, and not an ethnic minority.

Mickey: You can collect in the workplaces. We proved that over the Richard Campbell campaign. We went to Brixton garage, which is about seventy per cent black, and the white stewards, right wingers, told us no-one was interested. We had to go underneath them to the rank and file, who were interested.

Another place we went to was a hospital with a racist shop steward. We managed to get into the AGM, with about 100 people there. When we had finished speaking, there were people coming up and signing the petition and offering to help. We will have to do the same sort of thing around Brixton.

local people. Many refused to help because they wanted a public enquiry and felt there was little it could do. A trade union enquiry was initiated by the Bristol trades council with locals as well as some celebrities. A defence committee was also formed.

The problem was, and is, that the trade union enquiry and the defence campaign, run by a separatist who didn't want whites involved, never came together. The workers were not asked to contribute to the defence costs and a joint campaign against the police activities and Tory policies was never contemplated.

Since the initial burst of 'activity', the talk has been of forming more committees, working parties, liaison groups, for further consultations. The Tory council seems to be well pleased with its major proposal. After 'detailed considerations', part of St Barnabas primary school would be converted into a community centre.

There are now available to the people five community centres, community social workers, detached youth workers, a multi-racial education centre and a careers centre. Yet, the problems of St Paul's are too deep rooted for centres and new coats of paint on houses to solve. Some trees have been planted, landscape gardeners have been busy and some streets have been blocked off to deter kerb crawlers.

Unemployment—25 per cent last year—is now nearing 40 per cent. The Royal Docks face closure throwing 2000 dockers on the dole and affecting the livelihood of another 20,000. The shops in the area are as dilapidated as the houses, and one or two are still burnt out and boarded up. Lloyds Bank has moved across the road to occupy a disused church. There is a rumour that the scorched bank premises will now house St Paul's very own police station. Just what the community most needed.

Bippin Patel

From riot to revolution

But how do we move from riot to revolution? Bristol left very little in the way of continuing organisation in St Pauls. What guarantee is there that things will be very different after Brixton? Chris Harman looks at some of the problems to be faced in drawing the political and organisational lessons.

Britain has two images in 1981. One is the politics of irrelevance. In its most absurd form it involves the surge of support in the opinion polls for the Social Democrats, the soap suds party launched with an expensive media operation but having no policies but a regurgitation of the slogans of the Macmillan era of 25 years ago. But it is also to be found on the left. Over the last week we've seen sane socialists forgetting everything the experience of the Wilson and Callaghan governments should have taught them, believing that the second coming can be brought about by a reborn municipal socialism and lower bus fares. Those who used to storm through the streets chanting Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh now tell us that the only important issue to be argued out in unions whose members face soaring redundancies and six per cent wage limits is which former senior cabinet minister is to be deputy leader of the Labour party.

Apathy to anger

The other image is of the brick and the petrol bomb, the police boot and the baton charge, the bodies clubbed down into the gutter and the screams of defiance, the explosion of St Paul's in Bristol a year ago and Brixton in London a month ago, echoed in Finsbury Park and Wanstead and Ealing and who knows where next.

Both images convey something very real about Britain today. The politics of irrelevance follow from the way in which the majority of workers still don't know how to respond to the crisis and the government. As factory after factory has closed, as the isolated outposts of resistance have remained isolated, as even the memory of the odd victories (the docks, the mines, the firemen) is drowned in the redundancies rational responses are replaced by blind hope.

Yet Brixton shows a deeper reality. Those without hope are capable suddenly, virtually out of nowhere, of shifting from apathy to anger. And that anger can break through all the restraints that education within capitalist society is supposed to build into people's consciousness. The local streets suddenly take on the aspect of a revolutionary battleground, with barricades and burning cars and instant solidarity against the state.

However, if the riot shows, momentarily, the face of real revolution, the riot is not the same as the revolution. The power of the rioters lies in their ability to drive the police from the streets and to burn down symbols of oppression. But the streets they briefly control are streets of poverty. They burn down parts of the old society but do not have the means to build a new one. For

those means lie elsewhere, in the productive core of society, the factories and mines and docks.

That is where a riot differs from a strike. It can be much more revolutionary in its slogans. But it leaves behind much less in the way of continuing, organised opposition to the status quo.

A strike takes place at the very centre of capitalist society, where value is created and surplus value is extracted. It shows workers that they have the power, if only they act collectively, to begin to control these processes in their own interests. A riot shows people they can fight together, it teaches some of them that they need to challenge society in its entirety—but it does not provide them with the organisational means, the power, to achieve these goals.

This problem is exacerbated by another one. A community is not a class, even if most of its members might belong to the working class. Also to be found in it are the shopkeepers, the lumpen proletarians, the petty gangsters, the upwardly mobile—and those who hope to make a comfortable living as the professional mediators between the community and the wider capitalist society. The moment the riot is over these go their separate ways, each proclaiming its particular aims as the aim of the community as a whole.

That is why a succession of ghetto uprisings could sweep the US between 1964 and 1968—and, at the end, leave the black communities hardly any better organised than before, with former radical black national-

ists treading the path of black capitalism and black capitalist politics.

The road from riot to revolution requires a detour that leads through the factories.

The detour is not impossible to make. An important section of the rioters may have been unemployed. But the majority were almost certainly workers. After all, despite the very high levels of black unemployment the great majority of black people in Britain—and even the majority of black youth—have jobs. The biggest single concentration of black people in London is not to be found in Brixton, but in the Ford factory at Dagenham. And the white youth who joined in likewise have fathers and sisters and friends on assembly lines and behind office typewriters.

At the moment conditions may not be quite right for the wholesale transformation of apathy into anger in the factories. But all past experience indicates that the moment there is the slightest upturn in the economy, this can be magnified into a much greater rise in the level of class struggle. We could find ourselves faced with dozens of industrial Brixtons.

Shift the ground

To make the transition from riot to revolution, you not only have to shift the ground of battle. You also have to make a political shift. The politics of the community is no good in the factory—whether you are talking of the hardline black nationalism that can so easily get a resonance among those who face daily racial harassment, or the half-baked municipal socialism that goes begging to the government for more funds.

What is needed is thorough going revolutionary socialist politics, a stress that the factories as well as the streets have to be seized, that does not tell black people to abandon their grievances while white workers have a change of heart, but which does insist that to be effective, vanguard street fighters have to learn to talk to and lead and organise older workers as well as the youth, white workers as well as black.

The urgent task is to build organisation based on such politics, before further explosions take place. Brixton revealed—as Micky noted in the interview above—that everyone with politics is an outsider as far as the most radical youth in Brixton are concerned, whether that politics is socialist or separatist. No-one has won their confidence and been able to articulate their anger into a wider view of how to transform society. Yet unless that is done, their anger can all too easily sink back into apathy.

The key here is making contact with those individuals who are beginning to see the need for some wider perspective. That is why we in the SWP put such a stress on the regular sale of our weekly paper, *Socialist Worker* in a period like the present. If we can sell it to those looking for an alternative in the communities and in the factories, we make the connection between the two. We can channel the anger of Bristol and Brixton in the direction where it is most likely to be effective. We can unite those, black and white, who want to struggle. We can destroy the politics of irrelevance with the politics of revolt.



The Thirties and the Eighties

With the March unemployment figures at an official level of 2.5 million for the first time since the 1930s (the real total is much higher), the demand 'No Return to the Thirties' sounds a bit out of date. But what was the nature of unemployment in the thirties? Is the situation today the same? Sue Cockerill looks at the facts then and now.

Just as today the official statistics underestimated the true extent of unemployment, both because not everyone who would take a job registers (particularly married women), and because of the various schemes for temporary 'work' for school-leavers, the unemployment figures in the thirties underestimated the real numbers by half a million or more.

Total figures for unemployment, adjusted to make them more accurate, are available. Using these figures, unemployment reached a peak of 3.4 million in 1932, but in only two years between 1922 and 1938 did it drop below 1.5 million, and then only slightly. And this was at a time when the total workforce was smaller than today. In every one of these years, at least one in ten people of working age was jobless. In seven of the years, three out of every twenty, and in the worst years, one in five.

Unemployment had reached near these levels before, in the troughs of periodic slumps, but never for such long periods of time. For a whole generation, mass unemployment was the normal state of affairs. Among the many books which describe more graphically than any figures what life was like in the worst hit areas in the thirties is George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*. For example the desperate search for scraps of coal among the pit waste in Wigan by unemployed people:

'That scene stays in my mind as one of my pictures of Lancashire: the dumpy, shawled women, with their sacking aprons and heavy black clogs, kneeling in the cindery mud and the bitter wind, searching eagerly for tiny chips of coal. In winter they are desperate for fuel; it is more important almost than food. Meanwhile all round, as far as the eye can see, are the slag heaps and hoisting gear of the collieries, and not one of those collieries can sell all the coal it is capable of producing.'

He writes also about the savage enforcement of the Means Test:

'Old people, sometimes bedridden, are driven out of their homes by it. An old age pensioner, if a widower, would normally live with one or other of his children. Under the Means Test, however, he counts as a 'lodger' and if he stays, his children's dole will be docked. So, perhaps at seventy or seventy-five, he has to turn out into lodgings, handing his pension over to the lodging house keeper and existing on the verge of starvation.'

The total figures for unemployment show only part of the story. Particular regions and industries were catastrophically affected. In 1934, 37% of the labour force in Glamorgan, 75% in Brynmawr, 70% in Merthyr, were out of work. After Palmers shipyard in Jarrow closed in 1933, eight out of ten workers in Jarrow were unemployed. Even after the slight recovery of the late thirties began, areas like South Wales, Central Scotland, Northern Ireland, and parts of the North-East and Lancashire remained devastated by unemployment.

Unemployment by industry January 1981

Steel	22.4%
Textiles	14.8
Clothing & footwear	14.0
Bricks, pottery, glass & cement	10.7
Motor vehicles	10.8
Food, drink & tobacco	10.4
Mechanical engineering	10.2
Shipbuilding	10.2

The worst hit industry was shipbuilding and repairing, where at the depth of the slump (1932), 62% of the workforce was jobless. Forty-eight per cent of steel and ironworkers were unemployed, and 35% of coalminers. About a third of the labour force in textiles, building and the docks were also without work.

The problem of understatement of female unemployment was probably even worse than it is now: women represented 29% of the economically active population, but only 17% of the recorded unemployed in 1935.

It took the outbreak of war to end mass unemployment: by 1940, only 700,000 people were jobless, and by 1944, 70,000. Many people believed that with the end of the war, it would return. Instead came the long boom, fed by continuing massive arms expenditure. Now the boom is over, mass unemployment has re-emerged.

Devastation

In many ways, the pattern of unemployment hasn't changed: looking at the regional figures for February 1981, 7% of the workforce is unemployed in the South East, as compared with 13.6% in the North, 13.5% in Wales, 12.7% in Scotland, and 17.3% in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland hasn't in fact had a rate of unemployment below 6% during the whole post-war period).

An important exception to the pattern is the West Midlands, which has normally had an unemployment rate below the national average, but now has a percentage rate of 11.7 compared to the UK average of 10.2.

Even within regions, there are wide disparities: Cardiff has an unemployment rate of 11.7%, while it is 17.9% in Ebbw Vale. In Scotland, Edinburgh is 8.7%, North Lanarkshire 18.3% and Irvine 21.1%. It is hardly surprising that Corby has a rate of 21.5%, while Northamptonshire as a whole has a rate of 10.5%. Liverpool has 16.2% unemployed and within particular areas of the city, worse than that. Even in the relatively unaffected South East, there are pockets of very high unemployment in the inner city areas of London, for example, and also in places like Chatham (11.2%) and several coastal towns. Although none of these figures approaches those quoted earlier for South Wales and the North East in the thirties, (excepting areas of Northern Ireland) they represent whole communities devastated in the same ways.

Scrap heap

The worst-hit single industry is construction, with 24.5% out of work. 700,000 people were out of work in manufacturing in February, or 9.6%. Production industries account for half those out of work, manufacturing for a little under a third. But the service sector has also been hit: nearly 600,000 people were unemployed in the distributive trades, banking and other services, not including 100,000 in national and local government, and another 100,000 in transport and communication in February.

In terms of age, 38% of the unemployed are under 24, 18.3% under 19. 32% of male school-leavers and 30% of female were out of work in 1980. The government has been keeping some kids off the register by a number of different methods like YOP and Work Experience which often mean cheap labour for employers and six weeks off the dole for kids, who are then thrown back on the scrap heap and another batch put on the scheme to keep the figures down. In the second quarter of 1980, 47,000 school-leavers were on some kind of Manpower Services scheme. There are other job assistance programmes, short-time working subsidies and so on, which keep about 345,000 people off the register in total.

Women

Women now account for about 30% of the total unemployed and for 22% of those unemployed for six months or more. The shift in employment during the past decade to the service sector was matched by an increasing number of women entering the workforce. The female workforce increased by a million in the 70s, or about the same amount as the working population as a whole. The number of women actually employed rose by about a million, while the total numbers in employment remained constant. The rising number of women among the unemployed reflects the increased importance of women in the workforce, but it is difficult to measure how unemployment is affecting women because of the fact that married women often don't register as unemployed, on losing their jobs. Nor can

the figures measure those who would work if there were jobs available, but see no point in registering if they are not entitled to benefit. The rate of increase of female unemployment has been faster in the last year than male, but the recorded rate of unemployment for men remains much higher: 12.1% as against 7.0% for women.

Heartlands

There is no doubt that the level of benefits for unemployed people today has meant that the situation is not comparable with what people suffered in the thirties. But the government's effective cuts in benefit in the last budget, the phasing out of Earnings Related Supplement, and the deliberate raising of fuel prices, together with the fact that a growing number of people have been unemployed for 6 months or more (38% of the total) will be hitting the living standards of the unemployed hard. Another difference between the situation today and the thirties is that prices fell during the thirties, whereas they have been and still are rising today.

The similarities with the thirties are there clearly: in terms of the fact that the recession has again hit the traditional sectors of industry hardest, mainly in the regions which were affected before. Steel, textiles, shipbuilding—all in the traditional heartlands of industry. But not only those industries. In the thirties, jobs were created in motors and light engineering in the Midlands and South while they were being destroyed in the heavy industry of the North. This time round these industries have been heavily hit, as have the so-called 'growth' sectors like chemicals and computers. Areas like the Midlands and the South East have not escaped.

No vacancies

Another major difference is the speed with which unemployment has risen: by 65% in the last year, compared to the steadier rise during the twenties and thirties. Partly because of this, and partly because of the level of benefits, the effect on both the unemployed and the employed has been different, at least so far. There is not yet the despair which comes from the belief that you are facing literally a lifetime on the dole; nor is there quite the feeling among the employed that they are on the edge of the abyss. Mass unemployment has not succeeded in stifling all fight among the employed.

But although unemployment has risen sharply, there are no signs that it will fall sharply. Even though the recession is said to have 'bottomed out', all forecasters agree that the upturn will have little impact on unemployment levels, and that unemployment will rise still more by 1985. The two most recent forecasts by the ITEM group and the Cambridge Economic Policy Group forecast adult unemployment of 3.5 and 3.6 million by 1983, and Cambridge forecast 4.3 million by 1985. (*Guardian* 27.4.81). The *Economist Intelligence Unit* recently produced a report which suggested that mass unemployment would now be a permanent feature not just of the British economy, but of all the major industrialised world. The latest figures bear out this by showing the lowest level of vacancies since the figures were first compiled twenty years ago.



Photo: John Sturrock



Photo: John Sturrock

'The only people that can talk about a future for mankind are marxists and we shouldn't be ashamed to say so'

As the NW TUC's People's March got under way, Mike Gonzales, went to talk to Harry McShane for *Socialist Review*. Harry represents a link with a chapter of working class history that is all too relevant for socialists today. For he was a central figure in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the mass organisation of the unemployed that campaigned throughout the inter-war period. The lessons of that movement must be absorbed today, for in its successes and failures it represents the highest experience of self-organisation of the unemployed that Britain has ever seen.

Harry McShane is 90 years old this month. His life is an inspiring example to us all—'of a rank and file leader who never left the rank and file'. A leading member of the Communist Party for thirty years, he left at the age of sixty in order to remain faithful to the ideas of revolutionary Marxism. He is still very active, fighting for the unity of unemployed and employed workers and for a socialist society. Harry began by describing the NUWM campaign.

'The first unemployed march was in 1922. It was a ragged thing, and I couldn't be on it; I was in jail at the time. The 1930 march wasn't a lot better, but after that the marches were very good. In 1932 we got a tremendous response; there were three marches in the thirties, and they were outstanding. The discipline was excellent.

We got a form of democracy I've never seen before in the movement. We never took a decision without consulting all the marchers. We sometimes expelled a marcher, but that was always taken to a full meeting. And if there were any obstacles on the road—with the police or anything like that—we would call a meeting of everybody and discuss the tactics. In the end, the police always seemed to retreat.

We fed ourselves along the road, too, which the people won't have to do this time. We took collections in every town. We didn't collect in the factories then, but we took street collections, and held meetings at night wherever we stopped. But I don't think we went through hardship. As a matter of fact, I think the marchers were happier and better fed than they were at home.

The TUC, the trades councils—none of them would touch us until 1936. As a matter of fact, before 1936 I can remember that Mary Sutherland used to go ahead of us telling the Labour Party not to support us because the march was organised by communists. But we got working class support, and we never wanted for anything.

After 1936, we did get Labour Party support, when Attlee spoke at the Hyde Park rally. At that time the Jarrow march was on, and we met and exchanged speakers with them. And when we got to London, they had formed a march council that included people like Aneurin Bevan and Jennie Lee.

How does the experience of the twenties and thirties bear upon the present People's March? We asked Harry what he thought about the current march's emphasis on the churches.

We never had anything to do with religion at that time. What we did do was to take the unemployed round the churches on a Sunday morning, to demonstrate what the situa-

tion was. But we never went *into* the churches. On weekday evenings we would go round the hotels, so that people could see how bad the situation really was.

There were one or two ministers here and there who identified with the movement. Most of them were just sentimental socialists. Here in Scotland there was an Englishman who worked in Scotland—Tom Pickering. He came on one of the marches, but he didn't behave like a clergyman; in fact he never referred to the Church. He was the one who said to me one day, as we were leaving Preston, that he hoped, when he got to heaven, that the front row would be occupied by the comrades from the Communist International. Pickering had actually fought with the unemployed back in 1908, and got his head battered for it.

And what did he think of the overall orientation of the march, a 'People's' March rather than a march of unemployed workers?

Well, that's typical of the TUC isn't it. Tom Mann used to poke fun at the TUC then, and it was nowhere near as bad as it is now; if Mann were alive now, he'd have something to talk about. This man Murray's got no socialist principles at all, and the General Council's terrible.

Not only did the TUC oppose us, but they tried to form a separate unemployed organisation, which is what they're doing now. They tried to form them through the trades councils, but they never materialised.

What's happening now is that the Labour Party are trying to forestall us. They are afraid of any big movement. I think, for instance, that the Right to Work Campaign should have formed a national organisation. I'm not complaining about what's been done—and the chance will come again afterwards. Because these folk—the TUC and all the rest—have no staying power, they haven't the guts to face up to opposing the authorities. And I think that in the future the Right to Work will have tremendous success. They have to keep going, because they will be the only consistent people. The TUC and the Labour Party will have their demonstration, and then it will fizzle out.



They don't have the staying power or the people to keep it afloat—too many of them are concerned with getting themselves into parliament. So the Right to Work mustn't slow down.

We must support the march of course. Any division in the struggle against Thatcher would be a bad thing. You have to fight on a national level, and you have to fight with all the workers, regardless of whether they are members of the Labour Party or not. But that's why we need the Right to Work. Because I don't think this People's March is much more than an expression of religious sympathy for the unemployed.

Last night, speaking on television, Michael Foot was talking about unemployment, that it would be with us for a long time to come. For the first time, he was admitting that unemployment is permanent under capitalism. He had no solution to offer. And we can't raise people's hopes—we have to make propaganda and say clearly that there can be no solution to the problem of unemployment under capitalism. We have to argue that alongside the fight to improve the conditions of the unemployed, we must fight all the time to change the system. That's the only solution.

I get annoyed sometimes, you know, because we forget how strong we are. Theoretically, we are the strongest people there are. We should be challenging every other school of thought to come and put their cards on the table and debate with us. Because the only people that can talk about a future for mankind are the Marxists—and we shouldn't be ashamed to say so.

The labour movement is bigger than the Labour Party. For us the issue is working class unity. We never put up any barriers on our marches, and we must not now. Of course we must try to get people to join the union, to play their part. But it is workers involved in struggle that we want. At the moment there is demoralisation, and some working people want to buy their own way out for a few pounds. In that situation, principles go by the board. But we've got that nucleus of Marxists, and if they're doing their job we have nothing to fear. I think we can win.

Lessons from Naples

Naples in the south of Italy has been called the Calcutta of Europe — so bad are the conditions of life in the city. Chief among the social deprivations that it suffers is unemployment. Official figures record some 200,000 unemployed, 20% of the working population. But this figure is almost certainly a great under-estimation. There is no comprehensive system of social security in Italy and the lack of prospects for getting a job mean that there is little incentive to register as unemployed. Yet the city was the focus of probably the biggest movement of the unemployed in Western Europe. It threw up tactics, lessons and above all inspirations which can be useful in the struggle in Britain today. Jack Fuller looks at them.

The start of the movement was inauspicious. In the summer of 1973 there was an outbreak of cholera in the city. Sales of fish were suspended and thousands of self-employed workers around the industry were thrown into unemployment. Social tension rose throughout the following year and in 1974 the first organised committees of the unemployed began to appear.

At first, they were small and often short-lived, based on a small neighbourhood. Their immediate problem was to root themselves among the unemployed as organisations that could fight for their own interests. It demanded continuous day-to-day activity and highly imaginative tactics. One of the favourites was to block both the railroads and the motorways. By the end of 1975, 'occupations' of up to 500 people would take over stations or railway tracks in order to put across their demands. Of course, such tactics required the most detailed planning—without it, it was a lethal activity.

The movement really took off when a pensioner was killed by a police jeep on one of the innumerable street demonstrations of a group of unemployed. It made national headlines and highlighted not only unemployment but also the unemployed as a movement. The local committees which had painstakingly built themselves up from a few dozen militants to a couple of hundred found themselves swamped with new members.

Tactics of success

At its height, the movement had some 15,000 members organised in 20 territorial committees in Naples and with a city-wide leadership made up of a delegate from each committee. Its demonstrations attracted up to 10,000 marchers. But its success had been laid down by a year's hard work: contacting both employed and unemployed, starting off with small demonstrations and 'stunts' and only afterwards breaking through onto a mass level.

The obvious demand of the unemployed was for jobs, but jobs which were both secure, paid at union rates and socially useful. This demand meant that they could link up with apprentices and trade unionists rather than appear in opposition to them. To the government's statement that there were no useful jobs to do given the inflated nature of the state bureaucracy and the low profitability in the area, the unemployed organised themselves to show there were

jobs. They invaded hospitals, and cleaned up a ward and then photographed the resulting piles of dirt.

Such tactics were so successful that the government was forced to meet their representatives and promise 10,000 new jobs in the space of six months. Those jobs, the unemployed demanded, were to be allocated by the committees themselves in order to counter any possibility of corruption. Only those who fought for a job were to be given work, the committees decided.

The crucial problem that faced the unemployed was their relationship with the unions. Some, who had never had a job argued that the unions had never taken up their fight and were therefore to be rejected. But it was essential that the linkup was made

Debate: are import controls the answer?

One of the events which aroused most interest at this year's Socialist Workers Party rally at Skegness was a debate on import controls as the answer to unemployment. The main speakers were John Deason of the Right to Work Campaign and Mike Griffin, lodge secretary of Penrhioceiber pit in South Wales. Here we print edited versions of their introductory statements. We would like to hear the comments of readers of different political viewpoints on them.

John Deason

Five or six years ago, before the crisis was as deep as it is at present, if you asked, most people in the SWP thought of import controls, as some sort of debate we had with members of the Communist Party which wasn't really that central. Now the clamour for import controls is no longer just a debate within some sections of the left, but is much broader, is seen as some sort of solution, or part of some sort of solution, to the crisis. It isn't just the Benn wing of the Labour Party, or the Communist Party, or the TUC's Economic strategy. Their other bedfellows are now the CBI and whole sections of the Tory Party. Margaret Thatcher herself is involved in arranging import controls of textiles, and it is also one of the platforms that Reagan fought the last election on in America. So it isn't just a debate in the left.

if the unemployed were to break out of their isolation. The organised unemployed fought and won union membership and rights, as a special section of the unions. In this way they avoided being split along craft lines and remained united as unemployed workers. Through this link with the unions they won the right to participate in the meetings of the factory councils—the shop stewards committees. They were to play a very important role in certain struggles—notably the picketing of work-places where the bosses wanted to impose overtime on the workers.

Self-organisation

The unemployed movement still continues today. In January this year, 6000 unemployed from Naples marched in Rome. But it is now far weaker than it was.

The essential reason for this has been the decline, not so much in the level, but in the self-confidence of the employed workers' struggles over the last five years. There has been a turn to much more sectional struggles, and as a result the unemployed movement has become increasingly isolated from the rest of the working class.

The experience from Italy shows the possibility of self-organisation among the unemployed but also highlights its dependence, in the long run, upon the employed workers' movement. At the same time, the existence of a strong and militant unemployed movement can be a major ally in the working class struggle within the factories.

international process. Who can say whether a Ford car in Dagenham is a British car or German or Belgian?

Now such chauvinism is a danger, and I'm not exaggerating it. An example is a leaflet that was given out in South Wales on the question of pit closures by the Communist Party. The concluding slogans on the leaflet are 'No more cuts and closures' and 'We'll stop the Tory wreckers before they destroy our country'. That really is the danger that we're very sensitive to - this talk of 'our country'. It's an abdication, in our opinion, of any form of internationalism.

The second point is that the very raising of the demand for import controls diverts workers away from the need to take action. It is calling for another agency to defend your jobs, for some action in parliament, for some pressure on parliament, for the TUC to negotiate. If you take the example of the T&GWU, which has been one of the most active unions involved in campaigning for import controls the whole strategy is for joint union/management approaches to government. Again, we've had the spectacle of Duffy and Edwards in Leyland going hand in hand demanding import controls.

Logic

The very logic of the demand for import controls is not to take any action, but to build up a lobby with the management. And that's the basis for our opposition to it. But let's look a bit further to see, even if we did have import controls, would they work in any case?

As a matter of fact we don't even have to guess what would be the result. There are import controls in operation at the moment. The key example is, of course, in the textile industry where there are extensive controls. The textile industry has perhaps been hit harder by redundancies than any other industry, and those import controls have really not had any effect in preventing those redundancies.

But even worse, it is an example of all the things that we say are wrong about import controls. Once you slap import controls on someone, they retaliate, and here the key example is Indonesia where Britain slapped on import controls, £10m worth, and the Indonesian government retaliated by cancelling £150m worth of British exports which included a British Steel constructed bridge, 60 Leyland buses and a Hawker Siddely private plane. In other words, far from saving jobs, it hit jobs in other areas.

The case of textiles shows something else as well. As a direct result of import controls being put on the price of jeans went on up average £2 within a month. Import controls mean that you stop cheaper products coming into the country, therefore the prices escalate and puts up inflation. To take the case

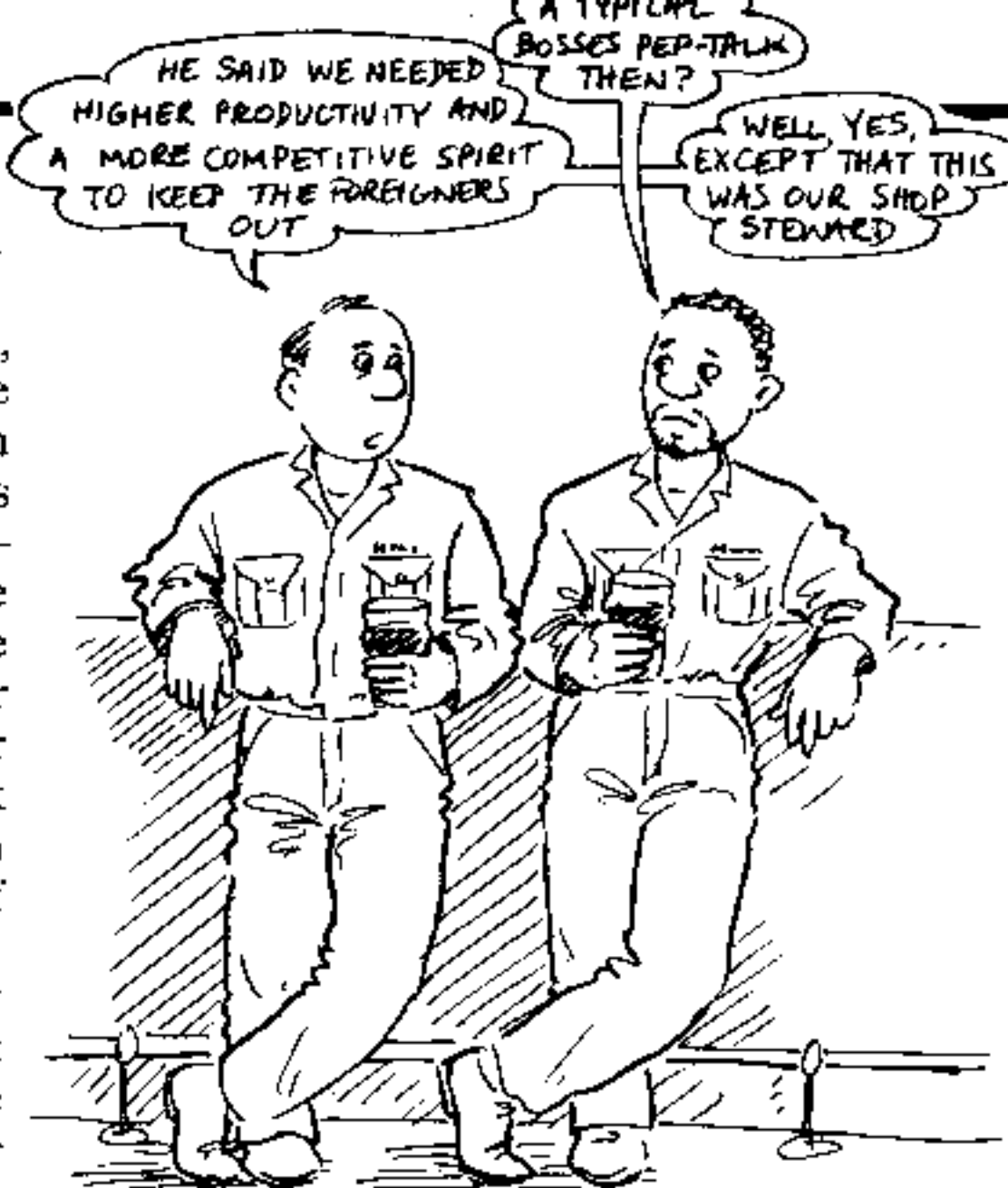


Illustration Sophie

of Lee Jeans, we have to ask why it is the company want to close down that factory. The reason is that there's a fall in demand, people can't afford to buy so many jeans. So they start shutting up shop. And the situation that the girls are so correctly fighting now is a direct result of import controls. Or take the example of shoes. It always makes me laugh when I hear people say that we're being flooded out with cheap Eastern European shoes. "If only people would buy British shoes!" If you're on the dole or a poorly paid worker, you don't have any choice between British shoes for £18 and East. European shoes for £9; the only choice is between the Eastern European shoes or no shoes.

When we look at where import controls are applied, even if it could be argued they have some immediate palliative effect in one industry, one sector or one area, the overall effect is very dangerous indeed.

Peripheral

The other thing you have to ask is, is it true that cheap imports are really the cause of unemployment? And again I can quote a government survey of 24 industries in Britain most affected by imports. The companies were asked what were the reasons for the redundancies they were instituting. Out of 100, 11 of them replied that the reason for redundancies were imports from the 3rd World, 22 replied that it was because of imports from other industrialised countries. But much more revealing was that 5 said it was because of losses inside the UK home market, 12 through decline in demand, and 50, 50%, through rationalisation. That, as anyone up against redundancy knows, is the main driving force - the fight for higher profits, higher productivity, rationalisation. And the issue of imports is largely peripheral.

Look to a specific example in South Wales of the fall in demand for coal from the BSC. You can either say that it's due to the cheap imports, or you can look to what the real figures are

all about. From 1979 to 1980, in a year and a half, coal imports rose from 2.3m tons to 8m tons. Now that has some effect, but the major reason was the falling demand from the British Steel Corporation who were sacking steelworkers, closing steel mills: the overall usage of coal by the BSC fell in that period from 21m tons to 15m tons.

We have to recognise that even if import controls could work, it's not true that cheap imports are the *main* cause of unemployment.

The biggest stumbling block about the whole argument for import controls is the notion that you can dabble within the system as it is and get some immediate and radical change - the argument that Benn and people like Benn are most associated with. What destroys the case are the multinational corporations. They are now so powerful that if import controls were slapped on it, would be just another thing they could use and manipulate when deciding which countries to invest in. And I'm not exaggerating.

Tinkering

It is now calculated that a third of all world trade is internal to the multinationals, and it's just dreaming to think that tinkering around with legislation will have any effect on their power.

We have to recognise the driving force behind the world crisis - falling profit rates. If you can make more money out of speculation than out of producing steel, running power stations, making motor cars, that's the way you do it. Unless you recognise that, you fall into the trap of looking for short-term piecemeal solutions. And I would argue that that's all import controls represent.

We argue, and I know Mike would agree, the key way of resisting redundancies is the activity of workers themselves. The miners were a classic example of it. The fight of the miners has always been with the government over the question of state subsidies, even back before 1926. I think we can all agree the key thing is the need for strikes, factory occupations, activity.

I think that where Mike gets drawn into the arguments for import controls is over tactics. In struggle it is completely legitimate to use any tactic whatsoever to disrupt the productive process to force concessions out of either the employer or the state. And I would make a very sharp distinction between, say, if Linwood had gone into occupation and had sent pickets round the docks to stop the movement of Peugeot cars, and the situation where people demand controls from the Tory Government in collusion with Giscard d'Estaing in France. That's to believe that Japanese workers interests are really with their Japanese bosses, Linwood workers with their French bosses.

Mike Griffin

The question of the debate is whether import controls should be supported. And the answer I'm giving, straight-away, is that it's to be looked at in terms of working class experience. And the only way to judge a particular case of import controls is the experience of the workers in that particular trade and to act accordingly. The answer that I'm giving is that you can support import controls in relation to the work experience of the workers in that industry.

In 1979, in the area where I live, the Cynon valley of South Wales, they were closing a pit called Deep Duffryn, and we decided to set up a Campaign to oppose that closure. A lot of tactics were used in that campaign from public meetings to petitions, to lobbies, to pickets, to strikes against the closure of a particular colliery.

Now, in the course of that campaign we went into a bit of research. They've got what's called an Intelligence Unit in the local county council, a Labour Council, and we thought we'd use that and let them get out some figures on what coal had been imported into South Wales in the previous year. We were amazed when we came out with the figures that there was a million tons of coal had been imported into South Wales in the previous year, and the countries of origin were various -- South Africa was one, and to think that coal from South Africa was being imported into South Wales was really too much.

Doctrinaire

At the same time that this million tons of coal was being imported, we had on the floor in the Cynon valley a million tons of coal, brought over from Taff Merthyr and other collieries in the local valleys. So, we went to conferences, we passed resolutions calling for a stop to the import of coal, and we went picketing.

The question of import controls is rather in the air, theoretical, doctrinaire, in fact. If you touch anything to do with internationalism, in particular with the Socialist Workers Party, immediately there's a reaction. Instead of the issue being judged on its merits, there's an immediate prejudice against the situation.

Now we went picketing down the docks in December '79. We picketed the docks for six weeks, down there at 5 o'clock on the side talking to the dockers and explaining the difficulties of the miners in their local communities on the basis that the coal had been put on the floor, there were no markets for the coal, and here was coal coming over the sea. As a result of it, the dockers and the tug-boat men agreed with us, and as long as we maintained a picket line there, they would neither

bring a ship into the dock side, or if there was any on the dock side the dockers wouldn't unload it.

To me that's working class solidarity and what I mean by working class experience.

I've looked into a lot of pamphlets and books, written by Duncan Hallas. They were proceeding from a theory and then trying to relate that to an actual circumstance. That's not on. As far as the situation in South Wales goes, from that particular campaign, from that picketing of the docks, it led us to a lot of discussion with steelworkers, dockers, railwaymen, and ourselves, the miners, and in addition to the resolutions being passed, we were trying to analyse such crazy situations as coal being brought 12,000 miles across the sea and allegedly being cheaper to put into Port Talbot steelworks than coal produced ten miles up the road.

Non-unionists

In fact, our boys were in the United States in 1979. I've got a little booklet here, *South Wales Miners in America, Report of the first Rank and File British Miners Delegation visit to the United States Coalfields, May 1979*. The Maeroy Lodge went out there, rank and file, and met the miners. What they found was that the major problem in the United States was imports. While we were having American coal exported to us, they were having the problem of Polish coal, in one instance, being sent to Germany, within the Common Market, having a subsidy attached to it, being sent out on a ship to America, being unloaded for coking purposes in America, and the same boat going to another dock and picking up 18,000 tons of coal to bring to Newport. The whole crazy situation became exposed in these discussions.

One point I want to bring up again is that it's privately owned, the US coalfields, and half of the miners are not in a trade union. Now we talk about international solidarity. International solidarity with whom? Non-unionists? Shall we all be scabs together? And blacklegs? Is this what we mean by international solidarity? It's not what I mean by solidarity. I don't accept solidarity with non-unionists whatever they are, whether they're in Taiwan, America or South Wales. The issue of a union has got to be fought, it's no good pretending we've got these links of solidarity.

What I'm saying is that if we hadn't stopped the importation of coal in that particular period, our miners would be out of work. And the same issue is there at the present moment. The campaign over Deep Duffryn, and the discussions we had with other workers led to the strike we had in February this year. We went for it, we came out first, and went all over the country, to Yorkshire and different places that were a bit behind coming out with us, and this was appreciated by the movement.

One of the things we were striking against was imported coal. We've got the situation in Port Talbot at the present moment where the contract for 300,000 tons of United States coal has come to an end, and there's 300,000 tons from the Welsh pits going in there, and it's going to be subsidised by the government as part of the demand that we made.

I am not concerned about the theory. I am concerned that we won't have one man or woman as an addition to the unemployment figures for the sake of a theory, because the indignity to that family is tremendous. And that's the reality of it. I'm not interested in the general theory whatsoever. It's the working class experience that must be judged in every instance, and if the instance says that by demanding control on imports to save a job, well, save that job, we'll come to the other question later.

If anybody's going to tip over this society, it's going to be the miners. Have no illusions about that, because when the time for the barricades does come, the first ones to the barricades will be the miners. And the theory will again be forgotten in the direct action. Direct action is what we believe in. I'm unhappy with the inferences that are thrown out all the time when you try to argue a detailed case of job saving as we have done -- and we have saved jobs, there would be thousands of miners on the dole at the present time in South Wales, if we hadn't conducted that strike in February. One of the basic elements in that strike was to stop the importation of coal. And if it's good enough for the miners . . . I get the idea coming over that there's a special case for the miners, but if it's good enough for the miners, it's good enough to be examined in a work experience situation in other industries.

Tactic

We are not recommending import controls as the answer to society's problems. No way, neither are we advocating nationalisation as the to society's problems -- we know from experience that nationalisation has been a hollow sham in many respects, a milk cow for private industry. But because we know that nationalisation hasn't been a success, it doesn't mean we won't advocate nationalisation. Because we will advocate it: it is necessary to change its style, and content. And it's the same with import controls -- it's a tactic, and it depends on the circumstances. There's no general answer. It is fundamental really in my discussions with members of the Socialist Workers Party, whom I admire very much. I feel that in this trend of argument about import controls, there lies a thread of disagreement which I have when we discuss problems, and the thread is that there appears a desire for the generality to overcome the specific, that the theory, doctrine is what matters and the circumstance of the particular occurrence is completely different.

Shirley, Shirley, quite contrary how will your garden grow?

The 'old politics' are dead, according to Shirley Williams. Meanwhile the new Social Democratic Party have attracted 40,000 members in less than six weeks. Paul Foot explores their politics and their appeal.

No matter how often we blink our eyes in disbelief, the ridiculous reality is still there. A gang of four former Labour cabinet ministers, each one of them with deeply reactionary records both in government and outside, have broken from the Labour Party to present themselves as 'a new force' in British politics.

Without spelling out a single policy, they have attracted 40,000 dues-paying members, a seventh of the total Labour Party membership. The public opinion polls put this party without a policy *ahead of all others* and come to the preposterous conclusion that if there were a general election tomorrow the new 'social democratic party' would be able to form a government!

The mass appeal of this new party is not, I think, a mirage. It is here with us to stay for some time yet. This has nothing to do with the SDP's policies, for it has none. As Dr David Owen blurted out to a questioner on the day of the SDP's birth: 'Look, love, if you want a manifesto, go and join one of the other parties'.

No. The appeal is based, first, and most solidly, on *freshness*. The 'old politics', Shirley Williams ceaselessly tells us in her book, *Politics is for People*, are dead. By 'old politics' she means in particular the politics of Labour.

In this, she is on strong ground. Three bouts of post-war Labour governments, two of them with huge majorities, (and two of them with Shirley Williams and Roy Jenkins as senior ministers) are remembered without a trace of nostalgia. Who wants to go back to Wilson or Callaghan? They were backward, stale administrations whose few achievements in the field of social reform in the first blush of office were largely rubbed out by the slide into conformity.

Yet there is another side to the new party's appeal which appears to contradict this freshness. It is that the new party appears 'safe'. It will not do anything drastic or revolutionary. It will not upset the balance of the 'market' or 'the mixed economy', about both of which Shirley Williams writes almost lyrically.

'The market' she tells us (p46) 'matches demand and supply better than the planners do. It responds more easily to changing fashions and needs. It is rather good at getting rid of unsuccessful enterprises..'

There will be no nationalising or intervening from her, we can be sure!

The limits for all Shirley Williams' 'new, radical policies' are set by the forecasts of economists and the ebb and flow of booms and the slumps. In Chapter 4, *How the World Has Changed*, she abandons any responsibility for changing the rules which have brought about the recession. The 'low or negative growth rate' is there. It is inevitable. Anything that Shirley Williams can do must be within those boundaries.

She toys for a moment with the possibility that the priorities of modern capitalism could be altered by tough economic controls. 'The only initiative that could radically alter the world's economic prospects' she tells us (p65), 'would be the recycling of the oil exporters' surpluses as well as some of the currency reserves of the industrial countries, in effect the Brandt Commis-

sion's proposals in their most radical form'.

Yes, in its most radical moments, the Brandt Commission, which included such well-known revolutionary figures as Edward Heath, former Tory prime minister, and Willy Brandt, former German chancellor, argued that the only way to deal with the huge surpluses (OK word for profits) of the oil companies and the sheikdoms had amassed from the rise in oil prices was to 'recycle' (OK word for 'direct or 'force') them to where they are really needed, to the starving millions for example.

What does Mrs Williams think of this policy?

'Simply to state such proposals' she goes on, 'is to emphasise how improbable their adoption is, despite growing public understanding and support'.

It would be *nice*, wouldn't it, if we could get control of the economic resources and plan them so that the needy benefit and the rich were squeezed a little?

But that is 'improbable' because it means mucking about with the market, and the profits which are its main-spring. So we have to accept a shrinking capitalism, the end of economic growth, huge oil profits, starving millions—we have to accept all these things and find political solutions in spite of them. From Chapter 4 onwards, these matters are referred to constantly as 'external circumstances outlined in Chapter 4' (p171) or 'the changes described in Chapter 4' (p178).

What follows in terms of practical 'radical' politics, not surprisingly, is thin, if not pathetic. The only coherent philosophy is: 'small is beautiful'.

Shirley Williams argues that industry and trade unions have become obsessed by size, and that smaller units and smaller businesses might prove more successful. She has discovered that there have been more jobs created in America in small business than in large business, and concludes that it's the job of a new radical government to give more help and encouragement to small businesses. The type of help and encouragement she advocates is rather similar to the proposals in Sir Geoffrey Howe's last ('radical?' 'reforming?' 'new?') budget, which scooped Mrs Williams' book by a few weeks.

Sometimes, the proposals she advocates for smaller units are plain reactionary. For instance, she advocates greater use of labour rather than machines, *in itself*, quite regardless of the type of work which is to be done.

She completely forsakes the traditional socialist attitude that, for the vast majority of work, which is dreary, soul-destroying work, machines which do the job are in themselves a blessing and are only a curse when they are used for profit to create unemployment and poverty. Control of the machines by people, instead of the other way round as demanded by capitalism, could result in a better life for everyone. Instead, Shirley Williams seriously proposes scrapping machines in favour of masses of people. And because she has also found out that smaller businesses use more labour per machine than do large businesses (usually because small businesses are less efficient, by the way, not more so) she concludes (again) that small are better than big.



Illustration. Gill Brownbill

This is the *main philosophical conclusion* of her book. And of course it is quite fatuous. It is not the size of the enterprise which determines whether or not it is efficient or even quite pleasant to work for. It is its ownership, its dynamic, its organisation, its purpose. About all these things Shirley Williams has nothing to say, save to echo the conventional Liberal Party call for 'more participation' and 'more democracy'.

She lumps industry and finance, where no one in control is ever elected, together with the trade unions, whose control is based on election and choice, however slack and infrequent the elections are. She is for workers and management sharing in the control of their firms, and she seems to favour the basic proposals of the Bullock Report for

power-sharing. Yet to the question: how to get even that degree of power-sharing in the teeth of the most hysterical and bitter opposition from the unelected and irresponsible employers? —she has no reply whatever. 'Governments, corporate powers of industry and trade unions' she argues simply 'should devolve some of their power downwards.' (*my italics*).

No doubt they *should*. But *what if they don't*? No reply. Once again, any question which might lead to confrontation is quickly side-stepped.

The obsession with 'safety' dogs all Shirley Williams' book, which is, by the way, a series of essays. Most of the essays were written at different times either for American university students or for the shadowy

Policy Studies Institute which stepped in fast to sponsor Shirley Williams when she lost her seat in the 1979 general election.

Her specific proposals are intended to span the gap between what Dr Owen has called the 'caring tradition' of the Labour Party, and the 'market tradition' of the Conservative Party. The 'caring' side includes a commitment to a wealth tax (which is more than Shirley Williams and the last Labour government could manage in five years); some very useful ideas about employing masses of people to improve older housing; and even a clear statement against all fee-paying education (which prospered so hugely during the last Labour government and Shirley Williams' three years as education minister).

To balance the 'caring', there is the usual call to sacrifice. She warns:

'The industrial countries have been *wildly profligate* in the booming post-war decades. Their governments and their peoples have enjoyed a *material spree* never paralleled before. Now, as the late Anthony Crosland said to Britain's local authorities in 1977, [well, actually, he was dead in 1977, but Shirley Williams is as untidy with her facts as she is with her philosophy] the party is over.'

There we have it. Shirley Williams and her new party represent radicalism and newness on the one hand, safety and caution on the other; the 'caring' of the Labour Party and the spirit of sacrifice usually associated with the Tories.

The appeal is to all decent people who are fed up with the stick-in-the-mud approach of former Labour governments, who dislike the Thatcher Government's meanness and class loyalty, but who are also nervous of anything drastic or immediate by way of reform. This, in the period of industrial quiescence in which we now live, is a very powerful appeal indeed.

It is easy enough to scoff at the Gang of Four themselves, their own political heritage, their middle class origins, their careerism and their cant. But the appeal remains, and will not be shifted by ridicule.

What can shift it is the argument which mounts up relentlessly against the likelihood of the SDP delivering even the most minor reforms. It is not just that their radicalism conflicts with their safeness; nor that their caring conflicts with their dedication to market forces. It is that such is the nature of the society we live in that when the two sets of opposites conflict, the former always loses; the latter always win.

Shirley Williams knows all about the inherent inequalities in our society. She cites the figures, and she wants them changed. There is at least one reference in her book to the need for equality.

But the figures of inequality describe more than something which is just 'wrong'. They describe a power structure, in which a class of people control society's wealth and therefore control society's political power.

We *know* this happens. We have all those Labour governments and all the efforts of Shirley Williams and her colleagues to prove it. They became ministers of the Crown.



Putting down new roots?

They cared about private education, but they did not move to end it. They cared about unemployment, but they presided over the doubling of it.

Roy Jenkins cared about racialism, but he was in government when it increased beyond anything he could ever have expected. William Rogers was not in favour of juggernaut lorries, but while Minister of Transport he fought desperately to remove the few controls on them. The power of the people with property lays down the law about what happens to all of us. And parliamentary democracy is too slender a connection with the masses seriously to disturb that power.

When caring people get to government in the way Shirley Williams intends to do, they find their caring conflicts with the economic reality and their caring is always shelved. A government headed by the Gang of Four would no doubt include most of the ideas in this book in its manifesto. But because there is not the slightest sign of how they are to be carried out, not the slightest moment of doubt about the capacity of parliamentary government to turn back the tide of corporate power, we will not even get Mrs Williams' wealth tax, her abolition of fee-paying schools, her full employment or her increased social services. We will not get her house improvements or her small power stations. But we *will* get her bombs, her incomes policy, her stronger Common Market, her increasingly hysterical calls for sacrifice. In other words, all her freshness, and radicalism will take us straight back to the fudged state capitalism of the last Callaghan government: exactly in the opposite direction, that is, to the one where Shirley Williams is now pointing.

There *is* an alternative; there *is* a new way of looking at politics. Shirley Williams knows it, and quite deliberately and shamefully refuses even to argue with it. After disposing quite easily with Russia and Russian-style Communists, she devotes a single sentence to 'revolutionary romantics and Trotskyites' who are

'Wedded to an idea of politics which has never been attained anywhere but which in theory might one day be achieved if only revolution could in some way be harnessed to the perfectibility of human beings'.

Human nature will not have revolution! It will only put up with the continued stumbling of 'caring' politicians who serve the interests of property! 'Human nature' offers us the only hope for political advance, a mixture of half-hearted contradictions of the type voiced by Shirley Williams. Human nature demands sacrifice instead of growth; poverty instead of plenty. Human nature presents a social democratic party, peddling the failed dogmas of the Callaghan government as a 'new radical alternative'.

Shirley Williams makes much of a quotation from Immanuel Kant: 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing can ever be made'.

She should make that the central slogan of her dynamic and radical appeal at the next general election.

The 1980 Labour Party conference passed a resolution in favour of the establishment of workplace branches. Labour Party members in the Timex factories in Dundee have gone ahead and set up the first of these branches in the country. The Timex Labour Party branch claims between 80 and 100 members and meets every month with an average attendance of about 30 — about half the members are women.

Alan Barclay and Jim Barlow from Dundee SWP interviewed the education committee of the branch.

What is the background to the formation of your branch?

The setting up of industrial organisation in the workplace by the Labour Party is a reflection of the leftward move in the Labour Party nationally. It is also a reflection of the deepening crisis of capitalism. In the past, workplace organisation has been solely the prerogative of the trade unions or parties further to the left than the Labour Party, but more and more, because of the deepening crisis working people are beginning to see they need something more than trade union organisation, not to defend the gains they have won in the past, but also to go forward. That means a political organisation.

It was only with the shift to the left in the Labour Party that the Labour Party itself saw the need to move away from being purely an electoral machine based in the wards, coming out at election times, but beginning to campaign on the issues which meant backing up the ward organisation by organising in the workplace.

Do you see your branch operating as part of an overall electoral strategy or discussing industrial issues in the factory?

It is obviously going to back up the fight of the Labour Party in the electoral field, in the local elections, or in we hope, a general election, quite soon. We also see the achievement of socialism in Britain not only purely through the parliamentary road, the achievement of socialism will come through a dual struggle, both inside parliament and outside — the demonstrations, petitions, deputations, the lobbying, the involving of working people actively in the winning of socialism.

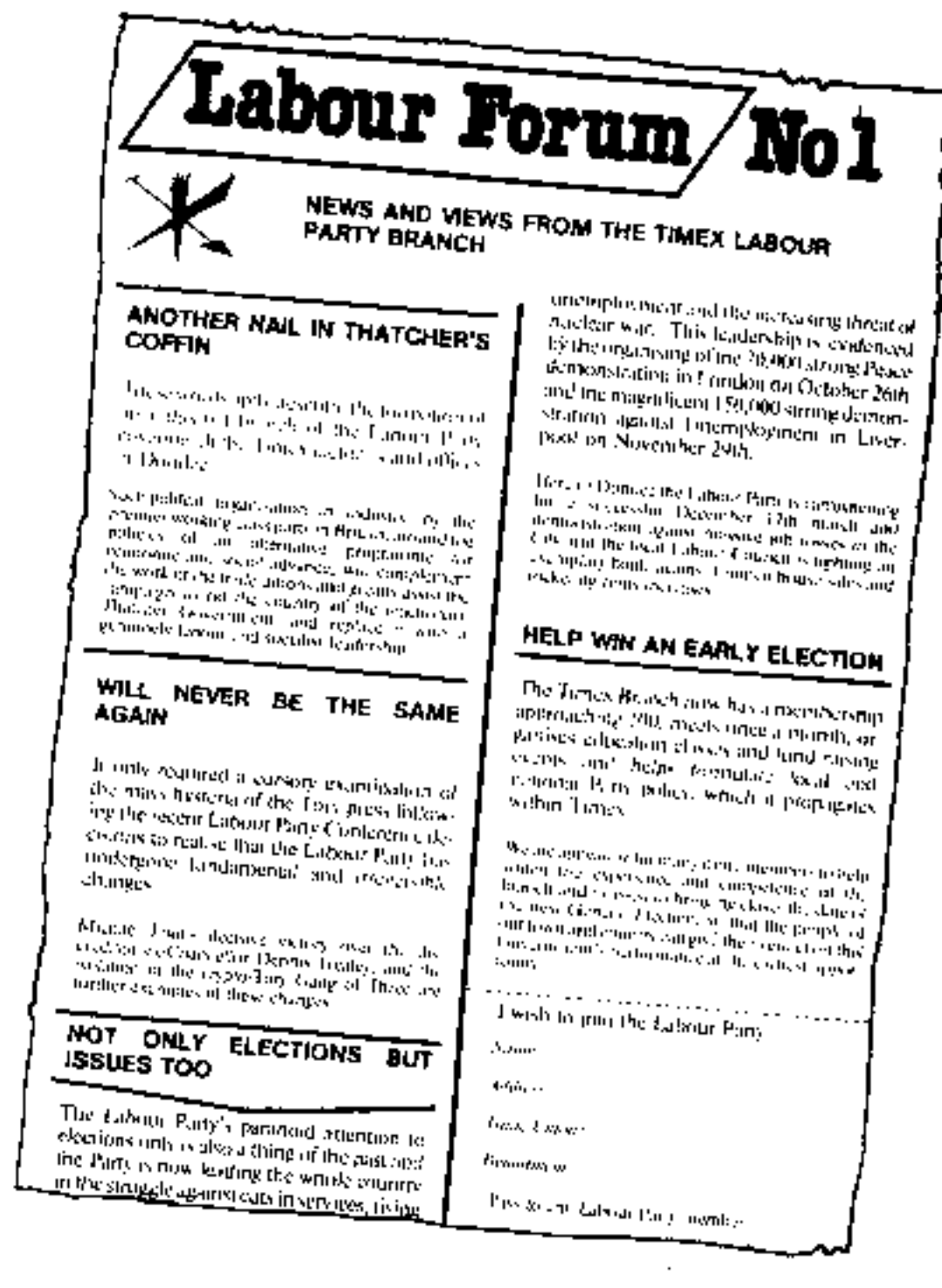
This is one of the roles of the industrial branch — to go to the factory floor, to agitate on the issues and mobilise the people of the factory floor in support of the issues being pursued at any given point. This represents a new feature of Labour Party activity. In the past the party put more emphasis on getting people to the polling station rather than getting them to understand the policies the party was putting forward.

Why did your bulletin not deal with factory issues?

The first bulletin covered major issues like the arms race and the peace question, which is very important. But we cannot ignore the importance of the trade union movement in the factory as well. They have got the organisation and the members and they have to represent these members. When it comes to things that are specific to the issues that the trade union movement is campaigning on, we can put that extra political weight behind what the trade union movement is saying — as long as we get their go ahead to do so. But what we don't intend to do is campaign against any issue the trade union movement in the factory is putting forward.

Would you print an article about a wage claim in the factory or sackings?

The trade union movement has access to workers in a way that an industrial Labour Party branch doesn't. Trade unions can call meetings of workers and address the workers directly on the issues. While there may be a cross-fertilisation, the trade unions are



concerned with wages and conditions in the factory, full-stop. The Labour Party industrial branch is to bring political organisation to the point of production, and at the same time to popularize the policies of the Labour Party. It is not the job of the political organisations to get involved in industrial relations matters, the trade unions have the procedures to deal with these.

Could a conflict develop between a party member and a trade union official, also a party member?

No doubt there are gulfs between individual members and officials. If it happened it would be a trade union issue and not discussed at the Labour Party branch. As far as wage claims are concerned it is the prerogative of the 'on plant' union.

What impact do you see the industrial branch having?

There has already been one measureable benefit for the Labour Party in Dundee — the increases in delegates to the General Management Committee from Timex as a direct result of the formation of the industrial branch. Another important thing is that the members of the Labour Party who will represent the Labour Party as councillors and things like that are answerable on the shop-floor.

The more of that type of representation we can get, the stronger will be democracy inside the labour movement. It is one thing to vote for a rents increase and retire to a pub you own, it is another thing to vote for a rents increase and retire to the Press Shop on the night-shift in the Timex. There has been a massive gulf since the war between the Labour Party and the grass roots, and what the industrial branch will attempt to do will be to bring that gulf closer and become a more realistic voice of the Labour Party.

The right wing will oppose the formation of industrial branches, but because of the advantages politically to the Labour Party in the long term, they will have to give us good, sound constitutional rights. One of the things that amazed me about the branch — and I've been in the Timex for nine years during which time there have always been groups of socialists active on issues — is the unifying of these groups. All the socialists active in the factory over time are now active in the Labour Party branch. It is a unifying of all those committed to introducing socialism. Another good thing, the Timex Labour Party branch covers all the plants and all the sectors of the workers employed by Timex, that is a new dimension and this is one of the reasons why management are so apprehensive about the branch.

**Hard
NUT
to
crack**



The NUT Conference is not the most reliable indicator of attitudes among the general membership of the Union. The less militant rural areas are grossly over-represented—a Local Association of 7 members is entitled to 2 delegates while the Inner London Associations of 1500 are entitled to 6. Despite an elaborate procedure for voting on the order of the agenda, statements from the Executive (memoranda) take precedence in debate. A new procedural device this year ensured that amendments challenging the whole basis of Executive memoranda were shunted to the end of the Queue. No such restraint is imposed upon the Executive, whose response to most of the motions submitted was to delete them entirely, replacing them with bland statements of their own. With such a carefully rigged structure, the Left is unlikely to make any significant gains, but despite it the Executive was defeated on several occasions this year, confirming the general political drift to the left.

The most humiliating defeat for the leadership was over the suspension of the six Officers of the Lambeth Association who had refused to withdraw a motion passed by a General Meeting backing the Lambeth Council workers' strike on 4th February. The Executive tabled a motion congratulating themselves on "protecting the membership" against those who showed contempt for the Union's rules and acted outside its aims and objectives. Lambeth was not mentioned by name so that even if the motion were defeated the "Lambeth 6" would remain suspended! Delegates saw through this trick and refused to allow the motion to be discussed—though this was achieved only by forcing a card vote. A motion for the reinstatement of the "Lambeth 6" was ruled out of order on the grounds that the decision of the NUT Disciplinary Appeals Committee (the Executive!) was final.

The other major defeat for the Executive was over nuclear disarmament. They unsuccessfully sought to replace a motion expressing opposition to the nuclear arms race by a statement about "education for peace". The successful motion failed to take up the issues of CND, NATO, and Cruise missiles—and was "multi-lateralist" in character. But it will enable NUT members to campaign officially around an issue which the Executive has argued is outside the aims and objects of the Union.

The third victory for the Left was over the procedures for initiating official action. There is a requirement that two-thirds of all

Tapping an audience but not giving a lead

There isn't in real life a real difference between political and economic expectations, and it is wrong to separate them at work in the way the Labour Party branch at Timex appear to do.

The differences between the militants and the rank and file is how they actually see the world: for the rank and file the most important thing is having money—to put it simply—and the most important thing for the militants is having sound solid organisation. A permanent political organisation can only be based on the fact that you've got quite a large acceptance among ordinary rank and file. And all our experience is that you can't build that without a really long hard slog.

The thing that strikes me about the idea of Labour Party factory organisation as discussed here is that factory organisation is seen very much as tapping an audience rather than giving a lead. But you have to go out and do things which win the respect and attention of fellow workers.

Socialists are almost always a minority among the workforce at first, even if we are often tempted to hide the fact by passing grandiose resolutions at union meetings. We have to work over small issues to build up the support of our fellow workers, involving

them in action and showing them that *they* have the power and the ability to change society.

In this there can be no separation of industrial struggle and political organisation. Every initiative we make in improving shop floor organisation also improves our chances of getting our socialist arguments across. This means it is a mistake to believe that 'trade union matters' can be hived off by the political organisation in the factory to a separate trade union body. Instead, socialists have to be prepared, when necessary, to offer fraternal criticism of the conduct of the trade union struggle by bodies that include people who are not yet committed socialists.

It is very dangerous to behave in any other way. A lot of workers can all too easily think you are being devious, by hiding the fact that you're politics does influence your trade union work.

That is why we in the SWP operate openly as a political organisation in the factory, using workplace bulletins to put across our political views on trade union questions as well as on 'purely political issues'. But, of course, we welcome the opportunity to cooperate with Labour Party factory branches as and when they are founded.

Roger Cox

eligible to vote must express support in a secret ballot. Even then members are only asked to take action and no disciplinary proceedings are taken against those who refuse to do so. Discontent over the Executive's failure to lead a campaign for the reinstatement of Nottingham nursery teacher, Eileen Crosbie, who was sacked for refusing to teach a class of 40 children with only one assistant, resulted in a demand for members to be instructed to take action in future. Despite vigorous Executive opposition, this was carried after a card vote.

Taken together, these three setbacks for the leadership represent a sizeable dent in their strategy. The Lambeth suspensions were not designed principally to rid the Executive of embarrassing critics, but to deter those who were becoming increasingly willing to initiate action on their own account. The Executive's response to threats of teacher redundancy has been to assist the employers by negotiating jobs away through premature retirement, non-replacement of teachers who leave and the use of short-term contracts. Above all they want to avoid any confrontation with the Tories—hence the

need for strong centralised control over action, which they will now find more difficult to maintain. The Executive's other worry is the increasing volume of Local Association discussion on issues outside the narrow educational sphere—abortion, gay rights, nuclear disarmament and Ireland. Their standard response until now has been to quote the opinion of their resident Lord Denning, the Union Solicitor, that such matters are outside the objects of the Union. This will be much more difficult to argue following the Conference decision on nuclear arms.

The overall effect of the Conference has been to provide the Left with a much wider audience to address, particularly on the question of internal democracy. But it must be admitted that the interest in more overtly political issues arises partly from the difficulty in resisting school closures, increased class sizes and compulsory transfers. A school-based fight around these issues, in conjunction with other groups of workers, must be built if the gains are not to prove illusory.

Dick North.

Defeating a steel union witch-hunt



Regrettably the current victimisations of teacher militants by the NUT are not isolated examples. Some leading Iron and Steel Trades Confederation officials also prefer to turn on the activists inside the union rather than fight the policies of Ian MacGregor and his Tory paymasters.

Since the defeat of the steelworkers' national wages strike, there have been a staggering 77,000 job losses in the British Steel corporation. Another large wave of redundancies is inevitable when Macgregor reviews progress in July.

The militancy and shop-floor organisation required to fight back frightens our union leaders. During the strike, the explosion of rank and file activity in South Yorkshire posed a threat to Bill Sims and other right-wing officials.

Muck-raking

Take the example of Stocksbridge, where the joint union committee was particularly effective in organising flying pickets and raising funds, from all over the country, and as far afield as Germany, Sweden and Ireland. Unfounded rumours were spread about misuse of strike funds, and the ISTC executive set up an inquiry. Incidentally, the muck-raking was especially strong from the Communist Party dominated district committee of the AUEW who wished to hinder the setting up of a permanent joint union stewards committee (ISTC, AUEW, EETPU, T&GWU, etc) since they saw in it too much SWP influence.

The Inquiry was really just a cover to attack the militants, since the Stocksbridge funds had been professionally audited.

In contrast, the Scunthorpe strike committee was dominated by right-wing officials. No action was taken by the ISTC executive against full-time official Ted Hardaker, after a claim in the *Financial Weekly* that he could not account for £60,000 out of the £100,000 ISTC allocated strike funds.

Hardaker was said to have operated a 'slush fund' which included the payment of bribes to lorry drivers. Deals were done with the police, which kept pickets small and demoralised. When the more effective Stocksbridge pickets were sent in to help by the South Yorkshire divisional strike committee, Ted Hardaker threatened that if any damage was done to any lorries, then he would obtain half-a-dozen heavies with pickaxe handles to sort them out.

Friction developed between Hardaker and the Scunthorpe *Real Steel News*. During the strike, in front of witnesses, Hardaker threatened one of its supporters, Peter Johnson, a mould bay worker at the Anchor steel plant in Scunthorpe, with physical violence. He vowed that Peter would lose his ISTC card (Peter's branch is a 100% closed shop), and would never work in Scunthorpe again.

One year later, Hardaker personally complained about the *Real Steel News* to the ISTC executive, and demanded Peter's immediate expulsion from the union!

The January issue of Scunthorpe *Real*

Steel News had bitterly attacked two senior union officials, Jack Sturman and George Teale, for their willingness to sell jobs at Normandy Park works in Scunthorpe, a victim of the MacGregor axe.

The ISTC Executive set up an Inquiry into *Real Steel News* and Peter Johnson for allegedly writing the article in question. Under ISTC constitution, the Executive can expel any member if they feel he has brought the union into 'disrepute'.

McCarthyite

The Inquiry, with the union's president and vice-president, was held on March 25th, and Hardaker made all the arrangements. He collected 'evidence' in a McCarthyite fashion that led to complaints from four of the largest ISTC branches. He selected the witnesses, and he was to be the 'prosecutor' on the day. To cap it all, the union inquiry was arranged to be held on BSC management premises.

However, this crude attempt to single out Peter Johnson failed because the *Real Steel News* group in Scunthorpe did not rely on a fair hearing, but went to the rank and file for support. They decided offence was the best defence.

When the Inquiry team arrived, they were shocked to find 25 angry people already in occupation of the room. The lobby included steel-workers from Peter's branch, pickets who had been threatened by Hardaker, people who had witnessed Hardaker's threats to Peter Johnson, officials of the ISTC branches, as well as SWP and Labour Party activists. The message was simple: no kangaroo court would be tolerated.

It was made clear that *Real Steel News* would be defended collectively, and Peter should not be singled out. The size and determination of the lobby forced the Inquiry team to backpedal.

In the end, the Inquiry limited itself to the single question of whether Peter had written the *Real Steel News* article. A 'fair' procedure was adopted, and consequently no shred of evidence against Peter was produced—not surprising since he had not written the particular article.

Grovelling

By the end Hardaker was grovelling. He said *Real Steel News* had access to important information he could never get, and if only we would share it with him, he too could fight management.

The following Sunday, the ISTC Joint Committee erupted in anger over Hardaker's role in the Inquiry, and believed it should never have been called. Hardaker tried to hush the matter up by proposing that no statement should be issued to the press, but he was voted down by the 20 delegates present, and the row was featured on the front page of the local newspaper. Hardaker has isolated himself from the bulk of the lay officials throughout Scunthorpe and South Yorkshire.

The Inquiry is to report formally to the ISTC Executive on April 30th. With no 'evidence' against Peter Johnson, a decision to take disciplinary action is remote.

The successful defence of Peter Johnson has breathed new life into the Scunthorpe Socialist Workers Party.

Joe Herbertson



Smithfield NUR banner with an old message that is even more relevant today!

Quiet job loss on the rails

The continuing shake out in the public sector is taking various forms. From the dramatic closures in steel and the coal mines to the small, almost unnoticed (except by those directly involved) redundancies in British Rail.

In the railway industry in the past five years there have been thousands of 'voluntary' redundancies, almost all accepted by the main rail unions, many of them in fact encouraged by the wage bargaining style of NUR/ASLEF/TSSA.

The wage deals signed over the last three years have all contained promises of increased productivity, and none of the unions concerned have shown any qualms at the figure suggested by BR management of 30,000 jobs to be lost. Indeed this year at the start of the Conciliation Grade negotiations (drivers, porters, cleaners etc) the NUR were boasting of last year's 4,000 'voluntary' redundancies as a productivity gain.

Even more disturbing are the large number of vacancies (somewhere in the region of 20,000) which are unfilled. The BR board has been operating a virtual standstill on recruitment for almost a year and only key operating staff are being recruited. This of course is accepted by the rail unions and no attempts, by blacking of jobs etc, are made to fill these vacancies. Indeed there are indications from some regions that local managements are attempting to introduce Manpower Services Commission schemes to fill jobs such as cleaners, floor sweepers and so on. So far the NUR/TSSA have made no comment, and it has been left to the engineering confederation unions to put the block on it.

The main problem with the rail unions is

an ideological one—they are rooted firmly in the early part of the century. For them the 'agreement' is sacred, the 'machinery of negotiation' is a vast Moloch consuming the energies of all. The officials of the main rail unions are effectively personnel managers, but with a job for life.

So when they commit themselves to agreements which guarantee reductions in manning, the officials at least are bound by all their training to implement them.

Contradiction

It is an interesting contradiction, however, that although the rail unions are prepared to allow their members, such as the parcels staff, to be phased out, let the board talk of axing one mile of rail line and they are all up in arms. The recent dispute over the proposed closure of the Woodhead/Pennine freight line is an example. Here they supported moderately militant action by guards and drivers to keep the line open.

At the same time, action by cleaning staff at my own depot—Old Oak Common—who are refusing to work to tough new schedules which would ultimately mean staff reductions, is condemned by the local bureaucrat, Len Bounds, as 'unofficial and in breach of the agreement'. While NUR supervisors scab on workers who are defending jobs, their actions are defended by officials. The local ASLEF committee are also refusing to assist in any way what they see as actions in breach of the all sacred 'agreement'. In fact the only significant group who crossed the picket lines during a recent 24-hour strike in support of the cleaners were the 'militant' drivers' union.

So we see from these examples the result

of the 'friendly society' approach of the rail unions: job loss and 'voluntary' redundancy.

On the workshop side, the situation is a little different. For a start, the confederation unions do not have the 'railway servant' approach to the job. Policy for the AUEW for instance is made by the National Committee to cover engineering as a whole. Those who work on the railways must follow policy agreed for outside sectors. Engineers are seen as engineers, not as railwaymen. Indeed, last year's agreement was not signed by the confed representatives and we officially have no agreement with BR at present. This means in effect that there exists much greater local autonomy on the question of opposition to redundancy. Any engineering workshop which opposed redundancy would, because of AUEW policy, gain the automatic support of the executive for actions taken to fight them.

Workshop problems

The main workshops have their own problems, with redundancies being declared at Crewe and Glasgow and with the threatened closure of Ashford Carriage and Wagon works. In particular it is now clear that the Rail Board are trying also for substantial reductions in the number of apprentices—an action which the recent AUEW annual delegate conference condemned and agreed to press for reversal. Unfortunately there appears to be little will to fight, the concern being to achieve early retirement schemes. In some quarters, there seems to exist a rather naive belief that the jobs will pick up again. Just when, however, no one can say.

So the prospect for a fight back on the rail seems at present pretty remote. The main unions—NUR/ASLEF/TSSA—will huff and puff for the next few weeks, but when it comes to it, they will accept what is offered in the 'interest of the industry as a whole in the present economic climate.' That will mean more redundancies and if Parker is clever he will get away with it, providing he only cuts people and not rail lines.

Jim Scott

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NUJ: wanted, organisation

The National Union of Journalists is to open talks on amalgamation with the craft print union, the National Graphical Association, following a decision made at this year's NUJ annual conference held in Norwich. While a majority of delegates were in favour of amalgamation, fears were expressed that it could be a bureaucratic nightmare. Regular reports are to be issued by an amalgamation working party, to which good left wing members have been elected.

In a further debate, a mutual picketing pact with the NGA was unanimously demanded as a matter of urgency. In several current and recent disputes the NUJ has been uncertain of NGA support, with union solidarity falling well short of verbal statements.

'Direct support on the ground' was not the theme of this year's conference, but it should have been, with the union under attack from employers throughout its various sections—provincial newspapers, broadcasting, Fleet Street, books and magazines. Conference was saddled with a soggy national executive that lost most of what it argued for, coupled with an inarticulate right wing. The left was forced into a position that it adopted too comfortably, a position of revolutionary policy making. The NUJ's left wing grouping, *Journalist Charter*, is currently rather weak and tended to follow rather than lead new initiatives. The SWP shares responsibility for changing this weakness.

A balance sheet of gains and losses on motions put would take too long, especially as conference debated around 250 resolutions. We won the union to oppose the siting of Cruise missiles in Britain and to campaign for unilateralism, but we lost the motion for an annual women's conference funded by the union. We defeated attempts by a narrow clique to make the NEC into an even narrower clique and passed a programme of action to stamp out moonlighting. We vigorously condemned the racist Fleet Street coverage of the Deptford march.

Two fringe meetings were very well attended. The first, organised by the newly formed Journalists Against Nuclear Extermination (JANE) pulled a third of conference to hear EP Thompson talk on the nuclear threat. The second attracted similar numbers to hear speakers on racism in the press, with John La Rose talking about the Deptford massacre.

Over the coming year the left in the union is going to have to be better organised than it was at conference if we are to win disputes, push the NEC to support militancy against redundancies, take on the Maxwells and Murdochs, and move towards amalgamation on democratic principles. There are a lot of disputes on, and more on the way. We need much better rank and file organisation.
Stuart Axe



Clawing back some cuts

You may have had even more difficulty in catching a bus in London than usual over the past four weeks. London Transport have decided that we are running too efficient a service and decided to make further cuts. The GLC had given them a budget which, no matter which way it was stretched, could not provide enough cash to run the scheduled mileage. They therefore decided to cut back on the number of buses by cutting the overtime. Good, you think, socialists are opposed to overtime too, however in this case it would not have resulted in a single extra worker taken off the dole, just bus cuts.

This was to coincide with a massive reorganisation due to take place on April 25th and after much confusion and mind changing the TGWU central bus conference resolved to oppose these cuts and not to co-operate in any way with the April changes.

As soon as the information reached the garages there were explosions and a wave of unofficial action swept the fleet. So spontaneous was this that it is very hard to catalogue what exactly happened. About 25 garages were involved in some way or another from one day strikes and short guerrilla strikes to working to rule and overtime bans, mainly happening in the East and South where the cuts hit hardest. The most notable incident occurred at Upton Park where the garage struck for two days over a management attempt to victimise some garage inspectors who refused to implement the cuts and nearly all the neighbouring garages took supporting action.

So far so good, then came the meeting of the delegates conference. Management had had several meetings with the Central Bus Committee (CBC) and had agreed to withdraw about half the cuts, and the CBC recommended that conference accept this.

The only alternative was said to be an all out strike on the 25th. In the face of this ultimatum the conference voted 48-18 to accept the deal.

The problem all the way through has been that in a whole number of garages the information on the cuts was played down and nothing done to stir up the membership. This meant that while two thirds of the fleet were either taking action or waiting to be called on expectantly, the rest sat in blissful ignorance. The *Bus Worker* group produced a couple of leaflets which argued the case well for action, but unfortunately the garages most in need of them were effectively closed off.

There's a lesson for the future in this. With the fleet split in such a manner, any action would have been difficult to organise but not impossible. If it had not been put as an ultimatum everyone out or nothing, it would have been possible to co-ordinate and intensify the partial action and build up the resistance. As it was we clawed back some of the cuts and showed our teeth for the first time in a long time. If nothing else we showed that London's busworkers are prepared to fight—if we can now unite with our colleagues on the underground we can have London by the short hair.

Steve Cushion



Poland: can they reform the party?

The last weeks of April saw unaccustomed quietness on the industrial front in Poland. The regime has clearly still been on the defensive since the huge success of the warning four hour general strike of 27 March. But the feeling of intense crisis has not gone from the country. The bankers have been told that Poland cannot pay its debt repayments—and only their forbearance prevented a formal declaration of bankruptcy a fortnight ago, and now there is intense agitation within the Communist Party as preparations are made for a special congress in the summer against clear signs of Russian disapproval. Chris Harman looks at the significance of these two sets of developments.

Many commentators in the West now see the calling of a Communist Party Congress in the summer as the answer to the Polish crisis. They are wrong. Those who rule Poland cannot solve its crisis on their own terms unless they can first defeat the independent trade union movement. Nevertheless, the agitation developing inside the party is of immense importance.

It is usual to say that the Communist Party runs Poland and the other Eastern states. If you believe that, then naturally you believe that the Party congress can bring about a fundamental change in society.

But in fact it is not the party that rules, but a relatively small group of people at the top, not only of the party, but also of the other bureaucratic structures that dominate the society—the government ministries, the state economic planning mechanism, the police, the armed forces. The party is a mechanism of their rule (and of their protectors in Moscow)—perhaps the most important mechanism—but it itself does not rule.

At its highest level the party is a meeting place for the top people in the different sections of the bureaucracy. Through the politbureau (in some countries called the presidium) and the secretariat they get together, hammer out the policies that suit their goals of international military and economic competition, and choose the personnel who they think will pursue these goals at lower levels in the bureaucracy. It is here, too that decisions are made as to who will head the government, the armed forces, the



It is not the Communist Party that rules in Eastern Europe but a small group at the top.

economy, the police, the party itself.

But at its lower levels, the party is also a means for integrating other social groups into acceptance of the needs of the central bureaucratic rulers. It is run by the ruling class, but its membership includes people from all other classes.

It recruits members of these classes so as to encourage them to argue for its goals among those they work and live with. In return it offers them certain rewards—material rewards once they climb up beyond a certain point in the party (better promotion prospects in industry, a greater chance of getting decent housing, access to the better schools and colleges for their children). But it also offers them rewards of a not directly material sort—in the party people can mix with their 'betters', or can feel that somehow they are contributing to building society. So the party recruits not only self-seekers, but a certain breed of do-gooders.

By no means unique

In this, of course, the Communist Parties of Eastern Europe are by no means unique—the reasons people join them are not all that different to the reasons people join, say, the Christian Democracy in Italy or the Democratic Party in the cities of America. All of these are ruling class parties which seek to mobilise popular support for their goals.

The only difference with the East European parties is that in normal times, there can be no real argument among those at the bottom as to the directives issued from above—expulsion is the instant remedy for those who argue too much, and if that does not work, there are always the political police.

The party acts as a powerful controlling mechanism because to get on in any sphere of life, you have to join it. And once inside you have to defend the decisions made at the top. So if you are a factory worker, you can certainly suggest through the party how productivity can be raised by you and your mates working harder—but most of the time your job is not to suggest, but to listen to instructions on how to agitate to achieve the goals of management.

But the real importance of the party probably lies in the mechanisms for control over the 'middle layers' of society—the managers, technologists, journalists and so on who have themselves to determine the actions and ideas of those below them. Jour-



nalists for instance, need to have a certain freedom to decide themselves what they write if it is to be convincing to workers, yet also have to be bound in to the needs of the regime. This is achieved by making any progress inside a newspaper office dependent on taking a party card, and any progress inside the party dependent upon zeal in fulfilling the goals of the party leaders.

A hierarchy of bodies bind those non-ruling class party members to the top bureaucrats—branches, local committees, and, just below the top, the Central Committee. The full-time officials who run these bodies are appointed by the party secretariat under the so-called Nomenklatura system.

The whole structure is self-perpetuating: the secretariat chooses the branch and area officials; these then select who enters the party, determine who will receive promotion and special favours, and choose the delegates to congresses; the congress in turn elects a new Central Committee on the basis of recommendations from the secretariat and politbureau, the Central Committee then selecting the politbureau and secretariat. In this way, a vast system of transmission belts ensures penetration by the top bureaucrats of every level of society.

In normal times the structure seems all-powerful. It can work with immense success to ruin the job prospects and careers of anyone who opposes the top bureaucracy. Only a very small hard-core of determined dissidents will risk being squeezed right out of their jobs by continuing resistance to the regime.

But there are two ways in which the mechanism can jam.

The first is when the top bureaucrats in the politbureau and secretariat cannot agree among themselves on what needs to be done to maintain international competitiveness and control over the rest of society. Each side in the disagreement is forced to appeal to the slightly lower level bureaucrats of the Central Committee to settle the differences. But an argument which rages among a couple of hundred people is not always that easy to keep quiet. For instance, some of the politbureau and Central Committee members may decide to use their control over the security forces to quieten their opponents (this happened in Russia when Khrushchev fell out with 'the anti-party group' in the late 1950s; it happened in Czechoslovakia early in 1968), and others may respond by using their control of the press to mobilise 'public

opinion' in their defence.

In such situations, the transmission belts cease to function for a period, and first members of the middle layers, and then workers, can begin to organise in their own interests.

A second sort of breakdown occurs when there is a mass spontaneous movement below, against the whole structure of bureaucratic control—as in Hungary and to a lesser extent in Poland in 1956. In that case, the party members suddenly find themselves isolated in the factories and the offices and respond by isolating the most dedicated supporters of the top bureaucracy within the party bodies themselves. The transmission belts begin to snap under the tensions created.

In Poland today we are witnessing a complex interaction of the two forms of breakdown. Last summer saw the upsurge of the mass spontaneous movement from below, culminating in the consolidation of Solidarity (and now rural Solidarity) as an organisation completely apart from the transmission belts. The party made a last effort to use its disciplinary powers over its members to get them to stop March's four-hour general strike. Their refusal to comply showed that its transmission belts in the factories had snapped completely—instead of party members damping down their workmates they abandoned the party (200,000 people have left it in six months).

Isolation

Of course, the regime still has considerable power—it still controls the planning mechanism, the police, the army, the prisons etc. But it knows that the forces it controls are enormously isolated from every other social group. And this at a time when its goal of restoring the competitiveness of the national economy cannot be achieved without forcing or persuading the population at large to accept big cuts in living standards and high levels of unemployment.

It was this isolation which led the Central Committee meeting late in March to opt for a party congress to reform the party.

What this really amounts to is an attempt to get the middle layers—the managers, technocrats, journalists—to identify with the reforms suggested by the top bureaucracy as the way out of the economic and social crisis. In return for acceptance of these reforms, sections of the middle layers are offered a new say inside the structures of the party. The most disliked and the most corrupt officials are to be replaced by new blood which has much greater support in the localities. To this end, the delegates to the congress are to be chosen on a much more open basis than in the past.

A reinvigorated party will then be able to impose austerity on the rest of the population in the interests of restoring the international competitiveness of the economy, in a way that is impossible at the moment.

That, at least, is the aim of Kania and his circle. That is why they have been permitting things which would have been inconceivable six months ago—like meetings of party activists outside the ambit of the official structures.

But there is one big problem with any

such scheme. Rather than overcoming the isolation of the top bureaucracy, it can deepen it.

On the one hand, those under attack as delegates are chosen for the special congress will be the only group within the middle layers it can rely upon for support—those who have feathered their own nests through wholesale corruption and systematic bullying.

On the other, once debate opens in the party, the vast mass of previously passive party members in the factories and countryside can begin to raise their voices, reflecting the impact on them of the immense prestige

of Solidarity and the experience of months of massive struggles. Under such circumstances, still more of the party's transmission belts can snap. This is why the Russians are so worried about the party congress.

A party constituted to run society for the top bureaucrats cannot initiate the fundamental revolutionary change that is necessary if Poland is to escape the crisis without massive suffering to the working class. But its congress can serve to emphasise just how isolated and inept the old rulers are. It could be just one more nail in their coffin rather than the kiss of life which they need.

... and can they reform the economy?

'Spiritual bankruptcy, long tolerated, verging towards economical bankruptcy, becomes intolerable'.

Thomas Carlyle's comments on the unleashing of the forces that produced the great French revolution of 1789-95 sum up precisely the situation in Poland today. Economic crisis has been the midwife of social and political upheaval.

In a document presented to Western bankers last month the Polish regime spelled out the scale of the crisis. (Details published in *The Times* 16 April 1981). It warns that

'Despite plans for rigorous austerity programmes at home, the country's foreign debt will continue to rise until the end of 1985, when it will amount to £15,700m.'

This year 'severely restricted' imports will still cost \$700m more than export earnings—and on top of this some billions have to be found to pay interest on debts.

The 'austerity' designed to cure this crisis is what we would call in the West a Thatcherite slump.

There will be 'a deep deterioration' of economic activity this year leading to a nine per cent fall in the national income. This will involve 'some reduction in employment'.

'We have to realise that a certain number of people will not be able to find new jobs.' Alongside this there will be a general reduction in living standards (a 'very painful operation') to be brought about by 'widespread increases in prices, including prices for essential foodstuffs.'

Between this year and 1983 '900 mainly big and medium investment projects' will have to be suspended—forcing their workers (700,000 or 800,000) to look for new jobs.

It is the sheer scale of this crisis and of the 'sacrifices' needed to pay off the bankers that lies behind the economic reform programme being floated by the regime.

The outline of one version of economic reform was published by the Polish regime early in January to be introduced in three stages starting in the early summer (details in *Financial Times*, 13 January 1981).

The basic idea is that factories should cease to be dictated to by the central planners, and that instead each enterprise should decide on its own production targets and find its own finance for achieving these. 'profitability would be the measure of a factory's efficiency'.

The link between enterprises would be the market—which, as the Polish currency became convertible, would also be the link with suppliers and buyers abroad.

For an interim period enterprises would, however, be forbidden to undertake new investments—apart from those which would increase food production, help production and exports of raw materials and introduce energy saving technology.

The reform has been compared to that operating in Hungary for a number of years now. But in one important respect it goes further than that—it talks about 'workers' councils' playing a key role in the factory, as in the Yugoslav system. These would have 'control over the factory and its administrators', with powers over 'production planning', the determination of 'promotion, bonus payments and profit distribution', being able to propose candidates for directorships and to recommend directors' 'dismissal by higher authorities'.

A close look at the reform proposals, however, shows two things: that the workers' democracy would be a sham, and that the reform would be unlikely to deal with the fundamental faults in the economy from a workers' standpoint.

First the sham. The workers would have powers which were restricted to questions of collaborating with management in the operation of the enterprises inside a tight, unchallengeable external framework. To keep the enterprises in business, they would have to keep their costs competitive, which would mean keeping tight control over their wages and productivity. Full competitiveness would involve buying machinery based on new technology—but that would mean raising the funds by ploughing nearly all profits back into the business and borrowing from the banks. The banks in return would demand a controlling power over the enterprise: the situation would be like that in

'It has been competition, albeit at an international level, which has produced the present chaos inside the Polish economy.'

Yugoslavia, where the central banks control 50 per cent of industrial assets despite the pretence of 'workers' control' (figures in *Economic Intelligence Unit Quarterly Report on Yugoslavia 1971/2*).

The Polish draft reform proposals spell out, in fact, that for 'large industrial trusts containing several factories' there are to be 'supervisory boards containing delegates from banks, suppliers, consumers and workers councils'. In fact, the only power the workers would end up with would be that of tightening their own belts and sacking their own colleagues at the banks' behest.

This is very much in the minds of various managers who have expressed support for the reform.

For example, a mines director in Silesia told the *Financial Times*:

"I'm for a joint worker-management board, if they assume responsibility by remembering that they are the co-owners of the means of production" (23 January)

Most of the enthusiasm for the economic reform proposals comes from sections of intellectuals and managers. They see reform as a way to draw the workers' movement into pushing their schemes for overcoming the irrationality of the economy.

The prevailing attitude of this milieu to the present economic set-up was revealed very clearly in a series of interviews with intellectuals and specialists carried out two years ago (*The Report on the State of the Republic*)

One respondent put it:

'We are faced with sham planning and sham implementation of plans.'

Another spelt out that:

'In the real social and economic world there is no such thing as "the central planner". What we are dealing with instead is a heterogenous amalgamation of central institutions which employ a wide range of different standards in arriving at their decisions.. We know very little about how the centre does its work or the way in which it drafts and adopts strategic economic decisions... Many professional economists and economic policy makers are unable to come up with any answers to these questions...'

The overall impression that emerges is one that seems, on the face of it, favourable to defenders of the 'free market' in the West. 'Central planning' has produced apparently irrational structures, characterised by random decision making, immense waste and complete stagnation. So convincing does such an argument seem that it has even taken in a whole number of Western Marxists (like the people around the journal *Critique* in this country) who see the Eastern states as completely new forms of class soci-

eties which are intrinsically less dynamic and probably less progressive than capitalism.

Yet any such view ignores the most basic fact about the Eastern states—that it has been competition, albeit at an *international* level, which has produced the present chaos inside the economy. The rulers of all these countries have sought to impose on the rest of the population fantastically high levels of accumulation so as to have the means to survive in economic and military competition with the West and with China. All the irrationality within the economies can be seen to flow from the attempt to sustain a scale of accumulation beyond the resources of the various countries.

It is this which leads to 'tension' within plans, to continual shortages of key raw materials and components, to the continual switching of the orders given to factories as to what to produce, to huge sums being spent on investment projects that cannot be finished, to bullying of managers by planners and cynicism towards planners by managers, to a general inability to work out what is the real cost of producing goods in terms of labour and materials. It is the continual drive to over-accumulation that produces the chaos.

A world system

These trends seem absurd if the economy is looked at in isolation. After all, unless the central planners are mad, they cannot want such chaos. It is easy to draw the conclusion that these effects are inherent in the attempt to plan, and that the profit-motive and market could not do worse. However, it all makes sense the moment you see the Polish ruling group as part of a world system, constrained to accumulate as fast as possible—indeed, faster than possible—on the one hand by the need to compete in Western markets to sell goods and pay off debts, on the other by the pressure to contribute to the expansion of the Russian arms economy.

The most wasteful features of the Polish economy are not unique. The unfinished investment projects are not really all that different to the brand new steel mills that

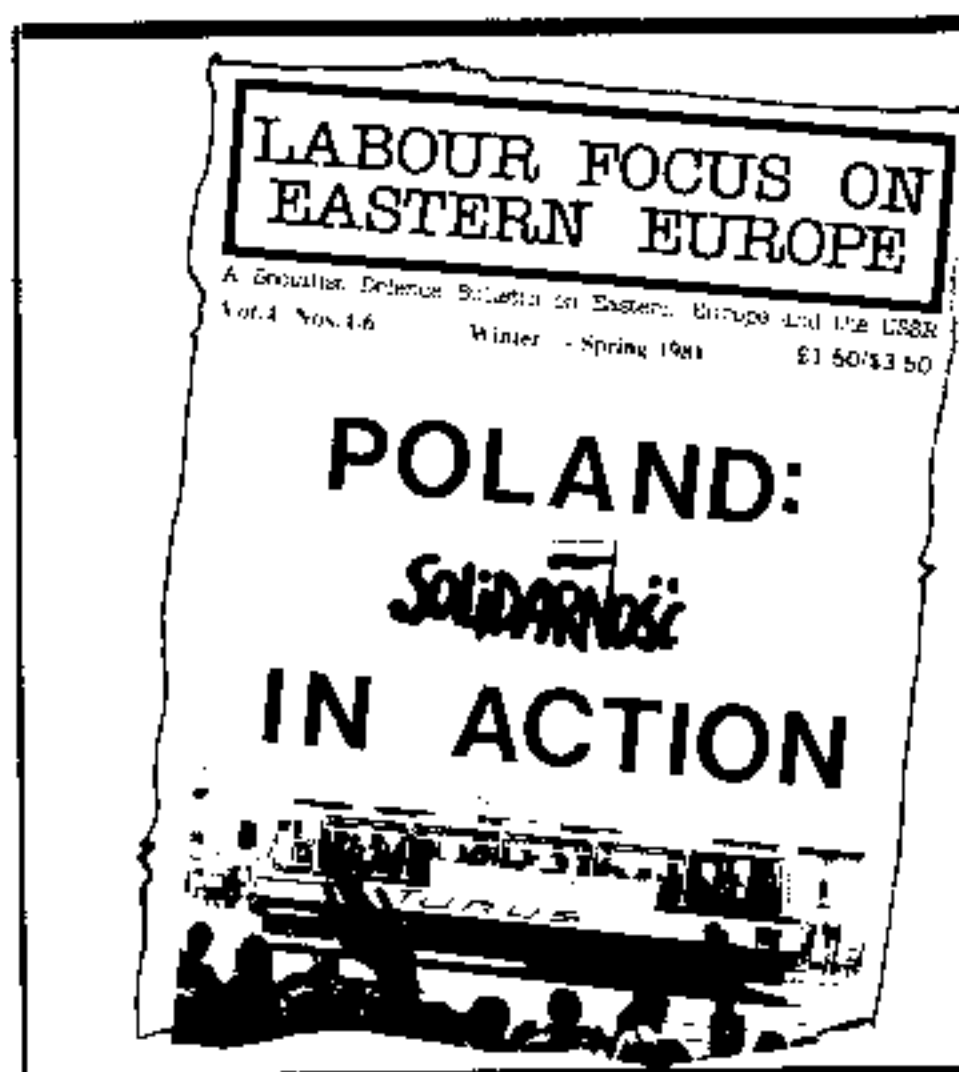


British Steel has working at less than 50 per cent capacity. The useless goods that are turned out have their match in the most expensive product of the British aerospace industry in the last 15 years—the Concorde—follily which can only fly at a loss. Delorean, a former top General Motors manager, has written a book about the world's largest private capitalist firm that shows that things within it are not so different from the state capitalist firm of Poland Inc: he describes massive planning mishaps, bullying executives giving arbitrary instructions to plant managers, continual switches in production schedules, massive wastes of resources, general cynicism.

All these forms of waste and irrationality are a product of a world system, in which the individual units—individual firms or whole economies—are motivated only by competition with one another. But if that is so, reform within the Polish economy cannot solve its problems on more than a very short term basis.

So what can economic reform achieve?

All it can really do is operate as a cover for attempts to solve the Polish crisis at the expense of workers. Whole sections of the Polish economy must be sacrificed while others are given the chance to forge ahead (although, in the context of world recession that too can be just a pipedream). But if you sacrifice sections of the economy, you sacrifice the workers employed there. The slogan of reform can make that easier—with workers' council participation in management providing a means by which workers in 'successful' enterprises are turned against those that are chopped.



Essential reading on the Polish crisis

Labour focus on Eastern Europe

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Glasgow Orange

'If we can stir up religious feeling in Scotland we have won.' These are words which have been taken to heart by Ian Paisley. They were in fact spoken in 1886 as part of the opposition to Irish Home Rule by James Henderson, editor of the *Belfast Newsletter*.

As one of his stops on the 'Carson Trail', Paisley last month organised a rally in Glasgow – a planned march had to be abandoned after a three month ban on all marches resulted from Loyalist threats to break up a H-block protest. Paisley with his strong Scottish roots – his mother comes from Edinburgh – realises there is fertile ground for his anti-Catholic crusade. Chris Bambery looks at the tradition of religious sectarianism in Scotland, and then Dave Sherry tells what is being done to combat it.

With unemployment on Clydeside standing at 15% and the closure of Linwood graphically showing the failure of the unions to stop the rot, there are many people ready to hit out at anyone in their despair. In previous times of economic uncertainty, such feelings have led to sectarian violence.

The 1930's saw rival 'razor gangs', with names like the Bridgeton Billy Boys fight out pitched battles in the streets. Outfits like the Scottish Protestant League could take seven seats on Glasgow council in the 1934 elections, with Protestant Action taking nine in liberal Edinburgh and holding one till the mid-60s. Protestant Action also organised and stewarded rallies for Moseley and his fascists in Glasgow, and were responsible for attacks on Jewish as well as Catholic property. But the traditional vehicle for sectarianism remained the Orange Lodge. Following the 1935 12th of July walk Orangemen marched into Catholic areas like the Gorbals, Calton and Shettleton. Fierce rioting ensued, with police baton charging protesters in the Gorbals.

Famine

The roots of sectarianism lie with the spectacular Irish immigration of the last century. By 1851 there were three quarters of a million people of Irish descent in Scotland, while one in four of Glasgow's population were Irish. For an immigrant fleeing the Famine, Glasgow was the nearest and cheapest option, but hardly the most attractive. Not only were immigrants crowded into ghettos like the Gorbals – "The Second Capital of Donegal" – but their children were denied state education and, as a government report said, "They formed the great body of unskilled casual labour in Glasgow". To be a Catholic was to be virtually excluded from the shipyards, the pits and any skilled work.

The start of large scale immigration in the 1830's coincided with an economic recession. Employers like the Duke of Hamilton were quick to blame the immigrants for unemployment, wage cuts and outbreaks of cholera and typhus. But while he might call for an end to Irish immigration, the Duke was quick to bring in Irish scabs when his mines came out on strike. The effect

of this blacklegging was immediate as noted by a government report: "A lodge of pitmen expelled all Catholics with whom they had previously lived and worked in peace and harmony". In the Lanarkshire coal and iron towns a rigid sectarian geography developed.

With Irish immigrants also in direct competition with evicted Highlanders, for jobs building the railways and canals, anti-Irish feeling was reflected in the growth of the Orange Order. The Order, first imported by Scots regiments sent to crush the 1798 United Irishman rising, had 45 Lodges in Scotland by 1833, with 12 in Glasgow, under the patronage of the Duke of Gordon.

Hard Loyalism

Employers were quick to use such a useful tool as sectarianism. In the 1850s they encouraged a number of bigoted preachers like the 'Angel Gabriel', who dressed to suit his name. After meetings by him trouble broke out in Greenock's sugar refineries and docks and, in 1855, Catholic labourers were driven from the shipyards in Dumbarton. That year also saw Lanarkshire miners coming out on strike after trouble on July 12th to demand the removal of Catholics from the pits.

But sectarianism wasn't simply created by the bosses. Scotland's close connections with Ireland and Ulster in particular, meant events there were reflected by violence in Glasgow. Following a tour by Daniel O'Connell in 1835 when he spoke in support of Catholic Emancipation to 100,000 on Glasgow Green, a Protestant Association, with 85,000 supporters, was formed to defend 'the faith and constitution'. The worst outbreak of violence came in 1875 after Home Rule supporters were attacked in Partick. An all out anti-Catholic pogrom developed, with the militia needed to restore order.

But most trade union leaders and Labour politicians would say this is simply history. After all, in Glasgow today people might drink in separate pubs, go to separate schools and follow separate football teams but there's no more discrimination in jobs, and the old ghettos are long demolished.

And it is quite clear Glasgow isn't Belfast. To be a Protestant doesn't mean you've a better chance of a job or

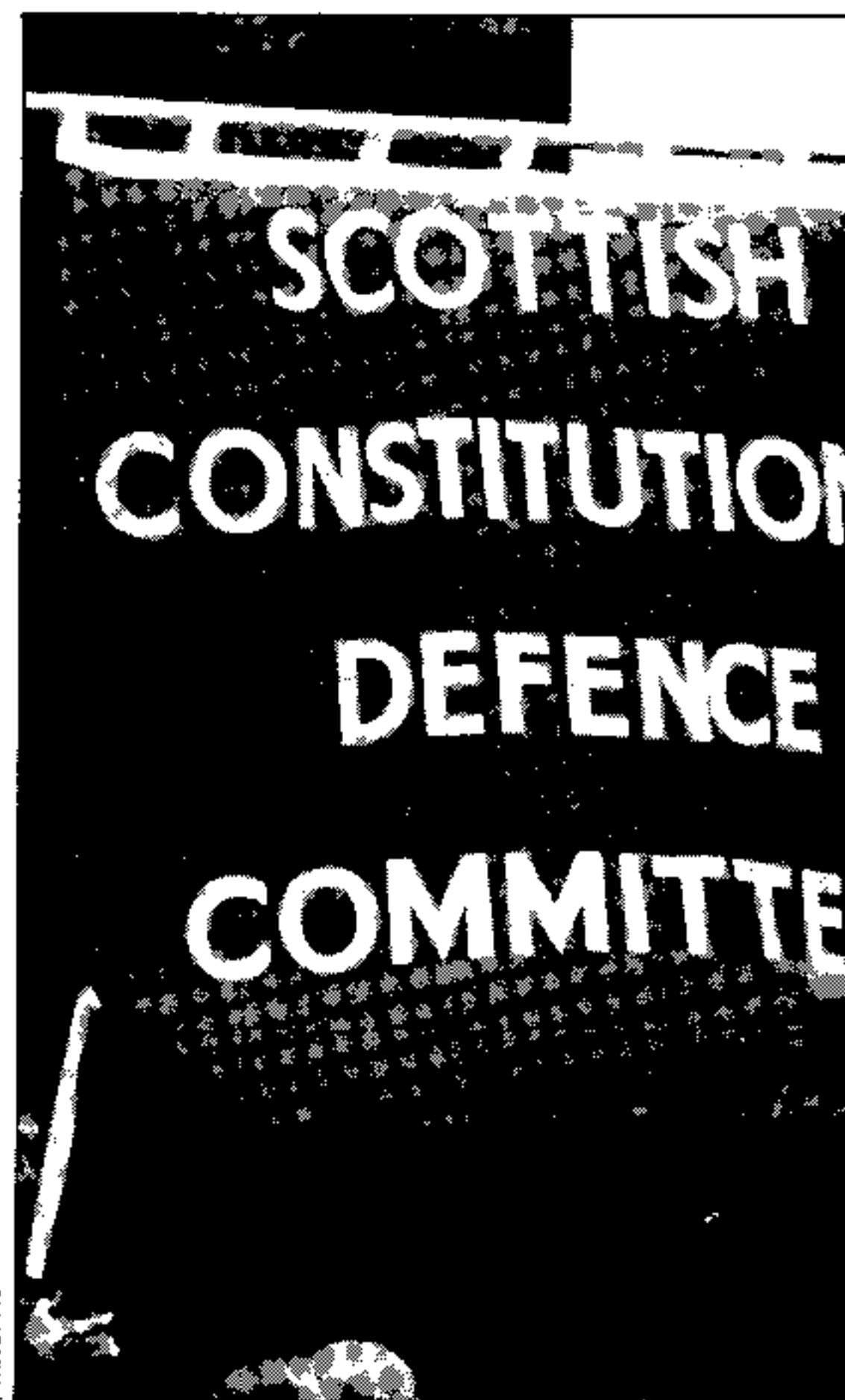


Photo: Neil Martinson

a house. There isn't the likelihood of an Orange pogrom.

But recently a hard right wing Loyalism has emerged in Glasgow. Really it was never far away. Even in 1970 a Loyalist candidate in Bridgeton could pick up 1180 votes, while Irish marches were kept off Glasgow's streets for six years because of Loyalist violence. We'd also seen UVF attacks on Catholic pubs, though on one occasion they sent up a Bridgeton Orange Lodge heavenwards when they stored gelignite in the oven and then switched it on to heat the pies!

Opening for Paisley

But what is different in 1981 is the discontent unemployment's created which can be channeled along traditional sectarian lines, and the fact that like their Northern Ireland brethren Glasgow's Loyalists feel betrayed. They believe Britain is selling Ulster out. They see the Pope coming to Glasgow next year as part of the conspiracy stretching from Thatcher to the Provos.

Loyalism in Glasgow could too easily be dismissed as rather bizarre. But a group like the Scottish Loyalists can bring 5000 people out on the streets. Their open links with the National Front mean, however, most Orangemen see them as extremists – a view strengthened by recent boasts about running guns to the UDA, to whom they're closely linked.

But the Scottish Loyalists provided an opening for Paisley. Following an attack on an H-Block march in February Paisley jettied in to announce "If something is not done this city will be like Belfast". He then set out trying to make



it as much like Belfast as he could.

Paisley has formed the 'Scottish Constitutional Defence Committee' headed by Pastor David Cassells, an ex-RUC man and a cousin of Paisley's wife. With its more traditional Loyalist politics, the Defence Committee can draw on support from within the Orange Lodges themselves. Already they have threatened to defy the ban on marches in Strathclyde and have promised further marches and rallies. The Pope's visit next year provides them with a real focus.

An Orange backlash isn't inevitable in Glasgow. The majority of Scotland's 120,000 Orangemen are union members and vote Labour. The basic anger is against the Tories, as shown on the February 21st jobs march. But sectarianism will gain a hold if there is no fight back against the Tories and if the union leaders continue to sweep the issue under the carpet.

In that we can learn from *our* history. At the beginning of the century with

the Home Rule crisis and the Irish War of Independence one would have expected a huge Orange backlash on Clydeside. It didn't happen, because there was a strong socialist movement and a militant shop stewards organisation. There were marches and rallies of course, and guns were run from the Clyde, but there was also a movement fighting for a 40-hour week and against rent rises. That movement could answer sectarian arguments and it didn't sweep Ireland under the carpet. John McLean could sell 35,000 copies of his "Ireland's Tragedy, Scotland's Disgrace" and organise a series of rallies in support of Irish independence.

Today we have to do the same. The answer to sectarianism is building the Right to Work Campaign to fight unemployment and a strong socialist organisation which can take up the arguments on the factory floor. That's the way to make sure Paisley goes unheard.

Chris Bamberg

Glasgow Red

Some people are fond of saying that Ireland is Britain's Vietnam. Yet the impact of the Irish war on the British mainland is, as yet, nowhere near as great as the impact Vietnam made in the USA.

The war hasn't had the direct impact on ordinary people that Vietnam had for ordinary, apolitical Americans. And so the opportunities for socialists to build a solidarity campaign within the British working class movement are that much less.

The present impasse in the North is another obstacle. In Vietnam it became clear that the freedom fighters were winning. In Ireland the situation is different.

Faced with these obstacles what can and what should we be doing in Britain?

One approach is to ignore the problems that exist and to stand on the sidelines, chanting the correct slogans but talking to no-one but the converted. The outcome is that Ireland becomes the property of the

'loony left', those latter-day Narodniks who believe that a magic wand will wave away those real obstacles. No attempt is made to connect Ireland with the day-to-day concerns that face ordinary people, and as a result Britain's role in Ireland is hardly discussed, let alone challenged, in the area where it really counts—the workplace.

There is an apparently opposed approach which in practice has the same impact—that commonly adopted by the official left in the labour movement. It can be described cynically perhaps, as 'looking the other way', involving as it does playing down and even ignoring the events in the North because they are too controversial, too embarrassing. The people who champion this position hide behind the smokescreen of the 'Better Life for All' campaign, or the 'Bill of Rights'.

United fight

This month at the Scottish Trade Union Congress in Rothesay delegates were treated to a fine example of this approach. The General Council decided that Bobby Sands MP and his comrades in Armagh and the H Blocks should not be recognised as political prisoners, and that Sands' life could only be saved on humanitarian grounds. Clearly, for some people, Ireland, unlike El Salvador or Soweto, is a bit too close to home. But this attitude can't simply be dismissed, it holds sway among many of the rank and file activists in the trade unions, and revolutionaries will have to pay closer attention to it.

Ireland is not an easy issue to raise in the union or the workplace, particularly in Glasgow where Orangeism is strong, and where local trade union officialdom is genuinely scared of a backlash. Yet while revolutionaries have to be realistic enough to recognise the limitations of what they can achieve, those limitations can never be an excuse for inaction.

The appeal of Loyalism *can* be challenged, and it must be, otherwise it will block the development of a real Troops Out movement in major parts of Britain. But it can only be broken if, as Connolly argued, the counter-arguments are put side by side with our routine activities in the day-to-day, piecemeal struggles of the class. It also means involving forces other than the revolutionary left in that activity.

For example, in Glasgow, the Right to Work Campaign has started to leaflet factories and dole offices with leaflets arguing an anti-sectarian message—an argument that answers Paisley's divide and rule politics with a call for a united working class fight against unemployment, low wages and bad housing.

Through unemployed work and through socialist activity in the CND it is now becoming possible to develop a campaign against army recruitment, particularly among youth. And out of that activity the class lessons about the army, and Britain's role in Ireland, can be drawn.

It is possible to hold meetings on the hunger strike—to organise pickets, demonstrations, leafletting and flyposting—and at the same time to raise the arguments in the union branch, the shop floor, the office or the college.

Dave Sherry

In a very real sense, political

"There always seems to have been some embarrassment, among authors, a tendency to blur the fact that many of the bravest fighters in this cause have been Communists."

The 'cause' is the fight against apartheid. The speaker is Nadine Gordimer, interviewed in the *Guardian*. Not that she is a Marxist; according to the same interview she is only interested in politics 'insofar as they motivate people. I am not expounding a political theory.'

Given the nature of South African society, politics is inescapable for a writer of any seriousness and honesty. Nadine Gordimer has both and, despite her disclaimers, her books are, in a very real sense, political.

Living and writing in South Africa places her in an ambivalent position. In the wake of the Soweto rising white anti-racists have tended to feel pushed to the sidelines; yet she sees the formation of black trade unions (however limited) as, potentially, the decisive development. Three of her books have been banned.

Her most recent novel is *Burger's Daughter*. Lionel Burger, a leading Communist, is imprisoned and dies on Robben Island. His daughter, Rosa, has been brought up alongside a black child whom she is taught to regard as her brother. Her childhood is dominated by the needs of the struggle; shaped by police harassment and the continual arrest of her parents.

The book explores the conflict between the demands of this world and her struggle to become an individual. It opens with a young girl waiting to visit her detained mother; her private self is there as well —

"The bleeding began just after my father had made me go back to bed after my mother had been taken away. No pain; just wetness that I tested with my finger, turned on the light to verify; yes, blood. But outside the prison the internal landscape of my mysterious body turns me inside out, so that in that public place on the public occasion . . . I am within that monthly crisis of destruction, the purging, tearing, draining of my own structure".

She is asked to visit a young detainee. Posing as his sweetheart she is able to tell him whatever the movement needs him to know. Ironically, she falls in love with him but her attempts to tell him so founder because they appear part of the pretence.

After her father's death she seeks to free herself, not from his ideals but from her restricted world. She manages to obtain a passport, knowing this will seem a defection from her political

heritage. In London she meets her black brother, with whom she lost contact years ago. He bitterly denounces her family's struggle as remote from the realities of black South Africa. Rosa's view of her history is thrown into turmoil. It looks as though her defection will become complete. Instead, she goes home —

"No-one can defect. I don't know the ideology. It's about suffering. How to end suffering. And it ends in suffering . . . Like anyone else, I do what I can. I am teaching them to walk again, at Baragwanath Hospital. They put one foot before the other."

As Soweto erupts she finds herself dealing with those crippled not by nature but the guns and clubs of the police.

In this heightened political atmosphere she again merits the attention of the security forces. In October 1977 she along with hundred of blacks, is detained without charges. The book closes with Rosa in prison, awaiting trial. She has found that even simple revulsion from human suffering has led her back to the political arena, to being 'Burger's daughter'.

Nadine Gordimer's handling of the tensions between personal and political imperatives is brilliant and the details of political practice have the ring of truth. Rosa's dilemma is sensitively drawn and revolutionary commitment remains, throughout, a credible option.

Where the Burgers are outcasts,



Nadine Gordimer

Mehring in *The Conservationist* is a solid citizen, a successful businessman with a farm where, at weekends, he can escape the pressures of the commercial world. The farm is an attempt to find permanence — his personal retreat to the laager.

His rural peace is marred when a corpse turns up in his pasture. He calls the police who don't want to come: dead 'kaffirs' can wait. When he insists, they simply bury the body where they find it, killer and identity unknown, and forget about it. There it remains; a half-remembered presence, an obscure threat to Mehring's world.

Mehring is a racist, sexist, deeply conservative white South African. Through his eyes we see his gay son 'who doesn't want to be a man' and fight freedom-fighters in Namibia, his estranged wife and his 'trendily left-wing' mistress who mocks the fortune he has made in pig-iron and confidently predicts his extinction as a type. He is the classic paternalist. To him the black farm labourers are wayward, overgrown children, helpless without a strong, guiding white hand. Yet Mehring is drawn as a real person, not merely a focus for our hatred.

Where the whites are only extensions of Mehring's consciousness, the dialogue, actions and characters of the blacks are fully and independently developed. When a flood threaten the farm and the 'master' cannot reach it, they cope — with complete mastery. This is a subtle, but effective device for exploding Mehring's racism.

The Conservationist is pervaded by images of flood, fire and catastrophe, prefiguring the tide of black anger which from Mehring's point of view, threatens to engulf society. The portrait of Mehring is the portrait of a man for whom time has already run out. The descriptive passages are extremely beautiful, creating a dense, highly charged atmosphere. The disaster that overtakes Mehring in the book's astonishing climax provides a powerful epitaph for the white supremacists.

Nadine Gordimer's work raises more questions than it answers about her political stance. The reason she stays in South Africa furnished one clue —

"If you are born in and committed to a particular place, the most meaningful way of life for you will be in taking up whatever challenges there are in that place."

That may be the basis of a personal, rather than political, philosophy, but it has certainly enabled her to produce work that takes up the challenge of the crucial political issue in Southern Africa; smashing apartheid.

Steve Kendall

Books mentioned

Burger's Daughter —

Recently issued by Penguin at £1.95

The Conservationist —

Penguin 95p.

Reactionary force

In the April *Socialist Review* Sally Bild and Caroline Conway alluded to the antics of *Militant* in the civil service pay campaign. Readers may be interested to know that this group's backsliding is quite in keeping with its record in the CPSA which cannot be described as anything other than disgraceful.

Back in late 1979 over 500 CPSA members were locked out of the Glasgow branch of the Department of National Savings for fighting the cuts. Together with Peter Colman (then CPSA vice-president, and a CP member), full-time official Terry Adams, a *Militant* supporter, concocted a behind-the-scenes deal with management which was then presented to the branch as a fait accompli. Adams:

'Outlined the case for accepting these proposals. He stated that the only alternative to an orderly return to work was an all-out strike by members at the Bank. Terry stressed that the CPSA should not allow itself to be provoked into a premature, all out battle with suspensions. Management would like nothing better than to drain the financial resources and energy of the union before the massive cuts which are imminent.' (*Militant*, 7 December 1979)

How a fight against 'imminent' cuts can be 'premature' is beyond me. On the 6 December cuts of 1090 jobs were announced for the DNS.

Adams obviously has no confidence in the ability of CPSA members to fight and preferred to betray the membership than extend the lock-out into an all-out strike. The DNS affair was very demoralising. There has been little action against the cuts since then. In 1980 *Militant* supporter Pat Byrne, then on the CPSA NEC, whined 'In the civil service we have been cut first by 60,000 posts and then by another 15,000 jobs as part of the price for our pay increase this year.' (*Militant*, 25 April 1980). Byrne forgets to say that along with fellow *Militant* supporters Steve Appleton and Kevin Roddy, he actually voted on the NEC to recommend acceptance of that deal. And the 1980 CPSA conference saw a glut of sycophantic *Militant*-inspired motions which supported the union leadership's betrayals on this issue.

1980 also brought the Brixton Dole strike. Despite the enormous significance of this issue *Militant* supporters were few and far between on the pickets. The most I ever saw was four—and that was on one of the well-advertised mass pickets. *Militant* cannot plead lack of resources; there are several dozen supporters in the CPSA in London. They were not interested because it wasn't their supporters who were being victimised and they could see little to be gained as a group from the dispute.

This sectarianism is in stark contrast to the Terry Adams affair a few years ago. In this case Adams, the *Militant* supporter of

DNS fame, was on his probation as a full-timer and was blatantly witch-hunted by a right-wing NEC. The whole of the left in the CPSA rallied round and defeated the witch-hunt.

This leads on to another thing. One of *Militant's* tactics is to get into the union bureaucracy. There are two *Militant* supporters who are full-timers in the CPSA and whose wages are something like twice the average of CPSA members. They are not elected nor are they subject to recall. I've shown just one issue where one of them has sold out an important dispute. I've also shown that *Militant* is a very reactionary force within the CPSA. Perhaps other readers can give some examples both within and without the CPSA where this powerful organisation has sold out union members.
CPSA activist



CND replies

A very good survey of the phenomenal growth of CND (*SR* 21 'The largest Mass Movement Yet') was spoiled by some gratuitous and incorrect remarks about the national organisation of CND.

The idea that we have 'done very little to build local groups' is frankly absurd. Please consider the following:

- 1) CND currently gets about 900 letters asking for further information each week. These are forwarded to local group organisers as well as being answered from the national office.
- 2) CND used to distribute *The War Game* from the national office, and at the time of handing over this work to a full-time film distributor we were supplying it to approximately 15 groups per week. We negotiated a deal with the Concord film council (who now have some twenty prints—all booked all the time) and help groups, still, to order it from them.
- 3) CND national speakers can be found at meetings and conferences every night of every week. Thanks to the expansion of regional organisations of CND sometimes regional speakers attend founding meetings of groups for purposes of advice and encouragement, but in general national speakers will be found at the start of every CND group.
- 4) CND helps local groups as far as possible with information and press relations work. All they need do is write or phone.
- 5) CND holds a national conference for all members and groups each year. This year we also have organised an additional campaign conference, youth conference and labour movement conference. The national organisation also helps put on conferences (all quite major events these days) for the CND specialist sections.
- 6) CND organises national demonstrations—there are two more this year.
- 7) CND runs a quite large publishing department. This year we will publish 12 pamphlets. We also publish stickers, posters, badges and a monthly paper in addition to leaflets. All this material is available to local groups at large discounts.
- 8) At the moment national CND has very

ambitious plans to help CND regions establish offices with full-time staff. We at the national office will provide much of the money for this and, who knows, hopefully the regions in turn may be able to provide full time workers in the localities.

But these are no boasts and certainly no reason for national CND to sit on our laurels. Often the rate of growth of the campaign outstrips our ability to service groups *as fully* as we would wish. Constant consideration is given to making sure scarce resources are used to the full.

I was baffled by the comment you reported from an unidentified 'person from Manchester' to the effect that they never see our publications—she or he must, literally, be one in a million.

Over the past twelve months the circulation of national CND's magazine *Sanity* has increased from 5,000 to 55,000. We have printed and distributed three quarters of a million leaflets. For a long time *Protest and Survive*, a pamphlet we jointly published with The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation was on everyone's mind. Our other titles are bought at a rate of over 5,000 per month per title (on average) by local groups alone. Of course, in the present situation, we can never produce enough and there have been distribution problems.

To conclude, *Socialist Review* is absolutely right to emphasise the growth of local CND groups rather than CND as a national organisation. The latter exists to service the former and, I believe, the 'two-tier' membership structure of local CND members joining local groups at often quite a small fee with the core of members joining the national organisation—in large part to fund CND publications and activities that build and support new groups—is working very well. If there are 'problems' with national CND, this doesn't appear to prevent a steady 400-500 new members (many from local groups) joining each week.

Chris Horrie

Secretary

CND publications committee



MISSILE MADNESS

SWP pamphlet by Peter Binns on the new weapons system and how they threaten your life. 40p (plus 10p postage). Bulk orders £3.25 for 10 post free from Socialists Unlimited, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London, N4.

Quietly subversive

It is not often that a television drama challenges directly the view of themselves the British establishment advances for our consumption, but the *Law and Order* series, screened three years ago and directed by Leslie Blair did just that. There was a fierce outcry from the upper echelons of the police; the prison officers were so incensed that the BBC was later banned from filming in prisons. The BBC themselves were obviously rather unnerved by the response and have turned down a large number of overseas sales. Jane Ure Smith talked to Les Blair about his work.

The *Law and Order* series may have made the biggest splash in Les Blair's career, but none of the films he has made for television over the past ten years has been exactly pro-establishment. Their subversive power lies perhaps paradoxically in their very quietness, their tendency to understatement, their concern with detail; the naturalistic style works constantly to lay bare the reality beneath the surface, to grasp the world as it is.

'Everything that happens on television is propaganda,' Les Blair claims. 'And I try to propagandise, I suppose, but I try to do it in a way that doesn't alienate. I like to do quiet films which present a realistic image of the world. I could bend that image to suit my purposes. It's difficult because the mere process of making a film is bending reality. But there is a danger in denying the truth to make your point. If you do that you immediately alienate a whole section of the audience who might otherwise go along. What I try to do is not so much hit the middle ground but to use the middle ground to make a point.'

Beyond the Pale, screened last January, is a good example of how Blair's theory operates in practice. The film dealt with the racist response to Russian Jews arriving in Britain at the turn of the century as refugees from the Tsarist pogroms, a response which culminated in the Alien Immigration Act of 1903. The parallels with situation

facing blacks and Asians in Britain today are inescapable.

'With *Beyond the Pale* I was dealing with a very specific period and I had to be very selective. The range of political response was enormous - even more than it is now - and I didn't want to produce a journalistic piece on the political landscape of the time. I selected an area that interested me, which was the area of the anarchist groups, and what I did was portray an image, the essential image of what had actually happened at the time.

'I could have bent that to demonstrate a political point, for example the need to organise politically against racism, but I would have found it very difficult to do because I was dealing with something that actually happened.

'What I tried to do in *Beyond the Pale* was show what happened in the context of today and to say if you're going to do this, these are the possible consequences.'

Beyond the Pale was an improvisation while *Law and Order* was heavily scripted. Yet stylistically the two have the same feel to them. The same feel is there in the excellent film *Only a Game*, a drama based on soccer player Famon Dunphy's account of his days at Millwall, screened last month by Thames. How does Les Blair explain his own particular naturalistic style?

'It is a product of my response to the things that I've appreciated and liked in the evolution of British cinema. I think the realistic strain has always been the strongest strain right from Grierson's documentaries onwards. Documentary has always been a significant strain in British film-making and the response of dramatic film-making to how good those early documentaries were has always been important too. The response is evident in films like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

'I feel the camera is about the real world. The whole point of the camera is that you can take it out into the real world and not be theatrical. My particular style has evolved out of an interest not so much in technicalities like acting style or camera style so much as an interest in content and subject



Les Blair

Photo: Peter Court

matter. I just find it very difficult to involve myself in subject matter which is to do with the real world in a non-realistic way. I want my audience to recognise the people in the film.

'The real decider is the casting, it's the most important part of the process. I look for actors who have something to offer to the film other than the ability to do the lines. It's what they can contribute from their own experience that's important.'

Although he has worked in theatre, film has always been the most important medium for Les Blair. The bulk of his work has been for television rather than the cinema. How does he gauge the importance of his films in terms of their power to influence people?

'Quite honestly I don't feel I have the message to change the world. I have a view which obviously I think is the right view, it's perhaps a similar view to those held by people like Ken Loach, Tony Garnett and Gordon Newman who wrote *Law and Order*. With the set up as it is in this country television is probably the only place where that view can happen. Fortunately it's the place that gets the biggest audience. It's an irony really.

'But I don't think you can change the world through film. All you can do is polarise. I don't think you can persuade anybody. The most you can hope for is that two people in a room watching a programme might disagree and one can persuade the other. I don't think *Law and Order* changed the world, but I don't think that's any reason for not making films like that. It's a pebble on the beach but it's worth chucking.'

The next film Les Blair has lined up is called *The Nation's Health*, a joint venture with Gordon Newman. 'It's a controversial look at medicine in Britain, a kind of "Health and Order",' he says. And hopefully it's another pebble that might cause the odd ripple before getting lost on the beach.

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New York women garment workers demonstrating against working conditions in 1901

Class war behind the sisterhood

The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict 1880-1917

Meredith Tax
Monthly Review Press £9.45

This book sets out to examine various strategies of organising working class women by looking at nearly 40 years of American labour history. The practical conclusions of the author are confused, but the description of the lives and struggles of the working class in this period is marvellous.

Working conditions were horrific, wages hovered on minimum survival levels, the use of the state and militia to brutally crush strikes was normal practice. More than 20,000 textile workers in Lawrence struck in 1912 because of a 30 cents a week pay cut. The cut in wages was the price of five loaves of bread—the difference between bare survival and starvation. Workers flooded out of the factories crying, 'Better to starve fighting than to starve working'.

Every strike was an example of stark class warfare. It was a period which, it seemed, would inevitably lead to revolution.

In the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of this century the American Federation of Labour (AFL) dominated trade union organisation. The AFL organised skilled workers into craft unions and refused to admit women into its ranks. Naturally this played right into the hands of the employers: unorganised low paid women workers kept down the wages of all workers and divided the class.

In desperation, without the support of the AFL, many working women appealed to middle class feminists for help. The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) stepped in, but, in the long run, provided little help at all.

The WTUL comprised of women from different classes and occupa-

tions, but was dominated by middle class women whose aim was to provide cultural education to women factory workers. The League helped with fund-raising for strikes, but it talked of uplifting and protecting women. After a bitter internal battle between those who saw moral uplift of prime importance and those who felt that trade union organisation of more help to working class women, the former won and the League sank into reporting on factory conditions and pressing for reforms such as a shorter working day for women—which was won with a corresponding loss of pay.

Meredith Tax quite rightly attacks the WTUL for being dominated by bourgeois feminists with little understanding of and quite different real interests to working class women. However, when she describes the activities of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or the Wobblies) around women, she rejects their analysis and practice as well.

The IWW was a stark contrast to the AFL in that it aimed to build one union for all workers. In reality it was much more than a trade union as they exist today: it continually taught Marxist economics and preached class warfare towards a revolutionary end.

The IWW maintained that it organised men and women on an equal basis, and throughout the strikes in which the IWW was dominant the wives of strikers were encouraged to play an equal role on picket lines, in meetings and on strike committees.

The IWW rejected any notion of women making cross class alliances. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, its leading woman organiser, said:

'The queen in the parlour has no interest in common with the maid in the kitchen... The sisterhood of women, like the bro-

therhood of men, is a hollow sham to labour. Behind all its smug hypocrisy and sickly sentimentality loom the sinister outlines of class war.'

Meredith Tax condemns the IWW as being 'economist', of reducing women's oppression to a manifestation of class society, and consequently failing to organise women separately according to their special needs. Having accepted that the interests of bourgeois feminists are fundamentally different to those of working class women and having rejected the 'economism' of the IWW, she goes on to recommend ways of organising women in her final chapter, Practical Conclusions.

The question she attempts to answer is, 'Can women really unite across class lines to fight their common oppression without betraying the revolution?' Tax says:

'Women's ultimate liberation demands socialist revolution as a precondition... The opposing

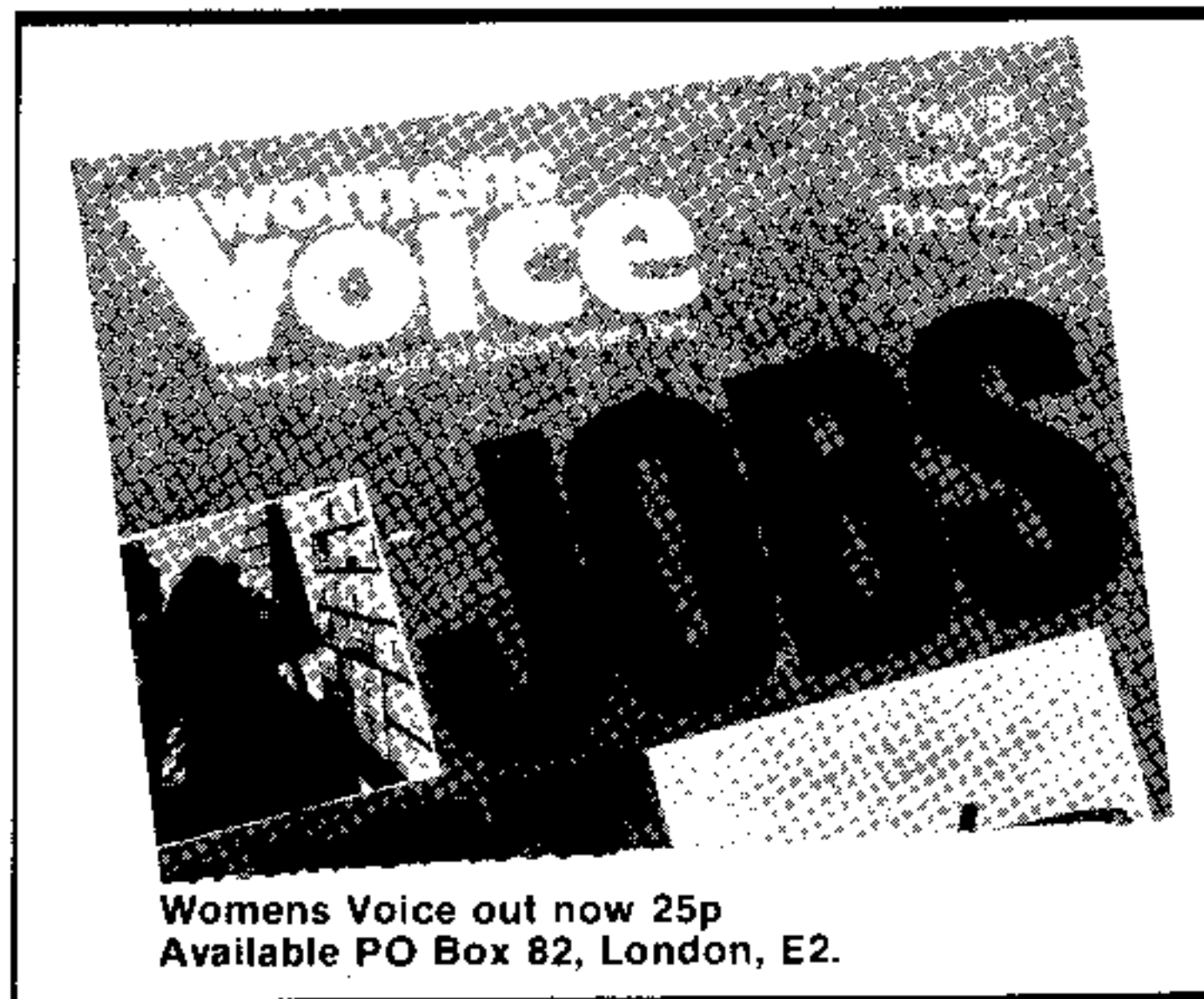
notion, common amongst socialist feminists, that the two struggles are separate but equal... is static and inadequate. It leaves out the relationship between the struggles and the way each affects the other—not to mention the fundamental fact that women are very much a part of the class struggle and their lives are entirely mediated by class relations. There is no struggle for women's liberation that is separate and independent of class. Indeed, how could such a thing be? Such a picture of the world leads to work that is detached, disoriented, floating in limbo.'

In the 1980s, Tax says, the labour movement is weak and divided, and the women's movement is under bourgeois leadership. 'Surely we don't want to return to the nineteenth century doctrine of a separate sphere for women, where women can make decisions about a limited range of female concerns and men can make decisions about everything else.' No we don't, so the answer is unite, says Tax. The women's movement, the labour (trade union) movement and the socialist movement must unite to become 'a general movement to change society'.

Now that sounds very nice and very easy. There's one problem. The way we change society, for good and forever, is by a working class revolution. Unfortunately there are sections of the women's movement, the trade union movement and the socialist movement that are not interested in revolutionary change.

So to unite with people whose aims are different from ours for unspecified but fundamental 'change' would lead nowhere except to a centrist swamp. Our task is to build a revolutionary working class party, of men and women, to fight for both women's liberation and socialism. To that end—building the party—we will work in a united front on specific issues: abortion, fascism, nuclear arms. But let's keep hold on our revolutionary politics.

Harriet Sherwood



It wasn't always thus ...

The German Family
 Edited by R J Evans and W R Lee
 Croom Helm £13.95

The common view of the family is of something eternal, unchanging, as natural as 'human nature' itself. Such a view is, of course, propagated by many defenders of existing society: the Catholic church, the Tory party and Labour politicians can all be relied on to voice deep concern about the future of the family. But, paradoxically, it is also implied in many fashionable feminist arguments: 'patriarchy' (literally, the rule of the father) is said to persist from one society to another, from feudalism through capitalism into socialism.

The 'house'

This book contains a useful corrective to such slipshod, unscientific ways of seeing things. The various essays in it describe some of the ways in which the family and the roles of men, women and children were transformed as German society moved from feudalism to industrial capitalism.

As Karin Hausen tells, neither the concept of the family nor the sexual stereotypes we associate with it existed before the latter end of the 18th century. Until then people spoke of the 'house' or the 'household', engaged in both production and consumption, in which a 'patriarch' (usually a man but on occasions a widow) laid down the law to the wife, the younger men, the children and

the servants. Within this structure both men and women had defined productive roles, very different to the sexual stereotypes of the bourgeois family.

For example, it made no sense at all in the present household for women to be valued as 'weak, submissive, protective': rather, they were expected to be capable of hard physical labour, although of a different kind to that of the men.

In the same way children were viewed in a very different way to what we take for granted now. So, as Robert Lee notes, in early nineteenth century Bavaria once a couple of children had been reared to keep the household going, the rest were regarded as a burden: "The amount of attention given by parents to young children and particularly to infants remained minimal. In Mittelfels, for example, it was rumoured that a farmer would rather lose a young child than a calf."

Hostile world

But the risk of a new mode of production in the cities smashed the old 'household'. It was increasingly displaced by new forms of livelihood - based, for the middle classes, upon salaried employment in the world of business or the state. The new ideal which corresponded to this was that of the autonomous individual, cut off from all the old ties. At the close of the eighteenth century - the era of the French revolution - this briefly challenged all preceding notions of

hierarchy and authority.

But there could be no real autonomy for the individual in bourgeois society. Instead there was the competitive rat-race for the men, while the women were left to socialise the next generation in the home. Life became divided into 'the hostile world and the friendly family'. Women were re-defined as creatures who kept the family together - the protective, submissive, caring, intuitive, not-fully-rational wives and mothers.

Women's nature

Novels, plays, church sermons and 'scientific' texts all endorsed this ideal as 'female nature'. By the end of the last century the stereotype was so widespread, that it was even adopted by the 'bourgeois women's movement': as Karin Hausen notes, it based itself on a notion that it was 'the cultural task of women' to bring humanity, through their femininity, into 'the inhuman world of men' - a notion that still persists today in some sections of the women's liberation movement (how often have we heard so much nonsense about how the women's movement can teach 'new forms of organisation'?).

The new notions of the family and 'women's nature' began to percolate all of society (as Karl Marx noted, 'the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class'). But they never fitted other classes in the same way as they fitted the middle classes. In the countryside the old household persisted as a source of foodstuffs for the capitalist market well into the twentieth century, so that men still valued wives for their productive power rather than for their 'feminine' qualities: as one bemused observer noted a century ago, the 'characteristic' differences of the sexes were not to be found here, for 'the voices, the facial features and the behaviour of both sexes are very similar'.

Family wage

Among industrial workers things were a little more complex. As the old peasant family was broken up, the ideologues of the ruling class attempted to persuade workers to accept the values of the bourgeois family: they saw it as a means of ensuring that a new generation of workers was physically nurtured and they feared that a weakening of the family would open women and children to some of the pernicious socialist ideas growing in favour among the men. Yet, as Richard Evans observes, "the very employers whose spokesmen so eloquently delineated the consequences of female employment on family life, were at the same time engaged in the wholesale employment of women and child-

ren, often at starvation rates ..."

The working class family certainly could not survive on the man's wage alone. In a perceptive essay, Heilwig Schomerus shows that the idea that men were actually paid a 'family wage' sufficient to keep their wife and kids was a myth. Engineering workers' wages reached a peak when they were 25-27, a couple of years before they usually married, and began to fall dramatically when they were 40-45 - long before their children were old enough to work. The result was usually appalling poverty, which could only be relieved if the wife was able to get paid employment. But this was impossible most of the time because of the impact of repeated pregnancies and continual child care in an era when safe and reliable contraception was virtually unknown. And even when married women did get work, as Robyn Dacey tells in a study of textile workers in Hamburg and Berlin, employers exploited their double burden to force them to accept unstable and appallingly paid jobs, often done from their own homes.

Antidote

In a final, disappointing essay, Richard Evans discusses the attitude of the German socialist movement to the family. He suggests that although initially people like August Bebel and Clara Zetkin accepted Marx's view that capitalism was destroying the family, they later were forced by the realities of German society - and the acceptance of those realities by Social Democrat workers and their wives - to shift their ground. The women who joined the socialist organisations were usually the wives of male members, not women workers, and what began to be preached was not an abolished family but a reformed family.

The implication is that Marx was wrong to argue that the entry of women into production provided the basis for women's liberation and the destruction of the bourgeois family.

But there are two faults in Evans' argument. First, he talks about the attitudes of workers, both male and female, without reference to the industrial struggles they were involved in - and there were in fact very few such struggles in Germany prior to 1914. And secondly, he deals with a period when the number of women in continuous lifetime employment was still relatively small.

The price and the academic style of this book will put it beyond the reach of most *Socialist Review* readers. But some of its material deserves to be popularised as a welcome antidote to prejudices found often enough on the left as well as encouraged by the right.

Chris Harman



Anna Paczuska Sisters and Workers

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Ditch your prejudices

Belt & Braces and DET Enterprises
Coming Up
 by Kate Phelps

Belt and Braces and DET Enterprises, acting as a joint production company, put *Coming Up* on the road for three months in a nationwide tour, ending up at the old Half Moon in Alic Street, East London.

Kate Phelps' play addresses the interplay between sexuality and class, and sexual politics and class politics, in a manner that is rare in that it recognises the often complex reality of actual experience. Frequently, plays dealing with sexuality omit or appear to reject class analysis and class politics, and plays dealing with the state, industrial conflict, and class omit, acknowledge in a token way, or reject the importance of issues arising from sexuality, and consequently, considerable areas of our experience are neglected. To say that 'the personal is political' or even 'the political is personal' doesn't confront this head on necessarily, and, in fact, can be a justification for avoiding doing so, with the result that class politics and sexual politics remain in their own corners, un-integrated. *Coming Up* attempts this integration.

Kevin is a working-class actor from Sheffield, in the rare position of working regularly for a good wage with a prestigious theatre company. He is assertive about his roots when in middle-class company but, ostensibly, is apolitical. He lives with a male lover, Philip, a middle-class playwright, who has 'come out' more than Kevin, is intimidated by Kevin's class hostility, but — he's a socialist. The contradictions and tensions in this situation are very accurately drawn. Kevin's father, an active trade unionist, dies, and having returned to Sheffield, he finds out that his family, father's friends and workmates believe that he was beaten to death by the police after being picked up allegedly for drunkenness.

The similarity with the Jimmy Kelly case

is clear, and they begin a public campaign. However, it is made quite clear to Kevin by the main organiser, an old TGWU friend of the father, that his gayness is an embarrassment and must be hidden. Both Kevin and Philip are intimidated by this, and Philip also vacillates and doubts whether the campaign is based on hard facts, but the strength of Kevin's class feelings and pull of his family background, despite the past conflicts with his parents over his gayness, make him stay to take part in the fight — with the possible consequences of losing his place in the theatre company and endangering his relationship with Philip.

Before becoming an actor, successful, and a lover — and despite being happy in those roles — Kevin makes the choice to put loyalty to his class and community first. However, as is made clear in the final scene, where the campaign committee confront unsympathetic journalists at a press conference, he refuses to hide his gayness and in an angry tirade, points to the links between the oppression of people for their sexuality and the general capitalist attack on the working-class as a whole. In being confronted directly by state violence and attacks on his sexuality, Kevin both comes out as a gay and comes up as a fighter on behalf of his class.

Sometimes the play takes too long to establish points, and Kate Phelps appears to use a conflict or piece of polemic as a device to lurch the action forward, produce a theatrical effect, and make political points, in a manner that makes characters behave unbelievably. Most notably, Kevin, who has been presented as determinedly uninterested in politics, at the end develops suddenly a clear and well-articulated political understanding of the crisis. At the end of Act 2, Phelps sets up a conflict between class and sexuality that rings false through having the T&G friend of the father insult Kevin and Philip in a way that is surprising in its aggression and insensitivity, given the tragic situation. In what, by and large, is a play with a keen sense of reality, such contrivances undermine that reality and, therefore, undermine the strength of the politics which have been emerging clearly through the action.

However, despite that, *Coming Up* is the most thorough and positive play I've seen dealing with class/sex issues, because it makes quite clear that prejudices must be ditched — you can't fight the class war and avoid fighting sexual oppression, and you can't fight sexual oppression without fighting the class war.

The play was also directed by Kate Phelps, and contained excellent performances from Drew Griffiths, John Grantham, Jane Cox, Lynne Verrall, and Peter Attard.
Derek Newark

FILMS

Read the book

Tess
 Directed by Roman Polanski

Polanski's films — from the satanic nastiness of *Rosemary's Baby* to the sordid corruption of *Chinatown* — have always moved in worlds of darkness, erupting from time to time into scenes of extreme and bloody violence. It might seem quite appropriate therefore that he has chosen to make a film based on one of Thomas Hardy's novels, peopled as they are with suffering men and women whose lives seem governed in the main by ugly twists of fate. The bewitched landscape of *Macbeth* might easily have become Hardy's Wessex, with every local superstition and every pagan secret echoing out of Stonehenge played for all its worth.

But living in exile in France with a prison sentence hanging over his head, Polanski has opted for a different kind of film altogether. In *Tess* he has sought 'respectability': he has sought to make a film which middle class ladies will happily drag their daughters off to see in the hope of securing a better A-level pass. And Hollywood has responded accordingly by handing out three Academy Awards.

Columbia Pictures are obviously delighted with the product and are marketing it with appropriate subtlety and flair. 'In the tradition of the great motion pictures', roars the trailer, '*Dr Zhivago*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Lawrence of Arabia*...' Thankfully

they leave out the *Sound of Music*. In actual fact the film doesn't fit with these others at all: it is extremely restrained. But the net result is empty, flat and two dimensional.

Polanski has tried for a literal translation of Hardy's powerful imagery, but it simply won't work any more. Consumer capitalism has bought up images of natural beauty and fed them back to us as clichéd adjuncts to breakfast cereal, shampoo and toilet paper for too long. He has trimmed and trimmed Hardy's original text in order to have the beautiful Nastassia Kinski who plays Tess on screen nearly all of the time. As a result the minor characters no longer give voice and life to the social conventions and morality that Hardy is at pains to expose as cruel and destructive.

And that after all is the real interest of the novel: Hardy's dim perception of women's oppression as a social phenomenon. The problem is that he gets so far and no further. Although his sympathies lie with ordinary working people, he never quite manages to locate the oppression he recognises and attacks in the structure of class society. In the end his pessimism gets the better of him and he resorts to quoting Shakespeare: 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport'.

But never mind. My feeling is forget the film and go out and get a copy of the book. It's well worth the read.

Jane Ure Smith

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X will be Y written & on the Z street barricades



Those 'street barricades' are part of our mythology. A common judgement on a leftist not ready to join the party is that he or she will be 'on the right side of the barricades'. They are, in fact, the historical symbol of revolutionary socialism: the hard necessity for armed insurrection if the working class is to seize power from its exploiters. The first socialist to formulate this idea was the French revolutionary Auguste Blanqui in the 1830s. It was he who formulated the first rules of insurrection and prepared the first organised insurrectionary movement. For his efforts he was to spend more than 33 of his 76 years incarcerated in thirty different prisons.

The barricades for Blanqui were not mystical: they were the very practical response to the need to organise the military aspect of an insurrection. In May 1839, his 'Society of the Seasons' launched a failed insurrection in Paris. Blanqui planned the military aspect with precise detail. In the narrow streets of old Paris barricades provided an excellent means of defence against regular troops. They proved a reliable weapon later in 1848, when the masses rose to overthrow the tottering monarchy of Louis Phillippe. The ruling class certainly feared them: the counter-revolution of Napoleon III rebuilt the centre of Paris with wide streets to make barricades less of an effective weapon.

But the barricades, of course, were a weapon of struggle appropriate to a certain level of military technique. The development of modern warfare has rendered them less of a central element in armed struggle. The real core of Blanqui's discovery was quite independent of a particular military form. What he recognised was that the seizure of power is a military question. In order for a new class to rule it is essential that it utterly smash the armed apparatus of the old order. The only way to achieve that end is to deploy superior military forces and this entails detailed military preparation: the arming and training of a revolutionary guard capable of fighting the enemy.

A large part of the task of breaking up an army is, of course, political: the subversion of the military hierarchy and the direct appeal to the ordinary soldiers to make common cause with their class brothers and sisters. There are, however, in any army special elite units which it is impossible to win over and which have to be defeated. And even the subversion of ordinary units requires force.

The secret of any army is that it is more dangerous to disobey than to obey.

The reason why men 'go over the top' even in slaughters like the Somme in World War One is that there is *some* chance of surviving. To refuse orders in the face of the enemy means *certain* death at the hands of your own military police. The revolution has to convince the mass of soldiers that it is more dangerous to fight against it than to disobey their officers. That means shooting the officers who give the order to fire on workers.

All of this Blanqui saw. He took it seriously, organising to achieve those ends. But his life was one of heroic failure, best summed up by a series of events towards the end of his life.

On October 31 1870, a spontaneous demonstration of workers called on Blanqui to form a new government. He accepted but was powerless to act, and the insurrection collapsed. He went underground, but his organisation was in tatters. His newspaper collapsed from lack of funds. On January 21 1871 members of his party tried again, but Blanqui refused to join them. They failed and Blanqui was forced to leave Paris, to be arrested on 17 March. On 18 March, the masses of Paris rose and established the Commune. Blanqui, a prisoner of the reactionaries, could play no part in that first great experiment in workers' power.

What Blanqui did not recognise was the decisive role of the masses in the revolution. He saw the military aspect of insurrection, but had no real grasp of its vital political dimension. In his *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky made the following judgement on Blanqui:

"Insurrection is an art, and like all arts it has its laws. The rules of Blanqui were the demands of a military revolutionary realism. Blanqui's mistake lay not in his direct but his inverse theorem. From the fact that tactical weakness condemns a revol-

ution to defeat, Blanqui inferred that an observance of the rules of insurrectionary tactics would itself guarantee the victory. An active minority of the proletariat, no matter how well organised, cannot seize power regardless of the general conditions of the country.

'In this point history has condemned Blanquism. But only in this. His affirmative theorem retains all its force. In order to conquer power, the proletariat needs more than a spontaneous insurrection. It needs a suitable organisation, it needs a plan, it needs a conspiracy. Such is the Leninist view of this question.'

An insurrection against the old order is such an enormously difficult task that it can only succeed in the right circumstances. In Lenin's classic definition, the old order must be incapable of continuing to rule, the masses must demand a new order, and there must be a conscious revolutionary party capable of leading the masses. Such fortunate conjunctures occur but rarely in history. But they do occur.

It is the task of the revolutionary party to prepare for those moments. For success it is necessary to have the deepest implantation in the life of the masses. It is necessary that the masses have learnt from long experience to trust the party in struggle. It is necessary that the idea of socialism have permeated the minds of the masses. It is necessary that the masses themselves are prepared to fight for their own liberation. But it is still, even then, necessary for the insurrection to be organised as a technical operation.

It is for this last reason that we have to keep on defending those 'barricades' and to learn the lessons from Blanqui. Against his reformist detractors, he grasped a great truth and a revolutionary truth. It is not the only lesson of revolutionary politics, but it is an important one. Those who attack 'Blanquism', 'putschism' and 'insurrectionism' are not pointing to a better road for socialism. They attack the weaknesses and vices of a great revolutionary in order to justify their own refusal to think through the problems of how the working class can come to power. Their road is a road to failure and defeat.

Colin Sparks