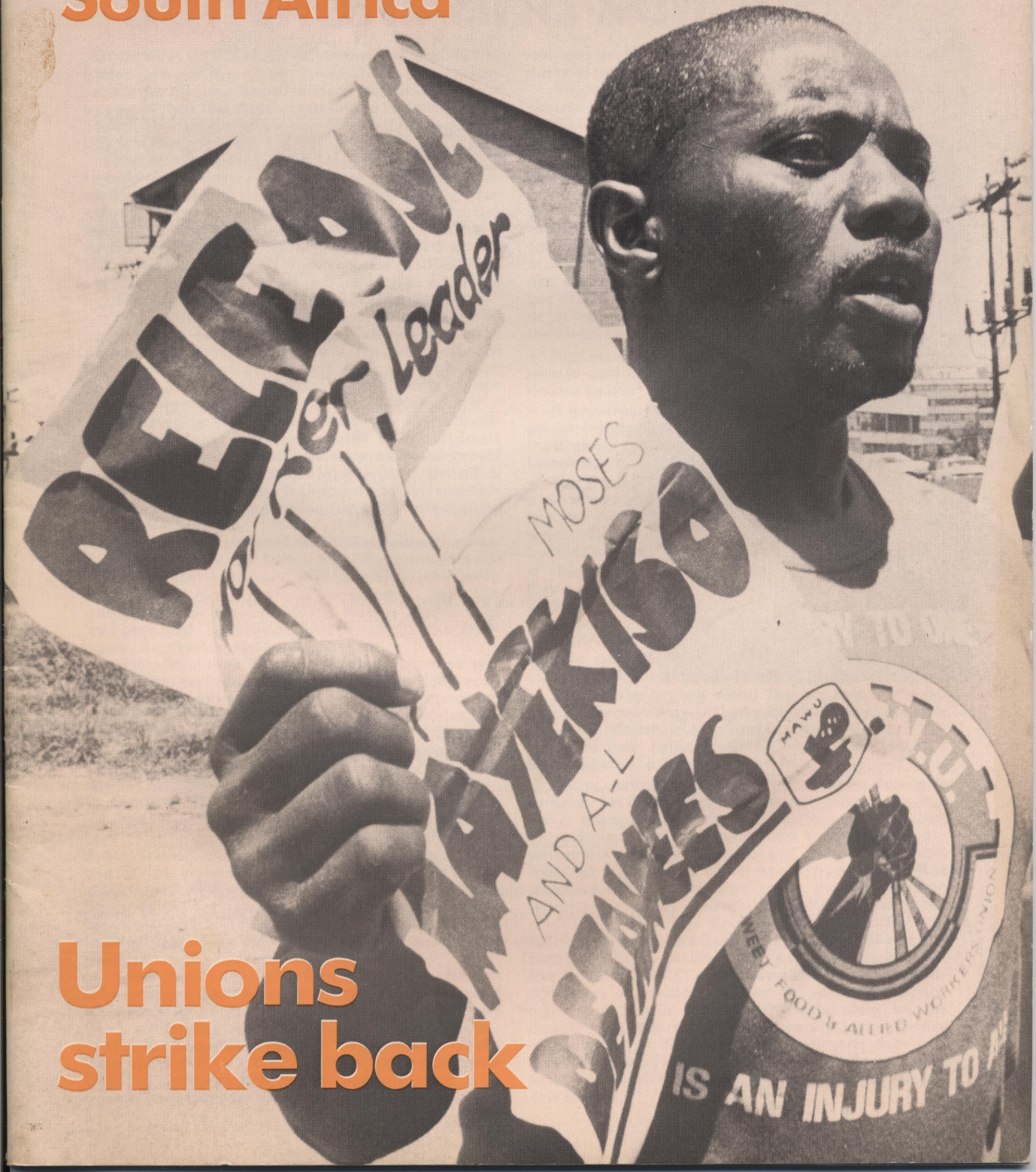


international

A journal of Marxism in the Labour Party

South Africa

Unions strike back



international

A journal of Marxism in the Labour Party

No. 5 July/August 1986

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Den & Dawn Barok

INTERNATIONAL
A journal of Marxism in the Labour Party

INTERNATIONAL
New series: No 5
Published by International
PO Box 503, London N1 1YH

ISSN 0308 3217

Printed by East End Offset (TU) Ltd,
London E3
Typeset by Character Typesetting (TU) Ltd,
London EC1

Cover photo: International Defence and
Aid Fund



Sanctions and solidarity

SUDDENLY, CAPITALIST governments across the globe are falling over themselves to support sanctions against South Africa. On the surface it appears that the Black resistance movement in South Africa has everyone but Britain and the USA on their side.

But imperialism's interest in maintaining its stranglehold over the southern African sub-continent should not be under-estimated. Besides wishing to safeguard their investments, the West dreads any continued turmoil in southern Africa, let alone it 'going communist'. Either would have enormous implications for the African continent as well as for the political equilibrium in the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

At £11 billions, British capital accounts for 40 per cent of total foreign investment in South Africa, more than this, the *relative* proportion of British capital tied up in South Africa (ten per cent of all British overseas investment) is many times greater than any of its imperialist rivals.

The bedrock of British trade and investment with Pretoria is finance capital and London's metals and gems market. Any dislocation of British involvement therefore would entail a major disruption of the bastion of British capitalism. Thatcher and her allies cannot contemplate this kind of action.

Seemingly opposed to the Thatcherite position that any measures taken 'must not harm the South African economy' are the Commonwealth states, the Non-aligned movement, the Organisation of African Unity and a handful of 'enlightened' bourgeois governments like Denmark, Australia and Sweden.

They fear that Thatcher's intransigence will precipitate an upheaval that will jettison the very system of exploitation she is seeking to protect. Hence, Neil Kinnock warns the government's present course will 'undermine British influence' in southern Africa. The underlying unity of the international bourgeoisie is revealed by the supine posture of the EEC after the recent summit.

Amidst this wrangling one thing is clear: the bourgeoisie has the initiative on an international level. The Soviet Union and its allies are sitting on the sidelines accepting the framework of 'sanctions for peaceful change and reform'. The working class internationally — the only force likely to act in support of the Black workers of southern Africa — has yet to make its voice heard independently of these inter-governmental diplomatic manoeuvres.

Over the years the leaders of the British labour movement have built up a shining record of inactivity in the struggle against apartheid from which the Anti-Apartheid Movement, regrettably, has done little to differentiate itself. Why should they? The AAM's strategy of establishing influence through its relations with labour bureaucrats and international diplomacy

has meant that only recently has an element of mass action become part of its thinking.

In contrast, the kind of solidarity the Black resistance movement needs must be committed to the conscious overthrow of the present system at whatever cost. Independent solidarity initiatives by the labour movement and the oppressed are needed.

Direct links need building with the independent workers' movement in South Africa. British trade unionists can and should impose their own sanctions now, in the manner of Dublin's Dunnes Store strikers. Mass political action is required, not simply to pressurise the Tory government, but also to fight for a comprehensive programme of action by the whole labour movement. This involves recognising that:

- ★ real economic warfare by Britain on apartheid *would* cost jobs and trade. It therefore must be linked to the fight against unemployment.

- ★ A genuine break with the multinationals and other institutions propping up Pretoria would involve an outright confrontation with the City of London.

- ★ The British labour movement will be unable to aid the overthrow of apartheid without challenging the racism in its own ranks — this involves supporting and building links with Black struggle in this country.

- ★ Demands must be made on a future Labour government — including the payment of compensation to workers taking boycott action, to the frontline states currently at the receiving end of apartheid's own sanctions and aggression, and to an independent Namibia for resources stolen by British companies.

- ★ There is a crying need for an *international* solidarity movement that will aid the overthrow of South Africa's rulers and not just sidetrack the struggle into talks and settlements as today's international initiatives tend to.

How useful sanctions are therefore depends entirely on their aims and content. Sanctions can be a weapon in any war as US and British imperialism have shown time and time again when they really want to get rid of a regime. Against Nicaragua, Cuba and Libya the US has organised complete blockades, punitive action against friendly states, companies and individuals; and has linked this with off-shore military manoeuvres and the funding of terrorist organisations. Neither the Labour leadership, the 'EPG' or the Commonwealth would contemplate an equivalent policy in southern Africa against Pretoria. But the working class in this country can make its voice heard independently — building on the massive sentiment that has developed and the visible desire to take action in solidarity with the Black working class of southern Africa.

Murderers fall out with thieves

DEPUTY CHIEF Constable John Stalker was appointed two years ago to investigate the shooting dead of unarmed individuals by SAS-trained RUC squads in 1982. His attempt to find out who was finally responsible and what actually happened was continually obstructed at all levels right up the very top, as it became apparent where decisions were being made concerning the incidents. Those implicated included senior RUC officers and possibly RUC chief Sir John Hermon himself.

In an apparent move to further block the investigation or delay it — the British security establishment are attempting to have Stalker punished for associating with criminals, as a cover for pulling him off the RUC case.

So much mud is now being thrown at Stalker and his associates (now including top Manchester businessmen, Tory MP Cecil Franks, — it's possible that even chief constable James Anderton won't be spared) that the state may succeed in diverting attention away from the cover-up towards Stalker's own alleged misdemeanours.

Those thought to be involved — MI5 and the Special Branch — have a good reason to be covering things up. A whole range of atrocities and illegal practices have been integral to Britain's war in Ireland since the early 1970s — including under the instruction of British Labour and Dublin government leaders.

The present attempted cover-up concerns three shooting incidents in November and December 1982 in which six unarmed people were killed by the RUC. The idea of the original investigation was probably to throw out a few 'bad apples' and prove that British justice in Ireland extended beyond the summary execution of individuals simply on suspicion. Unfortunately shooting-to-kill as a policy dates

back to the 1970s and presenting it as anything else but deliberate policy would be very difficult.

One of the 1982 cases Stalker was sent to investigate also implicated the Dublin establishment. Seamus Grew and Roderick Carroll were shot dead in December 1982 after being followed by E4A, the RUC undercover unit, as they travelled home to Armagh from south of the border.

Any full revelation of the facts would involve an admission that E4A were operating south of the border. One of their other activities was the employment of RUC informers in the south — one of whom, George Poyntz, was involved in the Grew and Carroll case.

At the original trial concerning this case, in April 1984, RUC constable Robinson was acquitted of murder after revealing he was instructed to tell a false cover story that Grew and Carroll were shot after crashing through a checkpoint. He also admitted to being ordered under the Official Secrets Act not to reveal the

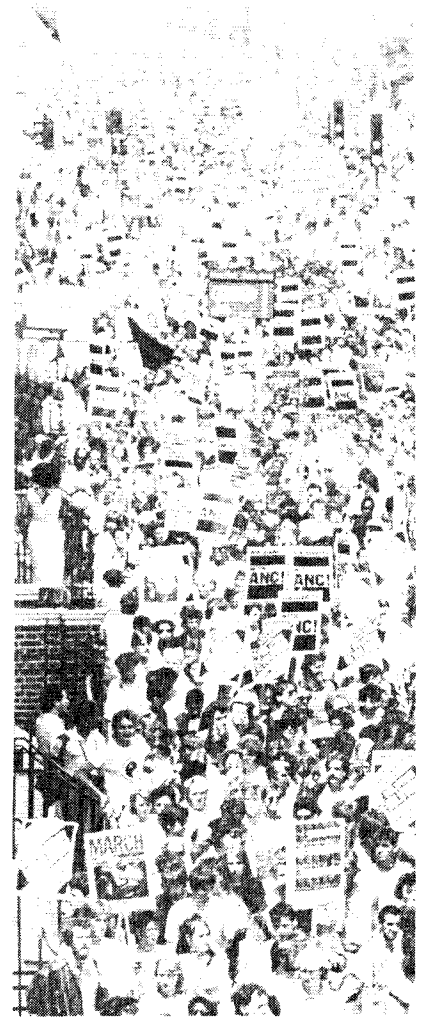
true facts. This wall of obstruction was still firmly in place when Stalker starting delving into the issue.

Like the recent trial and conviction of the 'Brighton Bombers', the Stalker affair and shoot-to-kill expose the Anglo-Irish Accord for what it is — summary justice. The only trial takes place on the front pages of the tabloids while the nationalist population gain nothing.

Few commentators have stopped to consider that British use of under-cover squads, selective assassination and cross-border incursions are only necessary in the first place because the Republican movement has mass support and other methods cannot beat them.

Two things we can remain sure of. British terror tactics like shoot-to-kill will continue to be the order of the day; and the higher echelons of the Police and the local Conservative Association in Manchester will continue to be the dens of thieves we all knew them to be anyway — whatever the outcome of the affair.

PIERS MOSTYN



Hundreds of thousands demonstr

Wapping: who is going to lead?

DISMISSED PRINTWORKERS fight on after a magnificent vote by SOGAT, NGA and AUEW members against the £50 million pay-off that SOGAT and TUC chiefs Brenda Dean and Norman Willis hoped would clear their decks of a stubborn strike. But after the vote was announced, the questions that needed answering were: 'Where do we go from here?', 'Who now is going to lead this strike?'

The Saturday night immediately after the vote saw a reduced number of pickets compared to the beginning of the strike.

The vote itself demands a show of solidarity from the labour movement, especially the Fleet Street union members. Instead of demanding

such a response, Dean, at the SOGAT Bi-ennial Delegate Conference (BDC), attacked the 'wreckers' of Fleet Street. No, not the media magnates, but her own union's members.

The London District Council (LDC), dominated by the Communist Party, had the chance to become the *de facto* leadership of the strike having lead the campaign for the rejection of the pay-off deal. Regretably having won the initiative from Dean, they handed it straight back in return for vague promises and the same old strategy. To call this a 'compromise' is to prettify it!

The BDC passed a motion calling for the failed boycott campaign to be revitalised, to push for the expulsion of the EETPU from the TUC and to

step up the picketing at Wapping.

Since then, the national leadership has done nothing to implement these decisions. Rather, they are fixated with what they regard as the BDC's key decision to keep within the law while prosecuting the strike. This means not prosecuting the strike at all. Threatened with sequestration the BDC voted to ensure, 'the maintenance of SOGAT as an independent trade union'. The national leadership proposed it, the LDC agreed it, the conference voted for it unanimously. The dispute is now trapped by legalities. Murdoch, never slow to see his opportunity, immediately slapped down affidavits for injunctions on SOGAT members of the LDC.

JAY NAIDOO, General Secretary of the 650,000-member Congress of South African Trade Unions, (COSATU) has been detained following the South African government's state-of-emergency decree of June 12. The speech below was given by Jay Naidoo at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzberg, on 19 March, 1986.

“What I would like to set out here today are the broad circumstances in which we as the independent trade unions, and COSATU in particular, operate. I will attempt to locate COSATU in the present political environment and explain the pressures under which a relatively new union movement exists.

In understanding the significance of COSATU it is worth recalling that 10 years ago in 1976 the total paid-up membership in the newly formed independent unions was probably 20,000 at the most. By 1979 it was probably around 40,000. Today in COSATU alone there are now 600,000 fully paid-up members located in every industrial concentration in South Africa.

But for all the strength that we have at present, for all the experience of our worker leadership and more broadly the working class, COSATU still is a relatively new organisation.

Nevertheless we do believe we have something to say and with this in mind I would like to share some thoughts with you.

COSATU is first and foremost a trade union federation. It is an organisation that unites organised workers. Its roots are on the factory floor. Its starting point is its organisational strength at the point of production — its members are the producers of the wealth of our country.

Political struggle

But experience has taught us that it is not enough to simply concern ourselves with factory issues. Non-political unionism is not only undesirable, it is impossible. And this basic truth has become increasingly clear to the organised worker movement. 1985 was probably the most turbulent year in the history of our country. It saw the emergence of levels of resistance to the apartheid state which have never been seen before. It saw a ruling class floundering, a government directionless and an economy ravaged by inflation and soaring unemployment.

It was against this background that COSATU adopted an explicitly political direction. We do not see COSATU as a political party but we do believe that COSATU has a responsibility to voice the political interests and aspirations of the organised workers and also more broadly of the working class.

We therefore see COSATU as an active participant in the liberation struggle. We see

Speech by Jay Naidoo

'The Significance of COSATU'



ourselves as a political force at local, regional and national levels. And we therefore are forced to confront the following questions.

What sort of politics?

What sort of liberation are we seeking?

Who are our friends and allies in the struggle?

What are we fighting for?

What are we fighting against?

The political policy adopted recently by our central executive committee states:

'that workers experience repression, hardship and suffering not only at their workplaces but in every other aspect of their lives and within the communities where they live. It is therefore imperative that the Federation should play a major role in the struggle for a non-racial and democratic society and that the Federation will not hesitate to take political action to protect and advance the interests of its members and the wider working class.'

Clearly we see ourselves as part and parcel of the broad struggle against apartheid and racism. We see ourselves as full participants in the fight for democracy, justice and peace in South Africa.

Exploitation and working class politics

And yet our experience as workers has taught us more. Justice for us is not simply a beautiful phrase. It also means social justice, economic justice and political justice. It means freedom from hunger and poverty, the right to work, the right to proper housing, decent medical facilities and a meaningful education system that would develop the human potential of our people.

It is our experience that apartheid racism has gone hand in hand with our exploitation and suffering at the hands of the bosses. Free enterprise has not been something separate and hostile to racism. Despite the desperate attempts by organised business to distance themselves from the present discredited regime we have learnt one important lesson, that the root and fruit of the apartheid tree is the exploitation of

workers in South Africa. Our most recent experiences at Gencor, Rand Mines, Haggie Rand all confirm this. It takes very little to unmask these monopolies and reveal their ruthless pursuit of superprofits. The last 10 days have come as a shocking reminder that nothing has changed. Many lives of our members have been sacrificed on the mines through the brutality of the mine bosses and repressive organs of the apartheid state: the SAP and army. To us the alliance between big business and the apartheid state is soaked in the blood of the workers.

It is therefore clear that we see ourselves expressing the interests of workers in the struggle for our freedom. We see it as our duty to make sure that freedom does not merely change the skin colour of our oppressors.

We are not fighting for freedom which sees the bulk of workers continuing to suffer as they do today. We therefore see it as our duty to promote working class politics. A politics where workers' interests are paramount in the struggle.

Alliances

At the same time we recognise that no struggle has ever involved one social force acting alone. We therefore have to look carefully at our society to see who are our allies.

'This brings me to the other important aspect of our political policy: "... the independent political interests of the working class shall be waged through ... taking up political struggles through our membership and structures at local, regional and national levels as well as through disciplined alliances with progressive community organisations whose interests are compatible with the interests of the workers and whose organisational practices further the interests of the working class.'

Therefore our experience has taught us firstly, to avoid isolating ourselves as workers and defining our friends and allies too narrowly, ie the danger of workerism; and secondly, to avoid subsuming ourselves in an incoherent mass mood or populist desire for an ill-defined 'freedom', ie the danger of populism; and thirdly to choose our allies on the basis of what we know, what has been our experience as workers, and not on the basis of abstracted principles of what is or is not a 'correct' approach, ie the danger of impractical but nice sounding theories.

Thus when we look at our society we can broadly say that our allies fall into two groups. Firstly there are those that we regard as close allies of the workers. These are the unemployed (there are more than three million); the rural poor (the landless, peasants and farmworkers); and the militant black youth. These are our closest allies. We believe that they share with us the desire for real freedom, for meaningful change. It is our experience that they are largely the brothers, sisters, children and parents of our very own members. Their future and that of the

workers are inseparably linked. Like us they want a meaningful transformation of our society.

The second group of allies consist of all those who share with us a hatred of the present system. It consists of all those people oppressed by racism ie the entire black people; as well as all democratic forces amongst the white population.

Of course we may have differences with our allies. But we believe that the widest possible unity is necessary to rid ourselves of the evils of apartheid. We may differ in the type of society we would like to see emerging in this country, but we believe we have enough in common to fight together.

Intellectuals and working class leadership

On this platform I would like to address a few words to the intellectuals amongst us. We extend our hand to you. We ask you to put your learning skills and education at the service of the workers' movement. If you are a researcher then do research that would help the workers' movement. Look at unemployment, look at the housing crisis, the transport problems workers face. Help expose the poverty wages paid and the pervasive influence of the big monopolies. If you are a doctor, serve the people, look at the problems of the working class: malnutrition, kwashiorkor and health hazards at work.

But we believe that the direction of the workers' movement will develop organically out of the struggle of workers on the factory floor and in the townships where they live. Accordingly the role of intellectuals will be purely a supportive one of assisting the greater generation of working class leadership.

As COSATU we believe that we have generated a working class leadership that is competent enough to debate its position and to direct the movement itself.

Other organisations

What I have said up to now is fairly general, but in the real world we live in we have to come to terms with organisations that exist.

COSATU is forging closer ties with democratic community based organisations. In particular we have a high regard for those communities which are building strong grassroots structures in the form of street committees. We see this as a major step forward and an important principle that is integral to working class organisation on the factory floor.

We encourage this development and see it as COSATU's policy for members and local structures to play an active role in building such structures. In many areas COSATU locals are becoming a driving force in the growth of solidly based community organisation.

At the third level of our political policy we have chosen, as COSATU, 'not to affiliate to any political organisation', but to retain our independence. Nevertheless our commitment to ending apartheid, the State of Emergency, the release of comrade Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners, the unbanning of the banned organisations, the end to the pass laws has given us much in common with a wide range of organisations.

Undoubtedly the most important of these is the ANC [African National Congress], a movement whose stature and influence is growing daily in South Africa. In the light of this COSATU recently met with a high level

ANC-SACTU delegation in Lusaka. The talks were open and conducted in a friendly spirit. It was recognised that COSATU, as a representative of the working class, is seized with the task of engaging the general democratic struggle, both as an independent organisation and as an essential component of the democratic forces of our country. Further it is clear that in the specific conditions of our country it is inconceivable that political emancipation can be separated from economic emancipation.

Therefore while united in opposition to the entire apartheid system, there is a common understanding that victory must embrace more than formal political democracy, and must involve a struggle for a society free from the chains of poverty, racism and exploitation which would require a restructuring of the present economic system.

Obviously there is much more to say on this point. However the democratic nature of COSATU ensures that we first report back fully to our membership before going into details on platforms such as this.

It was in 1960 that Macmillan spoke of the winds of change blowing across Africa. In 1986 those winds have become a hurricane. Even the corridors of parliament have felt them. When Dr Slabbert resigned saying he saw no purpose in parliamentary debate he was merely signifying the decay and political wilderness that even the isolated white political establishment finds itself in.

COSATU resolves

As COSATU we believe that change is coming. Therefore as workers we have resolved to:

- * take the lead in organising and mobilising not only in our factories but in our townships
- * bring the lessons of solid organising to our people as a whole and especially to our close allies

- * raise the issues of social, political and economic transformation now and not leave it to some future unspecified date
- * build workers to gain confidence in themselves and in their ability to lead our struggle
- * understand the dual needs of workers' autonomy; and to form disciplined alliances with all progressive forces
- * organise the unorganised and build powerful national industrial unions
- * through our activity and education programmes to develop an increasingly coherent political perspective and programme for our federation.

In carrying out these many tasks we will at all times be guided by the following principles. Firstly, our political and economic strength lies in building powerful, militant and democratic organisation in the workplace. This strength will guarantee that worker aspirations will not be suppressed. Such organisation is also the basis for the real democratisation of production.

Secondly, organised workers are not representative of the working class as a whole but they constitute its most powerful weapon. The better the organisation the more powerful their weapon becomes and the greater will be their contribution to the struggle of the working class and the oppressed people in South Africa.

Thirdly, we must draw all people into a programme of restructuring the economy and society as a whole in such a way that the wealth of our society is democratically controlled and shared by all its people.

Politics for workers is not only the matter of changing governments. For workers it must go much further to break the chains of poverty and exploitation that bind our people at present. It is the struggle to liberate our people so that they can realise their fullest potential as human beings. ”

LETTER

Feminism and Marxism

It is rather difficult to understand the criticisms that Valerie Coultas makes of Engels in your last issue ('Women hold up half the sky', *International* No 4, May/June 1986).

One only has to read Engels even as far back as the 1840s to discover that the integration of female workers into the workforce is hardly a particular feature of modern capitalism. For instance in 1850 Engels remarked that the introduction of large scale industry de-skilled labour and that 'industrial exploitation at once engulfed the whole family, imprisoning it in the factory; women and children were obliged to work without ceasing day and night until they fell victim to complete exhaustion'. The contention that Engels believed that women would not be integrated into the workforce under capitalism is not serious.

On the contrary, Engels recognised that womens integration into the workforce whilst remaining domestic slaves in the home was a feature of class society that predated capitalism. Engels statement that '... the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry ...' is a demand for the abolition of all forms of

domestic slavery ie a *qualitative* change in the character of women's labour. For Engels the prerequisite for women liberation was not the extent of women's integration into the workforce but an end to the role of the family as the economic unit of class society.

Engels' argument therefore is not a tactical prescription but the assertion that the abolition of class society is a prerequisite for the emancipation of women. Many marxists understand this to mean relegation of the struggle for women's liberation to the indefinite future. But it is also wrong for marxists today to narrow their view of women's liberation to issues relating to women as wage earners. No amount of reforms under capitalism will abolish the role of the family as the economic unit of society and likewise there is no way that marxists can avoid the struggle now to popularise a programme for women liberation that explains that the oppression of women neither started with the advent of capitalist property relations nor ends with their elimination.

Roy Wall,
London

'Style' and the Left

Who are the real philistines?

What is 'style'? And does the left need it? Where does it come from? Does Neil Kinnock have it? To **MIKE MARQUESE** and **TOM TREVELYAN** the 'new look' Labour Party does not look that new at all.

WHEN THE LABOUR Party changed its leader after the general election debacle of 1983 it sought and acquired a 'new look'. The duffel coat in which Michael Foot had tarnished the memory of the fallen at the Cenotaph was consigned to the museum of labour history. The new leader revels in his youthful image and his smart Mark and Spencer suits. Labour's image is being reshaped like a High Street window display — and public relations experts are brought in to manage the face-lift. They order a new colour for Labour's campaign (grey), a new generation of media-polished trade union leaders, a new emphasis on professional presentation. Those who do not welcome this trend, they imply, will soon be joining the duffel coat in labour's museum.

In the May issue of *New Socialist*, Robert Elms, associate editor of *The Face*, pilloried the left for its alleged indifference and even hostility to something he kept referring to as 'style'. Elms claimed that the labour movement, under the aegis of the left, had distanced itself from the aspirations of ordinary people by its puritan rejection of consumer values and its philistine contempt for 'presentation'. He dated Labour's decline from the late 1960s, 'when the radical wing of the Labour movement got hijacked by hippiedom'. Socialism in the '60s 'stopped talking in the language ordinary people could understand', thanks to 'drab anti-materialism'.

Elms' vision is not burdened with any pedantic concern for historical accuracy. The industrial upsurge of the late 1960s and early '70s was preceded not by a golden era of proletarian radicalism but by decades of working-class passivity. The reviled youth rebellion of the 1960s was more than 'hippie' indulgence; there were little matters like a war in Vietnam supported by a Labour government, and an opposition to it which became world wide. And a minor upset in France in 1968 which threatened the overthrow of the state. Elms' notion that hippies or revolutionaries ever dominated any part of the British labour movement or the working class is quaint, to say the least.

Elms would no doubt take little interest in such quibbles. After all, his position has friends in high places. As presented in *New Socialist*, it may appear little more than a bunch of inconsistencies, but it has been employed by opportunists to justify an increasingly élitist and in reality philistine political practice. Elms' article is symptomatic of a trend of thought which is currently serving as a figleaf for a rightward-racing Labour Party and trade union leadership.

Much of the Labour leadership now insists on the pre-eminence of the media. We are repeatedly told that we must learn how to present ourselves and our policies on television and in the press. We must enter the magic circle and acquire the tools of the trade, the professional secrets known only to the few. Kinnock and those associated with him have relied heavily on this media-obsession to justify themselves. The miners' struggle, for example, is criticised for being old-fashioned, dreary, couched in a traditional trade union jargon which no longer appeals to a working class yearning for flair,

you cannot adopt the campaigning style without the campaigning politics'

flexibility, fashion, as well, of course as 'freedom and fairness'.

David Widgery has aptly labelled this trend 'designer socialism', and his contempt for its superficiality is well placed. However, it does raise a number of critical questions for the left. What precisely is 'style'? And if it is something we need, where will we find it?

'Style' as used in the Elms article and related pieces appears to mean, first, public taste in consumer goods and services, notably clothes, haircuts, records and films, household furnishings; and secondly, a less specific and more insidious notion of manner, vocabulary, personal or collective 'identity' — increasingly reduced to an inoffensive stamp like a corporation logo designed by an ad agency. In reality, perhaps, Elms' idea of style boils down to the mannerisms of a self-appointed trendy milieu.

Style, however defined, is a complex social product, but a social product nonetheless, and one that is historically determined. It is not a thing in itself, an autonomous entity,



which the labour movement can pick up or put down (or rather put on or take off) at will. In the world beyond the pop video dreamland inhabited by *The Face* and its proliferating lookalikes, style exists as a constantly shifting and overlapping multiplicity of choices available in different measure to different people in different social groups.

Any serious consideration of the question of 'style' should begin by acknowledging that there are, in fact, many styles current at any one time, and should go on from there to ask the crucial question: where do these styles come from? Are they created out of thin air, as Elms seems to imply, to meet some natural pre-existing demand in a consuming public unaffected by historical change? In all the lessons now being read to the left, mention is rarely made of the huge economic forces involved in shaping the choices available to the consuming public, in restricting those choices and consciously creating demands for styles that can be produced and retailed at a profit. There is no attempt to name, still less analyse, the manufacturing, financial, and commercial factors which determine what is on the market at any given time and to whom it is available. What we find when we scrape the surface of the new designer socialists — and their surface isn't nearly as beguiling as they think it is — is a naive but sinister faith in the natural operation of the marketplace. 'True style', Robert Elms informs us, 'is implicitly progressive'. As the Tories say, the market is always right.

Underlying this uncritical idea of 'style' and indeed much of Kinnock's approach to marketing the Labour Party, making it



palatable to the media, is a conception of the working class as merely an aggregate of individual consumers. People are seen as passive purchasers of off-the-peg identities, not as possible participants in a genuinely creative and collective project. Under the guise of expanding the choices offered to people they are actually reducing them — a technique developed by capitalist marketing. More goods appear to be available in an ever increasing variety of packages, while the ability of people to choose for themselves the life and the accoutrements of life which they would like is increasingly circumscribed by economic and social factors.

Elms and others say that we on the left are hard, inhuman philistines who would begrudge the working class their washing machines and videos. Our objection to his consumerist approach to politics is otherwise. By treating people as individual consumers of mass-produced goods you obscure the connections between them. When you introduce 'style' as a common denominator for a political constituency, you draw a veil over the social and economic relations which actually determine how people in this constituency live. The relation between exploiter and exploited, which is at the heart of capitalist society, cannot be seen; after all, both are wearing the same shades of pastel and white.

This is the politics of a new trendy elitism, dressed up in a garb as falsely democratic as the workshirts and overalls of the much-reviled 1960s. They offer the working class something ready-made and pre-packaged, even pre-digested, like Macdonald's, and just about as nourishing. The illusion they peddle is that if only we step into the right fancy dress, adopt what is deemed to be the

style of the moment (whose style? at which moment?), then everyone will buy our product (like Macdonald's) and we will achieve an instant credibility with the masses. These people themselves are asked to contribute nothing, except a vote. Their creative intelligence, their immediate experience of the struggles of life under capitalism will not be drawn upon.

The GLC is commonly cited as the progenitor of Labour's new look. There has scarcely been standing room on the bandwagon which started rolling once the polls confirmed the defunct council's popularity. That the style of Livingstone and others on the GLC was forged in revolt against the hidebound and paternalistic of right-wing Labour councillors has not stopped the latter from claiming a share of the GLC heritage. The dreaded hard left drones of *Labour Briefing*, who played a major role in selecting the candidates who were to make up the Livingstone administration and in initiating many of the policies on which it campaigned, are now consigned to outer darkness by the likes of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, *Marxism Today*, and Livingstone himself.

What price style, then, of content; imagery exclusive of substance? The GLC's poster campaigns, concert, and carnivals were not events in a vacuum. They were part of a programme aimed at the disadvantaged and dispossessed, and which at least tried at times to place in their hands the levers of their own liberation. As Livingstone himself has recently pointed out, you cannot adopt the campaigning style without the campaigning politics. To reduce the lessons of the GLC to a series of promotional devices is also to miss perhaps the most interesting facts about these promotional devices. Many of them originated not in the conference rooms of marketing agencies, nor in the

committee rooms of County Hall bureaucrats, but in the streets, playgrounds, community centres, and pubs of the oppressed themselves. Jazz, reggae, neighbourhood festivals, street theatre, and innumerable other idioms seized on by the GLC were created in the first place at the roots of society. They were outgrowths of a diverse, multi-cultural urban environment. They cannot simply be summoned by a snap of Neil Kinnock's fingers. And if they could be, what would they become in the hands of the current Labour leadership? Kinnock and his friends are not only divorced from the milieu in which these ideas originated, they are also quite determined to eliminate its manifestations inside the Labour Party, in particular the forces fighting for women's and black self-organisation.

The vacuous hijacking of the GLC heritage is symptomatic of the phony populism which characterises Labour's new look. It accepts the language of the media, the imagery of advertising, with all its warped inhumanity, as a given which cannot be changed. It says we must communicate in these terms and through these forums because no other valid ones exist. No one talks of a strategy to forge new terms, establish new forums. Kinnock becomes our leader because he is 'good on telly'; he has a 'common touch'. Here we allow the 'common' to be defined for us by a bourgeois media and public relations machinery which has its own specific interests largely at odds with the economic and social interests of the majority of the population. The *Sun*, the *Mirror* and a thousand local newspapers also

'Elms' style boils down to the mannerisms of a self-appointed trendy milieu'

have this 'common touch', which does enable them to communicate with large numbers of working class people, but on whose terms? Someone becomes 'good on telly' not because of some inherent attribute or even because they attend the right training courses for PPCs, but because the moguls of the media have allowed them to appear this way.

Where does this logic take us? In the United States much 'political commentary' now dwells exclusively on evaluating not the policies or abilities of the politicians, but their media *image* and its ups and downs. Mondale loses to Reagan because he is not 'telegenic'. Reagan may be a murderer but he is a 'great communicator'. Kinnock appears to wish to emulate his success. This is to acquiesce not so much to the lowest common denominator of public life, but to the self-perpetuating laws and values of institutions created by the bourgeoisie to ensure its own survival.

The objection to this school of thought is *not* the importance it attaches to the media or to the question of the 'presentation' of Labour policies. Nor is it an anti-cultural cry from the workerist fringe of the movement.

It is precisely because we are aware of the importance of the media, because we recognise the immense weight of cultural factors in shaping how people perceive the world — and the possibilities of changing it — that we reject the posturings of the designer socialists. The language of the mass media as well as its structure has to be challenged and changed. The dominance of the working class by capitalist institutions and ideas must be fought on the cultural as well as the political front.

What evidence is there that the designer socialists are prepared to take up such a struggle? They appear to believe that revamping *New Socialist* in the image of *The Face*, or recasting Labour Party propaganda in the mould of a corporate retailing campaign represents some serious meeting of culture and politics. But is it any more than just a 'new look' philistinism? The power they ascribe to 'style' is principally the power of the marketplace. How much importance can they really give to cultural and stylistic concerns when they have divorced these concerns from any attempt to change the way people look at the world they live in? They have shrivelled artistic, cultural, and aesthetic factors into an easily manipulable lump labelled as 'style' — not a creative process in which the public participates, but a uniform which politicians can do as a substitute for political debate and leadership.

All kinds of wild historical generalisations and inaccuracies are drawn into the designer socialist dressing room. According to Robert Elms, who follows the more sub-

'Reagan may be a murderer but he is a "great communicator"'

stantial but also ahistorical footsteps of Eric Hobsbawm, there was once a homogenous, united labour movement in Britain. The leaders of this movement addressed the working class directly and naturally because they all spoke the same language, dressed in the same style, shared the same culture. In this rewriting of 20th century history, the many national, racial, sexual, regional, and generational differences which have always divided the British working class and its movements are sublimated. The long-term presence of variegated 'styles' and different cultures within the British working class is ignored. The undemocratic, collaborationist record of these leaders is shrouded in silence.

Now it is true that the composition and culture of the working class today, particularly in the big cities, is different from what it was in the past. It is also true that, despite the many divisions that did exist in the old days within working class culture (not to mention politics), there was a greater uniformity than there is now. All the more reason, then, it would seem, to reject the prescription of a 'style for the labour movement' which is imposed from on high. The notion that we have 'lost touch' and can regain it by the adoption of the dominant marketing techniques of the day shows scant



Style — a multiplicity of choices

regard either for the current diversity of working class cultures, or for the capacity of those cultures to shape instruments of real social change.

Of course, the sources and subtleties of this cultural shift entirely escape the designer socialists. They prefer the simplicity of a convenient scapegoat. Their assertion that the hard left is responsible for the alienation of large sections of the working class from the labour movement ludicrously overstates its influence — and says nothing of the detritus left behind by the Wilson and Callaghan governments. This has not kept it from becoming one of the great journalistic clichés of the mid-eighties. The myth of the dogmatic, 'boring' hard left cadre born of 1968 alienating the authentic, consumerist worker is useful to the designer socialists, partly, of course, because such tendencies do exist on sections of the left. But it should be exposed as the historical fantasy it is. Elms' interpretation of the 1960s, which he defines as 'hippies spurning materialism', is unfortunately inadvertently supported by David Edgar's apology for that decade carried in the same issue of *New Socialist*. On an international scale, the 1960s were marked by an upsurge in anti-colonialist, anti-militarist and anti-racist struggles which had all manner of side effects, one of which was the advent of the so-called counter-culture and hippies. Elms' attack makes particularly unpleasant reading at a time when the Hippie Convoy — some of whose members are the working-class survivors of this once largely middle-class movement — has become the latest victim of Thatcher's vendetta against the 'permissive society'. The irony is that the hippies of the sixties were in fact adherents of a 'stylistic' movement of the type with which Elms would replace mass political and industrial struggle.

And where did the 'anti-materialism' of the '60s come from? The expansion of higher education in northern Europe and North America, which began in the early 1960s and which opened to the working class and lower middle class what had once been the near-exclusive privileges of their betters, had contradictory effects, one of which was a widening of the horizons of personal choice which cast the old values in a new light. When unemployment did not pose a personal threat, who wanted to be dressed up in a pin-stripe suit or channelled into professions policed by feudal establishments? When mum and dad were being told they'd never had it so good, could anyone blame you for throwing up when *Coronation Street* came on the box? If you were a woman, the new university place promised much, but rarely delivered more than the same old submission when it came to the job market.

The illusions of that era vanished with the conditions which created them. In a colder climate, spurning a career and the material goods it brings no longer seems such an attractive act of rebellion. But this change itself shows that the choices we make regarding our appearance and the whole manner in which we choose to present

'we are offered politics in terms dictated by the media and the marketplace'

ourselves to the world are of immense significance. As socialists we wish to widen and enrich these choices. Designer socialism would narrow them. Socialism must hold out the prospect of a transformation in our lives, a realisation of the enormous creative capacities sealed up by the concrete jacket of capitalism, however fashionably tailored.

Instead of the involvement of people in movements which would actually change the conditions of our lives, we are offered the passive consumption of a politics presented in terms dictated by the media and the marketplace — precisely the terms which we must overturn if we are to raise the level of political consciousness. Instead of recognising culture in all its manifestations as a battleground on which we challenge our opponents' notions of the way things work in this society, it is relegated to pure surface, a cloak we wrap round ourselves to hide the ugly bits from the masses. Instead of revealing the truth about the forces which shape people's lives — including the 'style' they choose to adopt — these forces are taken as given. They are unchangeable. Their products are endorsed.

Behind the snappy dress and sneering modishness of the designer socialists can be detected the deadening hand of the old labour bureaucracy. From them we can expect only a shadow of the excitement, diversity, and freshness with which we should present our ideas. The duffel coat may have been discarded, but the politicians in the new suits are the servants of the same old forces.

Labour's Ministry for Women

The risks of 'respectable feminism'

On the face of it, the Labour Party's plan for a Women's Rights Ministry could lead to a big step forward for women. The plan is inspired to a large extent by the Ministry for Women set up in 1981 by the Mitterrand government in France. But, as **FRAN RAYNER** argues, if the pitfalls of the French Ministry are to be avoided, Labour's proposals must be part of a wide plan of action for women's rights and for socialist change.

LABOUR'S SUGGESTIONS FOR a Women's Ministry, drawn up by MP Jo Richardson and her working party, first reached Labour Party women's sections earlier this year, inviting their comments. The proposals now seem likely to be ratified by the party's National Executive and to be unveiled in Labour's general election manifesto as a package designed to attract women voters.

Praising the French experience of a Women's Ministry Jo Richardson's plan claims that 'notwithstanding the recent changes in the fortunes of the Mitterrand government, the Ministry ... continues to command the support of the majority of French women'.

In fact quite the opposite is the case. Because of its sad record, the French Ministry for Women's Rights finds itself five years on with its survival in the balance and with no support from the feminist movement or from the French left. It has been part of a 'socialist' government which has presided over cuts in crèche provision, mounted major attacks on abortion rights and made it easier for employers to sack male strikers during industrial disputes and substitute part-time women workers on the lowest wages.

From the start, the Ministry has been accountable to no one but President Mitterrand. It has proved timid and apprehensive at each step, introducing economic planning proposals, including quotas, intended to promote sexual equality, yet lacking the political will or clout to push for their enforcement when the bosses complained.

In any case, commitment to women's rights never became a central feature of the workings of the other government departments. For example the publicity push by the Women's Ministry stressing contraception rights was never backed up by the provision of the necessary contraception facilities. Worse, it was effectively negated by inducements to women, introduced by the government as a whole, to produce more children and stay at home.

Minister for Women's Rights, Yvette Roudy, smiled benignly in television adverts promoting equality in the workplace. Meanwhile the Prime Minister was busy taxing the salaries of women cleaners. The Ministry urged an end to wage differentials between

'the Ministry has been accountable to no-one but President Mitterrand'

men and women. Yet when women workers came out on strike for this demand at the French multinational firm 'Effilor' in 1982, the government gave its blessing for the company to preserve its profits by moving some of its operations to the Philippines.



The French Ministry for Women's Rights has been at best a bystander and at worst complicit in a whole series of attacks on the working class in France. These have been conducted under the guise of government and employers achieving greater 'flexibility' of the labour force. Flexibility measures have left young workers, immigrant workers, seasonal labourers and part-timers extremely vulnerable and have hit women especially hard.

As a concession to the employers in return for an agreement on a 39-hour working week, the government and union leaders allowed the lifting of previous legal restrictions which had protected women from weekend and shift work. The Ministry for Women passed over this in silence.

Most significant, it performed a complete about-turn on the policy of part-time



Mitterrand with Yvette Roudy, Minister for Women's Rights



Will working class women benefit from a ministry?

working. Before entering office Yvette Roudy claimed: 'Part time work is a decoy which, if it is institutionalised, will lead to women becoming marginalised'. Yet in 1983 the Mitterrand government introduced tax inducements for employers that enabled them to create more part time jobs and split

'Richardson's proposals present a largely organisational package'

existing full time jobs into part time. Yvette Roudy then declared: 'For my part, I much prefer a woman working part time to a woman not working at all'. It was this response which, more than any other, lost the Ministry its support and credibility among women and with the left of the labour movement.

So what of the Ministry's future? Even before the French Socialist Party lost its majority in this year's elections, the fate of the Ministry for Women's Rights was in

doubt. Its budget has been progressively reduced and it seems unlikely to survive beyond 1988 precisely because few people are willing to fight for its retention.

All in all, by abandoning any active commitment to either socialism or feminism the Ministry for Women has become an empty symbol. In fact, its failure has helped to clear the way for the right wing and fascist parties in France to challenge women being in the labour force at all.

To avoid a similar catastrophe in Britain the left must raise the issue of a Women's Ministry and its role now. There was not one article in the French left press which discussed the proposed Ministry before it arrived.

The acceptance of the idea of a separate Ministry for Women is in itself an important step forward, offering many opportunities. For instance, the demand of the Women's Action Committee (WAC) that women in the Labour Party should be able to elect their own representatives will become much harder for the party leaders to ignore if these demands are consistently backed up by the existence of a separate Ministry for

Women's Rights.

However, Jo Richardson's proposals, as they stand, present a largely organisational package without any political focus. They acknowledge the growing strength of women's demands while conceding as little as possible to them.

A 'small but high-powered' ministry of politicians, civil servants and lawyers is suggested. They would decide political priorities 'as appropriate'. Regional units would bring together trade unionists, women's organisations, employers and government bodies to decide and oversee the regional implementation of policies for women.

A small dose of ill-defined contract compliance would be introduced along with moves towards equality in jobs, training, education and taxation. The achievement of all this depends on 'political will', say the proposals, but they leave it at that.

A crucial omission from Labour's plan is any mention of abortion rights. Absent, too, is a clear commitment to oppose any future

'Labour's Ministry, we are told, would have "resources"'

measures on part-time work which could increase the vulnerability and exploitation of women in the labour force.

Labour's Ministry, we are told, would have 'resources'. But this has to mean a budget. A Ministry for Women without money of its own would be useless.

Positive discrimination and quotas should be introduced in training schemes funded by the government. Powers of contract compliance should be tightened up and should be subject to effective sanctions.

The new Ministry's policy-making would have to involve women and be accountable to them otherwise decisions would be made by civil servants. Regional units should have a majority *against* employers with an important say given to women representatives from the trade unions.

Unless we fight for these objectives and develop them, Labour's Ministry for Women's Rights would achieve the political advancement of women at a superficial, bureaucratic level only. This may satisfy some of the soft left. But it will do nothing to aid autonomous women's organisations with a strong working class base such as Women Against Pit Closures which are raising far-reaching demands. Nor will it assist those raising feminist demands in the trade unions.

The French experience shows that a Women's Ministry operating in a political context where the working class is suffering an onslaught, is not only rendered powerless to prevent attacks on women's rights but can actually be used to provide a cover of 'respectable feminism' for these attacks. That is why it is so vital for the left in Britain to link the fight for women's liberation to the fight for socialist change and make sure that any future Women's Ministry becomes an ally, not an obstacle, in that process.

Interview with Ralph Miliband

Pushing from the outside

RALPH MILIBAND is one of the best known Marxist writers in Britain* and has recently been a fierce critic of what he calls 'the new revisionism' — the abandonment of socialist positions by many in the labour movement. **KATHY LOWE** and **PHIL HEARSE** talked to him about the problems facing socialists today.

It is widely held that there is a 'crisis of Marxism'. Do you think this is so?

I think it is much more a crisis of socialist conviction and socialist confidence. Obviously ever since the beginning of Marxism you have had questions, controversies, probings about it. From this point of view there is nothing very new about the controversies going on, in theoretical terms. What I think is much more significant now is the attack on certain fundamental categories which relate to the nature of the socialist project. Take for example the category 'class'. This is a critical category. What is happening now is a rejection of the notion that the working class remains the indispensable agency for socialist change. Most of the grounds for this rejection are exceedingly questionable, or simply false, encapsulated in the formula 'goodbye to the working class'. By this people mean either the working class has failed to carry out the revolutionary project assigned to it by Marx, which is true as far as the last 100 years is concerned. But is this a terminal, final thing? This has to be questioned and I don't believe it's true.

So if people mean by crisis of Marxism a collapse of it, then I disagree. If they mean the need to probe, discuss, to go further, well then I've no objection.

What has given rise to the 'new revisionism', the abandonment of socialist ideas by a spectrum of people and publications on the left?

It's a number of things. We are at a difficult and important historical moment insofar as the two major forces which have dominated the labour movement of the capitalist countries — social democracy and 'orthodox communism' have shown signs of degeneration and collapse. Plus a whole series of events have contributed to this loss of confidence.



In the British case where the collapse is a social democratic one, I think a good deal has to do with the performance of social democracy in the sixties and seventies and the failure of the Labour left to 'capture' the party between 1979 and 1981/2.

This has contributed to a loss of confidence, an absence of perspective, and people are falling back on a whole series of gimmicks, looking for new agencies of social change, trying to resurrect popular fronts and so on. The thing which I find dangerous is that this search seems to represent a dilution and an evacuation of the socialist project.

Now the relative electoral success of Thatcherism — electoral since in almost every other sense its been a failure — has disheartened a lot of people. But that's nothing new, you get it in every generation.

Can radical socialist ideas be made popular in Britain? Surely the argument that we have to capture the middle ground to win has some validity?

I disagree that you have to move rightwards to capture the middle ground. One has to make a distinction. If you say that the ideas of storming the Winter Palace and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat are unpopular, then undoubtedly they are, for a whole series of historical and other reasons. But the notion that transformation of the social order, in a democratic, egalitarian and co-operative direction is inherently unpopular strikes me as nonsense and is contradicted by the evidence. For example the Labour Party has actually won elections on some fairly radical programmes, promising 'a

fundamental shift in power and wealth to working people and their families'. So the notion that the working class is inherently against socialism strikes me as a curious sort of mystification.

On the notion of 'alliances' I've got nothing against the notion that you've got to get on your side a large part of the lower middle class intelligentsia which has emerged in the last decades, well absolutely I'm all in favour of that.

But that's a different thing to saying that you've got to enter into alliances with anti-socialist forces like the SDP. That's not alliance, that's capitulation.

On alliances with social groups other than the working class, let's start with the working class itself. It's a big constituency you know; there's white collar workers, frayed white collar workers, industrial workers, non-industrial workers and a whole variety of other people. Now some people talk as if there had been a time when 90 per cent or more of the working class had voted Labour and now it's not the case. But this is not true, it has never been the case. In 1935, after slump, unemployment and the means test, Baldwin was returned with a 200-seat majority. So while I'm not saying we're on the up and up there never was time when the working class was unanimously pro-Labour.

After 1959 there was an attempt to explain the defeat of Labour at that general election by saying that you had to move to the middle ground, and I think something of the same phenomenon has happened today. I may add that a lot of people who are talking this way are moved by honourable motives. They're worried by Thatcherism, creeping authoritarianism and the like and they want to constitute a broad front. They are worried that a sectarian emphasis will put people off — and they are right about that. The problem is how to prevent it, and I think they're going about it the wrong way.

But what about the notion that the central role of the working class has to be replaced by an alliance of social groups, each fighting their own oppression, with no particular grouping having a privileged role?

But the question is not who has a 'privileged role' in any metaphysical way, but which class grouping is most likely to be able to achieve that transformation. We shouldn't say only the working class can do it, that's not right. You need the working class plus a whole lot of other forces and movements, in which women's movements insofar as they are separate

from the working class are one, and in which a lot of groupings are needed to forge an alliance.

So I'm not giving a workerist emphasis; but I am saying that the working class is the central part, the indispensable part of a constellation of forces, and if you reject that you are making a big mistake.

Anyone who is aware of just how powerful the structure of capitalist power is, and how utterly determined the capitalist class is to keep that power, must base themselves on an alliance which includes forces powerful enough to effect its overthrow. It seems to be obvious that only an alliance with organised labour at its core will have that power. So if anyone says that the working class will not, is not capable of, playing a central role in the transition to socialism is really saying that socialism is impossible.

Another idea that's gained some popularity is that nationalisation of the means of production is inherently bureaucratic and therefore we ought to concentrate on things like co-ops and local enterprise boards. Do you think nationalisation can ever be non-bureaucratic?

Well I certainly hope so! If not we are in deep trouble, since I take it for granted that some form of social ownership of the main means of production is a precondition of

'people are falling back on a whole series of gimmicks'

the socialist project. Of course nationalisation in its Labourist form was highly bureaucratic — it was never intended to be a road to socialism after all.

But at a deeper level we're dealing here simply with the problem of statism and non-statism. I think that a revolutionary socialist movement and a socialist regime would need the state for a very long time to come, and that the notion of the 'withering away of the state' has to be highly qualified. On the other hand there is a very good and important anti-state bias in socialist thinking which ought to be encouraged.

There is a genuine tension here, which we have often tried to avoid. I'm not saying that this is a problem which we cannot solve, but it is a genuine problem nonetheless. It's like the tension between organisation and spontaneity. If you stress organisation too much you end up with the apparatus and nothing much else, and if you only stress spontaneity you probably end up in jail.

As for local initiatives, well that's fine. But the idea that they can be the be-all and end-all of socialism, and a substitute for a degree of centralisation seems to me to be an illusion.



Thatcher's Britain illustrates the need for socialism

I worked in the late 1950s with a pressure group in the Labour Party called 'Victory for Socialism', which was promptly sat on by the party leadership. From that limited experience I formed the impression that the Labour left was really incapable of doing much more than putting a little pressure on the leadership. So I underestimated the Labour left that came up in 1979-81, which was a much more vigorous and determined left. But after Benn's defeat in the deputy leadership election in 1981 the centre-right gained the ascendancy.

Now, the left is still there, and I'm not one to dismiss the idea that the Labour left could pressurise a Labour government, prevent it doing some of the worst things that it might do and so on. But I really cannot believe that the Labour Party is an instrument for socialism.

If you believe that the Labour Party is at best a party of social reform, as opposed to socialism, then you have to decide whether to push it from inside or outside, and for some time I have been a partisan of pushing it from the outside through an organised socialist party.

How can the kind of socialist party that you want, a non-sectarian party firmly committed to socialist change with some thousands of members, come into existence? Even people who agree with it cannot now join it, but have to make some other choice.

Such a party cannot come into existence until people are convinced of the need for

it. That's what worries me about people precipitating themselves into the Labour Party when they are not convinced that it is a socialist party, because it tends to foster illusions. It seems to me that to do what sections of the revolutionary left did after 1979 and join the Labour Party, ultimately makes the formation of a genuine socialist party more difficult.

Since a non-sectarian socialist party doesn't exist, well I'm not in a position to give people advice. They should do socialist work wherever they feel they are effective. But until a real socialist party comes into existence, which can contain

'until a real socialist party comes into existence, we are not going to get very far'

within it a spectrum of different trends and positions, then I don't think we are going to get very far.

Haven't we already seen the kind of parties which you are advocating, for example the French PSU and the Italian II Manifesto group? Surely the balance sheet of these parties, the Manifesto going back into the Italian CP and the PSU virtually collapsing with many of its leaders going off to the right, is a lamentable one?

A Trotskyist might say this is what you get with centrist parties which can't decide whether they're revolutionary or reformist.

You are right about the difficulties which these kind of parties face — of necessity you get very heterogeneous organisations. But you have to ask yourself whether the fate of the PSU and II Manifesto would necessarily be the fate of all such organisations — for example there is a similar organisation in Denmark which seems to be doing quite well.

Let me be clear though that I do not see the kind of party which I have in mind in the British context as a replacement for the Labour Party. I think the Labour Party will continue to be the mass party of the working class for some time to come. I see a socialist party as a formation which would exist alongside the Labour Party, engaging in class struggle, and injecting socialist ideas into the culture. It would be parallel to the Labour Party and put pressure upon it.

What you seem to be saying is that the experience of France and Italy renders such a vision utopian and unworkable. If that is right, then we are in a bad way. I'm horrified about how weak the ideals of socialism are in this culture, and how can we change that outside or an organised socialist party?

† Ralph Miliband's best known works are: *Parliamentary Socialism* (1961), *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969), *Marxism and Politics* (1977), *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (1981) and a collection of essays *Class Power and State Power* (1983).



1936: the Popular Front

1986 marks the 50th anniversary of two momentous events in the history of the international working class — the Spanish revolution which initiated the civil war and the coming to power of the Popular Front government in France. Both met their defeat at the hands of the policy of ‘popular frontism’ — governmental alliances with capitalist parties — pursued by the working class leaderships, and especially by the Stalinists. Here we publish an account of the struggle in Spain by **JEFF KING**, and the story of the workers’ defeat in France by **CHRIS BERTRAM**.

REVOLUTIONARY POSSIBILITIES

FIFTY YEARS AGO on the Iberian peninsula, the last workers’ revolution of the inter-war years broke out. In February 1936, the Spanish people elected a Popular Front government made up of bourgeois Republicans, Socialists and Communists. By a prior arrangement between the right-wing Socialist leader Indalecio Prieto and the Communist Party, the Republicans had been given a guaranteed majority in the Popular Front, their candidates had 152 deputies whereas the workers’ organisations had 116. From the beginning the downtrodden and the exploited attempted to stamp

their own interpretation of the electoral victory onto Spanish society.

Within four days of the liberal Anzana becoming president, the workers and peasants started to take the land. Across the country the despised clergy were expelled from their churches and by June 1936 there was scarcely a church open in Valencia.

The government was transfixed with horror at the sight of working people making their own liberation instead of accepting what the capitalist politicians decided they could have. Anzana promised he would stop the strikes and seizures of land. He prolonged the press censorship inherited from the previous government and postponed the municipal elec-

tions due to be held in April, when the workers’ parties would have swept the board. As the revolution swept across Spain, the capitalists and their servants in the Cortes were united in one single desire: how best to crush this upsurge of proletarian ‘disorder’.

A CHOICE FOR THE SOCIALISTS

Of course the extreme right and the reformist leaders differed on how best to return the situation to ‘normal’. Anzana and the liberal republicans favoured using the reformist leaders and urged the right-wing socialist, Prieto, to form a government, but the left led by Largo Caballero insisted

UNLESS THE Popular Front government could solve the agrarian question; develop and extend Spanish industry; break the hold of the church; smash the power and influence of the military and solve the colonial and national question, it was doomed to fail.

The attitude of the workers' parties to these matters was decisive. The Socialist Party was to stand or fall on them.

THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

Agriculture accounted for more than half of the national income and nearly two thirds of exports. Some 70 per cent of the population worked on the land.

One third of the land was owned by the big landowners. Another third was owned by the middle sized landowners. The final third was owned by peasants and this was invariably poor, dry land which was rarely capable of supporting a peasant family.

With few exceptions agricultural was conducted by the most archaic methods and the yield per acre was the lowest in Europe.

The agrarian problem could only be solved by distributing the two thirds held by the landlords to the peasantry, and by a big investment in modern farming equipment to raise agricultural productivity which meant cash from the state.

INDUSTRY

With fractionally over one percent of world trade, industry in an even worse position than before the 1914 war. Unemployment was rife, accounting, if you included dependants, for more than a quarter of the population.

When the government of de Rivera had introduced tariffs against imports to protect Spanish capitalism, the big powers had retaliated by cutting out Spain's agricultural exports, causing a dreadful agricultural crisis which led to the collapse of the internal market for industry.

There was no way forward for industry without the use of a monopoly of foreign trade, but the capitalists were hostages to foreign capital and inseparably linked to the landowners. This meant that it was impossible for a bourgeois government to create a monopoly of foreign trade.

THE CHURCH

The Church had enormous economic power. In 1931 the Jesuits owned one third of Spain's wealth. It ran a



that Prieto needed the permission of the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party, however, faced a dilemma: despite its left programme the Madrid section had carried a resolution which endorsed the theory of permanent revolution - it could either head the revolutionary wave or divert it back into parliamentary channels. Its leaders, schooled for years in the academy of parliamentary socialism, recoiled from the 'lawlessness and disorder' of the workers and peasants.

At local level however the masses, often under socialist leadership widened the struggle. In Badajoz, 25,000 peasants families, inspired by their local Socialist leaders took over the great estates. In Asturias, once a powerful base of Prieto, 90,000 miners struck demanding the dismissal of the Ministers of Agriculture and Labour. At the same time *El Socialista*, official paper of the Socialist Party was writing: 'The system is genuinely anarchistic and provoking the irritation of the rightists'.

COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Exasperated by the inability of the Popular Front government to curtail the demands of the insurgent masses, the Spanish ruling class launched a counter revolution. At dawn on July 17, General Franco assumed command of the Moors and Legionnaires of Spanish Morocco. He called for the establishment of an authoritarian state and within three days every one of Spain's 50 military garrisons joined him. The Popular Front government dithered.

To crush the fascist rebellion meant civil war which in turn meant arming the workers. To the liberal bourgeoisie, the 'enlightened' servants of capital, an armed working class was an even more frightening prospect than the armies of Franco. The workers' demand for arms was met by a statement on July 18 from the national committees of the Communist Party and Socialist Party which asserted blandly about Franco's rebellion: 'The government is certain it has sufficient resources to overcome this criminal action'. They went on to say: 'The government commands and the Popular Front obeys.'

Thus from the beginning both the Communist Party and the Socialist

**'by June 1936 there
was scarcely a church
open in Valencia'**

Party leaders made it clear their alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie over ruled any considerations of socialist revolution. In Barcelona, Spain's second city, the workers ignored the stalinists and social democratic leaders and stormed the barracks - by July 20 they controlled the city. In Valencia the rank and file troops shot their officers and distributed arms to the workers. In Asturias, a column of 5000 workers, armed with dynamite from the mines began a march to Madrid. In the capital itself the workers attacked the city barracks. Acting against the advice of their leaders the workers had saved the situation and stopped the counter-revolution in its tracks.



Inspired by the activity in the cities, the peasants swarmed over the land, using their tools to hack to death landowners and officials who tried to stop them. Committees of workers and peasants led the militias and as the old order began to crumble, so the CNT (anarchist trade unions) and UGT (socialist trade unions) organised factory committees that extended their influence beyond trade union affairs, in fact, in embryo soviets were taking shape.

These bodies, based as they were on the power of the masses and their armed militias, organised separately from the government and its institutions and a situation of dual power began to arise.

LOSING THE REVOLUTION

The Popular Front government had lost its army to Franco, its state apparatus had gone over almost without exception to the counter-revolution. The opportunity for the workers' parties to launch the struggle for socialist revolution was at hand. The bourgeois politicians were discredited, their state had dissolved in the conflagration. But the workers' parties did not organise for power.

The Spanish Communist Party faithfully carried out Stalin's policy of the popular front intent only on establishing an alliance between the western 'democracies' and the USSR, they sacrificed the Spanish revolution in the interests of Russian diplomacy.

As for the Socialist Party, its leaders were imprisoned within the social democratic tradition of parliamentarianism; revolutionary situations

demand revolutionary actions, and such actions were alien to these reformist veterans.

The anarchists were the most courageous and audacious forces in the mass movement, but they were crippled by their anti state theories and their attitude to government, the situation cried out for the forming of a workers' revolutionary government and the establishment of a workers' state. Later, ironically, the anarchists joined the Popular Front government, justifying their entry into a bourgeois government by claiming 'exceptional circumstances'. But what is the use of a theory that collapses before exceptional circumstances and leads to betrayal of the workers' sacrifices?

Thus at the very moment it was possible not one of the workers' organisations — not even the left

'they sacrificed the revolution in the interests of Russian diplomacy'

centrist party of the POUM (Party of Marxist Unity) — was prepared to organise and lead the workers and peasants in a struggle for power. The choice was clear enough, either rely on the workers' committees and the workers' militias or support the government. By failing to support the revolutionary alternative to the capitalists, the workers' parties were dragged in tow behind the liberal bourgeoisie.

Eventually Caballero joined the government and became prime minister. Later, so did the anarchists. In the interests of 'national unity' the workers' militias were dissolved, the factories and the land restored to their owners and the 'excesses' against the church stopped. Likewise, all idea of granting independence to Morocco was dropped, after all such talk might stir the colonial slaves of those same 'western democracies' Stalin, and the Popular Front government, wanted to court.

By breaking the back of the workers' struggle the Communists, Socialists and Anarchist leaders broke the back of the resistance to Franco and thus the civil war was lost. When today Spanish socialist prime minister, Felipe Gonzales, preaches the need not to provoke the right by 'excesses' we should remember that his predecessors, Prieto and Caballero helped to introduce four decades of fascist dictatorship in Spain. They too did not want to provoke the men of property.

number of enterprises like flour mills and laundries, using the labour of unpaid orphans to cheapen production costs.

By its control of education it kept the peasantry illiterate. In 1930, more than 50 per cent of the population could neither read nor write. If Spain was to embark on the path of progress, the power of the Church had to be broken. Its wealth had to be confiscated and used to help the peasants cultivate their land. Education had to be taken out of its hands and all the religious orders had to be dissolved.

THE ARMY

The army was essentially an outlet for the sons of the rich. Its officer caste was linked by kinship, social position and common interest to the ruling class. Its main purpose was to put down rebellion in Morocco and act as the last line of defence for reaction at home. With a ratio of one officer for every six men it was thoroughly dominated by an extreme right wing officer corps. Unless the army was democratised, which meant replacing all the officers by officers elected from the ranks it would always be a dagger at the throat of the government.

THE COLONIES AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

In a series of bloody wars Spain had subjugated Morocco, viciously exploiting the Moroccan people for the benefit of the government and Spain's capitalist class.

The Republican-Socialist alliance took over the colonies and used the corrupt colonial administration, the Foreign Legion, and native mercenaries as its overseers.

Only by granting Morocco immediate and unconditional independence could the Popular Front government have broken the hold of the army, and incited the Moroccan masses to rise up against the Foreign Legion, thus depriving fascism the use of its shock troops against the Republic.

In provinces like Catalan and Basque, strong nationalist movements existed, led by the petty bourgeoisie but which could have been won to the side of the workers providing they had been granted their full rights to autonomy. A failure to do that meant leaving these movements under the political domination of forces hostile to socialism.

The failure of the Popular Front in



IN JUNE 1936 a great movement of strikes and factory occupations spread through France. For millions of working people something had changed and they felt they could take their fate into their own hands. 'Now everything is possible for those who are bold enough,' wrote Marceau Pivert, the leader of the Socialist Party left wing.

Yet within two years reaction was again in control of France, and the CGT (trade union confederation) could only muster two million, of its five million members, for a one day general strike.

The weakest of the imperial powers, France had long played a role in the world that did not correspond to its economic weight. None felt the crisis more acutely than the impoverished peasants and the ruined shopkeepers of the towns. Fascism had triumphed in Germany in 1933 and the danger seemed real enough in France.

On 6 February 1934, after a day of violent demonstrations, armed fascist and royalist gangs attempted to storm the Chamber of Deputies to overth-

'the united front of the working class parties was greeted with enthusiasm'

row the government. The government of Gaston Doumergue, which came to power three days later presided over an eight-month offensive by the Fascist Fiery Cross. It seemed that France might go the same way as Germany.

The parties of the working class were shaken by the events of the 6 February. The Communist Party had been violently hostile to the Socialist Party, applying the line of the Communist International which said that social democracy was the left face of fascism. From the Socialist Party, Marceau Pivert and Jean Zyromsky called for united action with the CP.

Their call was echoed by Jacques Doriot, a leader of the CP and mayor of St. Denis. Doriot had gone too fast. The CP expelled him only to adopt his positions immediately afterwards. Doriot formed his own party and soon became a fascist himself.



The united front of working class parties was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm, but the leaders were more interested in parliamentary deals than in fighting for power. Almost from the beginning Maurice Thorez, the Communist leader, wanted to broaden the alliance to include the 'democratic' bourgeois party — the Radicals. To the ordinary militants in the Socialist Party this was unacceptable.

The Socialist Party, or SFIO, led by Leon Blum, was one half of the old party of Jean Jaures. In 1920 a majority of the party had formed the CP, taking the daily paper *L'Humanité* with them. Those that remained in the SFIO were often careerists and timeservers, but as the CP became more sectarian and turned into an instrument of Stalin's foreign policy things began to change.

Workers began to look to the Socialists and left-wing tendencies emerged in the party. The June 1935 Congress of the SFIO saw a pitched battle between left and right, with Jer Zyromsky advocating the seizure of power by 'direct action'.

The Socialists declared that they could not share power with a party of the ruling class, that it must be 'all or nothing'. Conference decisions did not deter the party leadership. In July Blum addressed a meeting together with Thorez and the Radical Party leader Daladier. The 'Front Populaire' was born.

Chronology

- 1920 Tours Congress of SFIO — creation of French CP.
- 1934 Attempted fascist coup. Doumergue government. CP expels Doriot.
- 1935 Mulhouse Congress of SFIO.
- 1936 Victory of Popular Front. Occupation of factories. Matignon agreements. Devaluation of franc. Spanish Civil war.
- 1937 Blum announces 'paix'. June — Fall of Blum government.
- 1938 June — Pivertistes expelled from SFIO. September Munich. November — Failure of General Strike.

France



Leon Blum

The programme of the Popular Front was very limited — limited to what was acceptable to the Radicals. Under the slogan 'Bread, Peace and Liberty' the alliance promised cooperation with the League of Nations, dissolution of the fascist combat organizations, and an unspecified reduction in the length of the working

'the workers did not wait for Blum to take office'

week. Added to this were the reform of the Bank of France and the tax system and a few nationalisations. Workers' power was not on the agenda.

When the elections came in May 1936, the left was victorious. The most startling aspect of the results was the defeat suffered by the bourgeois component of the Front, the Radical Party. At the same time as the workers' parties vastly increased their vote the Radicals lost 43 seats. The social and political crisis had engendered a deepening division in French society and a growing political awareness among sections of the farmers and shopkeepers as well as the working class.

The workers did not wait for Leon Blum to take office, they occupied the factories. All the official leaders of the working class were horrified and frightened. Jouhaux of the CGT, an anarchosindicalist turned right-

winger, negotiated concessions from the bosses while the CP used its influence to halt the strike movement.

After voting for Blum in order to defeat reaction the workers had repudiated his alliance with the Radicals by threatening the rule of their class.

On 9 June that Matignon agreement was signed. The French workers had won a 12 per cent increase in wages, paid holidays and the 40 hour week. They also gained recognition by the employers of their right to bargain collectively. But they had been cheated of power. On the left, only the Trotskyists opposed the agreement.

The leaders of the working class, both Socialist and Communist, could not lead it to power. For all their left wing rhetoric, they were still firmly tied to the ruling class.

For a time, it looked as if a new leadership could emerge from the left of the SFIO. As well as the Trotskyists, who briefly joined the SFIO in 1934, there was the tendency led by Pivert, which included such figures as Daniel Guérin.

Trotsky was to be disappointed; the 'revolutionary left' tendency could not break with Blum, and so ended up supporting him: 'No matter how much the centrists babble about the 'masses' they always orient themselves to the reformist apparatus. Repeating this or that revolutionary slogan, Marceau Pivert subordinates it to the abstract principle of 'organisational unity', which in action turns out to be unity with the patriots against the revolutionists.'

And so it turned out, Pivert supported the Matignon agreement and acted as the left-wing conscience of Leon Blum. The government that took power in June 1936 was composed exclusively of Socialists and Radicals. The CP and the CGT elected not to take part themselves, but to give their support. Carried to power by the workers, the Popular Front proved incapable of changing their basic situation.

The gains made by the strike movement were however large enough to damage the interests of the bourgeoisie. Economic sabotage by the bosses led inevitably to financial crisis. Revolutionary measures against capital were not open to a social democrat in alliance with a capitalist party, so Blum was obliged to 'restore confidence' instead.

By March 1937 he was calling for a 'pause' in the reforms. This only encouraged the ruling class in its attacks. The devaluation of the franc, carried out by the Blum government, helped to unload the burden of the economic crisis onto the shoulders of the working class. A growing proportion of the workers sank into passivity

and scepticism and the peasants and shopkeepers turned back to the bourgeois parties. The Blum government fell in June 1937.

In the international arena the Popular Front acted as it did at home. In words it supported the Spanish Republic against fascism. In practise, Blum became the chief advocate of the 'non-intervention' policy promoted by British imperialism. When Hitler and Mussolini were supplying Franco

'a growing number of workers sank into passivity and scepticism'

with all the arms he needed, Blum was helping to strangle the Republic.

The same Radical Party to which Blum and Thorez had tied themselves, showed how 'democratic' it really was.

In November 1938 the Daladier government warned that efforts to enforce the 40 hour week in munitions would be considered a crime; workers could be given a two-year prison sentence for holding anti-war discussions.

The workers responded to this with a spontaneous wave of strikes, but the CGT, with the support of the Socialist and Communist parties, limited action to a one-day protest stoppage, the Popular Front had prepared the road to defeat.

Blum turned on the opposition in the SFIO in June 1938, forcing Pivert to form the Workers' and Peasants Socialist Party (PSOP). But Pivert had not been won to Marxism; he supported de Gaulle in the war and then returned to the mainstream of the SFIO. Jean Zyromsky, the other former leader of the left, joined the CP.



Maurice Thorez



1936 was the year of the infamous purges in the Soviet Union. In this **WASHINGTON** points out in his article the significance of the physical elimination of all potential opponents of the policies at home and abroad.

Midnight of the century

THE SHELL BEING CRACKED BY Deutscher's analysis is the wave of terror that was unleashed when the purges began in August 1936. The wave of sadism and horror drove on until the trial of Zinoviev and the Bolshevik part that had led to victory in 1917 had been killed. Every single member of the politbureau, with the exception of Stalin, and the central committee, had been shot or jailed. In addition to Zinoviev and Tomsky, 14 other long serving leaders of the bloodletting died in the trial. In January 1937 Radlitzky and 10 more were found guilty of murder. In June of that year, Bukharin, Pilschachevsky, heads of the secret intervention and chief of the foreign staff, along with eight of the most generals of the Red Army, were executed after a summary trial.

Finally came the trial of 1938 when Bukharin, the head of the theory of socialism in one country, and 20 others were found guilty of plotting to restore capitalism in the USSR. Every one of the 20 was charged with plotting to assassinate Stalin, with the aim to wreck the Soviet economy, and to poison masses of the population and with being brought to the aid of the October Revolution by the British, German, Japanese and American Intelligence. It was Bukharin who agreed with the KGB to give the USSR and give Germany and other great areas of Soviet territory to the "credulous" German bourgeoisie. The monstrous charge that the most dishonest could not believe in was that the defendants had conspired with the alleged traitors. Bukharin and the defendants were the only ones to produce the verdicts, which were then subjected to verification. The confessions were impossible because of the blatant falsehoods. In 1938, in a trial where three defendants were found to have met with the traitors who existed for years. Yagoda, chief of the political police, who prepared the case of Zinoviev, was to have been

clumsiness in fabricating evidence, by himself becoming a victim at a later trial. His successor Yezhov befell the same fate 16 years later. Beria, successor to Yezhov, got the executioner's bullet, thereby closing the final chapter of ignominy and frame-up.

The trials were orchestrated like show pieces, intended for national and international consumption. Stalin wanted to — in fact needed to — destroy the last remaining links with Lenin's party. That meant the physical destruction of every one of the old leadership so that in the event of popular resistance to his regime there would be no one to give that resistance political voice and leadership. Furthermore by this awesome display

Vyshinsky ended his courtroom tirades: "shoot the mad dogs"

of power he sent a message to every bureaucrat and aspiring apparatchik, that the only path to success in Soviet society lay along the road charted by Josef Stalin. The message international — like as equally as blunt and brutal. It informed the 'capitalist class in the western democracies' that the Russian house was being put in order, resolution was no longer the message from the USSR, as the old revolutionaries were being shot in the cellars of the Lubyanka prison.

Frightened of the threat from a resurgent Germany on Russia's western borders, Stalin had elaborated the policy of the Popular Front which aimed to bring about a military and diplomatic alliance between the USSR and western capitalism against Hitler's Germany. The purge of the Trotskyite 'leftists' was done to isolate all those socialists and militants who were opposed to subordinating the interests of the working class to the Russian bureaucracy's diplomatic manoeuvres. As the civil war raged in Spain, the Russian secret police and the Spanish Communist Party imported their own versions of the Moscow trials as they secretly tortured and



shot those in the Republican ranks who wanted to place the interests of the Spanish revolution in the fore of the struggle against Franco's fascism. What gave the trials a surrealistic atmosphere was the sight of the defendants, one after another, confessing their 'crimes' and incantating the prescribed hosannas to the 'mighty leader comrade Stalin'. It was one of history's cruel and ironic twists that the tormentor of these old bolsheviks was the public prosecutor Vyshinsky, a former menshevik, who had only made his peace with the revolution to further his career, and who time after time ended his courtroom tirades with the demand: 'Shoot the mad dogs?'

The confessions can only be understood if one recognises the dilemma of the defendants. For them the Communist Party was the only conceivable instrument of change, hence they were determined at all costs to stay within the party. As Deutscher explains in his book *Stalin: a political biography*: 'Ever since the middle twenties recantation had been something like a ritual habit, an accepted routine, with the broken men of the opposition. They had begun with the admission of ordinary offences against discipline and they ended by confessing apocalyptic sins. In between there was a wide gamut of gradations which they had gone through slowly, like sleepwalkers almost, hardly perceiving the direction of their movement. Each time they made a recantation, they agreed to confess some sin only slightly worse than the one confessed before. Each time they hoped of course, that this would be the last sacrifice demanded of them for the sake of the party. . . It is doubtful whether even at the end of the journey they saw clearly that what awaited them now was the holocaust.'

Added to this was the undoubted use of torture, both physical and moral. The political police had been allowed to seize their families as hostages and it is almost certain that the prisoners hoped their confessions might save their relatives. No other explanation will explain the confessions. Every crime of which they were accused was utterly alien to the very spirit of their existence. The absurdity of the charges can best be realised by recognising that if the defendants had taken over the entire machinery of the Soviet administration — and that is what the prosecution claimed had happened — it is not they who would have been in the dock, but Stalin and Vyshinsky.

Despite the grotesque nature of the charges, the farcical character of the evidence, and the crudeness of the prosecution's case, the Communist



Vyshinsky, Stalin's prosecutor

parties throughout the world welcomed the verdicts, offering one final proof that these former parties of revolution had been converted into servile tools of Soviet diplomacy. None was more servile than the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Its central committee hailed Zinoviev's 'well merited death'. With the aid of funds from Moscow, the CPGB and its front organisations turned justifying the trials into an industry. Books rolled off the presses: *The Moscow Trial: Defeat of Trotskyism; Eight Soviet Generals Who Plotted Against The Peace; The Trial of Radek and Others*, are just a random selection from the assortment.

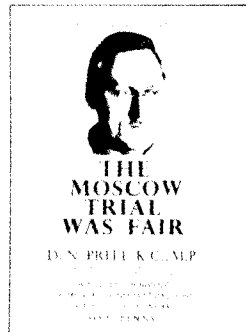
As one trial followed another and previous justifications collapsed under a welter of new revelations, the hacks of the CPGB remained impervious to truth and reason. At its 15th Party congress the CPGB had applauded the 'bolshevik comrade Yezhov' and later, at his trial, enthusiastically greeted his sentence! Lajos Magyar was drawn into writing for the party's theoretical magazine *La-*

bour Monthly where he denounced the 'Trotskyite-fascists', then he too fell victim to the purges.

But, support for the bloodletting was not restricted to the CPGB. The Labour MP and barrister D.N. Pritt, was present at the 1936 trial — journey and expenses courtesy of the Russian bureaucracy — and claimed the accused were 'as guilty as they themselves said'. The Right Reverend Hewlitt Johnson, then Dean of Canterbury, in robust Christian style justified the executions of the latter-day heretics, but then the good Dean did accrue his share of loyalties from the sales of his book in what he described as the 'socialist sixth'. John Strachey, then flirting with the 'left', he later become a right-wing minister, was 'convinced all those Trotskyists are working in close association with the Nazis'. *Tribune* plumbed the depths when it had the affrontry to declare the secret trial of the Red Army generals — accused of being Nazi agents, three of the nine were Jewish — as 'very democratic'.

The support for Stalin from a collection of lefts, lawyers, intellectuals and men of the cloth grew out of two considerations. For some being a 'professional friend' of the USSR meant material benefits like free jaunts and royalties. For others the most important thing was the idea that an alliance between the Soviet Union and the western democracies was the best guarantee of defeating fascism, and thereby saving British democracy. And if this meant turning one's face away from unpleasanties like frame-ups and legalised murder so be it. If 'our way of life' could be saved by the death of foreign revolutionaries it was a small price to pay. It never entered the heads of the left MPs and intellectuals who justified the trials, that the only way to guarantee democracy was the advancement of the socialist revolution. For them independent working class action was an alien concept, and thus in the cause of bourgeois parliamentary democracy they became Stalin's apologists.

In those awful years when midnight descended on the 20th Century, Stalinism and reformism revealed their true face. It was only the small Trotskyist groups, aided by other socialists and a few intellectuals who stood out for truth and justice against the might of the Soviet state and its supporters world-wide. Of course most of the left fellow travellers and intellectuals deserted Stalin when the going got rough. Many like Strachey become supporters of the Cold War in the late forties and fifties, after all they no longer needed the USSR to defend British democracy, they now had American imperialism at hand for that job.



Pamphlet by Labour MP D.N. Pritt

Photographs from 'The Great Purges' by David King and Isaac Deutscher (published by Basil Blackwell).

L A B O U R BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

TURN BACK THE GREY TIDE!

The right wing of the labour movement has been getting away with murder: policies and principles have been slaughtered. Kinnock, Hattersley and a cabal of union bureaucrats have been setting the agenda and setting the pace towards a new witch-hunt.

New alignments have helped the "new realists". Urging on the process of ditching and diluting Labour's policies have been: ● The new *Tribune* ● The new Livingstone ● The new *New Socialist* ● The new *Marxism Today*.

All these elements are central to the new grey election campaign (never mind the politics, feel the breadth!).

But beneath the thin veneer of "new" politics lurks the same old reality: Kinnock's gang are limbering up for a period of Wilson-style Labour government pledged to capitalist policies, and certain to attack the working class.

We can't yet stop the careerist bandwagon which Kinnock is driving, or stop some former left wingers, jumping aboard. *But we don't have to concede the initiative to the right wing.*

We can begin to organise the hard left to fight back in defence of socialist policies, class struggle methods, and the demands of the oppressed.

That's why we need the new, fortnightly paper to be launched in the autumn, which will expand and improve upon the present *Labour Briefing*.

The new *Briefing* will argue for the policies which the labour movement needs to fight back against Thatcher and combat Kinnock's retreat.

Our aim is to stop the rot. Our allies and audiences are the most militant forces in the trade unions, the Labour Parties, women's campaigns and struggles, Black struggles, the Lesbian and Gay movement and among young people — anyone committed to the fight for a socialist solution to the crisis.

The new paper will be tighter in focus, harder-hitting in its line, but broader in scope than the present *Briefing*. It will still be democratically run, and offer a forum for debate as well as a basis for organising the left. It will be basic reading for activists, but understandable to workers on picket lines and first-time readers.

The campaign for the new paper was launched at a 200-strong conference in May. Now we need YOUR support to help raise the funds and assemble a network of sellers and supporters.

If you agree that it is time we fought back against the witch-hunt and the right wing rampage, we urge you to:

- **Join our "500 Club" scheme: pay £1 per week towards the Launch Fund of £8,000 — and be entered for a weekly £25 Draw!**
 - **Make a donation to the launch fund: send cheques (payable to Labour Briefing No. 2 account) to: Launch Fund, 162 Millfields Rd, London E5.**
 - **Pledge a regular sale of the new paper in your workplace, Labour Party or neighbourhood. Order your copies of our Pilot Issue (out July 15th) from Millfields Rd.**
 - **Tell your local comrades about it: organise a Launch Meeting, with a speaker from *Briefing* (write in, or tel. 01-533 2593).**
 - **Subscribe to the paper — £12 per year.**
 - **Order copies of our *Turn Back the Grey Tide* leaflet to spread the word and promote the new *Briefing* from 39, Talia House, Manchester Rd, London E14 9HB.**
- CONTACT US for any further details. TOGETHER WE can Turn the Tide!**

London's docklands up for grabs. Many 'flex spec' firms are relocating there



Carlos Guantia/Reflex

The GLC has put forward a rival industrial strategy to Kinnock's. **JAMIE GOUGH** examines just how different it really is, and suggests an alternative.

An improved economy?

BEFORE ITS ABOLITION, the Greater London Council published a weighty volume entitled *The London Industrial Strategy* (LIS) made up of strategies for twenty sectors of the London economy. The book describes policies for the GLC's own intervention, including for its investment arm the Greater London Enterprise Board. But this intervention was intended to be an experiment, developing and proving a left alternative to the industrial policies of the Labour and TUC leaderships. In the *New Statesman*, *Maxism Today* and elsewhere on the left it has been hailed as a new, pathfinding approach to economic policy.

The LIS contains useful proposals on many economic issues, including on the public sector and domestic work. But

the most distinctive contribution concerns policies for strengthening the power of workers within the private sector. There are in fact several contradictory lines on this issue in the LIS, reflecting the different political currents that were present in the GLC. It is these strategies I look at in this article.

Modernising Britain, from the left

In order to see what kind of alternative *The London Industrial Strategy* provides, we need to compare it with the traditional policies of the labour movement on industrial intervention. The central aim of these policies has been to improve the competitiveness of British manufacturing against its international rivals. The Labour and trade union leaderships have put

themselves forward as the champions of 'efficiency' and 'modernisation'. British capital is presented as 'backward' and unpatriotic, centering its activities on overseas investments and speculation. Accordingly, the role of the labour movement is to force industry to do its job properly — like German or Japanese capital, for instance. Kinnock's current presentation of the Labour Party as 'the party of production' is the latest version of this old theme.

The labour movement at all levels has largely followed this line. Since the second world war hundreds of billions of pounds of grants have been given by the state to private manufacturing firms, as regional grants, through industry-specific schemes, as funds for specific firms, and through tax relief on capital investments. The labour movement has very seldom questioned these hand-outs or attempted to harness them to its own particular ends. After all, if grants *equal* greater productivity *equals* more jobs and higher wages, what is there to question? The typical approach of the labour union movement has

'the rate of profit is so low that productivity increases just displace jobs'

therefore been to get together with the employers to lobby the government *for more*.

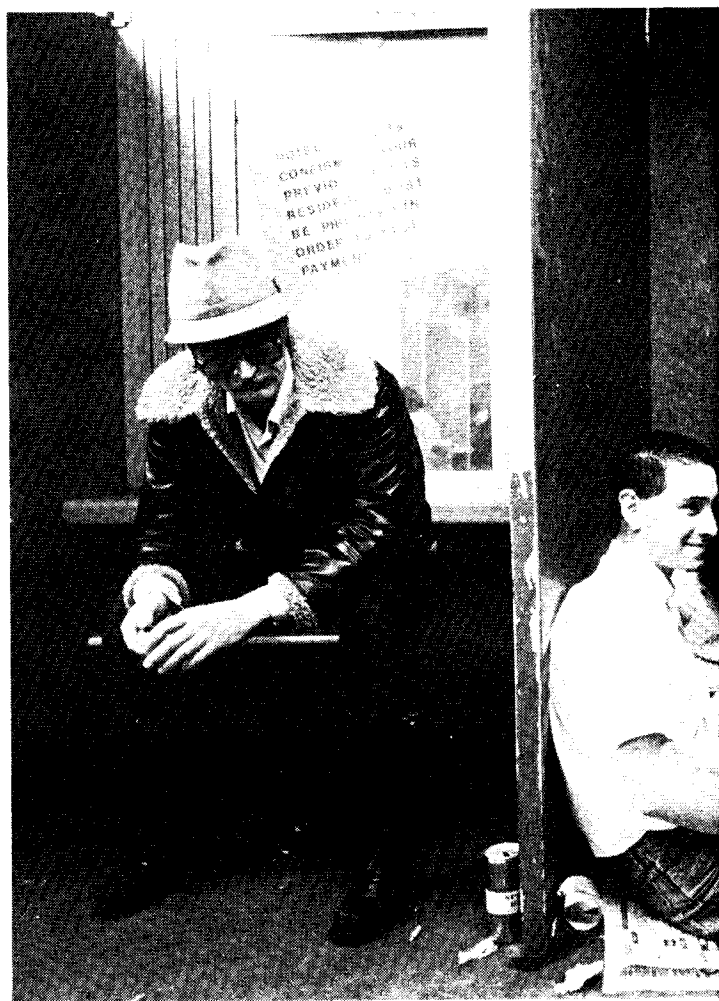
The first problem with this approach is that it is completely insufficient for the task it supposedly sets itself — 'modernising' British industry. The overseas, speculative orientation of British capital is dyed in the wool. To change this orientation would require such massive direction over the City and the British multinationals as to amount to expropriation in reality if not in name. Investment grants hardly scratch the surface.

But there is a more fundamental problem: on a world scale, increased investment and productivity now does not mean more jobs. During the 1950s and 1960s, increased productivity did help to feed the international capitalist boom, through cheapening consumer and capital goods and raw materials and thus sustaining profit rates. Good profits encouraged more investment and higher output, more than enough to offset the job displacing effects of increased productivity. Now, however, the rate of profit is so low that productivity increases do not encourage a new wave of sustained investment; they just displace jobs.

What is more, one effect of most increases in investment is to make capital's profit situation *worse*, through increasing capital intensity. Extracting the same profit requires more capital and so the rate of profit declines. This was happening also in the '50s and '60s; but with the current already low rate of profit increased investment helps to deepen the crisis of profitability, and thus the crisis of jobs.

Government grants that increase investment may well improve the competitiveness of a particular firm, or stop it becoming more uncompetitive. They may therefore provide some — often temporary — respite for workers in that firm. But they do not create jobs overall, and therefore are not a jobs strategy for the working class movement. For this, the first step is rather the kind of policies proposed in the Campaign Group's pamphlet *A Million Jobs a Year* — deflation and increased government borrowing made effective by nationalisation of the City.

The LIS, however, does claim that industrial intervention can create jobs. Vigorous and detailed state policies for production — in contrast to tinkering with the money supply ('monetarism') or with demand ('Keynesianism') — are said to be able to revive the economy. The LIS argues that, through using advanced technology and good organisation, an enterprise can gain a 'strategic place' in the economy. This might well enable the enterprise to reap higher than average profits at the expense — of other forms. But this does nothing for the overall rate of profit or for economic revival. The 'job creation' strategy of the LIS is just a more sophisticated presentation of the traditional policy of improved competitiveness.



Can the LIS solve youth unemployment? Signing on in Pimlico

A new flavour — 'flexible specialisation'

The G.I.C.'s publicity made much of the imaginary jobs it was creating through its investments. But the emphasis of the LIS is not on job creation but on strengthening workers' position through changing technology, organisation of production and organisation of industries — 'restructuring of labour' is the slogan. Central to this theme is a new form of industrial organisation called 'flexible specialisation'.

Flexible specialisation in its ideal form turns on its head most people's idea of 'modern' industrial production. Rather than 'mass production' to make large quantities of a standardised product, it sets out to make a large variety of products in short runs. Instead of plywood cupboards, we have the customised fitted kitchen, 'spanish', 'tudor' or 'high tech' to taste. Instead of jeans we have *designer* jeans, instead of M&S

'instead of jeans we have designer jeans, instead of M & S we have Next'

we have Next. And rather than repetitive production line work by workers most of whom are trained only for the specific, simple job, in the flexible specialisation model workers need to have the skill to handle constantly changing products, to reset machines frequently and solve problems as they arise.

This new organisation inside the factory can alter the organisation of the industry. The advocates of flexible specialisation agree that the new type of production can be carried out most efficiently not in the large factories and firms typical of mass production but in small or medium factories and firms. The necessary inventiveness and fast footwork is best achieved when factories and firms have extremely detailed knowledge and skill in a narrow area of production: hence



strategy based on flexible specialisation can therefore affect only part of the working class.

The new craft worker?

But the LIS has reasons for cottoning on to flexible specialisation: it appears to offer the possibility for a gradual increase in working class power based on skill. There are (at least) two lines on this in the LIS.

The first line, developed for example in the strategies for furniture and the media, is straightforwardly class-collaborationist. It argues that flexible specialisation gives workers strong bargaining power against their employers. The employers cannot easily sack them, because their skills are needed; nor can production easily be speeded up or reorganised without workers' consent because workers' collaboration and initiative is needed for this type of production. The employers are willing to pay good wages since, through their specialisation and unique designs, they are able to charge high prices for their products. Competition on the basis of quality, not cost, means employers need not resort to nasty cost cutting methods. In short, flexible specialisation is a step forward for the working class. It can restore the control over work and 'the dignity of labour' that the craft worker had before this was smashed by mass production.

Far from providing a radical alternative to the labour leadership, this line gives their policy a sophisticated underpinning. The fans of flexible specialisation argue that (especially in 'backward' Britain) state intervention will be necessary to support small, innovative firms: in providing funds, training services, common marketing and research services, and in

'the overseas, speculative orientation of British capital is dyed in the wool'

clamping down on employers who indulge in unfair cost cutting through super-exploitation or illegal practices. But state *controlled* enterprises would be too 'bureaucratic' and slow footed for this type of production. We are back at the Kinnoek-Hattersley line: no to nationalisation, yes to a National Investment Bank and local 'Enterprise Boards' to give money to small firms.

But, even for the production of varied and fast-changing goods, this return to the good old days of the craft workshop is an illusion. First, the degree of skill and autonomy of workers even within flexible specialist firms will often be limited. New production technology enables many quite complex design and production tasks to be substantially automated. And new information technology enables management to continuously monitor and measure — and so control — the labour of workers, even those doing quite varied tasks.

Secondly, big capital need not let itself be so easily undermined by these jumped-up smaller firms. Big capital, too, may be 'bureaucratic', but it is quite capable of organising to produce varied goods. It can easily expand and diversify its design departments, and it can divide its production up into specialist shops, factories and subsidiaries. And big capital can still maintain control over the crucial distribution networks, and probably increase it, as recent mega-mergers in retailing and the media testify.

A new craft trades unionism

There is, though, an important kernel of truth in the pro-flex spec line. As in all previous capitalist crises, there *are* firms and sectors of the economy which are able to reap good rates of profit on the basis of advanced technology and efficient organisation. Within these firms, some of the workers have skilled jobs which put them in a strong bargaining position. These workers are not *necessarily* conservative because of this, whatever Eric Hammond and left-talking eurocommunists would have us believe. Their strong economic position *can* be used to fight capital. In fact, in the end they always *have* to fight capital, as we now see in Fleet Street. Capital's never-ending

flexible *specialisation*. So instead of the large integrated steel works producing basic steel, you have small works producing steels for special markets.

The LIS sees flexible specialisation becoming the dominant industrial model in the world economy for a long period, in the way that mass production has been from the 1920s to the

'flexible specialisation is only *one* of capital's response to the crisis'

present. Computer controlled production equipment can be programmed for new tasks much more quickly than the old electro-mechanical machines could be set, thus cheapening the production of varied goods. The new telecoms and data processing can easily handle stock control and rapid ordering for a massive variety of designs and sizes. And the LIS argue that there is a decline in demand for standardised products and increasing demand for varied consumer goods and customised capital equipment. The LIS then bases its strategies on this flexible specialisation future.

It is true that the flexible specialisation strategy is being adopted by groups of firms in many different industries. But it is only *one* of capital's responses to the crisis. Mass production of standard products will remain important: in raw material and energy production; in transport, distribution, communications and other 'infrastructures'. In other industries standardised production is becoming *more* important: office work, many consumer services, and production of standardised machines with the flexibility to do many different tasks. In consumer goods, fragmentation of taste has a lot to do with increasing differences between income groups, ages and the sexes produced by the crisis — it is not a permanent feature. A

reorganisations always require or enable it sooner or later to undermine each particular group of craft workers.

But the pro-flex spec line takes us in the opposite direction: to *collaborate* with capital in making a strong economic position, supposedly for all workers, but in fact for a small minority. *This line deepens divisions inside the working class.*

For flex spec promoters, good wages and conditions depend directly on good profits. So these must be set at the firm or shop level; if you're in a weak firm, hard luck. In this way, solidarity across an industry becomes very hard to build — especially if the firms are as small as the flex spec fans would like.

Moreover, for these strategists the strength of the skilled workers depends heavily on their short supply. So it must be underpinned by restricting entry; and what more natural than for men to exclude women, white to exclude black, older to exclude the young? And if not all jobs can be in successful, flex spec firms, if mass production remains, where are the good jobs to be located? Naturally, in the imperialist countries, which have the infrastructure and education for sophisticated production, and are closer to the discriminating buyer. And so the flex spec promoters argue that their strategy can keep the imperialist countries ahead of the Third World, and banish low skill, low paid jobs to where they belong. Craft workers are not 'naturally' reactionary. But a strategy which centres on building working class strength through skill certainly is.

The class struggle . . . to enlighten capital

As I have mentioned, there are rival strategies in the LIS. A more left line on flexible specialisation is to be found in the Introduction to the LIS, written by the head of the GLC's economic department, Robin Murray. Murray argues that, while something called flexible specialisation is the future, this can include deskilling of work and continued domination by large capital, somewhat in the way I have discussed above. Like the fans of flex spec, Murray's central political aim is increasing the skill content and variety of work, and thus the worker's immediate control over the work process. But in Murray's perspective this requires opposing capital's attempts to deskill. The labour movement, backed by a Labour government, needs to compel firms to adopt skilled work processes, and the government needs to provide resources for workers to participate in designing appropriate production equipment.

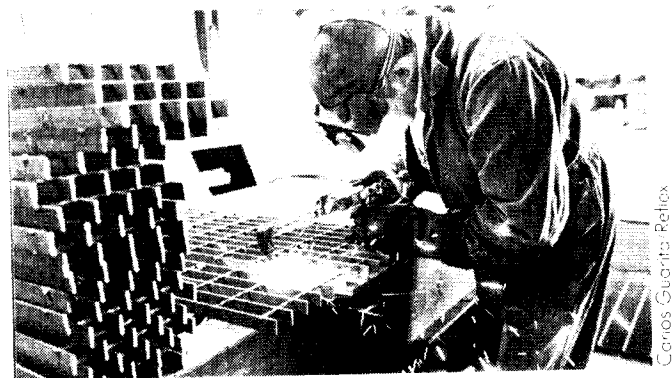
Promoting better jobs in this kind of way is certainly valuable, and more discussion is needed in the labour movement of how it could be done. But at this point Murray backtracks. He insists that these better jobs are always just as profitable for capital as low skill, tightly supervised ones. The employers deskill jobs out of a *short sighted* belief that super-exploitation and use of unskilled labour is in their interest. If this were true, then any strong *control* by the state or the labour movement over capital would be unnecessary to achieve better jobs. Capital just needs more progressive advice. We are back with the hands-off policy of the Labour leadership.

But the employers are not short sighted. They have an interest in exercising as tight as possible control over the work process. And capital always aspires to be as *mobile* as possible, to free itself from dependence on particular workers and to leave itself able to use the reserve army of labour. The needs of specialised production sometimes *conflict* with this, but don't override it.

An alternative

Increasing skill and variety of jobs, then, cannot generally be done in collaboration with capital. And relying on skilled, high profit work to strengthen labour is inevitably devious. Industrial policy needs to go in the opposite direction: *to break down divisions between groups of workers, and to help to strengthen collective organisation.*

This is a more fundamental aim than attempting to create better jobs, valid though that is. It is only on the basis of strong organisation that any positive measures can be imposed on capital, whether it be more jobs or better jobs. It is also an aim that helps to unify the working class, rather than seeking through directly economic means to build working class strength which is, at best, extremely uneven and unstable.



Welder in new small docklands firm.

In developing this policy, the first issues must be *how* a Labour government would invest in private industry. Given that these investments typically do far more for the employer than the working class, the most minimal requirement should be that the workers in the firm or industry concerned should be able to use the money as a bargaining counter against the employers, by having a *veto* over the making of the grant. To improve the chances that the grant was used for its intended purpose, workers should also be given *access to all information* relevant to the investment — which would usually amount to a complete opening of the books.

These are minimal reforms. But they would be a big change from past practice, including from the 'participatory' National Enterprise Board of the 1974-79 Labour government and from most of the investments of the Greater London Enterprise Board. They would help to strengthen trade union organisation, and begin to make government investment in the private sector an issue of debate in the worker's movement.

But a policy is also needed on what the investments are used for. The crucial need is to oppose the way in which the crisis and capitalist strategies are creating deeper divisions within the working class. The crisis tends to accentuate the differences in profitability between firms and increase wage differentials between workers. Capitalists are consciously promoting this by setting up 'separate' profit centres and subsidiaries, by fragmenting and decentralising production sites, and sometimes by increased sub-contracting. The 'Tories' monetary policies and trade union laws are designed to back up these processes.

In confronting these attacks, there are important lessons from the fight against privatisation in the public sector. This has sought to prevent the fragmentation of employment, the introduction of different wages and conditions of employment, and the transfer of production to more weakly organised workers. Policy for the private sector should start from a similar aim.

A minimal move would be to withhold grants from firms which are fragmenting and decentralising production. More positively, grants could be tied to reorganisation that brought workers together under the same employment contract, and that reduced or eliminated sub-contracting. In industries where fragmented ownership is a barrier to trade union organisation (and there are many), investment could be used to merge different firms and production sites to produce larger units.

A policy along these lines could and should be started immediately, with the relevant industries still in private ownership. But it follows from what has already been said that in many cases this type of reorganisation would be vigorously resisted by management. Fragmentation of workers is *important* for capital. Firms which did carry through reorganisation which benefited labour would often be at a considerable competitive disadvantage and therefore vulnerable.

Consistent opposition to anti-worker strategies would therefore require nationalisation of the whole industry with a workers' veto over management decisions — workers' control. And consistent reorganisation which positively strengthened the collective organisation of workers can only be carried through when workers actually run the industry.

An industrial policy which sets this aim, though, can help to resist capital's divisive strategies now. And it can show how a strategy of nationalisation under workers' control as a step to workers' management is necessary to consistently build the unity of the working class.



Claire Short MP

SHOULD THE women's movement campaign for censorship of pornography in order to oppose its sexist and degrading images of women? In America the anti-pornography lobby, supported by a number of prominent feminists, is campaigning for legislation. In Britain the Churchill Bill, from the right, and Claire Short's Bill, from the left, have both, in their different ways, called for censorship. In both countries feminists are divided on how to deal with pornography, and whether censorship is the answer. Below we reprint excerpts from an article in *Against the Current*, published in the US, which argues the case against censorship.

The debate centres on whether pornography is the cause of male violence against women, or whether it should rather be seen as one end of a continuum of the sexist representation of women, from TV soap operas and adverts to "snuff" movies.

Those who argue that 'pornography is the theory - rape is the practice' and 'pornography is violence against women', claim a direct causal relationship between the depiction of women as passive victims of sexual violence and actual acts of violence against women - assault, rape and ultimately murder. The logic of this analysis is that the banning of pornography would lead to a decrease in the number of attacks. In evaluating this argument, the theories underlying it must be critically examined.

For Andrea Dworkin¹ and Susan Brownmiller,² the origin of the oppression of women lies in our biological function, in reproduction. This makes women an oppressed class. Men, all men, are the enemy. The revolution to liberate women, then, will be a revolution in which women will take the power away from men. The approach that blames men for seeking domination over women in a power-hungry way, also blames men, all men, for violence against women, and pornography for encouraging it.

Marxists, however, have argued that this approach is based on false premises. While many would not reject Engels' claim that the oppression of women arose at the same time as class society, this does not necessarily entail the conclusion that biological reproduction itself was the basis of women's oppression. Rather, it is necessary to

The debate within the women's movement in Britain on the meaning of pornography and how to respond to it has been given a new focus with the introduction of Claire Short's bill. In America, the lobbies for and against state censorship have developed relatively well defined positions. Below, **JANE KELLY** outlines some of the points at issue for the women's movement and the left in her introduction to an American feminist argument putting the case against censorship.

Pornography and censorship

examine the economic conditions in which women's role in biological reproduction ensured their social inequality. In particular we must analyse the specific forms that this oppression takes under capitalism. These forms are interwoven with the needs of capital and the oppression of the working class.

Key to such an analysis is the form of the nuclear family, the site of the oppression of women, with its division of the private

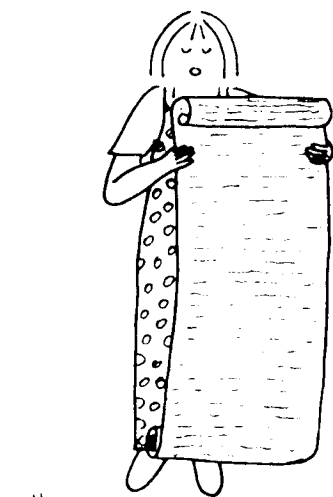
their demands is fourfold. First, there is no statistical evidence to support the idea of a causal link between pornography and violence against women. Indeed, in countries where pornography has been made freely available, there has been a decrease in the number of reported attacks. Not that this proves the opposite, for all sorts of other factors - economic, social and historical - have to be taken into account in a discussion of violent sexual attacks.

Secondly, there is the question of the definition of pornography. In a recent book, Mariana Valverde points out that any definition has to take account of the context in which so-called pornography is produced and consumed. An article by a group of women discussing sexual experiences in a feminist journal would be 'read' differently from the same article published in a soft-porn magazine. Further, many feminists would describe the representation of women as passive recipients of male passion in romance fiction, as not only sexist but pornographic. Far from being sexually explicit (indeed the language about sexual activity is usually ambiguous) such texts assume a constant equation between male power and violence, even if that violence remains only a potential:

"Women always looked at Alex Brent like that. His lean, hard body held a menacing sexuality, an implicit threat of sexual violence which attracted women like iron filings to a magnet."³

Whatever the definition of pornography it will be open to very wide interpretation. This problem is a critical one in the demand for censorship imposed by the state. State controls in Britain would include all sorts of sexual material for censorship: sex manuals, books like *Make it Happy*⁴, lesbian and gay literature and images - all could be banned, while TV serials, films and books glorifying male violence would be left untouched.

Thirdly, claiming a causal link between pornographic material and acts of violence assumes a direct relation between representation and reality, between fantasy and fact. While we all find male violence against women and children abhorrent, it is simplistic to suggest that looking at such material produces a given set of responses.



"Dear Sir, The following is a summary of my objections to your ad for Twinkle Toes bedroom slippers..."

sphere from the public, its heterosexual imperatives, its subordination of women to the demands of men, and the ideology of the home as 'the haven from the harsh world outside'. This 'home' is where most violence against women and children is in fact carried out. It is also the role of the nuclear family to reproduce both the labour force and capitalist ideology, to ensure the continuation of the capitalist system. An analysis that ignores these aspects of the relation between sexual and class oppression can all too easily produce demands that confuse not only the struggle for class emancipation but that for the liberation of women themselves.

The case against the radical feminists and

Behavioural psychologists might argue such a correlation, but feminists, amongst others, have developed a critique of such theories.

Lastly, and most dangerously, the radical feminist argument undermines an exploration of female sexuality. In a patriarchal, capitalist society, women's sexuality will inevitably be fraught with contradictions. Formed in a male-dominated framework, with the heterosexual imperative enforced by the nuclear family, female sexuality is bound to be partly informed, by male-dominated desires and fantasies. The exploration of female sexuality from a feminist direction can only be hindered by a repressive attitude towards sexual imagery.

So what should socialist feminists be doing about pornography? If pornography is one end of a continuum of sexist imagery,¹ there is no reason why it alone should be singled out for attack. In the seventies we also attacked beauty contests; feminists continue to undermine sexist adverts with their slogans. Such direct action plays a useful role in drawing public attention to oppressive images, of women. The advertising hoardings which line our streets with sexist images the representation of women in TV soap operas like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* — these are more pervasive and pernicious, more effective forms of sexist propaganda than pornography, which is consumed in private and which represents the result of conscious, if sexist, choice.

Rather than single out pornography, the sexually explicit end of oppressive imagery, rather than call on the state to determine what we should be allowed to see and read, we should campaign against all sexist representations. Direct action has its place in such a campaign — graffiti on adverts, the removal of pin-ups in workplaces — but the self-organisation of women, the autonomous women's liberation movement, will be the only force to fight sexism effectively. The women who organised in support of the miners' strike of 1984/5, radicalised at the same time over sexual issues, such as on the question of lesbian and gay liberation. It was the women who won first the men, and later the NUM as a whole, to a recognition of the importance of sexual politics, overcoming long-held and deep-seated prejudices.

However much we oppose male violence against women and children, its existence in our society cannot be adequately explained by patriarchy alone. The capitalist system which divides women from men, black from white, old from young; the nuclear family where most violence actually occurs — these also have to be part of the analysis in understanding, and then organising against, violence against women.

Footnotes

- 1 Andrea Dworkin: *Pornography*, The Women's Press (1981).
- 2 Susan Brownmiller: *Against Our Will*, Penguin (1977).
- 3 Mariana Valverde: *Sex, Power and Pleasure*, Women's Press of Canada (1985).
- 4 *Ibid*, page 138.
- 5 Jane Cousins: *Make it Happy*, Virago, 1978.
- 6 For an excellent exposition of this argument see Ros Coward's: "Sexual Violence and Sexuality," *Feminist Review*, Summer 1982.

While we oppose the pornography free zone campaign initiated by the Task Force on Prostitution and Pornography (TOPP), we are critical of pornography, its false representation of women's sexuality, and sexist imagery of all types, and we encourage and support protest of such depictions. We are enraged by the actual assaults and rapes women experience and sensitive to the discomfort some women feel about pornography. Yet, there are better, and less dangerous, ways to combat violence against women and sexism than the pornography free zone campaign.

But, what's wrong with supporting the pornography free zone campaign as a symbolic statement and an educational effort? First, we object to the notion that a 'pornography free zone' is a place that is 'safe for women and children', as the TOPP sticker claims. We object because the slogan trivializes reality by suggesting that the absence of pornography makes women safe and, implicitly, that the presence of pornography is what endangers women. Pornography is not the same as rape.

The problem of pornography is part of a much larger social and economic problem of the subordination of women in society as a whole. Pornography is an extreme example of a society that objectifies women, but the specific focus on pornography and sexually explicit imagery advocated by some feminists obscures how degrading depictions of women permeate society.

Sexist attitudes toward women are encouraged by advertisements on TV, magazines which project standards of appropriate behaviour, and by a culture which continually reinforces male dominance. Female sexuality is commodified in various ways, typified by waitresses in bunny suits and advertisements that use women's bodies to sell cars. Pornography is one end of the continuum.

It is not only the media which is sexist and devalues women. Women are segregated into jobs which require them to serve others, such jobs as secretarial work and domestic service. As a group, women earn 59 cents to a dollar earned by men.

Suppressing pornography will not end violence against women. Rape, wife-beating, and other forms of such violence have been around for a long time, long before pornography was widely available. This violence is caused by deeper sources of anti-women attitudes. Some pornography may condone such violence, but pornography does not cause it.

Secondly, we object to the porn-free zone campaign because it is directly linked to national anti-pornography legislative efforts led by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin and led locally by TOPP. The definition of pornography in the pornography free zone campaign is essentially the same as the definition in the Dworkin/MacKinnon



Protesting outside Ann Summer sex shop in Edgware Road

Why we oppose the pornography free zone campaign

ordinance, which is vague and open to anti-feminist interpretation.

Support for the porn free zone campaign will be used both to build support, and as evidence of support, for future anti-pornography legislation. The ordinance relies upon the courts to determine which sexually explicit materials fall under its vague definition and which materials may be legally required removed from theatres and bookstores. We know that ultimately this type of legislation will be used against our own literature and films. It will be used to — and will encourage — attacks upon feminist, lesbian, and gay lives, beliefs, literature and art.

The pornography free zone campaign mimics the nationwide nuclear free zone campaign strategy. Both are symbolic and both provide no true guarantee to safety. The nuclear free zone campaign clearly stated that its purpose lay in ultimately pressuring the government to legislate the banning of nuclear arms. The pornography free zone campaign denies a broader goal. We expect that the pornography free zone campaign will, in fact, be used to propose again an anti-pornography ordinance or a banning of pornography in this community. If this is not the case, what is the purpose of a symbolic act that uses essentially the same definition of pornography as the Dworkin/MacKinnon ordinance does?



We must reiterate our opposition to censorship, regardless of its brand name, 'civil rights' ordinance, or otherwise. Any legislation attempting to control the sale, distribution or availability of sexual materials will be used against us. Right wing groups and leaders already actively support this legislation. We know that they are not our friends and won't side-step trampling over feminist or lesbian or gay rights.

In Minneapolis, the anti-pornography ordinance did not pass, but a new obscenity ordinance did, ushered through in its wake. In Suffolk County, New York, the anti-porn ordinance was amended to attack gays by including sodomy as an evil encouraged by pornography.

In Canada, the Ontario Censorship Board, which bans films in the name of protecting women, has already twisted feminist-inspired legislation and language and used it to censor feminist films, including the feminist critique of pornography, 'Not a Love Story'.

Feminists across the country are debating the problems of pornography and the proposed legislative effort. Many feminists, lesbians, and gays oppose the Dworkin/MacKinnon anti-pornography ordinance and dispute the ordinance's definition of pornography.

We have fought hard to get the judicial and law enforcement systems to interpret and enforce the 'rights of all men' to include minorities, women, gays, lesbians and other oppressed groups. Many parts of this state and the nation still have little consciousness or concern about defending our rights.

We have no faith in this country's judges' ability or interest to look at

feminist photographs of nude women's bodies — which show beauty and sexual pleasure from a woman's viewpoint and are sold for women — and distinguish them from the kinds of pictures in *Playboy* or *Hustler*, which are sexist and are the aim of this kind of ordinance.

Some feminist literature that could fall under the pornography free zone campaign's definition of pornography include: books favouring abortion (conservative groups like 'Women Victimized by Abortion' believe that abortion is violence against women and could use this ordinance against pro-choice literature), *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Sisterhood is Powerful* by Robin Morgan, and *Yellow Silk*, an erotic magazine.

Feminist and progressive booksellers across the country have made it clear that they would cease stocking literature which might be considered pornographic due to the ordinance's threat of costly litigation. Local feminist artists fear censorship of their art, films, and literature.

Our disagreement with TOPP's support of the anti-pornography ordinance continues in our view of the current anti-pornography zone campaign. The mere removal of pornography from view, a dangerous strategy for the women's movement, will not change the pervasive attitudes of male domination. The attitudes and materials will remain. We need criticism of pornography and sexism, but we also need to create positive images and build toward something different. The problems of sexual assault, sexism, and sexist imagery are not simple.

We hope that feminists and progressives will continue to join us in taking up new, and older, feminist ideas, instead of

supporting the anti-porn legislative/censorship approach of attacking these problems. The activist program we suggest will not be as easy to accomplish as stirring up sentiment against pornography, a feeling that many share because they find any depiction of nudity and sexuality offensive, but it may bring about more substantive changes.

Let's create and support access to images, literature, and films which depict female and male sexuality positively, which are made for women's pleasure and which are not exploitive instead of fearing pornography designed by and for men. Let's create and support liberating images. To speak of sex exclusively in terms of rape is a disservice to ourselves. Let's fight for our own sexual rights and our own erotica.

We also advocate showing critical films, open discussions, and leafletting pornography shows. Let's institute a ten minute 're-education' period before the start of pornography as well as may R-rated films to teach people about sexism and to explain our objections to the depiction of female sexuality in these films.

We see these alternatives as being part of a needed comprehensive feminist program for women's liberation to adequately address sexism and the violence women experience and fear. Such a strategy should also include at least all of the following:

- ★ Fighting for our right to determine our own sexuality, for access to birth control and abortion, and for lesbian and gay rights.

- ★ Empowering women to fight back and refuse to be victims by teaching self-defense courses in schools and at work, and demanding better lighting on city and campus streets.

- ★ Demanding sex education for adults and children that does more than teach the 'evils' and dangers of sexuality, but also teaches choice and non-sexist behaviour, and which discusses sexuality not only in terms of traditional, heterosexual relationships. Demanding the resources to permit developing imaginative and appealing approaches to sex education, rather than the boring and moralistic ones offered today.

- ★ Demanding quality and affordable 24 hour childcare under community and parent control.

- ★ Fighting for comparable worth, affirmative action, and unionization.

- ★ Enforcement and expansion of existing rules against sexual harassment.

Yes, this and the other alternatives we have presented here may sound like a laundry list of things to work on. We, as countless others, have been engaging in these struggles for a long time already. Women's subordination is deeply ingrained in society, and fighting it successfully requires a multifaceted and grass-roots organizing approach.

Reprinted from *Against the Current*, No. 1, Jan. 1986.

AFTER ALMOST thirty years of unremitting illness, George Breitman died on April 19. He was seventy years old. Although he was in constant pain in the last period of his life and grew progressively weaker over the past several months, he continued to spend much of his waking time in productive political work, dictating three letters from his hospital bed only two days before his death.

Breitman joined the Spartacus Youth League in 1935, at the age of 19 and later that year the Workers Party of the US, a forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party. From that time until his death fifty-one years later he never wavered in his dedication to building the revolutionary socialist movement. He was delegate to the founding convention of the Socialist Workers Party in 1937, and remained a loyal and dedicated member of that organization until 1984.

In that year the present SWP leaders — who had developed profound political differences with this historical program of the party which Breitman continued to defend — shamefully expelled him and dozens of his comrades on trumped up charges of disloyalty. After his expulsion from the SWP Breitman immediately set out to organize the expelled and to try to save the party and its program.

During his years in the SWP Breitman served in many capacities. He was a candidate ten times on the party ticket, for offices ranging from State Assembly in New Jersey to the US Senate. He set such a good personal example with his election campaigns that James P Cannon the founder of the American Trotskyist movement suggested jokingly that Breitman was going to be regarded as a chronic office seeker.

In 1941 he began his first of several terms as the editor of *The Militant*. Except for the two and a half years he spent in the army as a draftee during World War II, he served continuously on the party National Committee from 1939 to 1981.

Perhaps his greatest strength was his ability to explain difficult ideas so that they could be understood by people who were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with movement terminology or jargon. He had a knack for seeing opportunities to apply the party's program to the day to day life of working people. And he had an informal, unpretentious style in writing and speaking that made it easy for his audience to understand him.

Breitman also helped in many efforts of the party to defend itself or its members from victimization by the government. The most famous of these was the 'case of the legless veteran', James Kutcher. The Veterans Administration tried to Kutcher from the job as a clerk and take away his veteran's benefits during the witch-hunt years of the 1950s because of his membership of the SWP, despite the fact that he had lost both of his legs in Italy as a GI in World War II. Breitman, along with others, helped Kutcher in his political and legal campaign against the government's attack. After a long battle the case won. Breitman collaborated with Kutcher in writing his book about this experience, and the two remained lifelong friends. Kutcher was expelled from the SWP



George Breitman

On 19 April this year George Breitman, a leader of the revolutionary movement in the United States over five decades, died. Below we publish an appreciation of his life and work by the editors of the US journal, **Bulletin in Defence of Marxism.**

in 1983, after a terrible slander campaign against him.

In the 1960's Breitman made one of his best-known contributions to revolutionary marxism when he helped develop an analysis of the profound revolutionary implications of Black nationalism in the US. In particular, he became an authority of Malcolm X and wrote *The Last Year of Malcolm X, The Evolution of a Revolutionary* in 1967. He also edited the whole or in part, many of Malcolm's writings and speeches for publication. These included the books *Malcolm X Speaks* and *By Any Means Necessary*, as well as the pamphlet *Malcolm X on Afro-American History*. Breitman proposed an extensive project for Pathfinder Press: to collect and publish the writings of Leon Trotsky.

Breitman took primary responsibility for the project of locating, selecting, translating from many languages, editing and annotating the massive amount of Trotsky's writings and shaping it into cohesive form. Ultimately this consisted of fourteen volumes in the series *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, covering the years of Trotsky's last exile (1929-40).

George was born and grew up in a working-class neighbourhood in Newark, New Jersey. His mother was a maid for better-off families and his father was an iceman who carried 50-pound blocks of ice up six flights of tenement stairs in the days

before refrigeration. When his father died at the age of 40, George's old sister Celia had to quit school to help support the family. She was by far the most important influence on George as a child. She became a member of the Young Communist League and combined her babysitting responsibilities and her political ones by bringing George to meetings while he was still quite young.

As a youngster, George read voraciously. Mostly he read junk — the hundreds of adventure and pulp novels for boys that were the diet of a generation before television turned reading for pleasure into an obsolete activity. But he also read good novels and short stories. His hangouts were his neighbourhood corner, which later became know to many as "Trotsky Square" because so many of his gang joined the Trotskyist youth, and the Newark public library.

At the age of 16, in 1932, George graduated from Central High School during the depths of the Depression and joined the ranks of the unemployed. During the summer of 1933 he was often in a playground near his home playing baseball and editing the playground's mimeographed newspaper. The whole year after he graduated from high school he spent writing a novel about his neighbourhood which he later destroyed. In 1934 George went to Alabama as part of the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal outfit intended to get unemployed youth off the streets. Here he received some copies of *The Militant* from a neighbourhood friend.

After returning to Newark in 1935, Breitman joined the Trotskyist movement and turned his attention to mass work in the unemployed, the Workers Alliance of America. In August 1936 he was the youngest (at age 20) of seven Workers Alliance leaders arrested and charged with inciting to riot. They were organising strikes and closing down government sponsored projects in Burlington County. Breitman spent a week in jail on that occasion. The charges were eventually dropped, the strikers were won and the strikers got a 5-cent holiday raise.

The unemployed movement of the thirties was the main opportunity Breitman had to participate in the mass movement and to test himself and his politics in action. In 1941, eighteen leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, charged under the Smith Act with advocating the forcible overthrow of the US government, were imprisoned on the day the US entered World War II. The eighteen included Felix Morrow, editor of *The Militant*. Breitman was asked to take over as editor of the paper, a post he held until he was drafted in 1943 and sent to France.

On his return to the US he again served as editor of *The Militant* from 1946-47 and 1951-53. In 1954 he moved to Detroit, where he worked as a proofreader for the *Detroit Free Press* and became a member of the International Typographic Union. He spent 13 years as an active leader of the Detroit party branch. When he left Detroit George returned to New York City where he remained for the rest of his life. He is survived by his wife, comrade, and companion of 46 years, Dorothea.

Rebellions

ROS YOUNG

'From Resistance to Rebellion'
An Exhibition on Asian and Afro-Caribbean
Struggles in Britain
Produced by the Institute of Race Relations

*'You wonder why we uprise
Politically unstabilised
Economically destabilised
People dehumanised
Youth criminalised
Mentally vandalised
Housing ghettoised
Politically unrecognised
And you wonder why we uprise'*

(LEROY COOPER, Liverpool 8)

RARELY IS the history of the Black community in Britain considered an integral part of working class history as a whole. Indeed, the history of the labour movement has been and continues to be so distorted as to not only exclude women, but to render almost invisible the enormous contribution Black people in this country have made to the fights of our class. When trade union struggles come to mind, we are more likely to look to Warrington or to the miners strike as examples of workers in struggle than the Stanmore Engineering occupation, Imperial Typewriters or Barking Hospital. And when we remember the campaigns in the women's movement in the past, it is with NAC (National Abortion Campaign), Greenham or Women Against Pit Closures who we identify with — not the struggles of Black women against the immigration laws, police violence, virginity tests or their militancy and strength in the numerous strikes they have led.

The new exhibition, *'From Resistance to Rebellion'* is a record of 'Asian and Afro-Caribbean struggles in Britain' over the last forty years. It is a shocking reminder to us of what has been forgotten or ghettoised and pushed to one side. Based on the essay of the same name by A. Sivanandan (*Race & Class*, 1981), the Institute of Race Relations has produced more than a visual history. It is in many ways a celebration of the multiple forms of organisation and struggle in which the Black community has participated, illustrated through an impressive collection of photographs, newscuttings, leaflets, posters and pamphlets.

The exhibition traces the changing nature of racism in Britain, from the racialism of the 'colour bar' in the 1940s,

the relegation of Black people into the worst jobs and housing, fascist and police attacks, the immigration laws, criminalisation of the Black community and into the eighties to state-institutionalised racism. It explains how the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities were racially divided — a legacy from British colonialism resulting in Asian workers being concentrated in textile mills and factories and the Afro-Caribbean wor-



kers in the service industries (transport, health and hotels). This inevitably led to different priorities in the fight against racism and different areas of struggle.

But there were common experiences giving rise, in particular, to the fight for better housing. The exhibition describes the variety of issues Black people have organised round in the community: the racism of the education system (from 'bussing' to the stereotyping of Black children as 'educationally subnormal' to the fight against Honeyford) and health care. Discrimination in health, housing and education above all led to the formation of political groups, the setting up of self-help projects, bookshops, advice centres, extra Saturday schools and health campaigns.

'From Resistance to Rebellion' is uncompromising in its account of the racism within the trade unions and Labour Party. It recounts the white dockers marching in support of Enoch Powell in the early 1960s, the alliances workers, trade unions and the bosses have made to defeat and exclude Black workers (at Imperial Typewriters for instance) and the refusal of the unions to support Black workers in their fight against discrimina-

tion and racialism at work. Added to this, we see over the years the passing of new laws on immigration, policing and housing — mainly aimed at the Black community, which the Labour Party has connived in or itself enacted when in government (for example the 'Kenyan Asian Act' of 1968 which barred free entry into Britain of British citizens in Kenya, and the Race Relations Act of 1976).

Facing discrimination in the workplace and the sell-outs of the trade unions, Black workers relied more on support from their own communities and organised their own workers associations, which were either involved in political trade unionism or became social and welfare clubs (the Indian Workers Association, West Indian Workers Association and Pakistani Workers Association were born from this need of self-organisation). The racism and attacks inflicted on whole communities meant that Black people set up their own clubs, bars, churches and their own political organisations and women's groups, developed their own music, poetry and art.

The exhibition documents the political parties that were built, the alliances that were made — naming far too many organisations to mention here, but they include the Pan African Congress Movement (1940s), the Racial Action Adjustment Society (RAAS), Black Peoples Alliance, Black Socialist Alliance, Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD).

'From Resistance to Rebellion' explains that anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and internationalism have always played an important part in the politics of the Black community who were 'informed by the struggles against racism and colonialism' in India, southern Africa and the Caribbean and who have organised in solidarity with Vietnam, Grenada, Cuba and the liberation movements in southern Africa.

Today we are witnessing a terrifying increase in racist attacks in the inner cities which is backed up by the state, police and media while labour's leaders remain silent. The exhibition illustrates these attacks are nothing new, though with greatly increased powers, the police are now a law unto themselves. Distinctions between the police, fascists and the state were broken down in the rebellions of Handsworth, Brixton and Broadwater Farm, led by Black (and white) youth from the inner cities — the 'never employed'.

This wealth of information is produced on 55 panels — so get hold of this exhibition. Organise showings for your Labour parties, trade unions, schools and community centres.

PAUL STERN

David Sanders with Richard Carver, *Medicine and the Politics of Underdevelopment*, Macmillan 1985 £2.95 (paperback); £12.00 (hardback).

I READ David Sanders' book with great pleasure. This is no ordinary text on the health problems of the suffering third world, but is about the nature of health care in a social and political world having been the victim of colonialism and imperialism. The underdeveloped world is underdeveloped not just from an accident of history, but because of the growth of international capital and the ravages of western industrialisation.

He describes the development of the health services in Britain, linking social advancement to the struggles of working people. For the masses living in dire circumstances in the slums around industrial conurbations, the prime health needs were for clean water, hygienic sewage disposal and adequate nutrition. Improvements in health followed the struggle for workers' rights generally, due to the growth of the Labour Party and trades unions, many of which started as friendly societies for the protection of their members' health. The factors which made this possible were the agricultural and industrial revolutions, which increased the production of food and commodities and forced workers to organise to protect and defend their interests. For most people the contribution of specific medical advances has been relatively minor.

The book is filled with beautiful graphs, and informative tables. Death rates from infectious diseases — the major killer of infants and children — fell impressively from 1860 to 1925, some 20 years before effective anti-infectious drugs became widely available.

The practice of medicine developed with the growth of modern capitalism, 'doctoring' being the possession of gifted individuals, shrouded in mystique and not communicable to others who were not part of the magic circle. The art and not much science of healing was available only to those who could pay. In reality, for most people the contribution of specific medical advances has been relatively minor.

The same analysis applies to the underdeveloped world. By and large the problems that cause early death and high illness rates are the same problems that afflicted the developed world. Poor nutritional status and low resistance to disease are the root causes of high death rates especially among the young in the underdeveloped world. Many of these



Mother trained to nurse her own children in Mozambique

The struggle for health

are aggravated by colonialism and imperialism.

Some specific diseases were introduced to which indigenous populations had no natural immunity; smallpox, measles and typhus. However, the greed of imperialism for raw materials and cheap labour ensured the continued depression of living standards, and often aggravated precarious supplies of food from subsistence economies to starvation where cash-crops replaced staple foods.

Imported with the economic and political effects of colonialism went the dominant ideology; the position of western technology and the need to 'cure' patients rather than to prevent disease. Like the 'inverse care law' in the developed world — where there is the greatest need there are the fewest facilities — so too the 'three-quarters rule' in underdeveloped countries. Three-quarters of the population live in rural areas, yet three-quarters of the spending on medical care is in urban areas where three-quarters of the doctors (and other health workers) live. Three-quarters of the deaths are due to conditions that can be prevented at low cost, yet three-quarters of the medical budget is spent on curative services, many of them at high cost. The colonizers initiated medical care in their own image; doctors prefer to work from 'disease palaces' rather than help serve people at a local rural level.

Sanders discusses the role of multinational drug companies in the distortion of health care, big business, private medical care, and how these affect the nature of services provided in both developed and underdeveloped countries. A critical review of different kinds of health care, such as that provided in China and Cuba, the nature of 'bare-foot doctoring' and Mao's shrewd observation that changing doctors' views of themselves (working and living in the countryside) would help them to become better doctors serving the needs of the people. The real advances contributed by the Chinese experience

lies in its ability to eradicate large public health problems by mass actions — the burying of snails to eliminate bilharzia is one example.

Sanders is an advocate of the Village Health Worker concept which has emerged in many underdeveloped countries. This is an attempt to tailor the delivery of health care appropriate to and under the control of the local community served by the VHW. The VHW differs from the 'auxiliary' in several fundamental respects: S/he should be selected by the people themselves, and responsible to them; should be part-time and therefore subsist by working in the community perhaps with a subsidy from the local community or the national health service; and may be someone who has already been a 'traditional' healer and trained in the community in health education and preventive measures.

In Zimbabwe, after a long struggle for liberation, a scheme to train VHW was established at Bondolfi Mission. This was initiated by the local villagers themselves, and this reviewer has as one of his warmest memories the recollection of witnessing the first graduation of some 200 VHW at a ceremony in Bondolfi. Over five hours the recipients and audience applauded and shouted slogans as each VHW received her certificate, many with babies strapped to their backs!

There is a need for 'curative' services and appropriate technology in the underdeveloped world; the issue is who decides and by which criteria. Sanders suggests that this has to be decided by the community served by the health worker: 'But, most difficult of all, the concerned health worker must be a servant to the people even when they are mistaken. Society will only be transformed and ill health combated when people are free to make their own mistakes.'

An excellent book, relating the development of health care to the underlying political and economic forces of international capitalism. I enthusiastically recommend it.

Harold Wilson's ghost

CHRIS BERTRAM

Leo Panitch, *Working-Class Politics in Crisis*, Verso, £6.95

HERE IS a popular notion somewhere on the left that we are going through is something called the 'crisis of Marxism'. Well maybe Marxism is in crisis, and then again maybe it isn't: what Leo Panitch demonstrates is that the crisis in working-class politics in the West is, in the first instance, due to the failure of non-Marxist social democracy. The left of the political landscape of much of the postwar period has been dominated not by the struggles of a class-conscious proletariat (to which we are now supposed to bid 'farewell', its forward march having been halted) but by welfare-statist social democracy as personified by Brandt, Kreisky, Palme and in Britain by the rather sorrier looking figure of Harold Wilson. If the prospect of social revolution in the West looks a long way off, the promise of the white-hot technological one has not been fulfilled either.

What does social democracy offer today? In Spain the Gonzalez government has unleashed market forces on a scale that would impress Milton Friedman. In Greece the rhetoric of the left has been displaced by the calculation of the Harvard Business School. In Britain the Giddens-Kinnock leadership has plans for the economy that are no more radical than those of the Liberal-SDP Alliance. As Panitch puts it: "'Common Sense' has seduced all of us that reforms conceived and implemented within the logic of capitalism have to be re-examined once they finally do begin to have the effect of driving business away'. In a crisis, everyone (or nearly everyone) dances to the tune of capital.

Both Hall and Hobsbawm have recognized the responsibility that Wilsonism has for the present impasse, yet in setting their faces against the forces that said 'never again' — the Bennite left — they are setting the scene for a repeat performance (perhaps this time as farce). Panitch submits the 'new revisionism' and the perversion of the recent history of the Labour Party to a searching critique: who was responsible for disunity in the run-up to the 1983 general election?



Harold Wilson

What is touted as a broad alliance of social movements actually turns out to be unconditional unity behind the forces that blocks the demands of the Labour Women's Conference and witch hunt the Black Sections. (And who actually supports these movements — why, the 'classist' National Union of Mineworkers.)

On the future Panitch is sober — not to say pessimistic — he argues that the 'new revisionists' in their call for unity at any cost to defeat Thatcher have (understandably) struck a chord with wide layers of activists and this is a very powerful barrier to socialists (particularly in the Labour Party) today. But there is a more profound problem, class identities are not just given, they are also constructed. (The 'new revisionists' seem to be in two minds about this, on the one hand there are those who argue that the policy and programme of working-class parties must conform to the empirical given consciousness of the class, the leadership must not run ahead of its base, on the other, the 'discourse theorists' argue that all subjectivities are constructed in and through 'discourse' and reject class as a

fundamental and privileged feature of the social world).

For Marxists there is a dialectical relationship between the class and its leadership and class identity has both an objective and a subjective side to it. Yes, there really is a working class 'out there' but its consciousness is formed by its experience and also by history and the concerted intervention of political leaders and activists. The problem in Britain is that the empirical consciousness of the working class has largely been formed in an environment dominated by Labourism, collaboration by trade union leaders and welfare-statism. The task of creating a new class identity is a Herculean one, but cannot be flinched.

This lack of answers is the weakness of Panitch's approach, a weakness he shares with Ralph Miliband and others. While the left has met the challenge from the 'new revisionism' and (in my view) defeated it on a purely intellectual level, such a victory will be of no significance if we cannot elaborate a plausible strategy for the years ahead.

The bulk of the essays in this volume are concerned with 'corporatism', an intellectual growth industry to rank with fast food and slushy drinks in the secular domain. Panitch deals with both the reality of the social contract and tripartism and with various theories of corporatism. For Panitch, corporatism is a system of state-structured class collaboration which poses acute dangers for the working class.

Far from opening the possibility of extending working-class control over economic policy, corporatist structures require that trade union leaders police their memberships in the interests of capital. Panitch rejects notions that seek to blur the class character of the state by talking of struggle within the state, and ideas that it might be possible to use corporatist structures to transform the existing state into some sort of social corporatism.

As a critique of social-democratic ideology and practice, Panitch's attack on corporatism is fine but his class struggle *versus* corporatism approach is nevertheless rather one-sided. What is interesting about some 'corporatist' socialisms — such as Austro-Marxism and Guild Socialism — which sometimes espoused themes of 'social peace' and class collaboration is that they also developed ideas about workers control, for example, that refigure a society of socialist democracy. Functional representation in a capitalist society might be a recipe for class collaboration, but get rid of the capitalists and it might be an essential element in a system of socialist democracy for a highly differentiated working class.

Engels updated

JUDITH ARKWRIGHT

Review: *Women's Work, Men's Property*. Eds. Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson.

Published by Verso

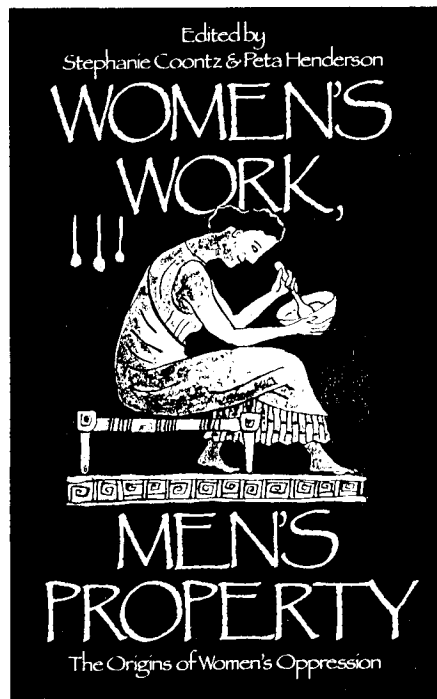
TO MOST PEOPLE male domination of society seems inevitable and universal. Even feminists and socialists have had difficulties in tracing the origins of women's oppression.

The essays in this volume attempt to offer, sometimes differing, perspectives on the development of sexual inequality and in so doing make one of the most important contributions to the debate in recent years.

For Marxist feminists the reference point for the discussion has often been Engels' *Origins of the family, private property and the state*. Yet it is now widely acknowledged that the book has many flaws both on the level of anthropological data and on certain theoretical issues. All eight authors in the volume place themselves within Engels' general framework, rejecting the notion that biology is destiny or that women's oppression is not intimately bound up with class society. However, they all also criticise and in some cases develop the Marxist perspective, drawing on impressive anthropological evidence from slave society, ancient Greece to modern day societies in West Africa and elsewhere.

In their essay, 'Property forms, political power and female labour in the origins of class and state societies', Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson take on the criticism of Engels. They explain that, contrary to his contention, male dominance has been shown to exist in some pre-class societies. The process whereby male domination arose is uneven, they explain, and in fact in some more developed societies, for example, in parts of West Africa, women actually appear to be more in control than in some more primitive societies, depending on the particular developments.

Engels, they claim, states in rather too sweeping a way that women's oppression developed from private property, class society and the state. In fact all these three developed at different times and different paces and the growth of women's oppression also therefore had a different relation to these processes. For Henderson and Coontz, Engels left many questions either open or confused. Why, they ask, if we do not assume innate biological differences between men and women did men gain control? What is the role of the division of labour between



men and women (a division which Engels appeared to accept as 'natural').

All the authors in this volume are addressing similar questions and in general they agree on certain basic issues which help to codify many of the discussions of the women's movement in recent years. First they all acknowledge that the division of labour between men and women is a social construct and whilst it may not be automatically unequal it became so because it coincided with other developments in different societies. They reject the notion that the origins of women's inequality lie in women's role in reproduction, claiming instead, as Engels did, that it was bound up with the struggle to control women's labour and products. Control of women's reproductive powers followed from this.

Although male domination does not appear to have been present in the earliest communal societies it was already present in the earliest class societies. The authors reject the idea of a move from communal societies to advanced societies with no intervening social formation or mode of production. While disagreeing on the precise forms they agree that such a formation was based on some kind of collective or group property. They call such societies lineage or kin corporate societies in which ties of kinship determined the organisation of work and the appropriation of goods. It

was in these societies that male domination was first identified.

The authors show how the system of patrilocality — whereby women had to move to the husbands' kin group at marriage — played a key role in this. In other words, since Engels, new research and development of the women's movement has shown that female subordination preceded and even laid the basis for, the emergence of private property and the state. In the words of the introduction: 'The oppression of women provided a means of differential accumulation among men, which in turn gave some men special access to the labour and reproductive powers of women, as well as to the services of other men.'

The immense value of the book is that it both codifies these basic tenets of a Marxist feminist analysis, but also takes the discussion on and develops a debate among the contributors.

The main differences occur over the precise origin of male domination and its evolution, as well as the exact form of the pre-class society lineage or kin corporate social formations. Coontz and Henderson agree with another contributor, Leibowitz, that male domination emerged within these societies because of changes in production techniques which in turn gave rise to an informal division of labour. This division of labour gradually became institutionalised as surplus and exchange developed. Leibowitz gives the example of the introduction of projectile hunting which changed the organisation of hunting in a way which gradually excluded women.

Nicolle Chevillard and Sébastien Leconte, in their contribution, judge this too deterministic. They see the of male domination as the result of a conscious effort by men in these societies to control women's production and the surplus that it engendered.

Coontz and Henderson argue, on the other hand, that there were features of the system of patrilocality which allowed the potential inequalities of the 'kin corporate mode of production' to develop. The mode of production that emerged was based on kin corporate property and the circulation of labour through marriage. Male domination thus developed in a more gradual way.

These last points begin to touch on the nature of women's struggle against oppression and on the common interests or otherwise between lower class men and women as a group. The collection's fundamental contribution, however, is in pointing the way to a more thoroughgoing debate in the women's movement where a Marxist view can be verified. It is an excellent riposte to those in the women's movement who have tried to refute a Marxist analysis

Wedding blues

**BY OUR COURT
CORRESPONDENT**

ANOTHER ROYAL WEDDING is upon us, this time Andrew and Fergie. For many on the Left the wedding is an occasion merely for saying 'stuff the monarchy' and reflecting that while royalty is a circus for the masses, nobody really takes it seriously nowadays. The real battle remains between the workers and the bosses and royalty is an irrelevant sideshow. Such an approach would be a mistake. It overlooks the very important ideological and constitutional role which the monarchy plays in our society, and the ways in which royal doings — births, marriages and deaths — are deployed in a quite conscious way by the ruling class.

The British royals are going through something of a boom. Royalty has to reproduce itself, and reproduce itself in sufficient quantities to establish a viable functioning unit — an extended family with the necessary number of princes and princesses to carry out all the royal duties. Hence the importance put on the selection of wives and husbands for the said royal personages, with all the attendant gynaecological examinations and selection of the right 'types'.

While royalty was once quite remote, now a positive premium is put on public accessibility — not only to the routine comings and goings, but also to intimate details. The growing over of the royal family into soap opera was nicely demonstrated at Ascot when Joan Collins of 'Dynasty' staged her own walkabout to clash with the arrival of Di and Fergie. As all the popular press pointed out, it was difficult to tell who was soap opera and who was royalty.

The present royal family is doing a splendid job — not only two royal marriages in quick succession, the doings of 'randy Andy', a succession of royal births, all topped off by a magnificent royal grandmum, loved by the nation.

All this is aimed at securing popularity for a group of people who above all represent continuity, the continuity of British bourgeois society. But the peace which the British bourgeoisie made with the monarchy in the seventeenth century was quite different to the myth of a family who provide some public entertainment and social cement. British bourgeois society is quite literally a 'constitutional monarchy' and the monarchy plays an active political role



Abolish the monarchy

in this arrangement. A reminder of this came in a sticky little business which the royal family carried off with some aplomb recently — the death of Mrs Simpson, the American-born Dutchess of Windsor. Edward VIII was not allowed to have an American wife because it interrupted the myth of a 'British' and 'royal' monarchy to which the armed forces, every member of parliament, the civil service and so on could swear 'loyalty'. By contrast, a monarch who is pure entertainment like prince Ranier in Monaco had no such problems.

The British government is 'Her/His Majesty's government'. The monarchy invites someone to form a government after each general election. By convention the leader of the winning party is invited to form the government. But as we move into a fragmented party system in which there may be no winner, the political role of the monarch is likely to become more transparent. Imagine if our beloved monarch was faced with a choice between a left Labour government or an Alliance government, if both parties had a roughly equal number of seats.

The monarch has an absolute right to dissolve parliament. We can be sure that in a period of acute social and political crisis all these so-called 'formal' rights would if necessary be used with utter ruthlessness. The monarchy has a select political advisory group, the Privy Council, which could act as a council of war in such a situation (by an historical accident Tony Benn is a member of it).

Utilising the power to summon and dismiss parliaments and governments,

the monarchy would also possess the power to appeal directly to the nation, to call on loyalty to the Crown against subversive governments and parliaments, or ex-governments and ex-parliaments, or insurgent workers. Here the popularity of the monarchy would come into its own.

The loyalty of the armed forces to the Crown is, of necessity, absolute. The political powers of the monarchy, in order to preserve its mystery and charisma, must be used with extreme circumspection. Despite the occasional reactionary rantings of Prince Philip, the hurly-burly of day-to-day bourgeois politics is strictly avoided. But the monarchy is there, with its powers and potential intact, and let nobody think that it could not be used.

Far-sighted members of the establishment clearly understand this, and this is why they raise a critical eyebrow when Prince Charles visits the homeless under Waterloo bridge, talks to flowers, or speculates on Nirvana. In general, however, they can content themselves with the thought that such eccentricity won't be too much of an obstacle when it comes to putting down the plebs.

Scorn for the monarchy on the Left goes hand in hand with a curious incapacity to combat it. Some very leading members of the parliamentary Labour left have steadfastly refused to countenance abolition of the monarchy as a serious demand and slogan. Often it has been left to people like Willie Hamilton, a right winger, to raise questions about the Civil List, and generally throw mud at royal parasites.

Such left passivity is encouraged by simplistic stereotypes which see the royals as simple entertainment and of no independent political significance. Abolition of the monarchy, a simple republican, bourgeois-democratic demand, should be as much a part of the socialist programme as abolition of the House of Lords.

For the royals are not just there to breed acceptance and loyalty to the status quo, any more than the House of Lords has a purely ideological function. They are also there to (literally) rally the troops against fundamental social change. Not 'stuff the wedding' but 'down with the monarchy — for a workers' republic' should be the socialist slogan!

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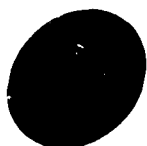
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