

International

September 1981

Volume 6

Number 3

60p

Bernadette McAliskey
on a New Stage for Ireland

Alan Freeman
on Benn's Socialism

Will Reissner
on Reagan's USA

**Images of
Nicaragua's
Revolution**

**Megan
Martin**



Contents

September 1981
Volume six
Number three

Editorial 3

Will Reissner

Six months of Reagan's America 5

Bernadette McAliskey

Ireland: a new stage 10

Reviews 13

Ken Tarbuck

A Marxist classic

Sue Jessup

Women in History

Chris Arthur

Japanese Marxism

John Inigo

10 years of gay politics

Megan Martin

Nicaragua: pictures of a revolution

Annie Hudson

Working for the Welfare

Mike Holbrook

Lenin defused

Oliver MacDonald

A hidden prophet of Trotskyism

Alan Freeman

Benn and British Socialism 21

Lidia Cirillo

Terrorism and democratic rights

in Italy 28

Jan Kowalski

'Solidarity: the only force to

resolve the crisis' 29

Managing editor

Davy Jones

Editorial board

Shelley Charlesworth, Valerie Coultas, Erica Flegg, Phil Hearse, Davy Jones, Steve Kennedy, Steve Marks, Martin Meteyard, Redmond O'Neill, Rich Palser, Celia Pugh, Ric Sissons

Designer

Katherine Gutkind

Editorial and distribution offices

328 Upper Street, London N1 2XP.

Tel 01-359 8180

Typesetting, camerawork & layout

Lithoprint (TU) Ltd, 329 Upper Street, London N1 2XP. Tel 01-359 8288

Printers

Blackrose Press, 30 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 0HT

Publishers

Cardinal Enterprises, 328 Upper Street, London N1 2XP.

ISSN 0308-3217

Back Issues

The following back issues are still available:

- * Vol. 2, No. 2 (30p plus 20p p&p). Includes: Dossier on the Chile Coup; USFI Theses — 'The Situation in Britain and the Tasks of the IMG'; Said and Machover on the Arab Revolution; Contributions on the 'Transformation Problem' by Hodgson and Yaffe; and 'Whither Russia? Towards Socialism or Capitalism', by Leon Trotsky.
 - * Vol. 2, No. 3 (30p plus 20p p&p). Includes: The Lessons of Chile — an exchange between Colletti and Maitan; Pierre Rousset on the Vietnamese Communist Party; 'The Economic Causes and Consequences of Detente', by Peter Deakin; Erich Farl on State Capitalism; Memoirs of a Chinese Trotskyist; and an interview, 'From Red Guard to Revolutionary Marxist'.
 - * Vol. 2, No. 4 (40p plus 20p p&p). Includes: Mandel on Workers' Self-Management; Anton Udry on the Class Struggle in Europe; 'Portugal: One Year of Turmoil', by Brian Stoccock; Chilean Trotskyists on 'The Coup And After'; 'The Economic Impasse of British Imperialism', by Alan Jones and David Tettadoro; and Tony Hodges on the Revolutions in Angola and Mozambique.
 - * Vol. 3, No. 1 (50p plus 20p p&p). Includes: 'The Nation in the Transitional Epoch', by Alan Freeman; Mandel on Imperialism and National Bourgeoisie in Latin America; USFI Theses — 'The British Crisis and the Way Out for the Working Class'; David Tettadoro on Roots of the Labour Bureaucracy; Tim Wohlforth on Trotsky's Writings; and two articles on the Portuguese Revolution.
 - * Vol. 3, No. 2 (60p plus 20p p&p). Includes: Part 1 of 'Trotsky's Marxism', by Denise Avenas; Mike Holbrook-Jones on Lessons of the General Strike; 'The National Movements in Euskadi and Catalonia', by Richard Carver; IMG Conference Document on 'The Programme We Need'; and an editorial on the Revolt in Southern Africa.
 - * Vol. 3, No. 4 (60p plus 20p p&p). Includes: debate between Geoff Roberts (CP) and Robin Blackburn (IMG) on Trotskyism and the 'Democratic Road'; '40 Theses on Imperialism and Permanent Revolution', by Jacques Valier; Mandel on 'Rosa Luxemburg and German Social Democracy'; 'The Comintern and Indian Nationalism', by Jairus Banaji; and two articles by Trotsky on 'The Nation and the Economy' previously unpublished in Britain.
 - * Vol. 4, No. 1 (75p plus 20p p&p). Includes: interview with Nicos Poulantzas on 'The State and the Transition to Socialism'; 'Imperialism and Raw Materials' by Dick Roberts; Ernest Mandel on 'The Soviet Economy Today'; a review by Pierre Frank of Ellenstein's 'The Stalin Phenomenon'; extracts from the debate between J.T. Murphy and R.P. Dutt on revolutionary strategy in the 1920s; and Ken Tarbuck on 'Ten Years Without Deutscher'.
 - * Vol. 4, No. 2 (50p plus 20p p&p). Includes: Norman Geras on Lenin, Trotsky and the Party; Isaac Deutscher on Marx, Engels and the Russian Revolution; Tim Jenkins on the New Philosophers; a review of Tom Nairn's 'The Break-up of Britain'; and a previously unpublished article by Roman Rosdolsky on a passage in the 'Communist Manifesto'.
 - * Vol. 5, no. 2 (85p plus 20p p&p). Includes: Valerie Coultas on 'Beyond the Fragments'; Alan Freeman on the Alternative Economic Strategy; David Tettadoro on the Tory Government; Anna Libera on the Italian CP; and P. Lawson replying to Chris Harman on the 'Crisis of the far left' in Europe.
 - * Vol. 6, No. 1 (£1 plus 20p p&p). *Only limited quantity left.* Includes: Oliver MacDonald on Poland; John Ross on British Politics in the 1980s; Jean-Pierre Beauvais reporting from Cuba; Alan Freeman on the SWP and the Labour Party; and reviews by John Harrison, Margaret Coulson, Michael Löwy and Denny Fitzpatrick.
 - * Vol. 6, no. 2 (60p plus 20p p&p). Includes: Geoff Bell on Labour's Irish Spring; Phil Hearse on War, Socialism and Nuclear Disarmament; Pat Masters and Jane Shallice on the Politics of Pornography; Peter Fuller on the Crisis of Professionalism in Art.
- Institutions: £1 per issue + 20p (p&p) for all issues listed above.
Airmail: Add 60p per copy to surface/inland rates given.
Dollar payments: Please allow \$2.50 to £1.
Special Offer: Order 4 or more and you pay no postage.
Other issues: Vol 1, Nos. 1-8, Vol. 2 No 1 and Vol. 3 No. 3 are out of print. Photocopies can be supplied; prices: Vol. 1 £2.50 each (£5 institutions). Orders: Write to Back Issues, International, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP. Cheques to 'International'. Note: Vols. 4 and 5 only have two issues each.

INTERNATIONAL is published by supporters of the Fourth International in Britain. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the Fourth International or of the Editorial Board.

Notes on Contributors

Chris Arthur is a lecturer in philosophy at Sussex University. He edited the Lawrence and Wishart edition of Marx's *German Ideology* and the German edition of Pashukanis *Law and Marxism*.

Alan Freeman is a member of the editorial board of Socialist Challenge. He has translated David Rousset's *La Société Éclatée* and is currently working on a book on Tony Benn to be published by Pluto Press next spring.

Mike Holbrook lectures in sociology at Durham University. He is the author of an article in *International* on the lessons of the 1926 General Strike.

Annie Hudson teaches social work at Sunderland Poly and is involved in the Tyneside Socialist Centre.

Oliver MacDonald is a regular writer on Eastern European affairs and editor of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*.

Megan Martin is an Australian member of the Fourth International who is active in the Nicaraguan and El Salvadoran solidarity movement.

Bernadette McAliskey is the best known anti-imperialist activist in Ireland. A founding member of Peoples Democracy, she was MP for Mid-Ulster from 1969 to 1974. She is currently a leading spokesperson for the National H Block Committee.

Will Reissner is a member of the American Socialist Workers Party and on the editorial staff of Intercontinental Press/Inprecor.

Ken Tarbuck is a researcher at Sussex University. He edited Bukharin's *Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*.

PARTIES AT THE CROSSROADS

This year's round of party conferences takes place against the background of major crisis in both the Labour and Conservative Parties. A recomposition is taking place in the bourgeois political arena in which all the old certainties — the steady alternation of Labour and Tory governments committed to much the same Keynesian, social welfare policies — are being thrown to the wind. When the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was founded, Roy Jenkins described it as the most important political event in Britain for fifty years. Roy Jenkins can be excused his exaggeration, but the formation of the SDP is part of a process which will change the face of British politics dramatically.

The change in the profiles of the major parties seems sudden — in a matter of a few years the Tory party seems to have slewed to the right while Labour has radicalised to the left — leaving the unfilled centre gap for the SDP to step into. But in reality this sudden change is the rapid crystallisation of long-term processes whose basic character has been absolutely obvious at least since the accession to power of the Wilson 1964 government. Wilson came to power after 'thirteen years of Tory misrule' with a mandate to solve the crisis — the halfbaked 'white heat of the technological revolution'. But no government, Tory or Labour, has been able to make the least dent on Britain's economic crisis, because the struggle between the classes has remained deadlocked.

The polarisation of the political parties therefore represents the failure of either major class to impose its own solution to the crisis. Social programmes are implemented in the political arena by governments. And the occasion for the rapid polarisation of the political parties was a political initiative taken by a section of the bourgeoisie, namely the Thatcherite experiment. Thatcherism represented the failure of two Labour governments and one Tory government to seriously alter the relation of class forces, to revive the declining fortunes of British capitalism. Trade union power, the central 'problem' for British capitalism, remained largely undefeated — even after the slump of 1974-75 and the years of wretched Healey-Callaghan austerity which followed it.

The crisis of Thatcherism

But Thatcherism is now seen by all but the most short-sighted Tory fanatics to have failed. The medicine — deflation — has only marginally affected the disease while causing traumatic side effects which threaten to kill the patient anyway. The destruction of British manufacturing industry is becoming too high a price to pay for the defeat of the organised working class, which is in any case far from being achieved. The Tories have thus gone into a nose-dive. All is despair in the Tory ranks, not just because they face the prospect of defeat, but because without a change of course they face the prospect of an historic defeat, which could make them the third party in parliament after the Liberal-SDP bloc and the Labour Party.

Moreover, the Tories now fear that a section of the ruling class bloc, particularly that associated with manufacturing as opposed to banking capital, could be lost to them for a generation. In the London clubs, all kinds of dark plots are being concocted to remove Thatcher. Even such a staunch cult of the personality as that enjoyed by Thatcher will not survive the Tories'

own genteel brand of the 'night of the long knives'. Perhaps just as damaging to Tory morale has been this summer's series of riots. Despite their 'law and order' proclamations the knowledge that mass unemployment is tearing apart the seams of Britain's social fabric has deeply alarmed Thatcher's supporters.

The beneficiaries of the Tories' crisis will, in terms of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois support, be the SDP. The election result in Warrington, where Jenkins won 42 per cent of the vote, amounted to something of a breakthrough for them — against all the predictions that they would be slaughtered. It is significant that perhaps something like 80 per cent of their votes came from former Tory and Liberal voters, with the Liberals standing down in their favour. The Tory vote collapsed into joke candidate proportions.

The rise of the SDP is in part a function of the fact that for the ruling class Labour is no longer a 'safe' alternative government. For the bourgeoisie the question of whether Benn wins the leadership in the short term is not the determining one in deciding its attitude. It is clear that the wave of radicalisation which has swept the party over the past two or three years is the product of deep rooted processes, which will continue irrespective of conjunctural victories or defeats for the left. The conclusion is inexorable: a new Labour government would be under the pressure of a radicalised base, both in the constituency parties and the unions, which would make such a government dangerous even with a right-wing leadership.

The leftward movement in the Labour Party, symbolised by the vicious fight for the deputy leadership, has forced party leaders to make increasingly radical statements. Denis Healey has discovered that he is an opponent of the Trident missile system, that he stands for an 'alternative economic strategy', and that the neutron bomb is a disaster. Every bureaucratic trick in the book is being hauled out by the trade union and Labour leaders to attempt to halt the left's advance. But even people who have a lifetime's experience of solving problems by quick manoeuvres, sordid deals and betrayals can't stop a process which is now implanted in the consciousness of tens of thousands of militant workers. The historical fact of two right wing Labour governments which were dismal failures, well within the memory of most militant workers, cannot be so easily expunged.

At its conference Labour has to face many questions of policy. But for the Labour left there are two major questions of strategy they have to face.

The first is how the Labour right's use of the SDP challenge to derail the left's advance can be confronted. The right's lesson from Warrington is that by playing down policies decided by Labour conference victory over the SDP can be achieved. But the real lesson of Warrington is the opposite. Doug Hoyle, the Labour candidate *did* play down those policies, refused to comment on the issues at stake inside the Labour Party debates and conducted a generally low-key campaign.

As Hoyle noted, accurately but too late after the result was announced, the media had had a field day. *They* refused to play the game. *They* commented on the leadership question, *they* ▶

Editorial

highlighted the differences between Parliamentary Labour Party policies and those of the Labour Party conference. They were given a free run. The solution is not to capitulate to the right to achieve unity in the party, but to achieve a fighting unity in the party through a fight to thoroughly defeat and rout the right, from top to bottom of the party.

Such a strategy has nothing to fear in terms of defection of working class support. Already a third of the working class vote Tory. The defection of this third to the SDP would not be a defeat for Labour, but part of the process of the historic defeat of the Tory party. The prospect is therefore one of a leftward-moving Labour Party continuing to command majority support in the working class. The Labour left has nothing to fear by standing firm.

The Benn current

For revolutionary socialists this poses acute questions of politics and tactics. The first is an analysis of the Benn current. The movement for Benn is a movement for radical reform. Benn does not have a revolutionary base which he is heading off — on the contrary. The fight for revolutionary socialist policies therefore involves not only a united front, with the Benn current but also a sharp rupture with the politics of Bennism. It would be the height of foolishness to believe that 'under the impact of events' Benn's base will evolve towards revolutionary socialist policies without the sharpest programmatic fight.

Many of the policies which Benn himself has been advancing within the deputy leadership elections can be the basis for working class action. The omissions of Benn's programme weaken it as a programme for a future socialist government. As Alan Freeman outlines elsewhere in this issue, it is Benn's concentration on the issue of political democracy at the expense of

measures to challenge bourgeois control of the economy which renders his programme utopian.

For within days of taking office the next Labour government, unless the left is utterly defeated beforehand, will be under the most ferocious attack from the bourgeoisie, just as Ken Livingstone and the 'left' GLC have been subjected to a vicious press witchhunt. Without the most decisive measures of nationalisation to wrest control of the economy from the financial institutions, the big monopolies and banks, the government would be put under siege within weeks. A left Labour government elected and then thrown out of office amidst a collapsing economy, capital flight and strike, could amount to an historic defeat for the British workers. In this context, economic sabotage could be a more effective weapon for the ruling class than a military coup or a similar adventure.

This scenario points up a major weakness in the discussions of the Labour left. Endless debate and effort to secure a left victory in the party is quite inadequate unless there is a thorough debate on the conditions and possibilities of securing left advance through a socialist government. In the coming months revolutionaries in the Labour Party should be hammering home these conclusions in the ranks of the labour movement.

Over the past decade, revolutionaries have used the formula that the political crisis has lagged behind the economic crisis. The political logjam has however been broken up by Thatcherism and Bennism. In the previous period the foci of struggle in Britain around which the left organised were multiple and diffuse. But it was always inevitable that in a country with a single mass party of the working class, the focus for left politics would return to the development of left tendencies in that party. The fight for revolutionary socialism in the 1980s has become the fight for influence in the base of that party — the industrial unions, the constituencies and the other affiliated organisations. Socialists who don't put their efforts there will be by-passed and defeated.

Socialist Challenge

New free book offer

OUR new free book offer for summer is 'Malcolm X — An Autobiography' by Malcolm X and Alex Haley, published by Penguin Books.

Malcolm X joined the Black Muslims after spending six years in prison for burglary. Twelve years later, he left the Muslims and spent what was to be the last year of his life developing his political ideas.

He died a black nationalist and a revolutionary internationalist fighting to build an independent, united black movement through the Organisation of Afro-American Unity.

There is much for socialists today to learn from the life and ideas of Malcolm X — a life cut tragically short by brutal murder but rich in political ideas and action.

With 12 month subscriptions to Socialist Challenge we are giving away a FREE COPY of 'Malcolm X — An Autobiography', normal price £1.95.

SUBSCRIBE TO SOCIALIST CHALLENGE

For new readers we are offering TEN ISSUES of Socialist Challenge for the incredibly low price of £2 (real value £3.15!)

With 12 month subscriptions we are giving away a FREE COPY of *Malcolm X — An Autobiography* by Alex Haley and Malcolm X, published by Penguin Books (usual price £1.95)

Complete the form below and rush your order to: Socialist Challenge, PO Box 50, London N1 2XP. Cheques and POs payable to 'Socialist Challenge'.

SPECIAL OFFER

12 months: £14

plus free copy of *Malcolm X — An Autobiography*

6 months - £7

10 issues for £2 only.

Overseas: 12 months — Surface mail & Europe air mail £17.

Other air mail £24.

Delete as appropriate.

Name.....

Address.....

For multi-reader institutions double the above rates.

International Features

SIX MONTHS OF REAGAN'S AMERICA

BY WILL REISSNER

United States foreign policy has for many years prompted little disagreement between Democrats and Republicans. Now it seems that domestic policy is becoming equally bipartisan. Many Democrats actually voted for Reagan's recent budget cutting social spending by \$36 billion, while the rest mounted only token opposition. Will Reissner looks at the changing face of US politics today.

Leading Democrats are falling all over themselves to proclaim the death of the 'old politics' and the need to adapt to the 'message the voters delivered in November'.

But what was that message? It seems almost in poor taste to point out that Reagan received the votes of less than 27 per cent of the eligible electorate; or that the opponent he beat, incumbent President Jimmy Carter, had an approval rate in the polls even lower than Nixon's when the latter was forced to resign in 1974.

What the 1980 election did show was the fundamental agreement by the American capitalist class and its two parties on the need to accelerate the drive against the living standards and social benefits of American workers.

The post-war boom, lasting into the 1960s, had allowed Democratic Party politicians to cultivate an image as 'friends of labour' by promising to extend social welfare programmes and increase living standards. But with the end of the boom, US employers launched a campaign to drive down the living standards of American workers in order to compete more effectively with West European and Japanese capitalists.

This offensive has been backed up in turn by the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and now Reagan administrations. As a result, the disagreements between the two bourgeois parties in the US have narrowed and the framework of their debates has shifted to the right.

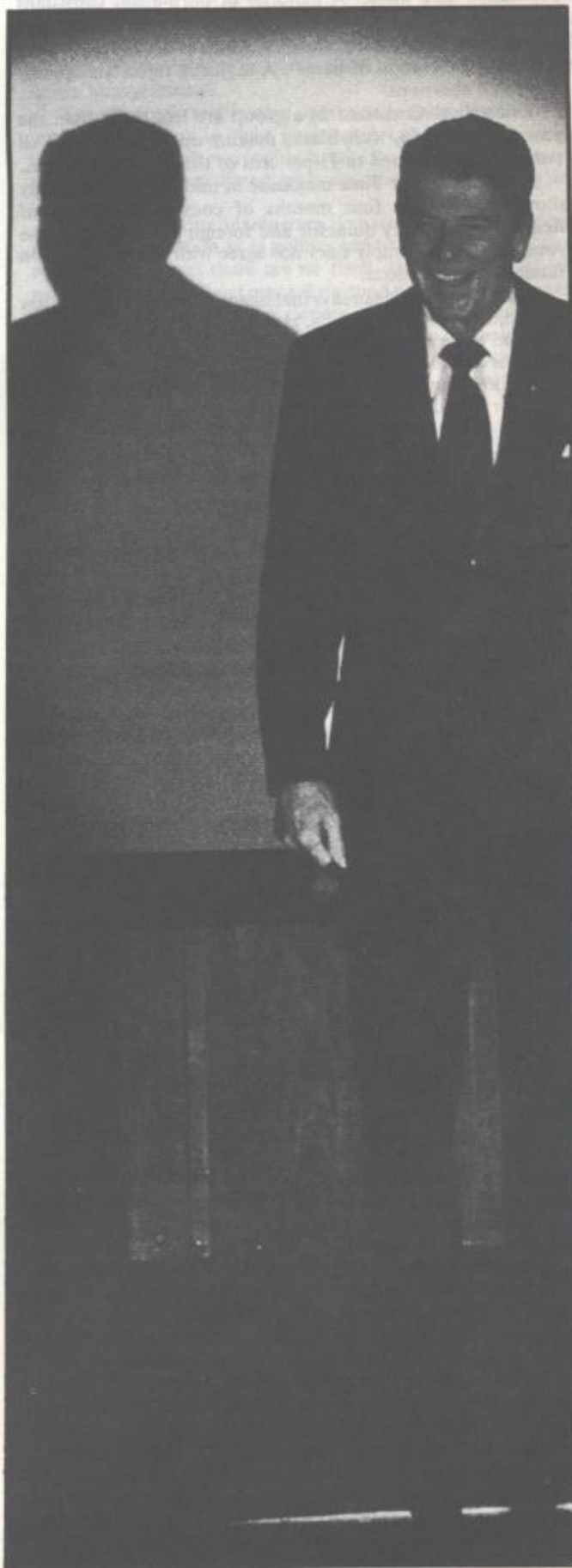
Americans shifting to the right?

But this shift to the right of bourgeois politics has not been reflected in the attitudes of the American people, despite the vast media attention showered on such rightist groups as the 'Moral Majority', and organisations opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and to abortion.

The playing up of the Moral Majority says a lot, however, about the ruling class's ideological offensive to turn public debate and public opinion sharply to the right. The offensive stresses anti-communism abroad and anti-Black, anti-welfare, anti-feminist themes at home. The Moral Majority gets such big play precisely because it echoes these very sentiments.

The Moral Majority has been touted as the representative of America's estimated 30 million evangelical Christians. The television preachers who form the group's leadership make extravagant claims about their following and influence, most of which are dutifully and uncritically repeated in the press.

Newsweek, for example, estimated the television audience for Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell's 'Old Time Gospel Hour' at 18 million. *Penthouse* magazine put the figure at 50 million. But when the Arbitron television rating service actually



International Features

counted, it found that only 1.6 million people tuned in.

In addition, despite Moral Majority's claims, polls have shown that evangelicals are not generally to the right of the US population as a whole. A majority of born-again Christians support the ERA, which Falwell opposes. A majority support government social programmes, which Falwell says have created a 'generation of bums'. A majority reject his opposition to all abortions.

Evangelical Christians as a group are less racist than the general population, with Blacks making up 28 per cent of all evangelicals compared to 11 per cent of the total population.

A poll taken for *Time* magazine in mid-May convincingly shows that despite four months of constant repetition of Reagan's reactionary domestic and foreign policy themes, the American public simply does not agree with the President on fundamental questions.

For example, Reagan says that negotiations with the Soviets — whom he describes as liars, cheats, and atheists — serve no purpose. But a solid 65 per cent of those polled favour reopening arms control talks with the USSR.

While Reagan and Secretary of State Haig hoped El Salvador would be the place where the dreaded 'Vietnam Syndrome' — the mass opposition to US military involvement abroad — would finally be laid to rest, two-thirds of the population opposes the decision to send military advisors to El Salvador. And barely 2 per cent favour committing US ground troops there.

Reagan wants to increase military and economic aid to 'authoritarian' anti-communist regimes, and opposes using 'human rights' criteria to determine Washington's military support for a government. But only 23 per cent of those polled favoured 'economic and military support to anti-communist allies even if they violate human rights'.

On social questions the differences with the present administration are just as striking. Reagan wants to make abortion illegal. Barely 10 per cent of the American public agrees with him!

The new President opposes passage of The Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution. But the ERA has the support of 61 per cent of the people. Reagan wants to end sex education in the public schools. But sex education is supported by 70 per cent of the population.

The increasingly bipartisan domestic policy seen over the past decade and a half does not reflect the attitudes of American working people. Nor does the traditionally bipartisan foreign policy. This explains why since the days of President Eisenhower, who left office in January 1961, not a single President has been able to last out two terms.

But despite the lack of any sharp differences between the candidates during the campaign, Reagan's victory has become the vehicle for a deadly serious campaign by the American ruling class to turn back the gains that workers, oppressed minorities, and women have won in the past two decades.

Reagan's programme

Under sharp attack are women's rights to abortion and the gains Blacks and women have made under affirmative action hiring programmes. Busing programmes to ensure school desegregation are being curtailed. Measures to protect the environment are being gutted. There is talk that Congress may not renew the Voting Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed many procedures used to keep Blacks off the voting rolls in Southern states.

Reagan is opening the national parks to the energy, timber, and ranching magnates. He is pressing ahead with nuclear power. Federal aid to state welfare programmes, to medical research and the arts, to urban transit, to housing and railroads, to education, to job training are being slashed.

Plans are underway to strengthen the power of the FBI and CIA to spy on Americans. The Freedom of Information Act, which allows people to obtain government files, is being gutted.



Reagan wants to change income tax rates to provide 'relief' to the rich. He wants to do away with regulations that 'tie the hands' of corporations by making them clean up some of the pollution and destruction they cause.

The new President has gone as far as proposing to slash the Social Security system, which provides the only retirement income for most elderly Americans. Social Security has hitherto been the most sacrosanct government programme of them all.

In terms of foreign policy, Reagan is building upon and accelerating Carter's drive to boost US military strength so that the Pentagon can intervene around the world in defence of imperialist interests. He has proposed spending an almost inconceivable \$1.5 trillion on the military over the next five years, while every other area of the budget is cut to the bone.

Symbolic of Reagan's vision is the fact that his budget proposes to spend more on military bands than the entire appropriation for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Crisis of leadership

Despite the massive opposition to most of Reagan's budget cuts, despite the overwhelming support for a woman's right to choose abortion and for the Equal Rights Amendment, Reagan's domestic offensive is moving full speed ahead. The missing element that prevents effective opposition is leadership.

Ever since the 1930s, the trade union movement and the traditional Black organisations have been tied to the Democratic Party. Under the impact of the giant labour upsurge during the depression, President Franklin Roosevelt was compelled to enact programmes such as unemployment relief and Social Security, and to sponsor legislation legitimising the new union movement.

This programme of reforms, collectively known as the New Deal, led to a restructuring of the electoral coalition that made up the Democratic Party. The reforms enabled the labour bureaucracy and the political machines of the northern cities to deliver the votes of workers and Blacks, while the Democratic Party retained its traditional pillar of support from the white supremacists of the 'Solid South' (the South remained a totally one-party region until the mid-1960s).

The Second World War and two decades of post-war economic boom, combined with the massive post-war witch-hunt (McCarthyism) that drove radicals out of the union movement, cemented the union bureaucracy's hold over the unions and its allegiance to the Democratic Party.

As long as the economy continued its upward march and profit levels remained high, labour bureaucrats could often

International Features



deliver higher wages and increased benefits to their members without big struggles against the employers and the government. The bureaucrats were convinced that the key to success was reliance on liberal Democratic 'friends' in government and cooperation with the 'fair employers'.

This attitude was epitomised by George Meany, the longtime head of the AFL-CIO trade union federation, who died in 1980. Meany used to boast that he had never walked a picket-line in his life.

Meany and his ilk were staunch supporters of Democratic Party 'cold war liberalism' — the combination of fierce anti-communism and economic concessions to the labour movement. During the entire Vietnam war, for example, the AFL-CIO bureaucrats were among the most loyal supporters of Washington's criminal policies in South-east Asia.

But today the trade union bureaucrats find that the politicians they help elect are stabbing them in the back and the employers are on a rampage.

In industry after industry, employers are demanding that workers give up previously won raises and benefits. By and large the union leaders have gone along with and helped implement these demands, arguing that they have no choice given the state of the economy.

The United Auto Workers agreed to reopen its contract with Chrysler and cancel wage increases. This was a special concession to Chrysler's impending bankruptcy, but the bosses at General Motors and Ford have told the union that they expect to get similar concessions when the present contract expires.

The United Rubber Workers have given up raises. The steel companies have told the United Steel Workers that they want to reopen the existing contract because they cannot afford to pay the negotiated raises. Municipal workers around the country have seen their wages, jobs, and working conditions under savage attack for several years.

Unions in trouble

The present leadership of the unions has brought the labour movement to its weakest point in years. For more than two decades the percentage of workers organised into unions has been declining. It now stands at only 23 per cent of the non-farm workforce — less than the percentage in 1940!

Lay-offs and plant closures have led to an absolute decline in membership in the basic industrial unions. Although the bureaucrats are anxious to stem the decline in dues payments, they have been incapable of waging serious organising drives in the largely non-union South or in new plants. Instead they concentrate on mergers with other unions and taking in members in

non-related fields.

The Teamsters Union, the country's largest, is a good example of this development. Membership has remained virtually the same over the past decade — 1.8 million. But the number of over-the-road truckers under its contract has dropped from 400,000 to 300,000. And the percentage of truckers organised into the Teamsters is at its lowest point in decades, making the union weaker overall.

These mergers and raiding operations weaken the ability of industrial workers to fight back against the bosses, because they dilute control over union affairs by those workers most concerned and acquainted with conditions in their own industry.

The entire labour bureaucracy is so steeped in the traditions of class collaboration — in politics and union questions — that on a national level there are no fixed, clear-cut right or left wings. The same official may take a good position on one question today, and a rotten reactionary position on another question tomorrow. No section of the present union officialdom has the social and political perspectives needed to effectively and consistently counter the intensifying attacks against working people.

Civil rights groups

The leaders of the traditional civil-rights organisations have also been thrown into crisis by the Democratic Party's inability to deliver significant concessions.

Over the past two decades, Black Democrats have been elected to major offices. Today there are Black mayors of Los Angeles, Washington, Atlanta, Detroit, Newark, Gary and other large cities.

But these mayors are like their white counterparts across the country in drastically cutting back on municipal services and laying off huge numbers of municipal employees. They also carry out the same reactionary 'law and order' campaigns. In a word, Black Democrats act like white Democrats when it comes to administering the capitalist austerity programmes.

The traditional Black leaders have been unable to lead any opposition to the attacks on affirmative action programmes, the curtailment of busing to achieve racial desegregation in the schools, or the racist murders of Blacks in Atlanta, Buffalo, New York, and other cities.

Under the impact of Reagan's proposals to roll back gains in women's rights, the National Organisation for Women (NOW) is growing by leaps and bounds, showing the sentiment for a campaign to fight the attacks.

But in the fight to ratify the ERA, the NOW leadership is locked into a 'no win' strategy which focuses on lobbying legislators in non-ratified states. Despite NOW's lobbying efforts, the ERA has not been passed in a single state since January 1977, even though many unratified states have big Democratic majorities in their legislatures. Unless there are major changes in the class struggle, the ERA seems doomed. To become part of the federal constitution it must be ratified by three more states by June 1982.

Nor have NOW leaders tried to develop a mass campaign in response to the attacks on abortion rights, despite the overwhelming support for legal abortion in all segments of the population.

In one arena NOW leaders have been active. That is around the reinstatement of the draft. But instead of joining forces with opponents of the Pentagon's war drive, they have gone into court demanding that women also be required to register for the draft!

Resistance to Reagan's proposals

Despite the lack of leadership from the traditional organisations of the working class and the oppressed minorities, there have been significant actions against Reagan's policies in the months since he took office. And we can expect more such protests as the effects of Reagan's budget begin to be felt in the fall. ▶

International Features

★ On 15 January, five days before Reagan's inauguration, 100,000 people, mostly Black, staged a march on Washington demanding that Martin Luther King's birthday be made a national holiday. This was the largest Black rights demonstration since 1963.

★ On 8 and 9 March, the 160,000 members of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) staged a two-day national strike, shutting down the country's coal mines to protest administration proposals to cut Black Lung benefits. On 9 March, some 8,000 miners rallied in Washington to press their cause.

★ On 28 March, about 15,000 people gathered in Harrisburg to protest plans to reopen the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant. The demonstration had the active support of a number of national unions, including the miners.

★ A month later, on 29 April, some 25,000 rail workers demonstrated in the capital against Reagan's plans to gut funding for rail and transit service.

★ 3 May saw the biggest anti-war demonstration since the height of US involvement in Vietnam. 100,000 people assembled at the Pentagon to protest Reagan's support for the bloody Salvadoran junta. In many respects the marchers' political level, especially their degree of identification with the cause of the Salvadoran rebels, was higher than at any time during the anti-Vietnam war movement. The participation of trade union and church groups in the El Salvador protests throughout the spring was already greater than during the Vietnam war.

★ For several weeks this spring, literally millions of working people — black and white — wore green ribbons to show their solidarity with the black community of Atlanta, where 28 Black children have been murdered. This huge outpouring of support far surpassed the media-sponsored yellow ribbon campaign for the hostages during the occupation of the US embassy in Tehran.

Despite the lack of leadership in the opposition to Reagan's plans, all signs indicate that Reagan will have a much harder time making his programmes stick than he will in pushing them through Congress.

The reaction to the attempted assassination of Reagan in March showed how much hostility his proposed budget cuts had already engendered. There was little of the shock and horror that had met earlier shootings. In many workplaces news of the attempted assassination was greeted by spontaneous cheering. 'Better luck next time' was a common expression when news reports indicated that the President would survive. A joke made the rounds that attempted assassin Hinckley should be hung... for missing.

'Vietnam Syndrome' lives on

Like Carter, Ford, and Nixon before him, Reagan is trying hard to restore Washington's political capacity to use its military might against revolutionary struggles around the world. But the biggest obstacle to this is the deep-seated opposition of US workers to military intervention abroad since Vietnam.

Initially the US rulers hoped that the seizure of the Tehran embassy and the hostage issue would do the trick. But that did not happen.

The imperialist propaganda campaign around the taking of the hostages did significantly undercut the sympathy most US workers initially felt towards the Iranian revolution. But it did not reverse the deep-going opposition to military involvement. In fact, the debacle of the 'hostage rescue mission' in April 1980 further deepened opposition to foreign adventures.

The Reagan administration also hoped that El Salvador could be used to whip up sentiment for foreign involvement. But that has been a complete bust!

For nearly three months, Alexander Haig was on television and in the newspapers every day, warning that El Salvador was part of a Soviet 'hit list' for the Americas, and that the struggle had been fomented by 'Soviet proxies' in Cuba and Nicaragua. But that shrill media blitz was counterproductive. The more

Haig yelled, the more nervous people became. Every time he opened his mouth, people saw the spectre of troops heading down the path to another Vietnam.

The State Department eventually recognised that the El Salvador campaign had backfired. On 12 March it held a background briefing for reporters, at which a high-ranking, unidentified official said that the US media was 'exaggerating' the situation in El Salvador. 'This story', the State Department official claimed, 'has been running five times as big as it is, and we figure if we talked to you about it, you might not make this thing such a big deal.'

The briefing had an instantaneous effect. El Salvador disappeared from the news overnight. But it remains in the consciousness of the population, as shown by the wave of local protests in March and April and the size of the 3 May Pentagon action.

Attempts to whip up hostility to other so-called Soviet 'proxies', like Libya and Syria, have also fallen flat.

The administration has had somewhat more success in arguing for higher arms spending based on the fictitious need to 'catch up with the Russians'. But this acceptance of higher military budgets is built on the most tenuous foundations, and could collapse like a house of cards as the impact of the cuts in social spending and the real scope of the contemplated Pentagon build-up become felt.

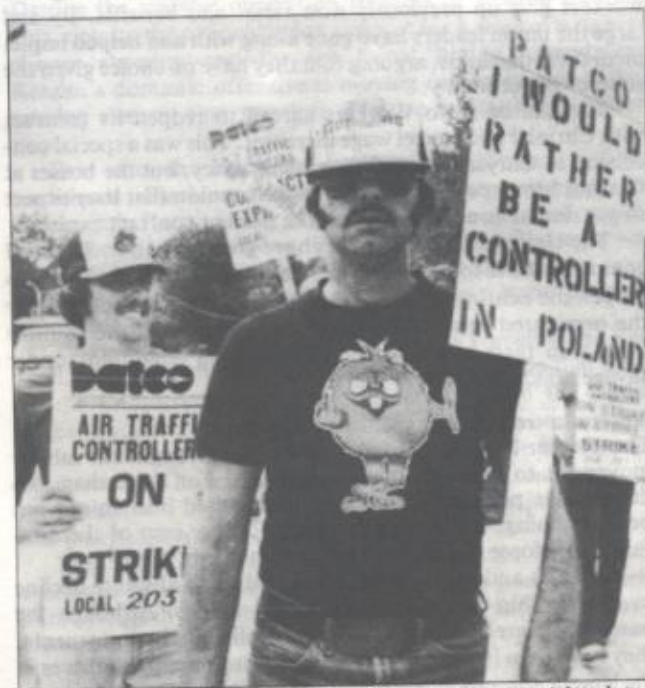
In fact, a Louis Harris poll taken in early May showed that only 1 per cent of the American population feels that 'standing up to the Russians throughout the world' is the most important issue facing the United States.

Labour party

As it becomes clearer to the union bureaucrats that they are getting little return on the millions of dollars and huge amounts of personnel they pour into Democratic election campaigns, some have begun raising the idea of forming a labour party.

Tony Mazzocchi, an official of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union and a candidate for the union's presidency, has made support for a labour party a major theme in his election campaign. For over a year he has been speaking on the need for a labour party at union meetings throughout the country.

The April issue of the *Machinist*, the organ of the Interna-



Ohio air traffic controllers on picket duty

International Features

tional Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, featured a long article on the role that Canadian members of the IAM played in organising Canada's labour party, the New Democratic Party. The editors noted that 'since the 1980 elections, a swell of sentiment has been surfacing around the country to establish a third political party'.

Other trade union figures have also raised the idea of building a labour party. But at this stage no union bureaucrats are contemplating any real moves in that direction. Rather they raise the threat as a pressure tactic within the Democratic Party.

Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the significance of the fact that for the first time since the 1940s the idea of a labour party is being raised by elected officials of some of the country's largest unions. When Mazzocchi calls for a labour party, that makes it easier for its supporters to gain a hearing among the union ranks.

The discussions around this question are just beginning. But the inability of the Democrats to deliver for the workers provides growing opportunities to wage an educational campaign for a labour party within the union movement.

The growing disillusionment with the Democratic Party can also be seen in the recent organising efforts of the National Black Independent Political Party.

Fight back

So far only one major union has resisted the 'give back' drive of the employers — the United Mine Workers of America. The militant coal miners have been a constant thorn in the side of the employers and government. In 1977-78, the miners waged a 111-day strike against the bosses, defying Carter's back-to-work court orders in the process. That's 111 days without any benefits, since the UMWA has never had a strike fund.

When contract negotiations opened this year, the coal bosses came in with a whole shopping list of 'give back' demands. They were trying to get the miners to conform to the pattern that had been established in other industries. They then hoped to use the concessions wrested from the miners to further step up the drive in other industries.

The UMWA leadership is not fundamentally different from any of the other bureaucracies running the major unions. If the coal bosses had been able to deal simply with the national leadership of the UMWA, they would have been successful in their take-back drive.

But the miners, through a virtual revolution in their union in the 1960s and early 1970s, had won the right to vote on their contracts. This victory raised the political consciousness and self-confidence of the ranks.

And the ranks of the miner's union fought back against the demands of the bosses. When they heard some of the more outrageous demands of the coal companies, they staged wildcat strikes throughout the coal fields even before the old contract expired. These wildcats, plus the two-day national strike against the cuts in Black Lung benefits, convinced the employers to withdraw their main take-back demands.

Then, when the UMWA leadership negotiated a contract that still contained significant give-backs and measures that would weaken the union, the ranks overwhelmingly voted the pact down, knowing they would again be in for a long strike without any strike benefits.

Through their hard-fought 72-day strike, the miners got another contract offer which they accepted by a two-to-one margin on 6 June. The new pact eliminated almost all of the original provisions that would have weakened the union and the ability of its members to determine working conditions in the mines.

In the coal fields the ranks have shown that when the members of a union have the right to determine its policies, and when they are mobilised to fight, they *can* stop the bosses' offensive. In this sense the miners are an example to all of American labour, and a harbinger of developments in other unions in the years to come.

Although the miners are still far out in front of the rest of the labour movement, the offensive of the government and employers and the growing mood of militancy in the ranks is forcing other bureaucrats to begin to consider 'non-traditional' methods of struggle. The example of the rail-workers demonstration in Washington, the union participation in the anti-nuclear and El Salvador movements, union support for the ERA, and the discussion around the need for a labour party are all encouraging signs of the stirring in the ranks of major unions.

Due to the success of the cutback drive in Congress, Reagan and the ruling class are intoxicated with success at present. But they mistake the acquiescence of the Democratic politicians for support for the cuts among working people in general.

As the cuts begin to be fully felt, however, Reagan and Wall Street will find out where the American workers really stand.

Postscript

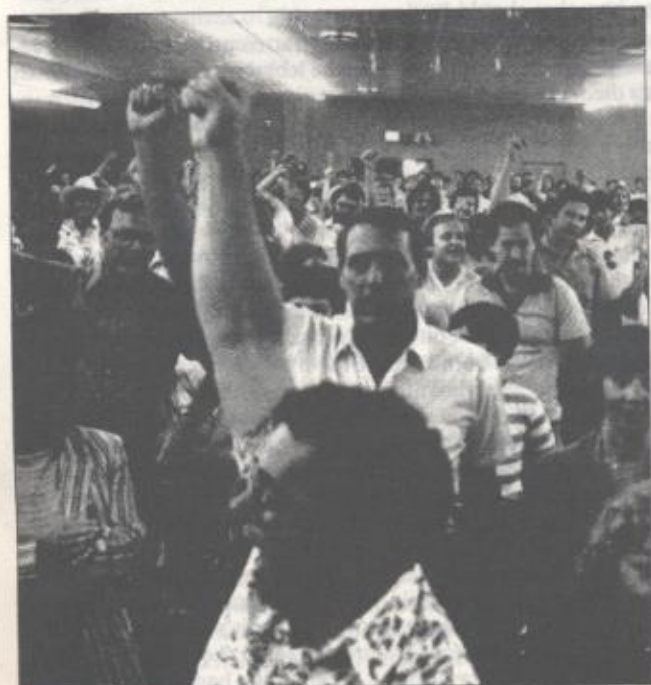
Since this article on the first six months of Reagan's administration was completed in early July there has been the first major test of strength between Reagan and the labour movement — the air traffic controllers' strike.

It is clear that the administration aimed to use the relative isolation of the controllers from the mainstream of the labour movement to smash their union organisation and set an example to the whole of the labour movement.

As we went to press support from rank and file workers for the dispute was growing — solidarity with the controllers was scheduled to be a major theme of Labour Day marches and of the massive 19 September Solidarity Day demonstration in Washington. But the unions are refusing to instruct their members not to cross the traffic controllers' picket lines.

Nor is there any sign of the Reagan administration backing down despite the obvious shambles to which the air traffic system has been reduced by the dispute. Whatever the final outcome of the dispute the severity of Reagan's response has caused a big re-thinking inside the working class particularly in the ranks of the air traffic controllers themselves. (Ironically the controllers' union had backed Reagan in last year's presidential election).

The stakes of the coming confrontations have been graphically revealed.



and chanting 'strike' at mass meeting

Interviews

IRELAND: A NEW STAGE

BY BERNADETTE McALISKEY

First Bobby Sands and then Owen Carron have been elected to Westminster as H Block/Armagh MPs. The campaign in support of the Irish political prisoners has mobilised broader support than any previous stage of the anti-imperialist struggle over the last ten years. It has left British and Irish politicians desperately searching for a mechanism to ensure Britain's continued domination of Ireland.

Bernadette Devlin McAliskey has been a leading figure in the anti-imperialist and socialist movement in Ireland for over 10 years. Despite a recent assassination attempt she remains a leading activist in the National H Block Committee. Penny Duggan spoke to her at the end of July about the new stage of the movement.

How does the anti-imperialist movement today compare with that in the late 1960s?

The number of people involved in both small local demonstrations and the more major demonstrations is quantitatively bigger. But I think you also have to look at it qualitatively — going back to the time when people like myself, and John McAnulty and Fergus O'Hare (members of Peoples Democracy recently elected to Belfast City Council) were the young militants, with all the responsible people breathing down our necks, telling us we were driving the thing down the wrong road.

What we honestly didn't know was where we were going, what effect our actions were going to have on the next ten years in this country. I can only speak for myself; but if somebody had taken us to a meeting and said, look, the next four or five years are going to be Bloody Sunday, internment, moving on to people dying in prison, women and children being shot off the streets — then I think some of us would have said that it was a reactionary plot to scare us off the streets, and others would have said, right, we quit, don't tell us any more!

The significant difference is that we are still there but with twelve, thirteen years of hard-gained experience. Not simply gained in theoretical terms, gained out there on the streets, gained by paying very dearly for mistakes we made in the past. The greater number of the 'old vanguard', if you like, the old Republican core, is out there on the streets; and behind us is a whole layer of militant youth that knows what we don't know — as kids who go right down to 14 years of age, who go out there marching, knowing the history of the past ten years, knowing the risks they take. So the militancy, the determination, the experience is much greater than it was ten years ago.

I think that the gut level of political understanding because of all those things is just incomparably higher than it was ten years ago. For instance, one of the problems that we always ran into in the early days was that we daren't have said 'imperialism'. But now it is impossible to argue against the use



of words like imperialism, it is virtually impossible in this country to red-bait.

There is a level of commitment to ending British rule in the lifetime of this generation that's much broader than it has ever been before. But there is not a clear political understanding as to how that should be done.

Our problem now is that we are attempting to build a movement and deploy a strategy in the length of time it takes a man to die. And the pressures in that situation are unbelievable.

Six prisoners are dead, and two more are dying, and two more will take their place, and so you get the totally understandable frustration of the vanguard of the youth, the Republican youth. Because after six deaths you're still arguing with and pushing and pressurising the Paddy Duffys (an SDLP councillor), because we have to take that level with us before we make the price of not giving in bigger than the price of giving in. We have got to either push them in behind us or expose them for what they are. You can't just say, right, we're tired of asking them, don't bother, leave them be. Or take the short cut of intimidating the whole thing.

That's the crisis we find ourselves in at the minute. Many of the people who've campaigned for political status and then in the broad movement for the prisoners' five demands since 1976, but are not politically clued up as to why exactly they are following this particular road, are at a stage when they're saying it doesn't work.

So I think our main task at the minute is to overlap on what we're doing with the basic political education of our supporters as to *why* we are doing it this way. That it's not enough to do it this way because Gerry Adams says so, or the leadership of Sinn Fein or the IRA says so, or because our backs are to the wall and we take help from wherever we can get it. That's not the

Interviews



Photo: Derek Spiers (Report)

historic role of the Irishman doing the job of work for the absentee landlord, then the mass of the people will turn against the Irish government. And what will be at stake in this country will not simply be the external relationship with Britain in terms of imperialism, it will be the internal relationship, as to the social, political and economic organisation of this country. So in fact what Thatcher is doing is aiding and abetting that which she fears most. She is driving the whole struggle in this country into a position of questioning the role and authority of the Church, the role and authority of the Irish police, the Irish government, in fact the entire role of the state. And what many of us have always argued will be proved in effect: that the questions of national liberation and socialism are so closely intertwined here as to be inseparable one from the other.

The Labour Party in Britain has been having a discussion about policy on Ireland, and it's now come out and said it's in favour of a united Ireland. That's the beginning of a break in the bipartisan policy. Has that had any effect here?

Not in terms of the Labour Party. I think people here are more aware of the Troops Out Movement, and individual people like Ken Livingstone, Carol Turner who came over, Tony Benn. People are acutely aware of the division: Benn versus the obscenities of Concannon, Mason, Merlyn Rees, Hattersley. People know there's a major division in the Labour Party.

Some of us have been arguing for some time that we should take more seriously the question of the role of the British labour movement, and that we should be making a concerted effort, as we did in the South, to send speakers not simply to outdoor rallies — where all people want are a few rousing sentences to make them feel good.

What's needed is public indoor educational meetings. You've got to go for local Constituency Labour Parties, rank-and-file trade union people, go at areas where people can argue and ask the kind of questions that are annoying them — like what is the role of the British Army, and would there be a bloodbath if they pulled out, and why are the mad Irish not grateful for our peacekeeping efforts?

Those questions have to be rationally argued, and I think that we have to make a much more serious attempt to move in the British Labour Party, and, for example, to move in Wales and Scotland — I think that's particularly important.

We're not asking the British labour movement for a conscience commitment for the poor Irish. It's a political question for them. Some of us have argued for years that if they could not get the Irish question right it would be the destruction of their own party, because the time would come when it would come home; and if they couldn't get it right here, the chances of them getting it right when it came home were infinitely less true. And it's true: look at the whole spectacle of the Labour Party getting up in Parliament to congratulate Willie Whitelaw after the youth went out onto the streets in Britain.

They've never recognised that you're talking about two different problems. Our problem is how to assert our own democratic right to control our future without kicking up a fuss about it in every generation. There is no common solution to those two problems; and the problem with Benn and all those people is that they're still trying to find some middle ground between those two. It means they just don't understand what the whole thing's about. They may be well-meaning, but they have got to move a bit further and recognise the nature of their role.

And they've got to do more than talk about it. You know, we have heard lots of words from Tony Benn and very little action. I don't see him leading any of the international marches, I don't see him out asserting, for example, our right to the City Hall in Belfast, where he'd be most welcome to join the demonstration — and then get a taste of what the penalty is for asserting these democratic rights in this country. Then he might begin to see the reality of it.

But right now he just wants to put the United Nations in to ▶

right way, and that is the argument that we've got to have.

I think we can make the mistake of overestimating the unity that we've got. What holds us together is the realisation that what Thatcher is trying to do is not just to break the bodies of the prisoners, she is trying to break the heart of the whole resistance movement of this country. What that woman is actually doing is saying: 'I can watch every man, woman and child in Ireland die and it wouldn't cost me anything. How many can you watch die?' I think she really takes it down to that level, she really says to people in this country, 'how many people, what price can you pay?'

And I think what we *have* to say is that we have no choice but to pay it, but that the price of what she is doing to us will in the end of the day be much higher than five demands for prison reform. Because what is happening is that while the movement is based on the five demands and winning support for the five demands, what is actually being raised is the true nature of Britain's role in this country, and where in particular the government of the Irish Republic fits in that relationship.

And I think that that more than anything else explains the riot at the British Embassy in Dublin — which wasn't a riot, it was a battle. It was a battle between two sides in the country: those who back the prisoners, and those who refuse to back them and, by their protection of the embassy, backed the British government's policy in the eyes of the people. And I think that that will more and more become the state of play if the government of the Irish Republic does not make a move somewhere. They will be clearly identified by the mass of the people as a secondary target, to use the Republican phrase, because Westminster itself is remote, it's inaccessible, it's across the water.

But if the Irish government is seen directly as playing the

Interviews

do the same job. And whoever comes in to uphold the state will end up in the same position; because the problem is one of the state, not of the people who are upholding it.

You mentioned the link between national liberation and social liberation: the fact that the question of the Irish revolution as a whole is posed. Do you still believe in the necessity of building a vanguard workers party to lead that struggle?

Yes, I think that's a problem we have always had at every level. It's one of those things you can't just quantify or say what would have been different — but in every crisis the biggest lack, the biggest vacuum that we feel is the non-existence of a vanguard workers party, a revolutionary party. And I think that the whole experience and process is towards building such a party.

In practical terms I think we have the same problems as everywhere else: at the one time suffering from the lack of a revolutionary party, and an over-abundance of organisations that think they *are* the revolutionary party and keep standing at the crossroads saying you're going the wrong way.

I see a whole series of practical problems. The biggest drawback is the history of organisations in this country, going right back throughout the whole struggle. Mostly a party has only been formed by that section which was about to sell us out. The first step in the sell-out was always to form a party.

And I think that that comes from long peasant rather than industrial workers' struggle, without a history of democratic organisation.

I think one of the big differences between the National H Block campaign and the civil rights campaign was that the Civil Rights Association, the civil rights movement did not have a solid base of the kind that's been built throughout this campaign.

The local committee in this town is elected, we have a public meeting once a week — that's of all the supporters in a large hall — and we have a steering committee of eight people who keep this office and the work ticking over. We also have a picket and public meeting on the street every night. Essentially it is the broad support in the town which is the committee, which controls the situation, and they have a steering committee.

Most other towns in the area follow that model. They send delegates to the county coordinating committee. We have about thirty committees in the county, and the county committee meets once a week, and it in turn sends delegates to the Six Counties to the Northern committee, and maintains through that contact with the National Committee.

I think that this is building in an organisational consciousness, which hitherto never was done outside the Republican movement and certain small organisations.

I think in fairness, to talk about small organisations — I'm

not a member of the Peoples Democracy, but that's been a significant difference in the whole campaign. Numerically the PD is not any bigger than some of the other organisations on the left. Yet the PD's attitude, role and work in the broad movement have not simply been shown in the tangible result of two members of the PD being elected by the mass movement to Belfast City Council, three members of the PD being on the National Committee. It's that the ability of the PD to argue the left perspective, with confidence, with credibility in the mass movement far outweighs its actual numerical strength. And that's a question of political credentials being forged in the battle.

The vast majority of the other left-wing organisations stand on the sidelines and pontificate on our weakness in their newspapers, but they are not in fact by and large part of the mass movement. And since I personally believe that the revolutionary party is forged in the struggle, not formulated in the pub or the room above the pub, the emergence of the revolutionary party I believe will come out of that axis of the relationship between PD, the Republican movement, and the mass movement.

That looks like a concrete project, but would it be right to say that there is a difference in line, in overall tactical, strategic, political line, between PD and the Republican movement?

Oh yes. It makes for very interesting National Committee meetings!

So you see it as a coming together of these currents — what tactic or strategy does this imply?

I think what's important is what is arrived at. The imposition of one tactic over another isn't what matters. I think that one of the things we have learned to do is to be prepared to accept that somebody's going to do the thing the wrong way. It's something you couldn't do even five years ago — to go into a meeting and argue your tactics, and the political basis of them, and why you believe that it's better, and to lose that argument, but to recognise the difference between what is a tactical argument and what is a principle beyond shifting. And to stay with it and say, well alright, the majority have said we'll do it that way, that's the way we do it, and we'll consider the value of it when it's done.

And I think we have been able on a number of occasions to learn both ways: to say at the end of it, well we did it that way, but even members of the Provisionals have said, right, if we had done it Fergus's way, for example, it might have been better.

One such instance, I think, is that the majority of the National Committee do recognise that it was a gross tactical error not to have taken on the Northern council elections on a mass scale and fought them. PD and myself argued for doing that, and we were defeated in the argument. So the PD accepted that, but under the auspices of its own organisation put two of its own members up and proved that they were right. The IRSP did the same; they had two members elected.

As I say, that way the political credibility of ideas and tactics are imprinted democratically in the mass movement, and it means that when we're arguing it the next time, although the PD is numerically much weaker than Sinn Fein, if its experience in battle has been that it chalks up more right roads, then more people say, right, these people here know what they're talking about.

It's that dynamic process that's at work, and equally there are times when it works the other way — when the Provos have tactically been right when I have disagreed with them. And that may seem small, but it is a major step forward in this country for people to be able to stay on the same committee having disagreed over tactics and not got their own way.

Even the last ten years are absolutely littered with defunct organisations that came and went on that basis. This is the longest lasting broad front that we have had.

Pluto Press

Poland: A Report on the State of the Nation Experience and Future Discussion Group

These two reports, 'On the State of the Republic' (1979) and 'Which Way Out' (1980) represent the views of over a hundred leading party members and intellectuals on Poland's mounting social and economic problems. They are a vital source of understanding the roots of the present crisis in Poland. £4.95 paperback.

Do It Yourself: Hungary's Hidden Economy

Janos Kenedi, translated by Julian Schopflin
In a hilarious and bittersweet account of how he built his own house, left-wing dissident Janos Kenedi shows how the system really works in Hungary. £2.95 paperback.

Send SAE for latest booklist to: Pluto Press Limited, Unit 10 Spencer Court, 7 Chalcot Road, London NW1 8LH.

A MARXIST CLASSIC

By Ken Tarbuck

Rudolph Hilferding: *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development* (edited by and with an introduction by Tom Bottomore), Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, £22.50.

It is a measure of the destructive and retrogressive effects wrought upon the socialist movement by fascism and Stalinism that it has taken seventy years for Hilferding's book to appear in English translation. It was one of the major works of the period which Isaac Deutscher often referred to as classical Marxism, and when first published in 1910 was hailed by most reviewers as a worthy continuation of Marx's own three volumes of *Capital*. Subsequent comment has not always been as uncritical, yet none have ever called into question the tremendously important contribution made by Hilferding. The book itself was a remarkable achievement for a young man of 33, and placed him amongst the very top flight of Marxist economists of the time.

In *Finance Capital* Hilferding set out to examine in a systematic, theoretical manner the development and changes within capitalism since the death of Marx and Engels. In the process a number of questions that Marx had only briefly dealt with were elaborated and amplified. However, the book is far more than a mere 'filling in' of some of Marx's own work, left unfinished by untimely death; it is a fundamental extension of the whole edifice.

The necessity for such a work had become obvious by the turn of the century because of the qualitative changes that had occurred within the capitalist system, both on a national and international scale: the extension of the joint-stock companies into cartels, trusts and monopolies; the development of bank capital as an independent fraction of capital, and according to Hilferding its domination of industrial capital; the major importance of the export of capital as opposed to the export of commodities. Associated with these trends were the creation of tariff barriers to maintain high profits in home markets and the rapid extension of colonialist imperialism, the division of the globe amongst a few powers and the racialist ideologies that went with this. The similarities with Lenin's later exposition of these problems in his *Imperialism* will be noted.

Finance Capital deals with all these and other questions in an exhaustive manner. The theory of imperialism derived from it has long since passed into common currency amongst Marxists; even if various glosses are put on this or that aspect, they all have some common roots in Hilferding's book.

If one were to choose the dominant theme of the book it is the role of bank capital as a force which speeded up the process of monopolisation and regulation of the capitalist economy, whilst acquiring for itself a dominant position in the resulting structure. The validity of Hilferding's theory of dominance has subsequently been challenged,



Finance Capital

A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development
Rudolf Hilferding

Edited with an Introduction by Tom Bottomore

yet it cannot be denied that the role and function of bank capital did undergo a metamorphosis in the period under consideration and that today it plays a crucial role within the system, particularly on an international scale.

One of the central problems posed by Hilferding was that of the theory of money, and the book opens with a fairly long discussion of this. Although the subject matter and the presentation may appear somewhat dry, it is an essential element in the process of Hilferding's exposition and is still essential for a proper understanding of modern capitalism.

Marx developed his own theory of money upon the basis of commodity-money. When Marx wrote, money was gold; with certain exceptions even paper money was readily exchangeable for gold coin. Marx was aware of the existence of credit money, but for purposes of exposition in *Capital* this is practically ignored.

The problem Hilferding attempted to tackle was: how can paper money which is not convertible into gold, and hence has no intrinsic value of its own, measure value and carry out all its other functions. He argued that: '...The value of paper money is determined by the value of the total quantity of commodities in circulation. A mere slip of paper thereby acquires a value which is out of all proportion to its negligible value as paper... paper has a value only because commodities are impregnated with value by social labour. It is therefore a reflection of labour value which converts paper into money...' (p.40)

Even though Hilferding came to the conclusion that such a paper money could not be maintained for any length of time, he was on the right track with his attempt to link such money with social labour.

Unfortunately his definition as it stands has an element of circularity in it. This arises because he refers to commodities in circulation as one undifferentiated mass, whereas there are three quite distinct categories of commodity which appear on the market under capitalism. These are (1) means of production, (2) means of consumption, and (3)

labour-power. The first two, of course, are produced by capitalists; but labour-power is 'produced' by the working class, and therein lies the difference.

The problem with unconvertible paper money is not to ascertain if it has value, but if it *measures* value, and for it to carry out this function it is not necessary for it to have an intrinsic value of its own.

Since labour power is the one commodity that enters into the production of all other commodities, this means that the value of labour-power — in the form of socially necessary labour — is the crucial determinant of the value of all commodities. However, the value of labour-power is determined by the value — socially necessary labour — embodied in the commodities necessary to reproduce this labour-power.

The *price* of such commodities can be determined in the following manner: with any *given* output of consumption goods the price of all of them is — individually — the sum of *money* wages paid to productive workers divided by the *volume* of consumption goods minus that portion unproductively consumed. In this sense the 'value' of paper money, i.e. its purchasing power, is determined by the class struggle. This is a highly simplified manner of presentation, but is adequate as a starting point.

So Hilferding's theory of paper was inadequate because it was underdeveloped, not because it was basically defective. He was certainly conscious of the role of social labour in determining the purchasing power of paper money. In this respect he was many years ahead of most bourgeois and Marxist economists, who remained wedded to the idea of gold and money being synonymous.

It took the great crash of 1929, the Second World War, and finally the cutting of the link between the US dollar and gold for the system of state paper money to become fully operative in the capitalist world. The subsequent orgy of inflation in all the capitalist countries indicates how inadequate is the control of this new form of money, and the relative autonomy of bank capital linked with the multinational corporations faced with a working class that has not been defeated in the manner of the 1930s. In this respect Hilferding's analysis of the extended role of credit and fictitious capital will still remain a starting point for an appreciation of modern capitalism and the endemic inflation that is part of it.

Finance Capital has achieved a reputation mostly through hearsay via the work of such theorists as Bukharin, Lenin and Sweezy. This reputation can now be appraised directly, and the full measure of the work assessed. The book is not easy reading and does require a fair degree of knowledge of Marxist political economy. Nevertheless it should be studied not as an antiquarian curiosity but as a necessary aid to understanding current realities.

Reviews Reviews Reviews

WOMEN IN HISTORY

By Sue Jessup

Susan Raven and Alison Weir *Women in History: Thirty-five centuries of Feminine Achievement*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981, £8.95, illustrated

From Hatshepsut, Egyptian pharaoh in 1500 BC, to Bernadette McAliskey and the attempt on her life in January 1981, the authors trade the lives of about 500 women, who, in their opinion, have made outstanding contributions in their own right. Their claims to fame are diverse: campaigners for women's suffrage, reform of prisons and mental hospitals, abolition of slavery, improvements in girls' education, the rights of divorced and married women, the right to be a doctor or engineer, and against prostitution laws; as well as women scientists, explorers, artists and sportswomen.

Many women combined several activities and interests. Dr Aletta Jacobs opened the world's first contraceptive clinic in Amsterdam in 1882, but was also a suffragist, pacifist and campaigner for prison reform and laws to protect children and Asian women. In addition she waged a twenty year campaign for employers to provide seats for shop assistants to alleviate gynaecological problems. Emily Faithfull set up all-women printing presses to print suffragist and ILP newspapers. The mountaineer, Fanny Workman, was photographed reading the headline 'Votes for Women' 21,000 feet up in the Himalayas in 1912.

Women also made personal protests against oppressive traditions. Muslim women removed their veils, Western women wore trousers or dressed as men to avoid ridicule in traditional male jobs; others included protests against marriage laws in their wedding



ceremonies.

Women faced obstacles and hardship in achieving their aims. Annie Besant lost custody of her children for advocating contraception, others cared for many children and dependents singlehanded: single and divorced women were ostracised and many suffered physical attacks and derision.

Frequently women achieved most before marriage or after separation or their husband's death — sometimes when elderly, often through self-education or in spite of illiteracy. Many women were denied credit for their creative achievements: male artists passed off the works of female assistants as their own; Colette's first husband imprisoned her and published her novels under his name; and Catherine Greene invented 'Eli Whitney's Cotton gin' but was denied any benefit because women could not apply for patents.

The majority of women discussed in this book were white and usually wealthy. Historical records in Europe and North America are generally more accessible, and while some Asian women appear very few African women are mentioned. That is the problem with this sort of approach.

Although the authors attempt to draw links between the achievements of women in different fields, they appear as exceptional and isolated individuals, unrepresentative of their contemporaries and shedding little light on the anonymous lives of ordinary women coping with everyday problems of work, poverty and war. We do not discover the involvement of women, children and men in popular movements led by such women. Significant groups of women, such as the suffrage societies of working class women who campaigned through the labour movement for the vote, are passed over because they did not produce sufficiently outstanding leaders.

The authors point to the lack of involvement in post-revolutionary societies of women who played important part in the revolutions which established them. But while mentioning Ekaterina Furtseva, the only woman in the inner circle of the Kremlin, they overlook Krupskaya and her achievements in Soviet education after the revolution and fail to mention Kollontai's proposals for maternity clinics, maternity leave, easy divorce, the abolition of illegitimacy and other measures to assist women's involvement in society. Perhaps in the interest of brevity, Sylvia Pankhurst's and Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to the First World War as a capitalist war is rather inaccurately described as pacifism.

While brief summaries are given of women's writings, the book would have been more useful for reference if the authors had listed more detailed biographies of the women concerned. However, it does extend the number of exceptional women about whom something is known.

JAPANESE MARXISM

Kozo Uno: *Principles of Political Economy: Theory of a Purely Capitalist Society*, Translated by Thomas T Sekine. Harvester, 1980, £25.

Makoto Itoh: *Value and Crisis: Essays on Marxian Economics in Japan*, Pluto Press, 1980, £2.95.

As early as the 1840s Marx observed that with the material links established through world trade there arises a 'world literature'. This is true above all of Marxist literature for the simple reason that it is (or should be!) free from the ideological particularisms of nation states. This global character of Marxist theory was made evident to me when I found that in a recent paper I was debating works by a Belgian (Mandel), an American (Sweezy), a Russian (Rubin — a man liquidated by Stalin when Marxist work was crushed in the USSR), a Japanese (Itoh), an Italian (Colletti) and a

Frenchman (Althusser).

Until recently British Marxism has suffered badly from its parochialism but more and more translations, such as the two Japanese books here reviewed, have become available. Naturally, notwithstanding Marxism's effort to achieve a global synthesis, every Marxist is shaped by his or her national experience, and this is true too of Japanese Marxism. Both Sekine and Itoh provide illuminating accounts of the way in which the specificity of late-developing, state-sponsored capitalism in Japan generated theoretical debates (including also the political perspectives, in which the Soviet orthodoxy was always strongly contested). These issued, in the work of Uno and his school, in a doctrine which sharply differentiates between three levels of analysis: a) the 'pure theory' of capitalism as a self-contained, self-reproducing system; b) a theory of the

By Chris Arthur

historical stages of world capitalist development; and c) conjunctural analyses.

Uno's *Principles* (first published in 1964) gives us a condensed version of the 'pure theory'. I strongly recommend anyone interested in political economy to read it. Uno is refreshingly undogmatic and freely criticises Marx's *Capital* where he finds it unclear or deficient. I was especially excited by his theory of value in which he makes a number of very acute points. Uno was one of the first to point out that Marx's great originality lay in the theory of the value *forms* as opposed to the labour theory of the value *substance* which he inherited from classical political economy. He insists on the necessity of fully developing — in a 'doctrine of circulation' — the forms of value, including money and capital, before discussing how these forms sink into, and take possession of, production itself.

Itoh is one of Uno's leading disciples and

10 YEARS OF GAY POLITICS

By John Inigo

Gay Left Collective (ed.): *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, Allison & Busby, 1980, £3.95.

Good books on gay politics are few and far between. So although this one was published over a year ago, it still merits a serious review.

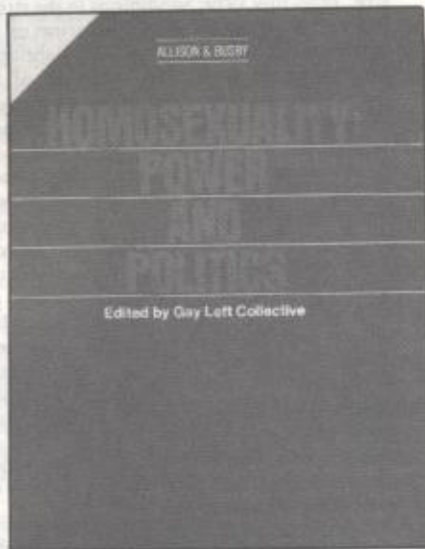
This book is a collection of seventeen articles by lesbians and gay men; and, for once, lesbian writers and politics are genuinely given equal status. The articles cover a wide range of topics: the history of sexuality, critiques of currents in the gay movement and the left, socialist and feminist morality, the portrayal and involvement of gays in culture and the media, and gay political action. While all the authors are (or were) socialists, there is no consistent line taken on either theoretical or political questions. The book rather presents a compendium of debates and developments on the left of the lesbian/gay movement at the beginning of the 1980s, though slanted away from orthodox Marxism and (even more) from Leninism.

Despite this diversity, certain themes and concerns run through all the contributions. The book might well have been subtitled 'Ten years after'; most of the articles look back at the ideologies and politics with which the gay movement started and criticise them in the light of subsequent political and social developments.

One important area in which this critique is developed is 'morality'. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF), and to some extent the women's movement in the early 1970s, confronted bourgeois morality by posing demands on individuals in a moralistic way that took little account of their material circumstances. Several of the articles explore, partly on the basis of personal experience, the contradictions of struggling for these political ends as real people in the real world.

While the often naive expectations of the early 1970s are rejected, most of the underlying aims are not. Socialist morality cannot consist of a set of rules; it is impossible for either revolutionary parties or movements of the oppressed to formulate such rules (though of course some elementary points of non-sexist and non-racist behaviour can be laid down). But it is possible and necessary for socialists to struggle, alongside the people with whom we are in daily contact, against the ways in which our 'personal' behaviour oppresses others and leads to our own unhappiness.

A second central theme of the book is the way in which sexual categories and sexual



behaviour and desires are not determined biologically but are socially constructed. This is all the *more* true of the categories of the heterosexual, the lesbian, and the homosexual, which are entirely socially constructed and have only existed since the 19th century. Moreover, over the last ten years these categories have been changing at an unprecedentedly fast rate — the most obvious example being the continuing expansion and 'masculinisation' of the commercial gay male scene discussed in several of these articles. The construction of sexuality also takes place in personal history: Margaret Jackson writes how her experience was not one of disclosing to the world an already existing lesbian identity but of literally *becoming* a lesbian.

The political implication of this is that the struggle is ultimately not one to liberate a given oppressed group, but to overcome the categorisation of people as gay or heterosexual, and in fact to overthrow the tyrannous importance that sexuality has assumed in self-definition in the imperialist countries (overthrowing 'King Sex', as Jeff Weeks puts it). While I agree that this should indeed be our aim, some of the contributions (that by Jeff Weeks in particular) seriously downplay the importance of the specific struggle of gay people for our rights.

Without a gay movement, which has been the product of the creation of gay individuals as a specific category, the struggle for gay liberation and all the broader issues it raises would not have developed, the struggle (at least up to the transition to socialism) must start from a struggle for gay rights and against repression rather than against the regulation and categorisation of sexuality as such. This is

(John Harrison) has remarked: 'value freaks should really get off on this one.' The two essays on crisis are particularly clear introductions to this knotty problem.

The Uno volume also contains a very substantial chapter by the translator, Thomas Sekine, on the philosophical underpinnings of Uno's work. Sekine tries to show that the peculiar character of the capitalist system not

argued in this volume by Frank Mort and, implicitly, by Amber Hollibaugh. Any other strategy is utopian and could lead to a return to GLF-style voluntarism or to passivity.

A third related theme is a critique of previous theories of the gay movement, including both GLF ideas and orthodox Marxism, for the spurious coherence that they give to the various mechanisms of repression and regulation of sexuality. Orthodox Marxist approaches are criticised, first, for a functionalist view of ideology as deriving directly from the mode of production and the 'requirements' of accumulation; and secondly, for idealism, in imagining that the ruling class is capable of articulating all aspects of sexuality in a way that serves its interests. This criticism forms one prong of an extended attack by Philip Derbyshire on the ideas of the International Marxist Group on gay liberation (an attack that needs a specific answer elsewhere).

Now it is certainly true that much gay movement writing — both Marxist and non-Marxist — has suffered from this functionalism. I think, however, that the Marxism of Marx, including the much-maligned concept of false consciousness, does not fall into this trap and does not attempt to *reduce* concrete instances to some 'general' principle or dynamic. Margaret Coulson's article in the book illustrates this very well. Moreover, the alternatives presented here, deriving particularly from Foucault, seem to me themselves to fall into severe and fetishistic functionalism.

More seriously, these alternatives effectively abandon any systematic or theoretical attempt to link the operations of the different institutions structuring sexuality. The political implications of this are not really developed, but seem to lead towards a deeply fragmented politics, radically divided not just into different movements but into different fields and institutions of struggle. A further problem is the silence of all the articles, with one exception, on the labour movement, linked in many cases to an undue pessimism about future prospects.

We *do* need a much more detailed and specific analysis of the great variety of practices that construct and oppress our sexuality; but we must constantly try to link together our struggles against them both theoretically and practically if we are to progress.

only makes it *possible* to grasp it with 'pure theory', but that it is in this way analogous to the object of Hegel's *Logic* with its pure forms of thought. I am not entirely happy with everything Sekine says but there is no doubt that this is potentially a very fruitful point of departure.

Harvester and Pluto are to be congratulated for making available to us these high-quality contributions to Marxist theory.

Reviews
Reviews
Reviews
Reviews
Reviews

has for the past decade been engaged in a one-person crusade to bring Japanese Marxism to the notice of Westerners. These essays include an historical survey of Japanese Marxism and interventions in recent debates in England on value, on crisis, and on the nature of the current inflationary crisis. The second chapter, 'A Study of Marx's Theory of Value', makes explicit the Uno school's differences with Marx's presentation. As another reviewer

Reviews Reviews Reviews

BY MEGAN MARTIN

Susan Meiselas: *Nicaragua: June 1978-July 1979*. Edited with Claire Rosenberg. Writers and Readers, 1981, £6.95

In July 1979 the people of Nicaragua, led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front, overthrew the brutal dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza. Writing 12 months after the victory, Susan Meiselas observes that the bourgeois media has been reporting 'news' from Nicaragua 'as if nothing had happened before, as if the roots were not there, and the victory not earned'. She says that this book has been made 'so that we remember'.

The main body of the book is a sequence of 71 large colour photographs, taken during a series of visits to Nicaragua. There are pictures of daily life under Somoza: a woman washing laundry in a sewer of downtown Managua; National Guard recruits being trained in the use of a US-made M-16 rifle. There are pictures taken during the September 1978 insurrection; youths holding a barricade in Matagalpa; one youth tensed in a doorway and wearing a Spider Man mask for disguise; and pictures of the counter-offensive of the National Guard; the town of Esteli on the fifth day of continuous bombing; a woman clutching a bundle of belongings in one arm and a naked child under the other as she flees Esteli; a guard patrol in Managua beginning a

NICARAGUA: PICTURES

house-to-house search for Sandinistas; volunteers heading for a Sandinista training camp in the mountains north of Esteli. Finally, there are pictures taken during the final offensive, June-July 1979; Sandinistas in the streets of Esteli; a Sandinista playing a clarinet on the barricades during the last days of fighting in Matagalpa; Sandinistas at the walls of the Esteli National Guard headquarters. In fact, the whole population seems to have become Sandinistas.

It is remarkable as a book of war photography. It is one of very few journalistic works that is openly sympathetic to a popular struggle, and not simply humanist in its concerns. Susan Meiselas knows more about the politics of what she is photographing than do most journalists. Though there are a number of photos of fires and burning bodies, there are few images of atrocities. Most of the photos are of people, civilian and guerrilla, and while these people might be suffering they are not seen as victims, not presented as evidence of a general human condition which accuses nobody and everybody in the way of most war photography.

This is even more remarkable in that the photos are in colour. Most colour war photographs, those in *Time* and *Newsweek* for example, give way to gore and by doing so transform history into spectacle. Alternatively, colour photography is used most extensively for advertising. It romanticizes its subject, particularly foreign lands. In Meiselas' book the colour, while indicating the tropical surroundings, does not emphasise them. Instead the colour, by revealing the ordinariness of the clothes serves to emphasise the ordinariness of the people.

But as a book to help us remember (by which I think Meiselas means incorporating the experience of the Nicaraguan people into our social and political memories whether or not we were conscious of events in Nicaragua at the time), it doesn't really work.

The main reason for this is the book's design. The photographs are presented in a



single large block without captions or titles. The captions, some of which are rather inadequate, appear at the back of the book accompanying small black-and-white reproductions that run alongside the text.

This is not Susan Meiselas' fault. The book is being published simultaneously in several different languages and financial considerations apparently forced this arrangement. But it weakens the book dramatically because the photos lose much of their meaning. They become isolated in the way that Susan Sontag refers to when she argues that 'through photographs the world becomes a series of unrelated, free-standing pictures and history, past and present, a set of anecdotes and *fait divers*. The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, opaque. It is a view



Sandinistas on daily rounds in Esteli neighbourhood

The first day, w
 "They're comin
 neighborhood,"
 litter the streets
 anything — so th
 not enter. All th
 it. I was nervou
 walked from co
 bricks on my h
 barricades. At
 waited behind
 an attack at an
 keep awake, so
 coffee, cracker
 we'd put aside
 we shared it w

ES OF A REVOLUTION

A G U A



E I S E L A S

the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity, but which confers on each moment the character of mystery.'

This very 'nature' of photography makes a formidable opponent for someone who aims to do what Meiselas does. For this reason it is a fatal mistake to present the photographs without trying to overcome the problem of discontinuity. Despite their subject they cannot by themselves narrate the history which surrounds them.

This absence of a context which could restore the meaning to the photographs is all the more disappointing because it so easily might have been there. The text provided at the back of the book is extremely vivid. It is made up of testimonies, letters and extracts from interviews with Nicaraguans which have

people said, they've taken the man out and helped bottles, garbage — hard's tanks could neighbors were doing very happy too. I to corner carrying to help build the *muchachos*. They were expecting ment and had to one brought them thing. It was food e war, but now e *muchachos*.

—Rosa Alilia, housewife in Managua

been put together with the help of another journalist, Claire Rosenberg. There is a letter sent to National Guard recruits by the Sandinistas; another from Episcopalian bishops sent to President Somoza. There is part of an interview with Marta, a housewife in Esteli; another with Sylvia Reyes, mother of two, organiser of neighbourhood women in Managua; another with Enrique, a fifteen-year-old boy in Managua; Augusto, a taxi-driver in Monimbo and so on.

In some ways the texts show more vividly than the photographs do what was happening in Nicaragua. They indicate the central role which youth played in the Nicaragua revolution. They show that the church was involved in the struggle against the dictatorship: a letter from the Archbishop of Managua in the then bourgeois opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*, outlining what he sees as the necessary conditions to be met before collective armed resistance can be legitimised; an interview with Father Gaspar Garcia Laviana telling us why he joined the armed struggle.

A different arrangement of the photos with the texts could have gone a long way towards reconstructing the context out of which each photograph was taken.

This could also have been assisted by a grouping of the photographs. At the beginning of the book there is a 'contents' page which tells us that the photos cover three periods in the struggle: June 1978, the Somoza regime; September 1978, Insurrection; and June 1979-July 1979, the Final Offensive. A progression is implied which doesn't really happen. Not only does each photograph remain static, but each image has equal weight. There are no emphases. The viewer is forced into passivity, isolated from an understanding of events.

One final criticism: there are photos of women, women guerrillas as well as women 'victims', but it would be very difficult for someone not familiar with the history of Nicaragua to realise from this book that there was a women's organisation which played an

Reviews Reviews Reviews

important role in the mobilisation and organisation of women from September 1978 in the period leading up to the final insurrection. It is possible that the photographs contain some of this information, just as they must contain more information about the Sandinista organisation and its relationship to the neighbourhood committees which provided the base for the popular insurrections in many of the towns in Nicaragua. Julia, neighbourhood organiser in Managua tells us that 'after September, we knew we had to get better organised. So we started preparing for the next insurrection by setting up Civil Defence Committees on each block, trying to get first-aid kits for every street where we had clandestine clinics for the fighters. We had to find safe houses for storing medicine, food supplies, and arms.' By themselves the photographs cannot reveal anything of these mysteries.

This is not a naive criticism. The self-organisation of the oppressed is something that bourgeois ideology is devoted to obscuring. In speculating on Susan Sontag's theory of the uses of photography, John Berger argues that 'today no alternative professional (photographic) practice is possible. The system can accommodate any photograph ... Yet it may be possible to begin to use photographs according to a practice addressed to an alternative future. This future is a hope which we need now if we are to maintain a struggle, a resistance, against the societies and culture of capitalism.'



Sandinista barricade during the last days of fighting in Matagalpa

WORKING FOR THE WELFARE

By Annie Hudson

Steve Bolger, Paul Corrigan, Jan Docking and Nick Frost: *Towards Socialist Welfare Work*, Macmillan, 1981, £3.95.

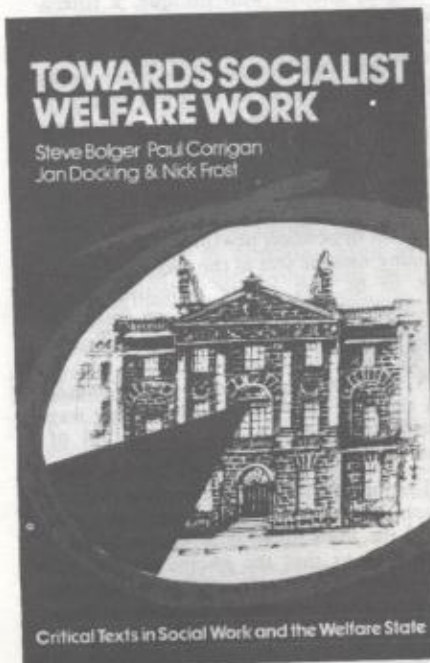
Social workers are easy prey for criticism and attack: from the right for irrelevance and ineffectuality; from the left for the 'soft policing' functions which underpin their practice. By providing (inadequate) services to be imposed on people, rather than developed with them and in response to their needs, the Welfare State has induced passivity and alienation. For some consumers at least, this has led to a rejection of the concept of collective state responsibility and certainly buttressed the appeal of the Tory party to many working people at the 1979 election.

This book analyses some of these issues and goes on to offer some beacons for the development of socialist welfare practice. While a coherent socialist practice is not possible under capitalism, the development of 'prefigurative forms' and 'alternative plans' for welfare services has not attracted the attention from welfare workers and academics that it warrants. The publication of this book is therefore to be welcomed.

Its authors are all socialist practitioners or teachers of welfare work. Their arguments are addressed both to socialists in welfare services and to socialists involved in other forms of struggle. The book begins with a discussion of various ideologies of welfare (social democratic, Thatcherite and 'democratic socialist') and of the crisis in the British economy since the early 1960s. The three central chapters proceed to look in detail at their impact on the organisation of social services departments, child care and community work.

The attempt to link political economy and ideology to specific practice situations is rigorous and comprehensive. Rather than viewing welfare as an ideologically unitary phenomenon, it is situated within the context of the development of post-war capitalism and the social democratic consensus. Welfare structures are not simply seen as the result of the now proverbial 'iron fist in the velvet glove' but as consequences of a struggle between monopoly capital and working people. All too often there is a considerable gap between academic analysis of the state and its reception (or lack of it) by those who actually 'do the state's graft'. So to read such a lucid and clear account of socialist ideas about the political economy of welfare is encouraging and refreshing.

The vast majority of social workers are employed by statutory-based social services departments, and the book provides a useful account of their history and values. Set up in the early 1970s following the recommendations of the 1968 Seebohm Report, they reflect many of the contradictions between the needs



of capital and those of working people. The Committee was chaired by Sir Frederick Seebohm, a prominent banker, and included many other well-known establishment figures in its ranks. There were no representatives of working class organisations and, inevitably, women too were poorly represented. This was hardly the kind of body which could speak either for the direct providers of welfare services or their recipients. Unsurprisingly, it made highly centralised, hierarchical management one of the organising principles of the new social services departments.

Towards Socialist Welfare Work argues that social democratic influences on the Committee's deliberations did, nonetheless, provide the seeds of a progressive practice. The stress on centralisation in Seebohm was partially offset by a parallel emphasis on the importance of locally-based area teams which would create 'conditions favourable to community identity and activity' (Seebohm Report, para 483). To some this may sound like a bit of myopic optimism, yet it was a crucial aspect of the report since it provided an opportunity to break away from the previously dominant individual pathology casework model and construct a more collective form of social work.

Whether social workers can effectively respond to this challenge is discussed on an assessment of the effects on them of deskilling and trade unionism. Intensified managerial control, mushrooming workloads and increased paperwork were factors in the background to the social workers' strikes of 1978-9 which, the authors argue, heightened social workers' consciousness of themselves as workers rather than the 'autonomous professionals' encouraged in their social work training. In Leeds, in particular, social workers in NALGO began to develop a more politically-

informed and community-oriented strategy for social services offering the beginnings of 'alternative plans' for the welfare services.

The Children and Young Person's Act of 1969 hovers uneasily between welfare and justice models of response to children in trouble. Although they recognise it as a pale and inadequate liberal form, the authors argue against recent radical critics who propose its abandonment in favour of a return to a judicial system where clear punishment for specified offences would replace vague and often oppressive 'treatment' with the very substantial, and sometimes abused, discretion that the latter entails for social workers particularly in relation to children in care. Rather than revert to a retrograde system of individual blame and punishment, they propose extension of the welfare model but on a firmer and explicitly socialist basis. For them this is the only way that working class children have any chance to offset their institutionalised subordination. They have a point. Juvenile Court benches are the last people to respond to 'delinquent' acts with a democratic socialist mind!

More positively, the authors point to recent moves by young people to organise themselves autonomously (through the National Association of Young People in Care) as opening up new possibilities of alliances with rank-and-file social workers further undermining their notional roles as expert professionals. While the realities of the social worker acting as an agent of the local state cannot be dodged, this role does not preclude some space for progressive manoeuvre and various other possible areas for this are suggested.

The third of the author's trilogy of practice areas is community work. While interesting and thorough, this section of the book breaks considerably less new ground than the preceding sections and provides little new for the many community workers who are struggling to maintain a feminist, anti-racist and socialist perspective in their work.

Without any doubt, social work urgently needs the challenges that this book offers. The possibilities the authors outline offer important insights into ways socialists working for the state can engage with the contradictions endemic to their jobs. The main gap lies perhaps in their failure to infuse adequately their Marxist analysis with feminist and racial perspectives. The needs of women and blacks, together with their different histories of oppression cannot always be easily subsumed under the interests of working people. Recent research, for example, has highlighted how girls are likely to receive very different treatment to boys from welfare agencies. Girls in care are often 'doubly judged': first in terms of the criminal offences they may have committed, and second in terms of their 'offences' against popularly-held ideas about how girls should behave. Care may thus often become a forum for the social control of young women's sexuality.

But the authors implicitly recognise that their analysis is 'unfinished', it is to be hoped that they, along with others, will gradually develop a more comprehensive critique and assessment of the possibilities of progressive practice.

LENIN DEFUSED

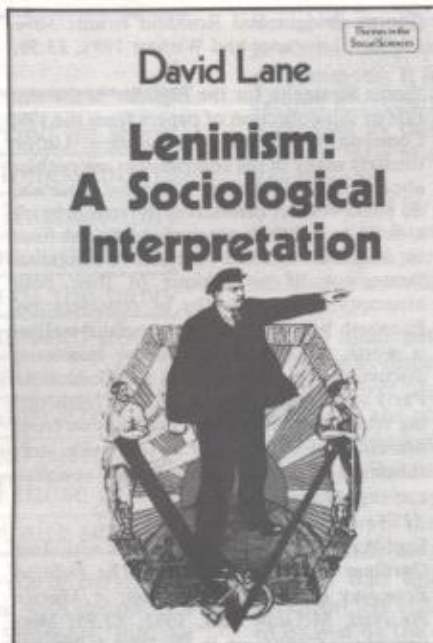
By Mike Holbrook

David Lane: *Leninism: A Sociological Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, £4.50.

David Lane is Britain's foremost academic writer on contemporary Russia; his *Politics and Society in the USSR* is a standard student text. In this book he tries to step out of the descriptive style of his earlier works, to provide an ambitious account of Leninism as a sociology of development. To achieve this he reviews the historic context of the October Revolution, the role of the Bolsheviks in power, (particularly explanations of the rise of Stalin), and finally attempts a 'general theory' of the revolutionary process, using the 'complementary' approaches of Talcott Parsons and Karl Marx (all in 138 pages).

The book owes more to the card index than to literary imagination — nearly every sentence is referenced or includes a quote. It reads as if it had been explicitly designed to put off the lay-reader. This is partly a result of the writer's commitment to 'ethical neutrality', which in practice means giving everyone an equal mention. As for sources, Lane has read his Lenin thoroughly, but other theorists of socialist development — Trotsky, Stalin, Kollontai, Kautsky — are discussed at second hand.

This weakens the authority of the text particularly in the first half of the book where — on the basis of a discussion of the state, the party, imperialism and soviets — Lane derives a 'political sociology' of Leninism. The result



is pathetic. It amounts to the following: the focus of revolution has moved from West to East; in the under-developed world the 'class struggle has a national form'; social sciences are in fact class sciences; and the party has to play a 'crucial and dominant role in the liberation of the masses'.

When Lane does seem to have a clear perspective is in the ensuing discussion of whether Leninism caused the degeneration of the Soviet revolution. This is the most successful section of the book and provides a clear

summary of contemporary and modern accounts. His purpose here is to establish four types of explanation of the 'Stalinist phenomenon' which can be summarised as follows:

(1) The revolution failed because of the under-development of the productive forces (Kautsky, Kolakowski).

(2) The revolution matured as it did because of the limitation of the country's cultural development (Solzhenitsyn, Tucker).

(3) Stalin's personality accounts for the degree of distortion from the socialist path (Khrushchev, Medvedev).

(4) The revolution degenerated because of the structural isolation of its economy in the capitalist world system (Trotsky, Mandel, Bettelheim).

Of these, Lane initially appears to favour the second explanation; but as it transpires, this is only a backcloth to his central project, namely, a synthesis of the four theories by combining, 'the strengths of historical materialism with the paradigm of Talcott Parsons...' (p.110). Those who know something

of Parsons (he was an exponent of conservative American sociology, usually labelled 'functionalism') will recognise this as daring to say the least.

A HIDDEN PROPHET OF TROTSKYISM

By Oliver Mac Donald

Christian Rakovsky: *Selected Writing on Opposition in the USSR 1923-30*, edited and with an introduction by Gus Fagan, Allison & Busby, 1980, £4.95.

Allison and Busby's publication of this book is one of the most important publishing events for English-speaking Marxists for decades. One of the greatest figures in the history of the European working class movement is at last made accessible to us.

In addition to Rakovsky's most important political writings in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, this book contains an extremely valuable biographical essay by Gus Fagan on Rakovsky's extraordinarily varied life. Rakovsky, a Bulgarian born in 1873, was the creator and leader of the Romanian socialist movement and went on to become the effective leader of the entire socialist movement in the Balkans before the First World War. He played a central role in the Second International before the war and was one of the main driving forces behind the Zimmerwald movement championing an internationalist resistance to the war. He participated in the



Russian Revolution, became President of the Ukraine, then a leading Soviet diplomat. But by this time, he was a leader of the Left Opposition within the Soviet Communist Party. When Trotsky was exiled at the end of the 1920s, he became its main leader in the country until his capitulation in 1934.

Publication of his writing places the history of the Left Opposition in a new light. Most importantly it destroys the traditional picture of that movement as simply the followers of Trotsky, a picture fostered both by Stalinist propagandists wanting to downplay the significance of the struggle inside the Bolshevik party and by bourgeois writers with no desire or ability to grasp the ideological and political issues at stake. Isaac Deutscher, of course, did not subscribe to this myth but ironically his biography of Trotsky, by rightly focusing on Trotsky himself, has contributed to it.

That this is no small matter can be seen by reading Rakovsky's magnificent speech on the national question at the 12th Party Congress in 1923. This speech in fact surveys the entire situation of the Revolution and the future perspectives for its development or downfall and it contains the key ideas that were later to form the basis of the politics of the Left Opposition. One of Trotsky's greatest errors was his failure to launch the struggle against Stalin at this Congress as Lenin had wished and indeed it could be argued that it was Rakovsky who really initiated the fight in the spring of 1923 (in conjunction with Preobrazhensky).

The speech indeed has an extraordinary ▶

SHORT REVIEWS

George Bridges and Rosalind Brunt: *Silver Linings*, Lawrence and Wishart 1981, £3.50.

'Some Strategies for the Eighties' is the subtitle of this collection of papers from the 1980 Communist University of London. Unfortunately many of the contributors say nothing about strategy in the real world and those who do either restrict themselves to retreading old ground or elaborate areas of the *British Road to Socialism* and the Alternative Economic Strategy as if no critique of their basic assumptions were worthy of consideration. Elizabeth Wilson's article on socialist welfare is worth a look but to pursue interesting discussions on strategy from the Communist Party and its periphery, wait for the forthcoming selection of articles on *Thatcherism* from *Marxism Today* which at least provide more substance with which revolutionary socialists can engage.

Sam Aaronovitch and Ron Smith with Jean Gardiner and Roger Moore: *The Political Economy of British Capitalism: A Marxist Analysis*, McGraw Hill, 1981, £7.95; Mike Campbell: *Capitalism in the UK: A Perspective from Marxist Political Economy*, Croom Helm, 1981, £5.95.

Two Marxist textbooks for students of economics in one year must say something about the evolution of teaching in the social science which has traditionally been most resistant to radical critique. In 400 pages, Aaronovitch et al cover an enormous amount of ground providing useful summaries of relevant statistics on the way; space constraints (and no doubt the requirements of first-year economics teaching) mean that much discussion is superficial. One can read the whole book and still have little understanding of the cause and dimension of British economic decline. Having four authors writing various sections leads to unevenness of style and presentation, and the attempt to introduce Marxist theory and an empirical account of the UK economy at the same time does not help. Mike Campbell's book is much shorter, a bit cheaper, more limited in scope, and much more readable. It contains no new ideas which is understandable in a text book, but less excusably it is rather weak on introducing the debates between Marxists on important topics. Nonetheless, the book provides a reasonable bibliography and guide to further reading. It adequately introduces basic Marxist theory in relation to business, inequality, economic crisis, the internationalisation of capital and the state, and uses it to sketch out a picture of the British economy today. Organisers of educational courses might well find it worth consulting their local library's copies of both books.

Peter Taylor-Gooby and Jennifer Dale: *Social Theory and Social Welfare*, Edward Arnold, 1981, £5.95.

A further addition to an explosion of Marxist writing on social policy and the welfare state (on which see also the more substantial review in this issue). This is basically two books for the price of one. Part I is a critique by Peter

Taylor-Gooby of a wide range of non-Marxist approaches to the study of welfare. Part II, by Jenny Dale, provides a useful summary and discussion of recent Marxist work.

David Coates: *Labour in Power?*, Longman, 1980, £4.95.

It is unfortunate that David Coates' study of the 1974-9 Labour Government is such hard work to read. For his account of how the government retreated from its pledges, of the weaknesses of its original manifesto, and of the underlying reasons for Labour's inability to move Britain in a socialist direction, would otherwise be essential reading for militants. Particularly in relation to industrial and economic policy *Labour in Power?* provides a revealing and painstakingly-researched account of the fate of a government which entered office 'with a series of clear policy commitments more radical in tone and in aspiration than any that the party had endorsed since 1945'. It is to be regretted that it will probably only reach an academic audience for whom Coates' Marxism will be an irritant rather than a guide to action.

Robert Jenkins: *Tony Benn: A Political Biography*, Writers and Readers, 1980, £6.95.

A revealing, readable and interesting sympathetic biography of Benn the politician which makes a serious if not always successful attempt to explain his motivation. The book has weaknesses: it fails entirely to assess Benn's relationship to the traditional Labour left. Nonetheless, it is essential reading as a background to the sort of revolutionary Marxist critique of Benn presented by Alan Freeman in this journal. Why no paperback?

The Runnymede Trust and the Radical Statistics Race Group: *Britain's Black Population*, Heineman Educational, 1980, £4.95.

Statistics have their limitations and this book certainly does not present any sort of clear picture of the lives of Britain's various 'black' populations. What it does do is provide facts and figures about state policies and their effects in relation to immigration, discrimination, employment, housing, education, and health and social services. It also gives a summary of statistics about the size, distribution and demography of Britain's black populations and about patterns of immigration into Britain. Quite a useful reference book but few will want to part with five pounds for it.

Books received: (listing does not preclude a subsequent review) Liam O'Dowd, Bill Rolston, Mike Tomlinson: *Northern Ireland: Between Civil Rights and Civil War*, CSE Books, 1980, £3.95.

Susan Edwards: *Female Sexuality and the Law*, Martin Robertson, 1981, £4.95.
Howard Zinn: *A People's History of the United States*, Longman, 1981, £6.95.
John Urry: *The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies*, Macmillan, 1981, £4.95.

relevance to the problems that many Marxists have today in dealing with Eastern Europe. It reminds us that workers' states are not created only for communists and socialists. They are created for *all* workers and peasants and when these non-socialist masses stand up for their rights and seek to exercise their power they by no means necessarily do so under the banner of communism. They may well do so under the banner of nationalism and democracy, particularly when they have been bitterly disappointed by the existing 'Communist' apparatus ruling them. Rakovsky's speech has lost none of its resonance today. In Ukraine in the 1960s, Ivan Dzyuba in his famous theoretical onslaught on Russian Chauvinism and national oppression in Ukraine that had such a strong influence on the entire opposition in Ukraine at that time, quoted the speech to provide the theoretical underpinning of his attack.

The second key text here is the famous Letter to Comrade Valentinov, which is made readily available in English for the first time. This text was the real theoretical groundwork for the Trotskyist theory of bureaucratisation in the workers' states. It requires serious study by all who wish to grasp this phenomenon.

The last section of the book contains texts by Rakovsky assessing the Stalinist 'left turn' at the end of the 1920s and the capitulationist drift of sections of the Left Opposition. Reading Trotsky's writings at this time as well as Rakovsky's, we can hardly escape the conclusion that the Left Opposition overestimated the 'right' danger and underestimated the danger from the Stalinist 'centre'. Trotsky felt that the 'left turn' would quickly give way to further capitulation to the right on the part of the bureaucracy and indeed it was Rakovsky who first grasped the real dynamic of bureaucratic consolidation against both the left and the 'right' at the start of the 1930s.

Gus Fagan is to be congratulated on this pioneering effort to bring Rakovsky back into the intellectual and political history of Marxism.

The task remains of bringing Rakovsky to the attention of socialists in Romania and the Balkans. The Romanian bureaucracy indeed has been unable to maintain a total silence on the main founder of Romanian socialism, despite Ceaucescu's attempts to trace his own lineage back to the Dacians and Roman legions! But the time will come when Romanian socialists will trade their real authentic traditions through the life and work of their great political ancestor, Christian Rakovsky.

BENN AND BRITISH SOCIALISM

BY ALAN FREEMAN

Labour Weekly last month carried an open letter to Tony Benn from longstanding Labour left-winger Janey Buchan. She explained that she would not be supporting Benn for the deputy leadership of the party because 'Yours is not a campaign about policies.... Your campaign is about personalities.' Is this the case? Alan Freeman argues that in fact there is a real difference between the politics of Benn and those of the old Tribune school.

What *are* Benn's politics? More than anyone else on the left, except possibly Stuart Holland, he is identified with the policies now known as the Alternative Economic Strategy¹. But the AES is supported, in one form or another, by everyone from the TUC to Denis Healey. What's so special about Benn?

The most telling difference is the importance he attaches to political democracy.

His leftward evolution began in 1968. He reacted to the French May events, to the Prague Spring, and to the failure of the Wilson government of the day — in which he was serving as Minister of Technology — with the argument that modern parliamentary democracy was inadequate. The danger, he said, 'is that it retains the arrogance of the benevolent despot and seeks to cloak the elected MP with something of the Divine Right once reserved for royal personages. At its worst, it still keeps the citizen at arm's length from the business of decision-making and bullies him into believing that the ballot box is the last word in participation. However attractive this idea may be, it won't do because it won't work any more. The game is up and we have to think the whole thing out again.'²

He saw two root causes for alienation from parliament. The first was the breakdown in the post-war consensus of welfare state policies designed to bring about full employment, rising living standards and rising social benefits, which were accepted by both Labour and Tory politicians.

'The election of May 1979 marked a real watershed... forty years of experience of trying to pretend that welfare capitalism was possible, successful and permanent, and could melt away the conflict between Labour and Capital have proved it cannot be done.... as the consensus of earlier years, which obscured these issues from our eyes, has broken down, we can see that the class system is still there with most of its privileges unchanged — and in some sense reinforced.'³

Tory governments were driven to make direct attacks on basic trade union rights, and Labour governments bowed to business interests and refrained from carrying out reforms. Thus working people and their families — the vast majority of voters — had no means of getting a government that carried out their wishes, and were consciously denied the right to control their 'elected rulers'.

The second problem was the rise of 'unaccountable centres of unacceptable power'. Not only were bodies such as the civil service, the House of Lords and other government institutions unelected and outside popular control; the economy was in practice controlled by faceless multinational corporations and bankers who used 'economic necessity' as an excuse for foisting anti-working class policies on elected governments. By 1980

Benn was openly proclaiming one of the best-kept secrets of government by consent: real power does not lie with the House of Commons. It lies with Whitehall, with a Prime Minister and cabinet who control the Commons and party, instead of being controlled by them, with the security and intelligence forces, with the 'new priesthood' in the media, and with the multinational barons.

He looked for a political strategy which would allow parliament to join hands with the people against these usurpers by responding to popular pressure from below. He sought ways in which direct action could bring political change without violent revolution.

'We shall never change society unless we start to do it ourselves by directly challenging the unaccountable power now exercised over us, exactly as our forefathers did by demanding the vote in the nineteenth century... This is not an appeal for violent revolution or even systematic and sustained civil disobedience. In Britain we don't need them. It is an appeal for a strategy of change from below to make the parliamentary system serve the people instead of serving the vanity of parliamentarians; an appeal for popular democracy.'⁴

This had immediate consequences for his strategy for socialism. He argued that the power of the big corporations had to be met by the unions, which had to take on a new political role by fighting for power in the workplace:

'If we are going to talk about industrial policy let us start with the people. Let's forget about legislation for a moment and start talking about industrial democracy... democracy means that the people ultimately control their managers. Just that, no more and no less... this is not a particularly revolutionary doctrine in all conscience. No-one is suggesting — at least I am not — that you do it by throwing petrol bombs or starting a guerilla movement in Morecambe. You could just as easily do it by removing the obstacles to it by legislation.'⁵

This led him to the ideas in Labour's famous 1973 Green Paper on Industrial Strategy. This called for a state holding company — the National Enterprise Board — which would also be the agency for tripartite planning agreements, which would make private industry accountable to the public and to social needs by using carrot and stick to force them into discussions and agreement, about their corporate strategy, with unions and government.

This fell well short of full nationalisation, and many have argued that this puts him to the right of the Tribunes, with their traditional policy of full state nationalisation. But it has to be realised, first of all that nationalisation for the Tribunes was used in a way that was far from socialist, and secondly that Benn sees these agreements as a way of gradually transferring power to workers by democratising industry from below. It is part of his strategy for socialism.

In order to deal with the fundamental problem of the economy — investment — Benn advocated that government, management and unions should exercise joint control over what had been the shareholder's sole prerogative: where to put capital and how to use it.

'Investors there will always be, but there is no valid reason why the investors' money should give them first claim to control, before those who invest their lives. Political democracy wrested the control of parliament from those who owned the lands and the factories, and industrial democracy is a logical and necessary development of it.'⁶

Unions should not just bargain over wages, but over their right to a say in such matters. In other words, for Benn the AES is a strategy for transition to socialism by the *gradual and peaceful conquest of control of industry* by the unions, as part and parcel of the struggle for democracy in society at large.

An immediate practical consequence of this approach was seen in 1970-74. Unlike nearly all other Labour politicians, ▶

British Features

Benn championed and gave legitimacy to the wave of working class struggles which broke out against Heath. He was widely criticised in the Labour Party for backing the illegal UCS work-in, where he marched arm-in-arm with communist shop stewards on the Glasgow support demonstration. He wrote in the *Daily Mirror* in support of the five dockers who were sent to jail for their defiance of Heath's Industrial Relations Legislation in 1972, saying that:

'According to the Prime Minister, Britain has been taken to the brink of anarchy because five dockers disobeyed the law. If that was true the situation would be serious. But it is not true. No five men could undermine our country. What has really frightened the cabinet is that millions of people who did *not* break the law expressed their sympathy and support for the dockers. One of them was me.'

Where others kept a worried distance from the upsurge of industrial discontent that swept the country, he welcomed it:

'A great new movement for reform is building up — peaceful but determined and coming from below ... and the leaders of it are tough and self-confident and irreverent. Top people despise the public. No wonder the public despise them ... The so-called credibility problem is not that people don't trust individual politicians. It means they are learning from the shipworkers and the students and the miners and the women, the railwaymen and dockers that if you want to get things changed you've got to do something about it yourself. This is a rebirth of our national self-confidence.'

These actions made him a very new kind of figure in the Labour Party's post-war history: a parliamentarian with an *active* relation to the unions. This should be compared, for example, with Bevan's run-in with the dockers in the late 1940s when, as a government minister, he confronted angry dockers protesting against the government's attempts to use wartime legislation to break their strike. He responded to violent heckling at a Bermondsey meeting with the memorable words, 'I will never be part of a government that imposes charges for National Health prescriptions'. The heckles turned to cheers, but Bevan had neatly turned his back on the problem that Benn confronted squarely in 1972: what attitude should a Labour parliamentarian take to trade union action — above all action that brings the unions into conflict with state and government?

Benn came out in *favour* of trade union and popular action, even to the point of a clash with the law and state; he developed around this a strategy aiming to involve the unions in a permanent, new, political role in the running of the country.

Yet he sought to limit popular action in decisive ways. He argued for the 'sovereignty of the people over parliament', but never satisfactorily showed how this could be asserted. Workers whose rights were trampled on by governments who behaved like 'elected despots' could only change things by elections or moral pressure. They could not dictate, coerce, or overthrow an elected government because it would subvert parliamentary democracy — in spite of the fact that the establishment did not hesitate to bend parliament to their will by every extraparliamentary device available. His vision of change relied on changing the way MPs themselves worked so they would respond to pressure:

'Historically, when democratic pressures from below were strong enough, the system worked just because the people on top accepted them ... Democratic change starts with a struggle at the bottom and ends with a peaceful parliamentary victory at the top. That is what I want to call popular democracy.'

But what should be done when parliament refused to accept popular pressure, and took its line from the civil service, the security forces, or the CBI and IMF? What if parliament was a tool of the state and not the people? Benn confronted this possibility under Heath. He argued that Heath was using the Law and Order issue to 'get us to accept the idea that all laws made by the State must be blindly obeyed'. But here also he

wanted to resist without going too far. He argued for passive resistance to unjust laws, aimed at raising enough moral pressure to prevent them being imposed. 'In our democracy no man should tell another man to break the law, nor should any man break the law to bypass parliament', he said in a Shadow Cabinet paper on Law and Order, 'But a person who is punished for breaking an unjust law may, if he is sincere and his cause wins public sympathy, create a public demand to have that unjust law changed through parliament.'

But in spite of these self-imposed limitations, Benn was still the main, if not the only figure of the seventies who argued that the people themselves must challenge, in some way, the unaccountable power of the state.

In what tradition is this philosophy? Benn himself claims descent from a unique, British school of socialism: 'This (democratic socialism) is very much a home-grown British product which has been slowly fashioned over the centuries. Its roots are deep in our history and have been nourished by the Bible, the teachings of Christ, the Peasants Revolt, the Levellers, Tom Paine, the Chartist, Robert Owen, the Webbs, and Bernard Shaw who were Fabians, Liberals, and radicals, and occasionally by Marxists.'

This is an impressive policy committee. But there are some notable absences: for example, James Connolly, John Maclean, Eleanor Marx, Sylvia Pankhurst, and the revolutionary syndicalist Tom Mann — all of whom spanned one of the most turbulent half-centuries of the struggle for democracy at the very birth agony of the modern political movement of the working class in the British Isles. Benn here expresses three of his basic assumptions about the tradition he is reclaiming: that it is uniquely and peculiarly British (in fact English); that it is uniquely peaceful and constitutional; and that it is an unbroken and continuous tradition stretching from 1381 to 1981.

None of these assumptions stands up to examination. In fact, in the act of associating himself with early British working class traditions, he breaks with a hundred years of working class history, in which its early socialist legacy was almost communicated by the official bodies of the labour movement, and by the Labour Party above all. This legacy was transmitted either by tiny English sects, by rank and file syndicalists, by the Scots, Irish or women. It was those in society who were most oppressed who kept alive socialism's democratic traditions, and nearly all were revolutionary socialists.

Nor is the tradition to which Benn refers — of radical working class or plebian democracy — uniquely British. On the contrary, it dates from a period in which the oppressed classes of all Europe and the New World saw themselves engaged in a common struggle for liberation against all the old tyrannies. Benn harks back to a time when Tom Paine was equally at home in Britain, France and America, and in which his fortunes and writings were followed with the same concern by the poor and dispossessed of each one of those lands.

Finally, these traditions were not in the least peaceful and constitutional, for democracy could only be won by revolutionary means. Both rulers and ruled treated a call for democracy and a call to arms as synonymous. The great liberators of the age were all revolutionaries, from Lilburne to Paine to Marx. The Americans even wrote the right of insurrection into their constitution.

The logical extension of this tradition was Marx's support for the methods of the Paris Commune, and Lenin's espousal of *soviet democracy*, which argued that it was necessary to guarantee the accountability of all organs of government, *including the state*, by involving workers directly in the administration of society and the economy, and by ensuring that officials were drawn from the workers movement, were elected, subject to recall, and paid only average wages.

The 'official tradition' of the Labour Party dates from the

British Features

1870s with the adoption, by much of the labour movement, of Liberal strategies which used the *existing capitalist state* to win material concessions, available because of Britain's imperial supremacy. In return, they suppressed the tradition of *struggle against the state*, both at home and abroad.

Above all the idea grew up that parliament and local councils were the only channel to the state. The idea of popular action to win political demands is absent from the Labour Party's vocabulary and only now is it starting to reappear, with the orientation to community action and trade union links being proposed by Benn and people like Peter Hain. Alone amongst European Socialist Parties, the Labour Party began life as a parliamentary party. It has been a laboratory pure specimen of parliamentary cretinism. It saw the gains and losses of the workers' movement almost entirely as acts of law, and never as victories won in struggle.

By way of illustration, consider the following account from *Merrie England*, by Robert Blatchford, which is said to have won a million converts to socialism:

'It always amuses me to hear the intensely practical person demand, how are you going to do it? When will you make a start? Where do you begin?'

My dear Mr Smith, it is too late to ask when we are going to begin. We *have* begun. We, or rather they, began long ago. Nearly all law is more or less socialistic, for nearly all law implies the right of the state to control individuals for the benefit of the nation. But of late years the law has been steadily becoming more and more socialistic. I will give you a few examples ...

The Truck Acts are socialistic, for they deny the employer the power to swindle his own workmen. The Factory Acts are socialistic, for they deny the employer the power to work women and children to death.

The compulsory and Free Education Acts are socialistic, the Acts which compel the inspection of mines and factories, the inspection of boilers, the placing of loadlines on ships, the granting of relief to paupers, are all socialist acts, for they all interfere with the "freedom of contract" and the establishment of corporate gas and water works are socialistic measures, for they recognise the socialistic principle of common ownership, production and distribution.

You will see, then, that socialism has begun so that the question of where to begin is quite superfluous.¹²

The logical climax of this approach was the Labour government of 1945, which implemented a programme worked out in detailed discussion with the Tories and proposed by the Liberal Beveridge, during the coalition wartime government. This involved a huge expansion of the state sector, Keynesian policies of state intervention to avoid the worst effects of the trade cycle, and dovetailed neatly with the 'official' ideal of a slow transition to socialism carried out through the state.

The Bevanites simply became the left wing of this tradition. They simply argued for faster nationalisation, more nationalisation, more state benefits, and cheaper state benefits. They wanted to build socialism by buying the economy from the capitalists a bit at a time.

This tradition has seeped into the bones of the movement. Even organisations like the current around the *Militant*, who claim to be revolutionary Marxists, have developed a kind of litmus test for socialists — the more you want to nationalise, the more left-wing you are. They have a strategy according to which the government must pass a parliamentary act making it legal to nationalise everything they want. The bourgeoisie will then try to depose the incumbent government and workers will rise to defend it, thus bringing a revolutionary government into being.

This ignores the fact that, as the CBI showed in 1974, there are much more effective ways of thwarting a government that relies on the state than armed subversion. If the state and business community merely withdraw co-operation, the resulting economic chaos renders the government powerless to act. It can break out of this *only* if it changes the agency through which it implements its policies: if it legalises direct action by workers themselves, empowering them to take over factories, open books, organise production under their control, and establish local, regional and national planning under the direct supervision of their elected representatives.

A socialist strategy must also be ready for the fact that, faced with the threat of economic chaos, a Labour government would either refuse to take such measures or split, losing its parliamentary majority. A socialist strategy would have to prepare the unions to take steps to prevent economic sabotage and take over the economy *in any case*, and to demand that a new government should base itself on the new democracy which the people had built, not on a gerrymandered House of Commons majority. Of course, if a parliamentary majority for this course was preserved it would be excellent; but it is utter utopianism to base one's entire strategy on it. The point is that such thinking has never played any role in any part of the Labour Party's approach, *left or right*. Workers' control, in the vocabulary of the labour movement in Britain, has become a kind of appendage to nationalisation, an added extra slogan.

Even though what Benn proposes is not, in fact, real workers' control, he has made a fundamental break from the old tradition by re-introducing, however partially, the idea of fighting in the workplace to win political ends.

Why has the Bevanite tradition begun to break down? Why did Bevan himself desert the Bevanite camp? Why has Foot been selected as the next compromiser? The reason is that the



British Features

material basis for financing long-term state concessions has been eroded with the collapse of post-war prosperity, and above all — for Britain — with the collapse of imperial income.

It is not generally realised to what extent Labour's 1945 reforms were paid for from the profits of Empire. The Commonwealth, although wrapped up in moralistic claptrap, was merely a disguise for the new lease of imperial life in which the dominions, the colonies, and Britain were wrapped up together in a protective trade association that provided cheap food and raw materials, and was forced to buy British manufactures. As a study of this process notes:

'Despite the widespread and apparently authoritative assumption to the contrary, Britain did not emerge from the Second World War having liquidated all her long-term foreign assets. As we said earlier, Keynes estimated that Britain in fact sold about £1 billion of her total assets of just under £3 billion by 1945, and made further sales of £500 million in the immediate postwar period ... Net indebtedness ... was soon made up by further foreign investment at a level *unprecedented in absolute terms in British history*. By the end of 1967 British long-term foreign assets amounted to £12.6 billion of which £11.6 billion were private assets.'¹³ (our emphasis)

This is what gave rise to Britain's enormous banking sector (employing 1.2 million people!) and world military and financial role. The threat of a collapse of sterling's world role (i.e. Britain's imperial profits) is always what the IMF has held over Labour governments.

But with the fiasco of Suez in 1956, the writing was on the wall. The idea behind Britain's world nuclear role was to deal with this problem by tying itself more closely to America's apron strings. Bevan's sudden break with unilateralism had a very simple cause: he understood absolutely clearly that *without a big-power role for Britain, his social programme could no longer be financed*. Foot has already made clear that he wants unilateralism out of the manifesto — in other words, he wants to ditch it.

His first public act when he became party leader, crossing the magic threshold which means he may some day run a government, if the ruling class let him, was to express nauseating and fulsome support for Tory policy in Ireland. He is the last of a long line of Labour leaders who have been taught that the price of power is support for the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. The problem is that the bargain isn't such a good one nowadays.

The rebirth of a radical democratic tradition in the British working class reflects the discovery, at a higher and higher level in British politics, that a strategy of financing material concessions via the state, out of the proceeds of Empire, is not on any more.

Benn's reaction to this, as Minister of Technology in 1966, was to search out a different model for the financing of material concessions, in which the strength of the *domestic* economy would pay for progress, and in which the workers movement would contribute by being much more closely drawn into the process of production, responding with much higher productivity and creativity. The German and Japanese models were obviously in his mind.

But because the British ruling class, rooted abroad, is not willing to take such a course without *first* destroying working class strength, Benn has encountered tremendous resistance — to which he has reacted by championing the cause of the workers who are thus deprived, and by attempting to mobilise them in a force that can break down this resistance by extra-parliamentary action.

He associates with the revolutionary tradition in three ways: in bringing socialism's democratic heritage out front where it belongs; in arguing for a socialist strategy based on a fight for the control and administration of the economy by workers in industry; and in his endorsement of direct popular action for



political ends. But he shrinks from the conclusions of his own argument, because he cannot accept that democracy, workers' control, and popular power can only be achieved by socialist revolution.

The fact that Benn's emergence has deep material roots is made plain by the nature of his following. A layer of new Labour leaders is arising who put forward the same ideas of democracy, popular action, and a fight for control. They do it in the same half-hearted way — as we write, Lothian council is backing away from a fight with the government over cuts. But during the early stages the Lothian Labour councillors tried to visit every union branch in the region to ask for strike action if

British Features



the government tried to jail them.

The attempts by council leaders like Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone to look for ways of confronting the government, and seeking strike action to back them up, reflects the growing impossibility of using the local state machine by capturing elected majorities as a strategy for winning concessions. Their attempt to deal with the cuts by raising rates is an attempt to stave off confrontation and preserve some independence for councils — but it obviously isn't working. They are being driven to very different tactics from the genteel Brains Trust of the Bevanites.

More significant still is the very broad support that Benn is

finding in the unions. When he first stood for deputy leader his campaign was almost dismissed as a symbolic gesture. Now the media anxiously discuss whether he will succeed even *without* Silkin's vote. What this shows is that a layer of trade unionists are also drawn to question traditional labour politics, and that they turn to Benn as the nearest expression of their conclusions they can find. Benn is proving to be a focus for workers *moving towards* revolutionary ideas. Revolutionary socialists have two tasks: to fight alongside these workers on every issue which takes their struggle forward, and to develop a clear and incisive critique of Benn's ideas.

But what should this critique centre on? Is Benn in fact putting forward policies which can lead to socialism?

At the outset we must note that he looks for an alternative foreign policy which will *still be acceptable to capital*. He proposes a non-nuclear defence policy *within NATO*. He argues for British troops to be withdrawn from Ireland and *replaced by UN troops*. Israeli troops, perhaps? He proposes withdrawal from the EEC but seeks to win the capitalist's consent for a *national* reconstruction of an economy in which the market, and competition, would still play a role, as would capital itself.

This idea is utopian. But it is based, quite consciously on the Italian, German and Japanese model.

Benn holds that because he is proposing eminently sensible reforms which *could be* to the benefit of all, the capitalists *can* be led to comply peaceably if they meet a determined enough government.

What he ignores is the fact that Germany, Japan and Italy started with two bonuses which our own ruling class does not possess as yet. They passed through a period of fascism which destroyed working class resistance to technical change and high rates of exploitation; they lost a war, which destroyed the overseas ambitions of their capitalists.

Trying to apply the same policies with an undefeated working class and a ruling class which is hooked on overseas investment would have a very different effect. It would make it impossible for private capital to recoup profits over any but the very long term from domestic investment. It would raise working class expectations which could not be satisfied without an onslaught which capital cannot accept. It would terrify the capitalists into panic flight, leading to a tremendous and inflationary balance of payments crisis.

This is why such extraordinarily fierce opposition greeted Benn's policies in 1974. The ruling class were afraid not of what Benn would do, but of what would be done by workers following his idea when they encountered the resistance of private industry to Labour's reform programme.

It is here that the central weakness of his strategy becomes clear. He regards all the reforms that he puts forward as something which the capitalists will *eventually* agree to — after a bit of a struggle, perhaps, but eventually they will see sense. The very phrases which he uses to describe his aims — a 'new constitutional settlement' or a 'new consensus' — incorporate this idea. The result is a strategy which delivers into the capitalists' hands the very weapons they need to defeat him. Let us go through them one by one.

Firstly, it gives the employers the ideal weapon to bully governments into giving way — withdrawal of co-operation. The first battle line drawn in 1974 was when the CBI said it was 'not confident' in Labour, and Wilson destroyed Labour's industrial policy on the basis that it would not 'give industry confidence'. Indeed, the Labour left have now been forced to put forward the ridiculous idea of a 'compulsory planning agreement'. Is it an agreement, or is it compulsory? If it's compulsory, then the manifesto has to make absolutely clear that the government intends to go ahead *with or without* co-operation. It is for *this* reason that the government must make clear it intends to nationalise the economy, not because state control is one step nearer socialism.

By declaring at the outset that it was going to nationalise definite, named companies, the Mitterrand programme in ►

British Features

France greatly strengthened the resolve of the workers' movement and weakened the resistance of the owners.

For the same reason, tripartite management is an abuse of democracy and a mockery because it does not incarnate the *sovereignty of workers in the workplace*. In this respect Benn's proposals to give the trade union movement full access to information are very important; but they do *not* give the workers real control. Only one third of the board is made up of workers. One third are managers and the other third will be supplied by the state. Lenin's strategy of workers' control was based on a very different proposal: the idea of majority (at least two-thirds) control, directly accountable to workers' organisations.

Furthermore, because Benn has a strategy of *bargaining* for control instead of *taking* it, he immediately opens the door for the trade union bureaucracy to interpose themselves between the owners and the workers. In the National Enterprise Board (NEB) and in the Bullock committee on industrial democracy it was the trade union leaders who were more anxious than anyone to limit the extent of real control by their members; and the support of most trade union leaders for Wilson against Benn, and now for all manner of measures designed to stop Benn, shows which side they are on. In order to ensure that the trade unions call their leaders to account, it is essential to have a policy which ensures that workers' representatives cannot pose as arbitrators between capital and labour, and use this arbitration role to justify imposing managements' demands on their members.

This became very clear under Wilson and Callaghan when the Social Contract, which Benn supported, became a means of policing the trade union movement *carried out by the union leaders*. Benn was genuinely surprised when the union leaders deserted him in 1975, but it was inevitable once the ruling class had made clear they were not prepared to negotiate with Benn. Benn wanted to negotiate, but he had no cards left to play.

Most importantly of all, Benn's approach leaves him unable to resolve the basic issue of *force*. He cannot say who is to carry out his policies because of his concern to avoid provoking a revolutionary confrontation. The simplest and most effective law which a Labour government could pass, to take control of industry, is a law entitling workers in each factory and branch of industry to take whatever action they see fit in order to guarantee that their industry meets the objectives of Labour's social programme. But if such a law were to be effective, it would require another law appointing, as agents of the government in all dealings with industry, only the elected representatives of the workers movement. These two laws alone involve the destruction of all the effective property rights of the owners of capital, and the disbanding of the civil service as we now know it.

Labour could begin preparing the movement for government now by drawing together representatives from all branches of industry to draw up a national plan, showing how its reforms could be met and what each industry should do to achieve them. In order to wage a serious fight around the new TUC plan to spend £25 billion rebuilding the economy, for example, the trade union and labour movement would need to draw together rank and file workers in every industry to discuss how production would have to be organised, and *also* how to meet the bosses' resistance to their plans.

But the best preparation for the working class to be able to act as agents of their government in this way would be for Labour to champion, organise, and develop every conceivable form of working class action in defence of their rights and in support for the social reforms proposed in Labour's programme. An active struggle *now* against Cruise missiles, for the 35-hour week, for a massive programme of public spending, against the Common Market, and in support of the democratic struggles of the Irish, of women, and of blacks, would create the best chance of winning these demands, would unify and prepare the working class politically, and would prepare them

for the business of government. It would also limit the room for manoeuvre of Labour's right wing in any future government.

But Benn closes the door to this kind of action by refusing to endorse 'using industrial muscle to overthrow the government'. What is the point in struggling against every single measure the government takes if one must stop at a door marked 'private — parliamentary democrats only' when it comes to getting rid of the government itself? The capitalists have no such scruples. Who was allowed to vote on Benn's removal from the Department of Trade and Industry?

And it is when it comes to the role of parliament that Benn's biggest weakness is apparent. He argues for the sovereignty of the people over parliament, but shrinks from the measure needed to achieve it — which is to set up a democratic people's state.

He abides by two symmetrical fallacies: first, that because of Britain's parliamentary tradition, the ruling class will permit the use of parliament to bring about socialism; and secondly, that because of the working class's faith in parliament and commitment to parliamentary democracy, it will not and need not engage in violent or revolutionary action.

This is neither historically true nor correct strategy. Firstly, Benn consistently confuses *minority violence* and *force*. Actions such as mass pickets and occupations are very coercive and forceful, but may be totally peaceful — because they are made up of large numbers of people who are determined to have their way, so that the police find it useless to take them on. Benn uses phrases like 'setting up guerrilla movements in Morecambe' as a synonym for revolutionary action — thereby using the same language as the ruling class when it sets out to criminalise popular action — but ignores the fact that in all real revolutions the decisive factors have not just been the arming of the people but the weight of their numbers and their determination to accept no compromise. What makes them revolutionary is the fact that the people impose *their* authority instead of the government's, and to do so they install a new government and get rid of the old one. The new constitution is brought into being by their acts, demands and decrees.

Secondly, let us look at what *actually* happened in the English Civil War, which was fought under the banner of defending parliament. It was fought by rival armies. It was a bitter war in which the parliamentarians demanded, not a more open king, or a more democratic or popular king, but a dead king, an end to the king. Furthermore when the parliamentary army thought that some MPs were not prepared to fight the king, they were arrested and sacked in order to ensure that parliament would carry out the will of the people.

If Benn really wanted to continue the tradition of the English revolution, including the Levellers, the next Labour manifesto would declare its intention to establish a parliamentary militia to crush resistance to its decrees from unaccountable

Other THE BOOKSHOP

328 Upper Street, London N1 2XP

Large selection of Marxist and left books, feminist literature, pamphlets, postcards, badges, etc.

Labour Focus on Eastern Europe — Britain's most authoritative journal on Eastern Europe and *Intercontinental Press* for regular coverage of world events, both available from The Other Bookshop.

British Features

table centres of power such as Whitehall, the army and police, and CBI or the banks. Labour would have to disband these unelected bodies if they defied parliament — as they did in 1974 — and, of course, it would have to arrest, as traitors and law-breakers, any MPs refusing to recognise the constitutionality of the new government's decrees, (thereby inciting illegal and terroristic acts of violence against the people and government.) This would probably lead to the disqualification of most Tory MPs and indeed, many of them would be liable to prosecution by people's courts under Labour's new Prevention of Terrorism Act. We leave the Queen's fate to the reader's imagination. This forceful and authoritarian process involves no more violence than all present *capitalist* states use against workers. The issue at stake is not whether violence takes place, but *under whose laws, under what constitution, by whom and for what purpose* it is organised.

Such a proposal would at least be a faithful transcription of the heritage which Benn proclaims, into today's terms. But even this does not represent an adequate strategy for socialism, because it is tied to the assumption that a parliamentary majority must first be won. And indeed a new layer of 'very left wing' Labour politicians is emerging which combine quite radical proposals for mobilising the working class — which is excellent — with a strategy which, however, *relies* on keeping an elected majority in order to legislate. This nullifies the strategy, because it puts everything under the threat of failure if a small group of right wing MPs desert, (of course refusing to stand for re-election), if parliament or a council breaks its mandate, or if — as actually happens — the ruling class uses the control it has over the state to *prevent* the emergence of a majority which will do anything dangerous for it.

Ken Livingstone could well become the prisoner of his own GLC councillors, simply because a few right wingers are going to break their mandate and vote against the Labour group every time something 'illegal' or provocative is done — like overspending the budget handed down by Heseltine. The whole purpose of the present witch-hunting campaign is to force such desertions. The only way to defeat these tactics is to mobilise, now, a working class movement which will *impose* the right policies on the council.

The problem in Benn's ideas is that real power, as he himself points out, does not lie with parliament. Using the many 'unaccountable centres of power' at its disposal, the ruling class can not only fall back on a coup as a last resort, but it can take many effective measures to ensure that a *parliamentary majority for genuinely democratic change will never emerge*. In 1974 it managed to reverse Labour's manifesto, which was not revolutionary, by first ensuring — using Whitehall, the IMF and the CBI — a cabinet majority which opposed the manifesto, and then using the threat of losing a majority in the House of Commons to whip the rest of the PLP (not very reluctantly) into line. In 1984 its method may well be to split the Labour Party.

In fact on only one occasion *did* the working class win real concessions. This was between February and October 1974, when Wilson governed as a minority, without coalitions, and carried through a price and rents freeze, spent £3 billion on public services, abolished council house sales, abolished wage controls, and presided over 16 per cent wage rises. These concessions were won, not because of the situation *in* the House of Commons, but because the working class had just mobilised to such an extent that it had driven an elected government from office. It was the fact that the working class would have made the country ungovernable if a coalition had been formed, or if some immediate concessions had not been made, that forced Wilson's hand.

Thus the key to what can be won in parliament — even mild reforms — is what happens outside. More important still, however, is Benn's idea that because of their faith in parliament, workers will not engage in violent or revolutionary action, and will not need to:

'Since the trade union movement believes itself, correctly,

to have been a major founding force in parliamentary democracy through its support for the Chartists and others, it is not likely to reject its own history by seeking the overthrow of a government freely elected.'³

'The thing that makes this country — with all its imperfections — such a law-abiding place is not the fact that we've got police and courts with judges in long wigs. It is that we are basically decent, generous, compassionate, hard-working and fair-minded people. These qualities and not the statute book are our copper-bottomed guarantee against anarchy — so long as we play it fair amongst ourselves.'⁷

But what the people confront on the streets and in the factories are not members of parliament but the police, the management, and all the repressive apparatus which acts in the *name* of parliament, and in reality serves the rich and privileged. When workers fought the Industrial Relations Act, occupied factories against redundancy, or organised mass pickets, it was these forces they came up against.

A socialist strategy has to begin from the principle that a struggle for democratic rights, for workers' rights, for control of the economy, and now even for small material reforms, will meet with repression by the *unaccountable* bodies that Benn has identified, and must organise to resist them and bring into being, in the course of this resistance, an understanding of the kind of alternative society that socialists want. Such a strategy must put forward policies which will allow workers to experience the power of their own organisations, not just as a defensive power, but as a power for positive change. This is why a struggle for workers' control, and for workers' plans, must take its proper place in the policies we put forward.

But we cannot rely on a strategy that only aims to give partial power to the people. We have to say that popular power is only possible if these unaccountable bodies are disbanded and replaced by genuinely democratic organisations of working people and their families. And we also have to say that no parliamentary strategy can succeed if it begins by supporting these unaccountable bodies against people in struggle, or trying to use them to carry out its legislation; but that on the contrary, the role of MPs is to champion the people *against* the state, and so bring a genuinely democratic workers' state into being.

In order to wage a consistent fight for these goals, an organisation is needed whose representatives, including MPs, are directly and immediately accountable to it; which will combine parliamentary and popular action in such a way that the needs of workers come before electoral manoeuvres; which will organise a left wing in both the unions and the Labour Party, that is prepared to fight wealth and status without compromise; and which is committed to a democratic, planned socialist economy. Such an organisation — a revolutionary socialist organisation — will be able to count in its ranks many thousands of those who, in turning to Benn, are turning their back on a Labour Party tradition which has long had its day.

References

- 1 See *The Alternative Economic Strategy* in *International* Volume 5, Number 2, Spring 1980
- 2 Speech to international conference of political consultants, 1970 (reprinted in *Speeches*, ed Joan Bodington, Spokesman 1974, p221)
- 3 *Granada Guildhall Lecture* 1980, Granada 1980, p45
- 4 Lecture to the Fabian Society, September 1971 (*Speeches* p275)
- 5 Address to the AUEW Foundry Section Annual Delegate Meeting, May 1971 (*Speeches* p19)
- 6 *Arguments for Socialism*, Penguin 1979, p43
- 7 *Daily Mirror* August 1973 (reprinted in *Speeches* p36)
- 8 *op cit*, (*Speeches* p38)
- 9 Speech to the Fabian Society, *op cit*
- 10 Shadow Cabinet Paper on Law and Order (*Speeches* P168)
- 11 *Arguments for Socialism* p146
- 12 Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England*, Journeyman Press
- 13 Phillips and Maddock, *The Growth of the British Economy*, McMillan, 39

TERRORISM AND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS IN ITALY

Lidia Cirillo of the Revolutionary Communist League (Italian Section of the Fourth International) outlined to *International* the problems posed by terrorism and the erosion of democratic rights in Italy.

There is no doubt that the depth of the political, social and economic crisis and the hopeless response of the Communist Party and union leaderships has enabled the terrorist groups to grow again over the past period. They have succeeded in recruiting young workers to their cells from the big factories in cities like Milan. They have achieved this through taking bold initiatives like kidnappings and linking them to the demands of the workers in the factories.

For example in Milan there is a large Alfa Romeo plant employing 25,000 workers. The Red Brigades kidnapped one of the managers and linked it to the workers' demand for an end to the layoff affecting the plant.

The effect of these actions is to strengthen the hand of the union leaderships and of the managers. Whenever such terrorist initiatives are taken any struggles against the bosses are immediately called off by the union leadership. They then substitute the 'struggle against terrorism' for that against the bosses; often calling token work stoppages.

These terrorist actions are also used as a pretext to attack and discredit all the militant and revolutionary workers and the demands put forward by workers in struggle. The Red Brigades' support for the 35 hour week has been used by the Communist Party paper, *L'Unita*, to try and discredit the demand itself.

Another example was during the period of the kidnapping of the manager Sandrucci in the Alfa Romeo plant when another manager approached a worker in the factory harassing him to reveal the names of the 'terrorists' in the plant. He suggested some names to jog the workers' memory — they were all members of the trade union left, the Proletarian Democracy group or the Revolutionary Communist League.

In the same period a popular right wing magazine called *Gente* (The People) carried an article on the Alfa Romeo kidnapping. It published a picture released by the Red Brigades which showed Sandrucci seated in front of a poster of the

workers' demands. Next to this they carried a picture of our party's poster supporting these demands. They explicitly drew the link between the two to imply that we and the workers' leadership in the struggle were really terrorists or terrorist sympathisers.

For three years now the workers' parties — the Communist and Socialist parties — along with the unions have supported the campaign of the government and the capitalists against terrorism. Needless to say all the anti-democratic legislation that has been passed has done nothing to stop terrorism but it has helped the state organise repression against worker militants and revolutionaries.

Early in July, when the FIAT bosses were discussing with the unions about 23,000 workers being laid off, the Torino anti-terrorist police launched a series of raids. As many as 40 workers' *delegati* (shop stewards) were arrested, all of whom were supporters of the trade union left or revolutionaries, including all 14 workers who comprised the co-ordinating committee of the laid-off workers.

The trade union bureaucrats accept the ideological argument of the capitalists that the militant unions are a 'nest' of terrorists. One Socialist Party leader, Mattina, went so far as to name the Alfa Romeo plant as having a number of terrorists who were trade union cadre. When a worker is accused of being a terrorist or suspected terrorist s/he is immediately suspended from the trade union for 'security' reasons. So collective workers' defence is very difficult — it is left to the individual against the ruling class and the courts to establish the worker's innocence or guilt.

Again in the Alfa Romeo plant a sympathiser of our party — Garofalo — was arrested as a terrorist while he was leading an important struggle in his workplace shop. Not only was the struggle immediately called off but he was held for seven months with no charges brought against him. Luckily the very unusual make-up of his branch meant that he was not suspended from the union — though his union-appointed lawyer was convinced that he was guilty and urged him to confess!

We were able to organise a signature campaign to free the comrade and we took legal action to insist that he be confronted with the evidence against him. This turned out to be the 'word' of a 'repented terrorist' — there are a growing number of these former terrorists who work in collaboration with the

police to frame up worker militants as 'terrorists'. After seven months the charges were dropped after the 'repented terrorist' was unable to properly identify the comrade.

But not all cases are that successful. In Torino in 1979 some sixty-one workers, including comrades from our party, were fired from the FIAT factory after organising a defence campaign for a worker accused of being a terrorist. He was in jail for one and a half years before being declared innocent.

The situation inside the workers' movement has changed over the past years, in the mid-seventies a worker accused of terrorism was assumed to be innocent by the workers, that is no longer the case — the majority of workers now go along with the union in assuming the worker's guilt. The turning point in working class consciousness on this was the killing of Prime Minister Moro in 1978.

We have argued the same view on terrorism for the last ten years, even when it was more fashionable on the far left to flirt with support for the Red Brigades in the early seventies. At that time their actions were less bloody and more spectacular.

We have always argued in the working class that the biggest danger was that the state would exploit terrorist actions to attack the democratic rights of the working class and their struggles. There have now been so many examples of struggles being halted after terrorist interventions that a growing number of workers understand this point.

We therefore also argue that any passivity of the workers in defending democratic rights or in allying with the state forces to 'defeat terrorism' only strengthens the hands of the bosses. Just as the workers mobilise in defence of their conditions and against unemployment so they should also mobilise in an independent and united way to defend democratic rights.

We have also had to take up self-defence within the workers' movement against terrorist attacks. The Red Brigades have gone so far as murdering a Communist Party *delegati* in Genoa Guido Rossa.

But it is important to remember that the appeal of the terrorists and their ability to take actions stems from the lack of initiatives by the mass workers' organisations, political parties and unions, to solve the crisis. They are a reflection of the deep crisis of leadership in the working class. When the traditional leadership are mobilising the workers in actions to defend working class interests the space for activity for the terrorists is considerably reduced.

International Features

'SOLIDARITY: THE ONLY FORCE TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS'

One year after the signing of the historic Gdansk agreements the Polish crisis has taken new forms. The Solidarity and party congresses failed to resolve the central problems of power that are increasingly coming to the fore. Martin Meteyard spoke to Jan Kowalski, a revolutionary Marxist active within Solidarity, about the current stage of the struggle in Poland.

The worsening economic situation is the most obvious aspect of the crisis in Poland today. What lies behind this?

Actually it's more helpful to talk about a general social, political and economic crisis as I'll try to explain later.

It's difficult to say exactly why the economic crisis has accelerated as fast as it has. The government isn't giving any satisfactory explanation, except for the level of foreign debts — particularly the question of debt repayments — and the fall in production, which they blame on the lack of labour discipline.

Since no one else in the country has complete access to the relevant statistics and economic information, it's very difficult for even the economists in Solidarity to come up with an explanation. Obviously to a certain extent the factors cited by the government are behind it. But you begin to get into a vicious circle once there is that level of economic crisis.

Take the question of production levels. Since the queues and shortages really took off after Easter, when the first ration cards were introduced, people have had to spend huge amounts of time in queues — so it's not surprising there's been a fall in production.

The introduction of rationing has led to the appearance on a much bigger scale of things like profiteering, the black market, and speculation. This in turn has made the situation in the shops worse, because people can see how much the black market pays, that it's worthwhile; and therefore very often shipments of goods never get to the shops, they simply go straight to the black market.

The government also instituted the ridiculous policy of putting out ration coupons and at the same time legalising a free market in meat; which means that it practically doesn't pay the peasants at all to sell meat to the state shops. For instance, Solidarity estimates that eight out of every ten pigs killed in the provinces which supply Lodz with its meat now don't go to the state shops. This is a much bigger proportion than before rationing was introduced.

In fact the availability of the goods that are rationed was much greater before rationing was introduced. Some idea of the general confusion and lack of organisation can be gathered from the statement of one government official who, when asked why there wasn't enough food in the shops to cover the ration cards, answered that if there was then there would be no point in introducing rationing!

The economic situation really highlights the social and political crisis in Poland. Perhaps the most significant feature is the total crisis of the government's power. They really are in no position to govern the country.

There are two main theories about this in Solidarity. One is that the government is simply so weak that it has lost credibility with everyone, to the extent that it is incapable of doing



Freedom fighters in the Hungarian insurrection 1956

anything about the mess — it's simply powerless.

The other theory is that the government is *deliberately* not governing the country, in order to try to starve the population into submission. But either way it amounts to the same thing: the government is not running the country, it is not governing. This is the case even in elementary areas such as linking up rail transport facilities with production, with the docks, etc. The mess and chaos that always existed has got very much worse since April.

That must place a great responsibility on Solidarity as the only apparent alternative.

That is obviously true. In this situation, the mass of people look to Solidarity as the only force capable of getting the country out of this crisis, the only force which has the confidence of the mass of the population.

For a long time this actually caused problems for Solidarity because it didn't have a programme. It's only in recent months that it has come up with what amounts to a programme: proposals for economic reform which are grounded in the concept of workers' self-management of industry and workers' control of distribution.

However, the situation is slightly complicated by the fact that there are a number of other issues of conflict between the government and Solidarity at the moment. These concern the proposed trade union Bill, the question of censorship, and the access of Solidarity to the mass media.

As conflicts with the government loom over these questions, it's clear that the only way that Solidarity can defend the gains it has made is by putting forward to the population a coherent programme which provides an answer to the question of how we get out of the crisis. But it also has to link getting out of the crisis to the existence of Solidarity itself as the only body capable of effecting that change, and thereby ensure the support of the population for Solidarity's line on all these issues.

The basis of that programme is certainly going to be the proposals drafted by Solidarity on the question of workers' self-management. It is here that Solidarity points to a possible escape route from the crisis. ▶

International Features

These proposals have really only received a lot of attention over the last two months. They were originally drawn up by the 'Network of Leading Factories', which is not an official union body; that's to say, it's officially recognised by the leading bodies of Solidarity, but it's not integrated into any of its structures — it simply advises the regional commissions and the national coordinating council.

These proposals are very far-reaching indeed. They give the workers' self-management councils in each enterprise the right to make all decisions which affect production and distribution of the products of the given factory; also the type of production which is carried out. They allow them to decide how that given factory fits into the larger bodies, combines and cooperatives, in Polish industry; to take decisions regarding imports and exports; and a number of other things like this.

Most importantly, the proposals give them the right to choose the manager. The impact of this on the power of the bureaucracy should not be underestimated. When you add up all the managers nominated by the government throughout the country, together with those who in turn depend on them — their families, the deputies and supervisors they appoint, etc — that's a significant social layer which helps to prop up the bureaucracy.

Solidarity's national council only agreed to centre its proposals for reform on the question of workers' self-management at the end of July. By then the party leadership had already launched a big attack on the whole idea, claiming that full workers' self-management would mean group ownership of the means of production as opposed to their social ownership — which is ridiculous.

Solidarity, however, has begun to tie in the question of workers' self-management to a series of issues involved in getting out of the crisis, especially as to the type of economic reform which needs to be instituted. For instance, the main plank of the government's proposals is price reform. Solidarity's position is that it won't agree to this unless it is linked to a general reform of the economy which is based on workers' self-management. In addition, Solidarity also says that a system of financial compensation for the lower paid must be accepted by the union through a referendum of all union members.

In other words, Solidarity fairly clearly links its acceptance of price rises — which the government presents as the main plank of economic reform — to the question of self-management. Moreover, it also says that in order to effect these price rises with the consent of the Polish population, it will be necessary for Solidarity to have full access to the mass media.

In this way the question of the mass media, and also of censorship, comes into play. What Solidarity is saying now is that we are really the only ones who can get the message across to the population that price reform will be necessary, and we're only prepared to say that if we can put price reform forward as part-and-parcel of a much wider programme of reform which includes self-management, and if we're satisfied that the necessary compensation will be provided for the lower paid.

How do Solidarity's proposals differ from the model that's already been applied in Yugoslavia, for instance? How does it intend to link in self-management with a mechanism for centralised planning?

The example of Yugoslavia is a very good one, actually, because it's one of the arguments that the government also uses. They point to Yugoslavia and say: look, you have full self-management there, and what goes wrong is that you have inflation and unemployment.

There are a couple of very big differences with self-management as it's proposed by Solidarity. The first thing is that in Yugoslavia market forces are given very wide rein. Self-management therefore becomes a fiction, because the idea of

self-management is that the workers are allowed to run their factory in accordance with the needs of the working class. This is impossible either if you have bureaucratic dictates from above, or if you are prey to the mechanisms of the market.

Secondly, workers' self-management councils in Yugoslavia are limited to individual factories, whereas in Poland we're talking about a national network of self-management councils. In fact, the fledgling councils of workers' self-management which are growing up now have already begun to link up on a regional basis. The first regional coordinating committee was set up in Warsaw, but by the end of July another five or six such regional coordinating committees had been set up, and I think that this process will continue to proceed apace.

However there is, as you rightly point out, one question which is left open. That is the question of centralised planning, the role of the state and the government in the economy. The proposals for workers' self-management put forward by Solidarity leave a lot of room for government intervention to shape the lines of national functioning in specific ways.

What obviously must be the next step is the possibility of the workers themselves intervening in that decision-making process. A demand that Solidarity has already raised is that it should be allowed to have 'legislative initiative' — that is, that Solidarity should be allowed to put Bills before the Polish parliament, the Sejm. This arose after Solidarity worked out compromises with negotiating committees on various questions and then these compromises were rejected and totally different Bills were brought onto the floor of parliament.

In the short term I think that will be very useful, but obviously it's an impractical way of solving the problem in the long term. And that's why so much interest has been focused on the question of reforming the governmental and other representative institutions in Poland. In fact as early as March, during the Bydgoszcz affair, a number of regions, wanted to put forward a proposal to add the demand for electoral reform to the list of demands which Solidarity was putting forward then. This said that all legalised social organisations should be allowed to stand in elections, and that there should be new elections to parliament and to the provincial and city councils.

So it's clear that, hand-in-hand with the idea of economic reform based on self-management, we're going to see much louder demands for electoral reform in the very near future. And that must be the first demand in taking up the question of the reform of the state and governmental apparatus in Poland — a demand which, even before it is popularised, obviously has the support of at least 90 per cent of the population.

However that also poses a problem, because if you're talking about electoral reform you're either talking about Solidarity standing in elections as Solidarity, or you're talking about the creation of new parties. The leadership of Solidarity, with the exception of Lech Walesa — who keeps claiming on television that Solidarity is just a trade union, and who has been reprimanded on numerous occasions for doing so — considers Solidarity to be a social movement. However, they do not make any claims that it is or should be a political party.

Therefore what we would seem to be suggesting in proposing electoral reform is proposing the legalisation of other political parties. Indeed, at the moment in Solidarity there is a very wide current of opinion suggesting that Solidarity should already begin to set up — or rather activists inside Solidarity should begin to set up — political parties. This is particularly connected with the chairperson of the 'Network', who is putting forward the idea of the creation of a labour party, a party of labour.

Most of the leadership of Solidarity accept that in the long term this must be fought for by the union, and that this will happen. At the same time most of the leadership consider that at the moment it is premature; that openly fighting for these demands right now would be a provocation, and an open invitation to the Soviet army to intervene.

International Features

Therefore the course that seems likely to be taken in the short term is that workers' self-management will be the first, preliminary step in the reform of the whole Polish economy and state apparatus, and that after the founding and the institutionalisation (in the best sense!) of the process of democracy and self-management, the question of electoral reform will be taken up on the basis of these councils.

Indeed, one idea that has already come up is to reform the Sejm into a two-chamber parliament, with the lower chamber being made up of representatives of the self-management councils — probably called the chamber of self-management. This in the medium term would provide a solution to the problem of how the workforce could intervene in the decision-making process at the level of the economy.

However, that in itself does not answer the problem of how to fill the political vacuum which has been created by the collapse in the credibility of the Communist Party. For that reason, whether the leadership of Solidarity want it or not, demands for general electoral reform are likely to be raised in the very near future, and political parties will begin to spring up like mushrooms after the rain. A number of political parties — all very small — have already been set up, and the breakthrough point will come when a large sector of Solidarity sets up its own political party.

What does this mean in terms of building a revolutionary party in Poland?

We've reached the situation in Poland where a general strike is impossible today — because it would be tantamount to taking power, and there just isn't the political cohesion yet to make that possible.

I think it's likely that a revolutionary party will emerge in answer to this problem, but it will probably look very different from what you might expect. Most likely it will be a fusion of unions, political parties, journals, groups of 'Network' activists, and so on. And it would be a big diversion to say that the central task now is to build a revolutionary party.

The most important thing today is to develop the movement for workers' self-management. Because this will create the space for a revolutionary current to develop its influence and organisation.

Could you explain how the struggle of the working class in Poland differs from that in capitalist countries?

Well, the workers have been told for 35 years that they are the ones who govern the country; now that they actually believe it, they merely seem to be claiming their natural birthright. It seems elementary for workers in Poland to throw the managing director out of the factory when they go into struggle. But in Britain it's far different. The question of *ownership* is very important. British workers don't normally challenge capitalist property relations explicitly, and of course that affects how they see the boss.

In Poland it seems perfectly normal to demand the removal of bureaucratic privileges. But how many workers in Britain would demand that the boss's £100,000 house be taken away from him? The revolutionary leap in consciousness which has to take place in Britain before workers take over the economy doesn't have to take place in Poland — it's only control, not ownership, of production that's at stake.

In general that's a distinction that's blurred — but it becomes absolutely crucial when workers move into struggle. Even if it's only sub-conscious, they begin to put forward demands whose logic is the political revolution. It really doesn't take a big step in consciousness to say the workers should run the factories themselves — after all, it's supposedly even guaranteed in the constitution! The key change is that workers move from political passivity into activity.

What is the influence of revolutionary Marxist ideas in Poland today?

Very few people see themselves as revolutionary Marxists as such. But there are a number of journals today which put forward revolutionary Marxist ideas; some, such as *NTO* in Warsaw, openly describe themselves as such.

What you have, though, is a large section of activists who in practice behave as revolutionary Marxists and put forward a revolutionary Marxist programme, including the use of some Marxist terms. All democratic demands in Poland today immediately become transitional demands in the most important sense that they promote the self-organisation of the working class.

The jump from demanding a 10 per cent pay rise to demanding the opening of the books is really very small when you don't have to contend with the mystification of property relations.



