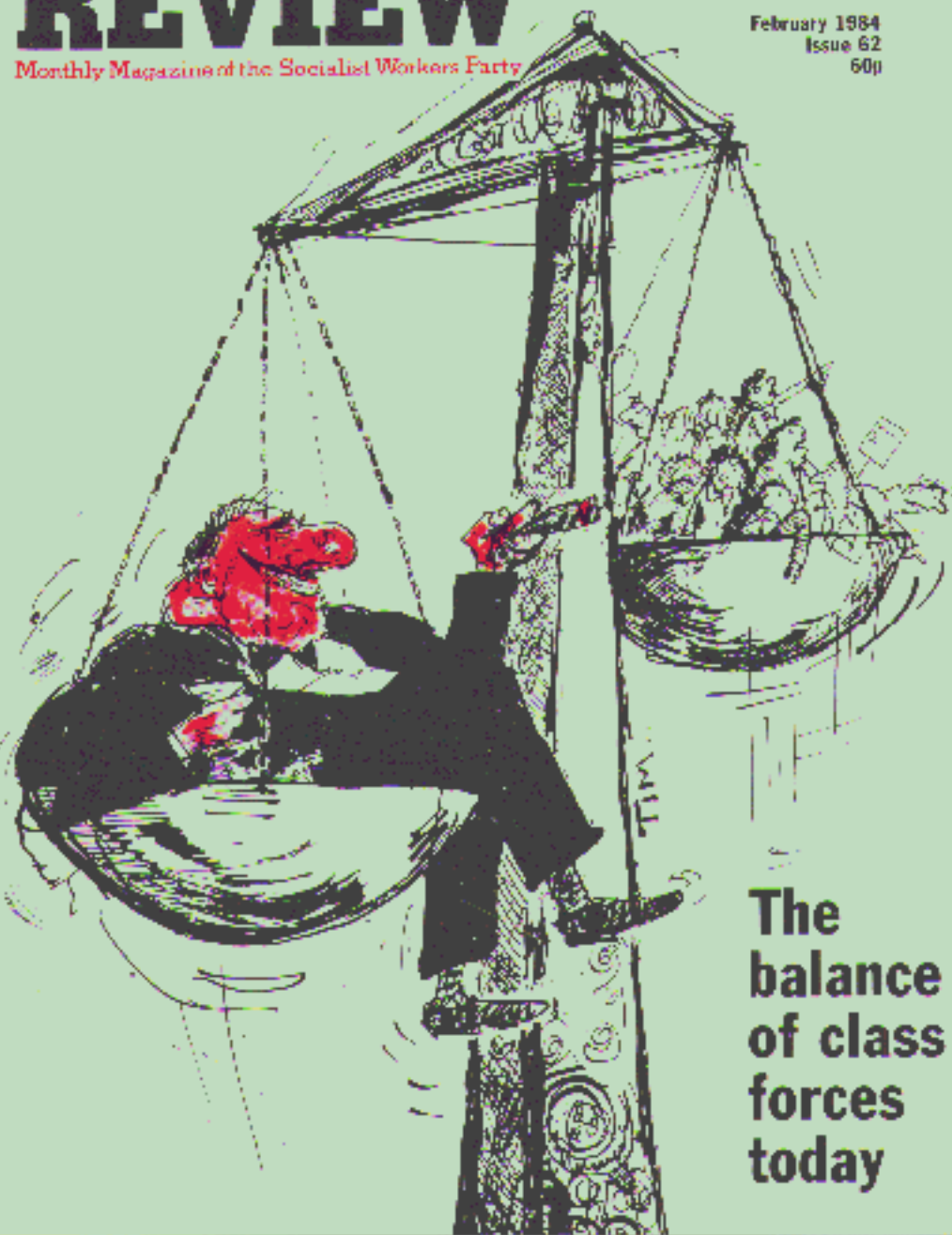


socialist
REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

February 1984
Issue 62
60p



**The
balance
of class
forces
today**

Shop floor snapshot

Dave Beecham looks at some new evidence which shows that an important part of the current downturn has its roots in the response of the labour movement to the Labour government of 1974-1979.

A central element in our understanding of the downturn in workers' self-activity and the class struggle over the past few years is the development of a suffocating stranglehold on organisation at the point of production and in other workplaces.

The new official survey of industrial relations, *Workplace Industrial Relations in Britain*, (published by Heinemann, £8.50) is useful ammunition. It provides evidence of the growth of a 'stewards' bureaucracy' and the formalisation of procedures during precisely the period we are talking about.

This evidence is important, but we need to be aware that the survey is a little suspect. It was carried out in 1980, in the aftermath of the steel strike and the engineering strikes, both national disputes, which mean some of the generalisations — eg on the importance of secondary picketing and negotiations—are simply wrong.

Next, the survey is a snapshot. It doesn't really measure change. And when it does—for example in documenting the growth of consultative committees—the results look a bit phoney. Finally, the survey essentially characterises everything by 'size of establishment'. There is no serious differentiation by industry, no differentiation at all between unions etc. And so some of the results are meaningless.

Nevertheless on some of the generalisations we are interested in, the figures are useful.

Suffocation

For example, on stewards' elections the survey suggests that in 1980 half of the workplaces covered *never* had more than one candidate in elections for senior positions. About 70 per cent of the elections were conducted by a show of hands in manual unions (noticeably less in staff unions). This suggests that ballots had become more important.

Full-time stewards (ie 100 per cent facility time, there is no other definition used) were quite rare in general. But the picture changes completely when you look at larger factories and workplaces. (See Table 1)

NALGO and CPSA reps should note that the figures for staff representatives give an even worse picture.

Given that the survey was censored by the Department of Employment before it appeared, it is not surprising that the

commentary is pretty dull and unilluminating. However, the authors do comment on the incidence of full time convenors, and this is worth quoting in full:

'Of some special interest was the existence of full time convenors. We have seen that they were the norm in establishments with more than 1,000 employees and we found, further, that many had been introduced in recent years. In nearly one quarter of cases where full time convenors operated they were first established within the previous five years.

'It appeared, however, that the most rapid period of their recent growth had been the two years from 1975 to 1977. That was especially true for the smaller establishments that had full time convenors. At establishments with fewer than 500 employees, over one quarter of the convenors owed their origins to that

ment of the industrial tribunals (set up to deal with industrial relations under the Tories and continued under Labour) and their insistence on written, formal agreements to codify industrial relations.

From 1971 on, all employers were under pressure from the tribunals to set out their procedures in written form. But the crunch period for this codification occurred at the same time as Labour's big productivity push and the high point of bureaucratisation of stewards' functions.

It is of course impossible to look at more than a few issues raised by the survey in a short space. But the survey's main claim to fame does deserve a mention.

It points to the growth of consultative committees, stating that in around 15 percent of establishments such committees were set up between 1975 and 1980. This is an impressive total. Consultative committees were reported in an overall 37 per cent of establishments, so the implication is that the period of the last Labour government also saw an approximate doubling of the number of management set-ups designed to 'involve' workers.

The problem with this finding is that the

TABLE 1

No of manual workers	100-199	200-499	500-999	1,000+
Any f/t convenors	4%	16%	38%	70%
f/t convenors as % of convenors	6%	12%	25%	39%

two year period. We have no direct evidence about why the number of full time convenors should have risen in the years 1975 to 1977, but the timing combined with previous research suggests that it may have been associated with the employment and industrial relations legislation of the mid-1970s.'

The other really significant area where the survey results seem generally reliable concerns procedures agreements. An overwhelming number of these agreements are now written, with the public sector completely covered by formal procedures and the private sector seemingly 85 percent covered. A lot of these agreements date back some years. For example, 30 percent of written disputes procedures in the private sector are reported to have been agreed before 1970. On the other hand the social contract period again stands out (though not as clearly) as the decisive time when procedures were formalised.

The five year period from 1975 to 1980, according to the survey saw a record proportion of written procedure agreements in the private sector. Nearly half the written agreements setting out discipline and dismissal arrangements were concluded in that period and over a third of disputes procedures.

This goes hand in hand with the develop-

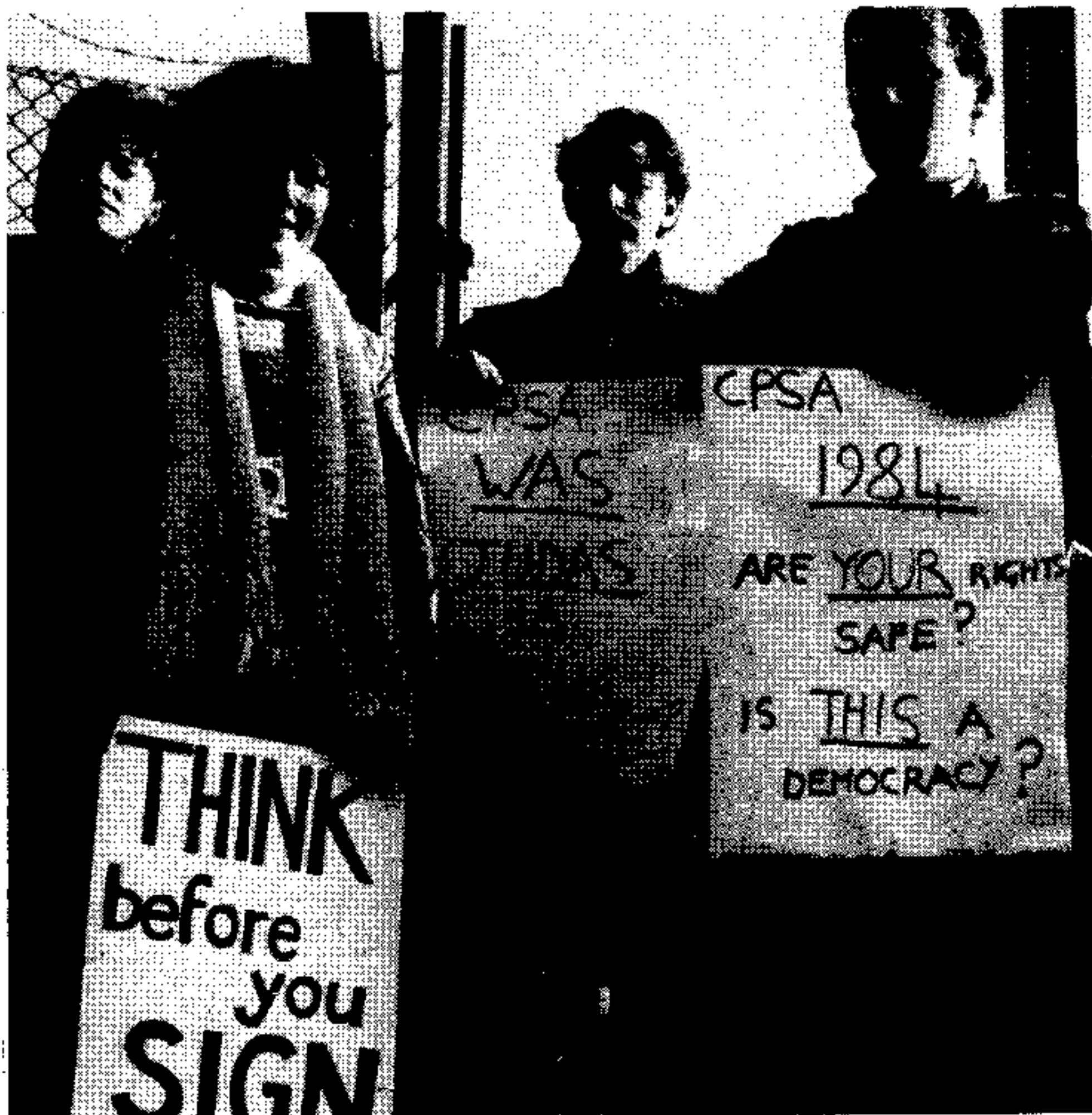
survey as a whole definitely underestimates the number of consultative committees in existence. For example, it suggests that half public sector establishments have committees, whereas in fact they are present in almost every public sector establishment of any size.

The other problem is that a consultative committee is a slippery animal: a lot of those covered by the survey were specifically on health and safety matters, but others covered a multitude of sins. The survey does not distinguish very well between different types.

Full-time

The conclusion we can draw from this is that Labour's health and safety legislation formed an integral part of the suffocation of independent workplace organisation. The survey found between 55 and 60 percent of engineering firms had a joint safety committee for example. But consultation on other issues is generally a management-inspired fashion.

The growth in 'participation' ideology under the social contract, however, was essential for its success. New committees, where they grew up, did pull stewards further away from their members and towards being a channel for management rather than the workers they represented.



The state of the movement

In one week at the end of January, the NGA 'purged its contempt' and *The Times* was stopped in another dispute over the closed shop. At the same time, the government's most open union busting attempt—the banning of unions at the GCHQ at Cheltenham—met an angry response from workers throughout the civil service. Still in the same week, the left candidate for the NUM General Secretaryship scraped home to a narrow victory over the unknown representative of the right. There can have been few periods in which the fundamental contradictions of the British labour movement have been more clearly illustrated.

Take the print first: we find a classic example of what Chris Harman, writing later in this issue, calls the 'trench warfare' of the class struggle in Britain. If the government and the ruling class in general won a victory against the NGA at Warrington, the print employers in particular might expect to benefit from it.

Joe Wade not only went into the witness box to apologise to the judge for the secondary picketing and to give an undertaking that it would not happen again, but he had the NGA's defence council plead in mitigation that the fact that the union had behaved itself since 9 December meant that it had changed its spots and should be treated more leniently.

It is hard to see how the NGA could have been more grovelling in its surrender. The ruling class, in the shape of Mr Justice

Eastham, took the opportunity to rub in their victory by making sure the NGA paid every last penny of fines and costs.

That was the victory, and the print employers might be expected to profit from it. They have certainly tried to do so. During the dispute itself, Rupert Murdoch, owner of *The Times* as well as much else, was one of the most determined of the bosses—it was his organisation that tried to win 'no strike' pledges from the NGA by continuing the lockout after the rest of the NPA had backed down.

Since the dispute, he has tried other ways of breaking the union. The current dispute at *The Times* has its origins in exactly that. Very briefly, what occurred was that a white collar worker, a member of the SOGAT Clerical branch, was told to transfer to the Manage-

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Subscription rates for one year:
Britain and Ireland £8, Overseas
Surface £9, Europe Air £11,
Elsewhere Air £14.50 (institutions
add £7.50).

Cheques and postal orders payable to
Socialist Review. Socialist Review is
sent free to all prisoners on request.

ISSN 0141-2442

Printed by East End (Offset) Ltd, (TU all
depts) London E2.

ment branch. He refused and next day came into work to find a member of the Management branch doing his job. The Clerical chapel then walked out—if they gave in on this, 40 more jobs would go the same way. Small beer, you might think, but looked at more closely it is exactly the same problem as Warrington.

Fleet Street, even amongst white collar workers, is of course the heart of the print workers' closed shop. While that closed shop is real and effective, there are one or two little areas in which the union leadership have allowed sweetheart deals to start the process of erosion.

The Management section of SOGAT is one such little deal. It recruits, among others, middle management. They pay their dues but there is no effective organisation; it is members of this section that are scabbing during the current dispute as they have in all others.

For the management to be able to insist that members of a real union chapel shift into this nominal, sham section which does not even have a chapel structure, is therefore a sign that they can get away with arbitrary changes in job structure without negotiation. It is also a sign that they are starting to erode the closed shop. It is a very small step from the management section to no union at all.

So the real picture we have is of the ruling class winning a victory and one of its more hawkish members trying to make a breakthrough. But despite the fact that he chooses to take on the weakest branch of the weakest union, and picks on a chapel which has suffered massive voluntary redundancies over the last few years, Murdoch still meets determined resistance.

What is more, after a certain amount of picketing the manual workers stopped the paper in support of the clericals. And the owners of other newspapers, for example *The Guardian*, are forced to agree with their workers that they will not seek to make a killing by printing any more copies while *The Times* is off the streets.

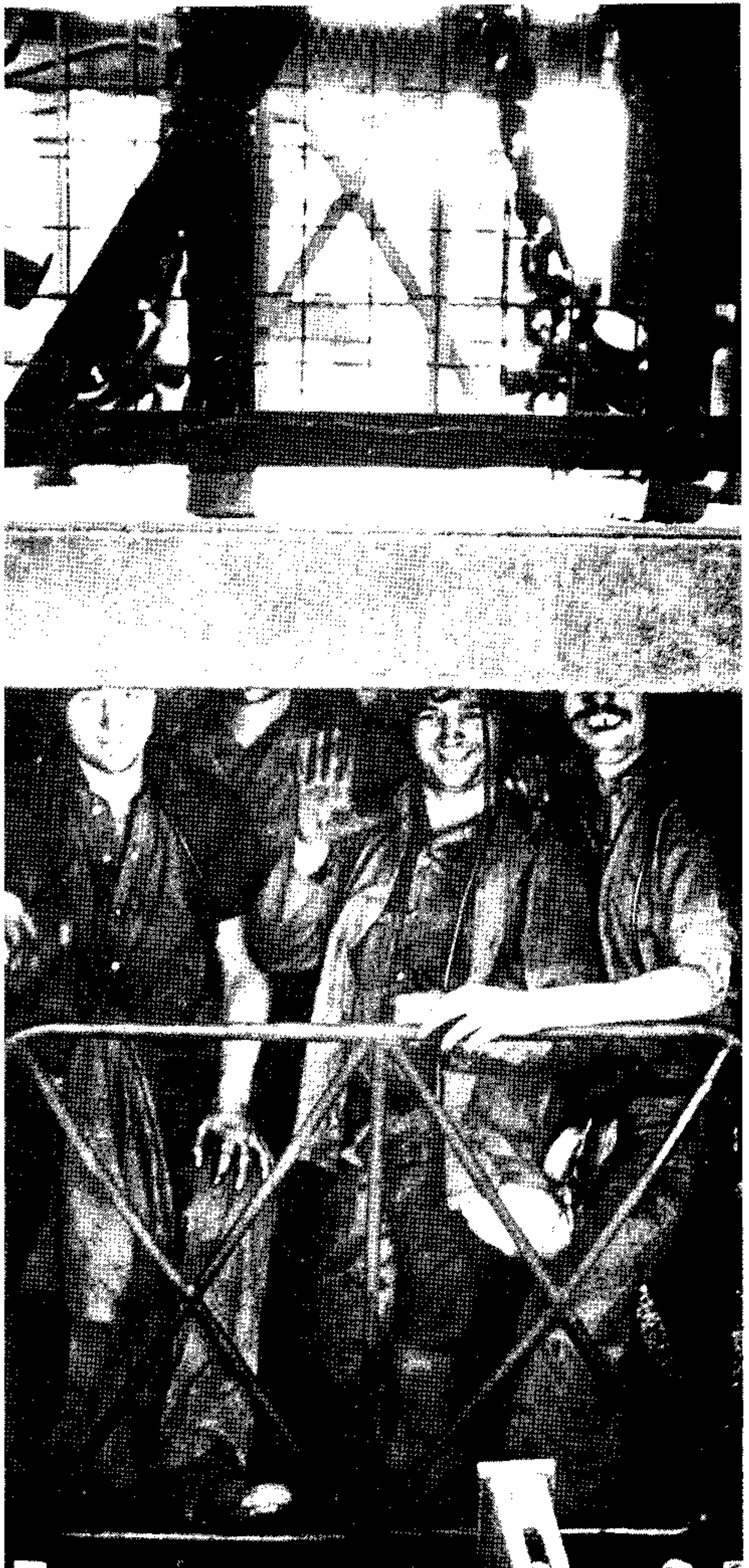
Destroy

None of this is dramatic. It is all very small scale. It is, in a phrase, trench warfare. The ruling class may win victories but they find it very difficult to take advantage of them.

The government attempt to ban trade union membership at the GCHQ at Cheltenham illustrates another aspect of the current balance of forces. It is quite clear that, whatever the outcome of the immediate issue, this is an instance of the way in which the ruling class can very easily become over confident and make mistakes.

The government have wanted to attack and if possible destroy the civil service unions for a long time. The CPSA, in particular, was one of the unions singled out by the secret report prepared for Thatcher before she ever became prime minister. It was identified as one of those unions which it would not only be desirable but also possible to severely defeat.

In reality, of course, the civil service unions, while displaying most of the features of the downturn, proved to be less of a walkover than the Tories might have



Going down to defeat?

expected. Although the government has been able to beat them in the set-piece confrontations over pay, and to win most of the local battles, like the long dispute involving workers in the Oxford and Birmingham DHSS offices last year, they have not been able to smash the union.

In the aftermath of their victory over the NGA the situation at the GCHQ must have seemed set for a walkover. Although the place is quite large, and thus has many of the features of the large unit of production which normally lead to high levels of trade union organisation, the staff are subject to security vetting which might be expected to weed out potential militants. Also there are a relatively high proportion of senior staff. Traditionally, in fact, GCHQ has provided one of the bases of the right wing inside the civil service unions.

Given that the government could cloak their union-busting intentions in talk of 'national security', it must have seemed as though it would be possible to get away with their plans with little or no resistance. Things, of course, turned out rather differently.

Miscalculate

Not only was there an angry response from the workers at GCHQ itself, but there were walk-outs in a wide range of civil service offices as well. It did not require a great degree of insight to generalise on this occasion. If the Tories could get away with banning unions in one office now, then they could ban them in another tomorrow and throughout the civil service the day after.

Spontaneous, or very nearly spontaneous, responses from civil servants is one thing, a serious fight back quite another. If the initial response showed how an over-confident government could miscalculate, the overall union response showed why the miscalculation need not necessarily be disastrous for the Tories.

Industrial action was clearly the way to win. The attack on trade union organisation is so clear that it was quite possible to generalise within the civil service and use that as a springboard to mobilise a more general fight back.

The response of the bureaucracy was quite the reverse. Token strikes they were quite prepared to tolerate since these strengthen their hand, but all-out action was quite another thing.

The union leaders made it quite clear from the first that they accepted the government's cover story of the danger to national security as a legitimate question for discussion and started their campaign off on that premise.

However much argument about the fact that there was no risk to national security from the unions might provide a popular debating point, the fact is that the logic was that the unions would be hamstrung in organising resistance.

John Sheldon, General Secretary of the Civil Service Union made it quite clear at the first angry mass meeting that the national interest came first. Arguing against strike action at Cheltenham he said: 'Geoffrey Howe will only jump up and say that we're threatening national security. Anyway, it's

not an issue for industrial action.'

Ruling out strike action at Cheltenham meant that the union had no intention of using it as a base to turn the protest strikes in the rest of the civil service into all-out action. They are already talking of settling for a 'no-strike' agreement. And going to the TUC, after the experience of the NGA, ruled out any possibility of serious solidarity action.

The TUC's initial response was to threaten to break off all political and economic contacts with the government. That is the sort of threat which must have had Thatcher shaking in her boots. It is worth noting that it was the allegedly left-wing Alan Sapper of the ACTT that came out with this pathetic threat. Apparently even this was too militant for Len Murray.

It is also worth noting that the Labour Party was very quick to take up this issue. In contrast with their evasions, silences and luke-warm support over the NGA dispute at Warrington, the leadership of the Labour Party made a lot of noise about this.

Neil Kinnock made it quite clear just how far the Labour Party was concerned to defend workers' rights when he began his attack on Thatcher by claiming that:

'The shameful and shamefaced decision on GCHQ was just another pathetic example of the way in which you are willing to surrender British interest to American pressure.'

The Labour Party, right, centre and left, made this question of the 'national interest' and US pressure the centre of their argument. According to no less a 'leftist' than Eric Heffer the ban was a slur on the loyalty and patriotism of civil servant trade unionists who were being treated as 'subversive, unpatriotic and disloyal'.

No one in the Labour Party started off by saying that what was at stake was trade union organisation and that if that interfered with the war preparation of the government then so much the better. Indeed, so loyal was the Labour Party that none of them even seem to have been sufficiently indelicate as to raise the question of what purpose the massive snooping operation actually served.

Something which can apparently eavesdrop on the conversations of Moscow taxi drivers might, just conceivably, be part of a set up that was bugging conversations nearer home—say between shop stewards and their

members.

The Labour Party saw the whole thing as a chance to pursue the popular theme of having a go at Reagan and kept very quiet about the class issues involved. If their defence of the national interest over the Falklands war was a political tragedy, this was a repetition of the same politics, this time as farce.

The long running dispute between the NUM and the NCB provides another set of sad lessons in the current state of the class struggle. The NUM leadership, and Arthur Scargill in particular, focus two of the currently most pervasive illusions amongst the left in the trade unions.

The first is that left wing leaders are really what count. The second is that the best way to carry out a struggle is to 'box clever' and to try to outmanoeuvre the employers.

Localised

The background to the current overtime ban is a long term offensive by the NCB which has gathered pace under the direction of the new chief MacGregor. The closure of pits and the shrinking of the workforce continues.


Three years ago the South Wales miners took action against closure and were able to close down their own coalfield and spread the dispute to other areas. The NCB and the government quickly backed down and agreed a 'review procedure' which it was claimed at the time represented a major blow against redundancies.

Unfortunately, it has proved impossible to sustain the level of pressure and organisation which forced the employers to retreat that time. 17 of the 23 pits saved in 1981 have since been closed.

The election of a 'left leadership' in the shape of Arthur Scargill has made no significant difference to this process. Although there has been resistance to some closures it has remained localised. Other collieries have closed with the agreement of the workforce.

What is clear is that left speeches by officials are not the answer to the downturn. Even with a leadership which undoubtedly *wants* to fight the Tories, the NUM is not immune from the downturn and rhetoric is no substitute for organisation when it comes to generalising resistance from one

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threatened pit to the whole of an industry.

At the same time, of course, there has been substantial militancy by miners on other issues. The dispute starting at Dodsworth pit in September and spreading to involve 14,000 miners in the Doncaster area is the best known example, but there have been a large number of others. The possibility of building towards a fightback certainly exists.

The response of Scargill, however, has not been to start from the real resistance and go forward from there, but to try to box clever. While the rhetoric of opposition to MacGregor, the Tories and all their works has remained as strident as ever, in reality there has been a shift to the right.

September provided a classic example of that shift. The month saw miners at Cardowan pit in Scotland and Brinlliw in Wales call off action against closure, and workers at Lynemouth colliery in Northumberland voting for closure against the advice of their local officials.

Amicable

It also saw the Barnsley dispute and another strike at Monkton Hall colliery in Scotland against a management productivity offensive. Management throughout the NCB were clearly getting ready for the annual wage round by tightening up their control and winning whatever battles they could.

Scargill's most publicised activity during this period was a remarkably amicable meeting with MacGregor. Despite the management offensive on closure and productivity he said of their 3 September meeting:

'The most encouraging thing about this meeting was that it did not produce the inevitable and immediate conflict which had been predicted.' He was '...pleased that we have got someone as chairman who's prepared to go out and meet the membership.'

This was no flash in the pan. A month later, after the NCB had made its 5.2 percent wage offer and precipitated the current dispute, Scargill was again calling for a common approach with management.

On 13 October he told the press that the NUM wanted a common approach on reducing interest rates paid by the industry, an introduction of import controls on foreign produced coal and oil, and the introduction of subsidies to match those given elsewhere in Europe. An end to pit closures was added as an afterthought.

Only after a month of the overtime ban was this attempt to do a deal called off by the NUM.

The call for an overtime ban to win an increased pay offer was, in this context, a classic bureaucratic manoeuvre. They had failed to prevent closures, had failed to support battles against the management offensive, and had devoted a lot of effort to finding common ground with the employer. Now the NUM leadership chose a form of industrial action which enabled them to bypass the need for a ballot of the membership and thus the need for a serious campaign.

No doubt the overtime ban decision was and is completely constitutional, and no doubt also most of the *right wingers* on the



Long time no seam

national executive support it, but from the point of view of serious class warfare such a course of action is a classic of bureaucratic stupidity.

Although the ban is capable of hurting the NCB, through maintenance problems as well as specialised shortages arising at a time of general glut, it takes a long time to have an effect.

Its effect on miners' pay packets, however, is immediate. Furthermore, it does not hit all miners equally. In particular, the winders stood to lose very large sums of money very quickly. The action is one which tends to split the membership rather than unite them.

In fact, winders in the North Staffordshire coal field were already threatening to break the ban by the beginning of December. According to the NCB figures, which of course must be treated with great suspicion, the average miner had lost £112 from wages by 14 December. But that is the average figure: some skilled craftsmen who work weekend overtime as a matter of course were allegedly losing around the average sum *every week*.

Such substantial financial pressures must tend to divide a workforce, and an overtime ban is such a passive form of action that it does not provide the unifying experience of common struggle to overcome the splitting pressures of financial hardships.

There is no doubt that the low vote for the left wing candidate in the ballot for the post of general secretary reflected the consequences of this pressure. The refusal to hold a ballot on the NCB offer, while quite proper, provided the press and the right wing with a big lever and the NUM leadership had nothing but appeals to the members' loyalty

to use against it.

The vote was not a vote on the pay offer, but it was a sign of the way in which the leadership had cut itself off from the membership.

At the time of writing things look very bad for the NUM. Only a serious miscalculation by the NCB can stop them inflicting a severe defeat on the union.

The lessons are very simple. The election of a left leadership does not alter the balance of forces in any fundamental way. To pin your hopes on a Scargill or whoever is to delude yourself as to the real nature of the problem.

In the mines as elsewhere organisation and solidarity have been eroded by the impact of the downturn and there is no quick substitute for the task of rebuilding.

Where 'left' leaderships try to short circuit that process by engaging in cunning schemes which avoid the difficult task of winning the rank and file to action, then they invariably end up in disaster.

In the NUM for instance, a few more rounds of this sort of boxing clever and the left leadership will have succeeded in handing the union back to the right; these sorts of schemes do not even work in bureaucratic terms.

The possibility of resistance is still there: *The Times*, the civil servants, and the miners' response to attempts to break the overtime ban show this. Piecemeal, local resistance needs to be co-ordinated. That, unfortunately, takes time and it takes a revolutionary socialist perspective—that is one that starts from the base of shopfloor organisation rather than the 'dizzy heights' of capturing the bureaucracy.

The balance of class forces

We publish here a transcript of Chris Harman's speech to the January National Committee of the SWP summing up the lessons of the NGA dispute at the end of last year.

The period of the NGA confrontation at Warrington was almost like looking back ten years. In terms of the way the party had to operate, in terms of the whole tone of our politics, things were quite different for a period of two or three weeks than they had been in the two or three years before, and certainly than they have been in the month or so afterwards.

Suddenly, for a two or three week period, the party was operating in a different environment. There was mass leafleting, mass agitation, arguments on a mass scale. The whole tone of politics was radically different. And not only for revolutionaries. All through that period on the front pages of the newspapers — when there were newspapers — there was Eddie Shah and Tony Dubbins. The question of the confrontation, of the trade union law, was suddenly central to the whole of British politics.

That wasn't true in November and it isn't true now, but for a brief period it was crucial. We have to look at that experience because it gave the party for a very short time, a glimmer of what an upturn can be. It was a glimmer of what it means for the things we argue to be central to politics.

Put it another way: for most of the last few years, in terms of political argument, Labour Party members have had the running over us. I'm not saying that they've won the arguments, but that what they have had to say has, for most people, seemed practical: votes, elections, don't let Thatcher back in, go out and canvass, and so on and so on.

We have been swimming completely against the tide. Then suddenly, the things we talk about — industrial confrontation, the working class is not finished, the working class has the power to change society — suddenly all that fitted. The things we said made sense. The things the Labour Party said didn't. In terms of Warrington, the



Labour Party was a nullity. Kinnock was very careful to keep his mouth shut about the Warrington confrontation until it was over, when he said he wished it hadn't taken place.

For a very brief period, politics was the politics of the working class struggle. But there is a problem, because that period was just an interruption in the downturn. It was like something in brackets. You have the downturn before it, and then after it. What I want to do is to examine the character of the struggle and the political lessons we draw from it.

When we talk about the downturn we mean a series of defeats, each one sapping the confidence of workers so that it is easier for the employers to inflict a further defeat. Each defeat deepens demoralisation, destroys confidence. Each defeat deepens sectionalism, because if you go on strike other workers don't come out and support you and show solidarity. There is a feeling that you are isolated before you even begin the struggle. You look to the trade union bureaucracy for support, because they seem to be the only force capable of offering support, and then they don't support you, and you are even more demoralised than before.

If you look back over the past four years, this was the character of the steel workers' strike four years ago, it was the character of the railway strikes eighteen months ago and, at the end of the day, it was the character of the hospital workers' strike. This was the

character of the Telecoms strike too. There was strike after strike and defeat after defeat. But when we say all this, we have to add one thing. None of these defeats has been decisive. The reason none have been decisive is that none of them have destroyed the basic organisation which workers have.

The fact is that there are still around 200,000 shop stewards in Britain. If an employer wants to sack a shop steward, he still has to think about it, to go away and worry about it. Personnel managers still have nervous breakdowns worrying about how they can get rid of individuals from the factory. The fact that they do get rid of them, is of course a sign of the downturn. But there are *limits* to the downturn.

I'll use an analogy, a military one, first used by Gramsci. At the beginning of the first world war, all the powers thought it was going to be a three month operation, a blitzkrieg with the armies marching on each other's capitals. Instead, what happened was that when the armies broke through the front line of the enemy, they found a network of trenches. It took days to fight ten yards. That went on for four years, and the end came not because one side finally broke through, but because the effort of continuing the war finally caused the German military machine to collapse.

Now from the point of view of the British ruling class, when they look at the working class movement they see something like a network of trenches. They smash the steel workers, but there are still 80,000 or 100,000 shop stewards in engineering. They smash the railway strikes, but they still have to negotiate over the one-man operation of the St Pancras-Bedford line trains. They get it, but they have to negotiate. It still takes a year to get that in operation, even after they have smashed ASLEF. They smash the hospital workers, but they still face a series of small disputes in the hospitals over conditions, health and safety and so on. Every time the ruling class break through they face a 'network of trenches'.

It is true that each breakthrough makes the next one easier but nevertheless they feel bogged down in this long drawn out war of attrition. Faced with a world capitalist crisis, they are some help in dealing with the profitability problems. But despite all these victories of British capitalism, they feel themselves no nearer to solving these problems.

The victories of Thatcher are very impressive, until you compare them with the needs of British capitalism. *The Financial Times* says that British capitalism needs to cut wages by 25 percent in order to restore the rate of profit. Yet in the last year, wages in private industry have gone up by 8 percent compared with inflation of around 5 percent. Wages in the nationalised industries have also gone up by 8 per cent. In the rest of the public sector wages are just keeping pace with inflation at around 4 or 5 percent.

So one large chunk of the working class is just maintaining its living standards, another large chunk is seeing them rise. But British capitalism requires an enormous *cut* in living standards.

Mass strike

In their efforts to break through you get situations like the NGA, where really the ruling class has to send its troops over the top, into battle, and take the risk of what may happen. It is then that you have the possibility of the piecemeal resistance suddenly generalising itself.

Let me illustrate what I mean. In the last year or fifteen months there have been four mass strike movements in the Western world, all approaching general strikes.

There were mass strikes approaching general strike proportions in Quebec, in Canada, and the same in Belgium. A mass strike in British Columbia — one worker in ten in the province on strike with all the television and papers discussing whether a general strike was going to break out.

In Holland, there were a series of sectional strikes building up, again the mass strike phenomenon.

In each case there was a situation where the ruling class were pushing much harder than it normally would. It was taking the risk of pushing harder because it was under pressure to solve the profitability crisis. When it took that risk, it suddenly touched a nerve inside the working class and there was a fightback. You suddenly saw a passive, acquiescent working class movement coming to life, and got a glimmer of what real

mass strike action is about.

People often think these countries have better working class traditions than Britain. In fact they are by and large worse. Take Belgium, where there has been a downturn for about ten years. The working class is very split, not only on sectional lines, but is also divided by the hatred between the two national communities.

The government announced cuts. A group of railway workers walked out on unofficial strike, and within three or four days you had a general public sector strike.

Suddenly out of nowhere you had the glimmer of the upturn.

Again, in British Columbia, after four years of extreme right wing Thatcherite government in which the trade union leaders retreated again and again, the government announced massive cuts, and suddenly mass strikes were taking place.

Forty thousand government workers were out on strike. Forty thousand teachers had a ballot on strike action. The ballot went 55 percent for the strike, 45 percent against. Despite that the strike went ahead.

In spite of predictions by the press that the strike would be unsuccessful, there was one hundred percent support. Every school was picketed, even though the strike was illegal. Picketing was illegal, but if you went to the picket lines, teachers would say things like 'Really, we shouldn't be picketing here. Will you take my place so I can go and picket down the road?'

There was a generalised ferment in Vancouver. Every night groups of four or five hundred workers — in a city of about a million — would be discussing how to organise, how to carry the strike forward.

So you can see how this mass action can develop in the midst of downturn. The basic organisation of the working class is still there. The network of trenches is intact. When the ruling class goes a little over the top, then they spur resistance.

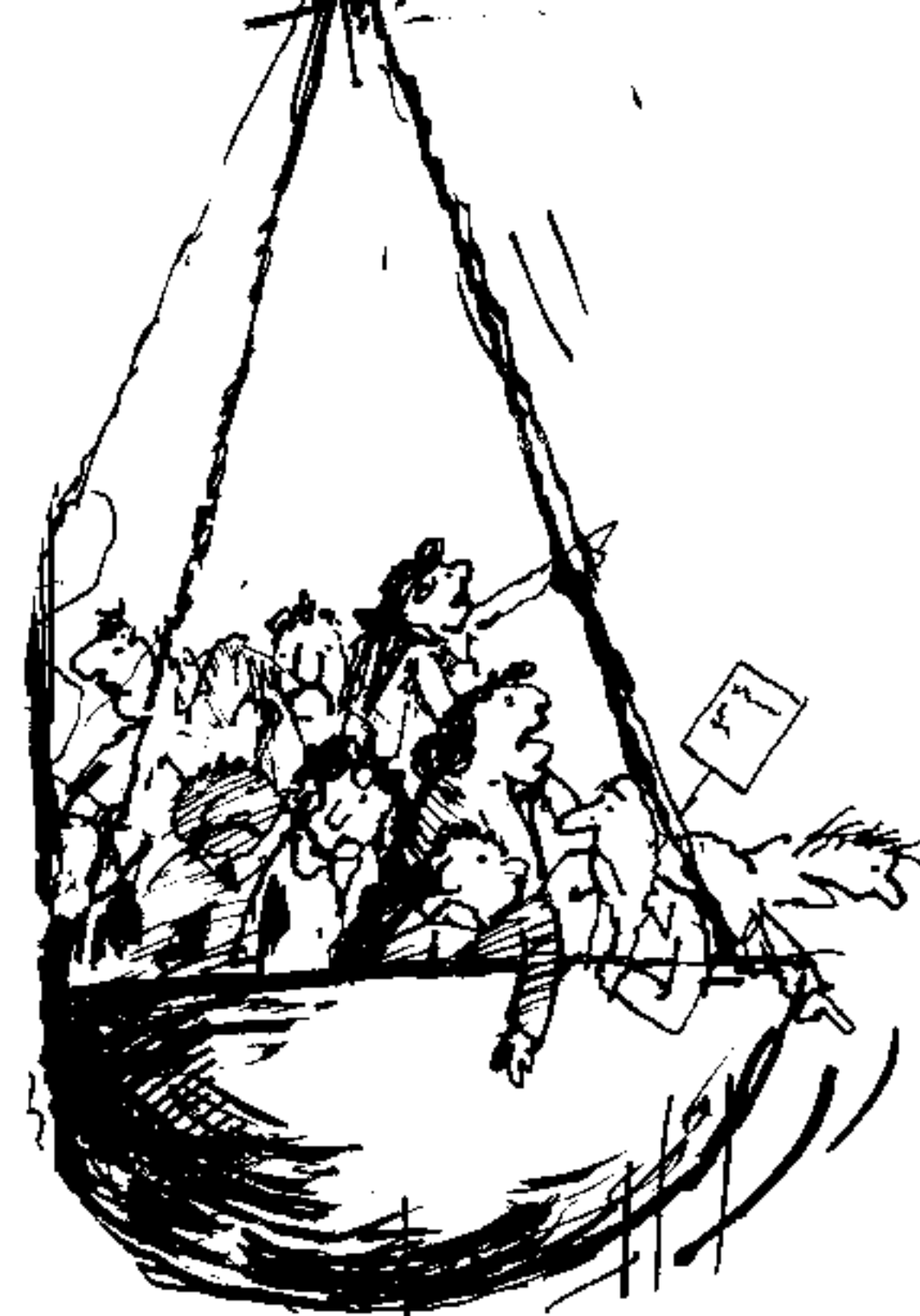
When the resistance starts to take place, then you find that all the confusion and demoralisation temporarily disappears. Once people begin fighting, they stir other workers to action and confidence begins to pour back at a tremendous speed.

Looking at the NGA dispute in those terms, it didn't amount to mass strike. What is however clear is that the ruling class faced a problem.

In order to weaken the defensive network of steward organisation, they need the industrial relations laws. When they introduced those laws — the Prior and Tebbit laws — they had to think very carefully about how to bring them in so that they would not immediately be tested in practice.

It is important for us to understand that the main purpose of the laws was to threaten people, not for the laws themselves to be used in the first place. The ruling class lived in fear that there would be a confrontation early in the Tory government, when the law would be used and a massive group of workers would defy it and bring the law into ridicule. This is what happened in 1972.

The theory behind the Prior and Tebbit laws was this. Use it first in little, niggling ways. That establishes its credibility. Then strengthen the law. Use it on more important



things. Again, establish its credibility and use it on more important things still. At the end of the day it's chopping the movement up completely.

All through this process they were thinking that if the law was to be tried in practice, they would far rather it was used against, for instance, six building workers in North Wales than the general secretary of a powerful union in central London. They wanted to establish its credibility over a series of small disputes.

The union leaders would see it working and become afraid for their funds. They would be frightened of coming up against the law and therefore would do the job for the ruling class.

The law wasn't designed to smash the union leaderships. It was designed to pressurise them. To do that the law had to be demonstrated to work without it being seriously tested against any major group of workers, at least in its early stages.

Minority

In the case of the NGA one individual, Eddie Shah, backed up by a minority organisation within the ruling class, the Institute of Directors, really felt that this general approach was too slow.

For Eddie Shah, the calculation was: 'I'm a small printing employer. If I can smash the NGA, I can become a bigger printing employer, at the expense of other print employers.'

In the case of the Institute of Directors, the calculation was: 'The CBI and the Engineering Employers' Federation have been pussy-footing around for far too long. The employers can get away with much more than they are doing. We can use Eddie Shah to confront a major union and raise the stakes. If we raise the stakes, the rest of the ruling class will be forced to back us up.'

So the ruling class didn't sit down and decide to confront the NGA. They were forced into battle by a minority on their own side on terms and in conditions the mass of the rul-

ing class would not have chosen.

If anyone doubts that the ruling class were afraid of the battle, they should look at the evidence. Robert Maxwell, head of the British Printing and Communications Corporation, the largest non-Fleet Street printing employer in Britain, offered four million pounds to Shah to withdraw the action against the NGA.

Look at the speed with which the attempts by the Fleet Street employers to get a lock out collapsed at the beginning of December. You can see that the mass of the ruling class weren't really ready for the confrontation and wouldn't really have chosen it.

Nevertheless they were forced into it. That was because they needed the anti-union laws to try to solve the profitability crisis of British capitalism. But once they have the anti-union laws they are vulnerable to all sorts of accidents, to maverick employers starting to use the law and forcing the rest of the ruling class to fight over it. That's what happened. The result was that they provoked resistance and there was an infusion of confidence into the minority of the working class who want to fight.

For three weeks the minority suddenly felt that they could fight the Tories, that they could really struggle. It was the glimmer of the upturn in the midst of the downturn. Not on the same scale as the general public sector strikes in Belgium or British Columbia or Quebec, but an inkling of it.

But we also saw something else which holds very important lessons for us. When we talk about the mass strike, we must not confuse two distinct kinds of mass strike action. When Rosa Luxemburg wrote her marvellous book *The Mass Strike, the Party and the Trade Unions* she was talking about a mass strike in the period of the upturn.

That is when workers start fighting, usually over some quite small economic issue, the fight gives the confidence and they move to the political. There is generalisation and one struggle leads on to another. It is a brilliant description of how you can get this elemental upsurge of workers' struggles—like Poland in 1980, or France in 1968.

In these upsurges of struggle the impetus comes from below. Almost invariably the organisation comes from the bottom. The mass strike of the upturn is organised and carried through from below upwards.

But there is another kind of mass strike that we have seen lately. I would call that the 'bureaucratic' mass strike. It is not that there is never an element of pressure from below in it, but what happens is that the offensive of the ruling class touches a chord of resistance in the working class and the trade union leaderships move very very rapidly to generalise it in order to control it.

Paradox

There are historical examples of this kind of mass strike. In Britain in 1926, the general strike took place after five years of bitter downturn. The basic organisation of the class was still there, though weakened by the downturn. The consciousness of resistance to the ruling class was there, but the element of leadership from below which could have provided an alternative focus to the bureaucracy in the organisation of the strike had decayed during the period of downturn.

The shop stewards' movement by 1926 was infinitely weaker than it is today. That element of organisation from below was very weak indeed.

There has always been a paradox which

has puzzled many Marxists and other historians. On the one hand the fantastic solidarity of the strike, the fantastic power of the strike, the fact that many more workers took action than anyone expected. On the other hand the bureaucracy could turn the strike on and off just like turning a switch at a power station. The complete control over the strike which existed from above is one of its most remarkable features.

The mass strikes which have occurred recently in Belgium, Holland, British Columbia, Quebec—have this character. The years of defeat have sapped the confidence of workers in their own forms of rank and file organisation. They lose confidence to rely on themselves when it comes to struggle. They are forced into struggle. The bureaucracy takes control in order to ditch the struggle, and is able to do so *because* of the absence of the traditions of organisation from below.

Look at two British examples: contrast the NGA dispute with Pentonville ten years ago. The difference certainly didn't lie in the behaviour of the trade union leaders.

When the dockers were in Pentonville in 1972, the then head of the TUC was constantly on to them, trying to get them to appear before the Industrial Relations Court, begging them to recognise the court. We know that Jack Jones, the head of the Transport and General at the time, was putting every pressure on them to appear before the court. They didn't. The reason they didn't was because the organisation was from below.

Not all the dockers were so well organised, but there was a minority of militants and activists who were organised independently of the bureaucracy and who could, on important occasions, carry the mass of dock-



ers with them.

In terms of spreading the action, they didn't see it as lobbying the general council of the TUC or knocking on Bill Keys' door — or even Vincent Flynn's — and saying, 'Spread the strike for us'. They saw it in terms of going straight from the docks to the newspaper chapels in Fleet Street, straight from the London docks to places like Sheerness and the docks on the Humber, taking and spreading the action themselves.

The reason was that they came out of a period of 20 years of struggle, a period of lots of small victories — 20 years of the consolidation of organisation in which they relied upon themselves. This meant that when the generalisation came they relied upon themselves.

The NGA dispute came after seven or eight years of demoralisation and defeat. When the generalisation came you didn't find Fleet Street workers going to the docks off their own bat, or even going to Warrington off their own bat. The whole thing was organised by the bureaucracy.

No one knows the names of most of the people who organised the resistance over Pentonville. With the NGA dispute it all centres on Wade and Dubbins, the lefts and rights on the General Council and so on. All was done from above.

Because of the downturn you didn't have the rank and file organisation which can blossom into an alternative leadership during a mass struggle.

The mass strike of the upturn and the bureaucratic mass strike are different, but this difference should not be exaggerated. There isn't a Chinese wall between the two.

If you look at the mass strikes in the Western world over the last eighteen months, and at the NGA dispute, and ask why the bureaucracy settled so quickly, the answer is only partly fear of the law. The other reason is fear that the confidence generated by mass strike action will throw up forces of rank and file organisation which will take control of the strike away from the bureaucracy.

Alternative

In the British general strike of 1926, the strike could be turned on and off, and a crucial reason why it was turned off was because the bureaucracy was in fear that the councils of action which were springing up in the localities could form an alternative leadership to take control of the struggle.

In the NGA dispute, the bureaucracy called it off mainly because they were afraid of the implications in terms of the law to their funds and so on. But they also called it off because they live in fear of any movement from below which could take control and spread confidence among workers that they no longer need the bureaucrats.

Although there is this difference between the bureaucratic mass strike and the mass strike led from below, one can lead into the other. This is absolutely crucial for us.

One historical example of this is May 1968. That began with the student protests. That was an initiative from below, but not from workers. Then the union bureaucracy, in order to salve their consciences and show



that they were prepared to do something about the students' struggle, called an archetypal bureaucratic mass strike.

The two union federations, the CGT and CFDT, called a one day general strike. The workers were to be marched through the centre of Paris and then put back on the coaches and sent home. The bureaucracy would have then done its bit for the students. The problem was that the workers began to feel their power and instead of going back and sitting at home they occupied factories, spread the action and generalised it.

There *can* be a move from the bureaucratic mass strike to the real mass strike. Our activity in any such situation must be to try to achieve this and to break down the barriers between the two and create the new elements of organisation from below.

This leads back to everything we have said about the downturn. You can't build the elements of generalisation if you assume they are already there. Understanding the downturn is absolutely crucial to understanding how you intervene in these types of actions when they do break out. What we have been saying about rank and file organisation in the downturn is that the basic elements aren't there. You don't have the individual militants who are confident because they know they can carry the shop floor with them, who have been putting over clear political arguments and who come together in some kind of spontaneous organisation to take control of the strike.

When you have the phenomenon of mass action in the downturn, you see that politics is absolutely central. If you don't have that

basic organisation from below which can coalesce to provide an alternative to the trade union bureaucracy, then you have to talk about something else taking its place. Hard political organisation becomes extremely important.

The NGA dispute made me go back and look at the twenties, the Minority Movement and the general strike. What is clear is that the idea that you could create an alternative leadership in the downturn by revolutionaries coming together with reformists in some kind of rank and file organisation didn't work. You were not talking about reformists who were all leaders in their areas and who were confident in their own abilities to mobilise. They were reformists even at the rank and file level who relied upon the 'lefts' in the General Council.

They relied on the lefts on the General Council in 1926 because they did not have the confidence that they could lead things in their own factories. What engineering shop stewards that there were in 1926 did not have that confidence and they looked instead to the left wing union leaders, the Purcells, the Swales and the Hicks. They absorbed their speeches, but when it actually came to the general strike Purcell and the rest ran to the right at the speed of light.

That's why the experience of the 1920s is important. If you read Trotsky on 1926, he says:

'What was the result of the Stalinists' British experiment? The Minority Movement, embracing almost a million members, seemed very promising but it bore the germs of destruction within itself. The masses knew only the left leaders, and these left friends in a serious test shamed and betrayed the proletariat. The revolutionary workers were thrown into confusion and sank into apathy. They naturally extended their disappointment to the Communist Party itself.

'The Communist Party was only a passive element in the whole mechanism of betrayal. The Minority Movement was reduced to zero. The Communist Party was restricted to the position of a negligible sect.'

Upturn

What he was actually saying is that when you talk about that sort of uprising taking place, unless you prepare for it with very, very hard politics during the period that precedes the upturn, during the downturn itself, then when the upturn takes place people will look towards the left leaders. The left leaders will betray them, and the whole thing collapses like a house of cards.

If you look at the NGA dispute and ask how did militants outside the ranks of the SWP see it, you find that they thought that suddenly there were these people they had never heard of before, Wade and Dubbins, taking a clear stand. They were being militant and leading the thing forward. The militants were enthused into activity. Wade and Dubbins ratted, and as soon as they did the whole thing collapsed.

The only way to avoid that is by having a clear political organisation. Politics is much, much more central in the situation of 1984

than it was in the situation of 1972. Politics was much more central in 1926 than it was in 1905.

This might seem odd when you think that 1905 in Russia was so near revolution. But 1905 was marked by continuous agitation from below, spontaneous activity from below. 1926 was a fight forced upon the working class by the bosses' offensive. There were only two alternatives: either it was led by the trade union bureaucrats or there was a political organisation in the working class capable of leading and carrying the thing through.

Let us look at the outcome of the NGA dispute. For the employing class the outcome was a victory that they never expected. When Prior and Tebbit sat down to draw up their laws they did not think: 'We are going to screw the NGA good and proper.' That was the last thing in the world they thought about.

The right wing of the TUC, the left wing of the TUC and the NGA leadership delivered them a victory that they did not even dream they would get.

Overrule

The right wing of the TUC is hardly worth talking about. The Chapples and the Duffys and so on are barely worth mentioning.

The left wing of the TUC behaved very, very cleverly. They only made one mistake — they got a majority at the EPOC meeting. But even when by accident they got that majority they then allowed Len Murray to walk out of the meeting and state that there would be no support for the NGA. You did not get Moss Evans standing up and contradicting him. You did not get Bill Keys, the Chairman of the TUC, who could claim the constitutional authority to overrule Murray, using his credentials to contradict Murray.

At the meeting of the General Council, you had Dubbins saying that if the NGA lost the dispute it was important how they lost. The best way for them to lose, of course, was to blame it all on the General Council. The left could get off the hook by claiming they were in a minority. The NGA leadership could get off the hook by claiming that it was all the fault of the TUC.

If you look at what happened in the dispute, the TUC left did not behave any differently from the right. I am not saying that there is always and invariably no difference between the left and the right, but the fact is that the bureaucracy did not even vacillate towards the left.

No one can produce even one circular from the TGWU National Office explaining the importance of the NGA dispute to the members. There was not one leaflet from the Docks section of the TGWU to dockers arguing that if the closed shop went on Fleet Street it would go on the docks. The 'lefts' did not even do the minimal things.

Having got a victory they did not expect, the ruling class are now in a stronger position than they were before the NGA dispute. The union leadership will now use the defeat of the NGA as an example to try to stop any other group of workers trying to break the law.

Before the NGA caved in it seemed quite

likely that there would be a strike by the NUJ about Dimbleby and his scab newspapers. After the NGA defeat I am willing to bet that the NGA will not fight on the Dimbleby business. The NUJ leadership have the perfect excuse. They will argue that if the powerful NGA can't win then the NUJ has got no chance at all.

The employers will exploit the breakthrough that has taken place and take advantage of it. The terms imposed on the shipyard workers are a result of the defeat of the NGA. If Fleet Street had been out in all-out opposition to anti-union laws then you would not have seen the shipyard leaders cave in in the way that they did. Even the shipyard employers would not have dared issue the demands that they did. They quickly took advantage of the employers' victory.

That will create real problems for our organisation. When anyone suffers a big defeat they really hope that things will be nice and quiet for a bit. You hope to have time to rest, recover and restore yourself.

The general climate will move to the right. Workers will be more demoralised after the NGA experience than before. Any battles that take place will be fought under much harder circumstances.

People sometimes think that if you have a defeat then workers learn the lessons of the defeat automatically and move to the left. It does not work like that. Defeats actually breed defeatism. They breed demoralisation.

During the NGA dispute revolutionaries

could feel very confident arguing with reformists because there was a concrete example of activity. I am told that all the 'lefties' working for the GLC were going around saying that maybe the working class does exist after all and tearing up their copies of *Farewell to the Working Class*. Now they will be sticking them together again. They will now say that the NGA defeat proves that they were right. They will say the working class can't fight, that they are sectional, that there is no resistance.

We face a war of attrition on even more difficult terms. Marx analysed the difficulties:

'The enemy are moving forward, forward, forward. You are on the retreat, more and more closed in, more and more defeatism in your own midst. A resistance too prolonged in a besieged camp is demoralising in itself. It implies suffering, fatigue, long periods without rest, illness, and the continual presence, not of that acute danger that tempers, but that chronic danger which destroys.'

That is going to be the mood inside much of the working class in the period ahead. The danger is that it will influence revolutionaries too; that we ourselves come to believe that every battle will end like Warrington. That is not the case. Because the ruling class is so cocky they can actually provoke battles on the wrong ground for them. Unfortunately, no-one knows whether they will slip up tomorrow or in a year's time or in ten years' time, but we must prepare now for that conflict.

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In the beginning...

When Marx died in 1883 the total number of trade unionists in Britain was well below a million. A considerable proportion of them were organised in small, often localised, craft societies and membership fluctuated markedly with the trade cycle. Collective bargaining, where it took place at all, was typically local, firm by firm, and sometimes, literally 'piece by piece', as in the boilermaking trades.

The union officialdom was not conspicuous, not an influential social layer, and had little *national* presence or cohesion (although the TUC had existed since 1868).

When Engels died, twelve years later, the situation had changed somewhat as a result of the mass strikes of the late eighties and the rise of the 'New Unionism', the organisation of the unskilled. By 1892 there were about one and a half million trade unionists, many in quite big unions, and although the numbers fell off for a while they were climbing towards two million by the end of the century.

Neither Marx nor Engels, therefore, had much experience of *stable, mass* working class organisation. Neither seriously discussed, a few casual comments aside, the question of the social role of the labour bureaucracy.

Understandably enough. They were concerned with the enormous transformation from the mass struggle and semi-revolutionary atmosphere of the early decades of the century to the conservative, 'respectable' (and weak) trade societies of the 50s, 60s and 70s. Of course the contrast can be overstated but it is real enough.

Slopes

For Marx, it was due above all to the fact that Britain, the heartland of the new industrial capitalist order, was still the 'workshop of the world'. In the 1880s, the little town of Burnley, up on the Pennine slopes, produced about 80 percent of the *world* output of machine made carpets. And much later, in 1913, 40 percent of the total new *world* tonnage of steam ships was built in British yards, 25 percent of it on the Clyde alone.

So Marx's comment that Britain had produced not only a bourgeoisie but also a bourgeois aristocracy and bourgeoisified (to use a later term) proletariat, had a real, material basis. He was right to stress that, the *main* fact, which determined the immediate prospects for revolutionaries; equally right in predicting that this state of affairs must pass away. But the very concentration on these brute facts blinded Marx and Engels to the problem of the labour bureaucracy, even in the eighties.

Lenin too. Taking up and vastly developing Marx's insight into the reality and consequences of uneven development, produced a theory of imperialism (1916), the operative content of which, in this context, was that 'a whole layer of working men', not only in Britain but in all the ten indus-

Following the antics of the TUC of late, many socialists are looking to the election of left leaders to solve the problem. **Duncan Hallas** looks at the history of the bureaucracy and the role of its left wing.

trialised countries, had been 'bought off'—the famous theory of the 'labour aristocracy'.

Lenin himself thought of this as very much a minority—a fifth, a quarter at most. But he thought that this layer was decisive in making opportunism and reformism dominant in the workers' movement.

He was both right and wrong about this. Right in that the German pipefitter or the British boilermaker was objectively an 'aristocrat' in relation to 'his own' working class, let alone those of the Third World (in 1914 the rates of the British Engineering Union (ASE) for fitters and turners were exactly double the labourer's rates). Wrong in thinking that this layer of skilled workers was therefore irrevocably conservatised.

In the event, the mass strikes of 1917-18 in Austria-Hungary, Germany and Britain, which shook the imperialist powers to the foundations, were, in the main, led by 'labour aristocrats'. He was wrong too, in the belief that 'the most exploited and oppressed' would always be the most rebellious.

Naturally, the opposite is not true either. Marx, because he had never seen a developed Labour movement, Lenin, because such a thing did not exist in Russia, laid too little emphasis on the problem of the labour bureaucracy.

It was, in fact, the pro-imperialist English Fabians, who first pinpointed the problem. The Webbs' *History of Trade Unionism* (first edition, 1894) pointed to an important change in the, still very weak, British trade unions in the last half of the nineteenth century.

'During these years we watch a shifting of leadership from the casual enthusiast and irresponsible agitator to a class of permanent salaried officers expressly chosen out of the rank and file of trade unionists for their superior business capacity.'

The Fabian couple naturally approved of this change but it never occurred to them to doubt that what they called 'this Civil Service of the Trade Union world' was essentially conservative. They wrote:

'Whilst the points at issue no longer affect his own earnings or conditions of employment, any disputes between his members and their employers increase his work and add to his worry. The former vivid sense of the privations and subjections of the artisan life gradually fades from his mind; and he comes more and more to regard all complaints as perverse

and unreasonable...

'Unconsciously biased by distaste for the hard and unthankful work that a strike entails, he finds himself in small sympathy with the men's demands, and eventually arranges a compromise on terms distasteful to a large section of his members.'

The Webbs also noted how 'insidiously, silently, unknown even to himself' the official 'insensibly adopts more and more of the vices of his middle class neighbours'.

Now note that all this was written about the British, the first institutionalised labour movement, when it was still dominated by craft societies, which, typically, had a rather low ratio of officials to members and in which the election, and regular re-election, of *all* officials was still the norm.

Spontaneous

In fact it was a bit out of date by the time it was published. With the rise of the 'New Unionism' from 1889, and still more, in the years of the 'great revolt' of 1909-1914, union membership rose from 1,530,000 (1894) to 4,145,000 (1914) and the numbers of full-time officials rose much more than proportionately. And, typically, the officials of the new unions were appointed, not elected.

From this time on the role of this new social layer has been crucial in the class struggle.

It expanded rapidly as union membership shot up during and immediately after the First World War (reaching nearly eight and a half million at its peak in 1918). Moreover, when the decline set in, in the early twenties, the officialdom did not shrink. Hinton and Hyman make the point that 'while union membership fell drastically during the 1920s, the number of full-time officials appears actually to have increased' (*Trade Unions and Revolution*, p18. This little pamphlet is factually valuable but marred politically by a too propagandist approach.).

The influence of the bureaucracy was, of course, enormously enhanced by the growth of national negotiations and often very detailed national agreements, especially after 1914. Agreements which the bureaucracies fought to enforce on unwilling sections of the membership at the cost, often, of fighting against 'unofficial' action.

Even before 1914 this was apparent. 'Practically every one of the great strikes from 1911 to 1914 was begun as an unofficial, spontaneous movement of the workers, spreading rapidly,' wrote the CP historian, Ralph Fox.

'Only then did the reformist trade union bureaucrats lend the strike the official support of the union, while their swift acceptance in every case of the "mediation" of the Liberal government doomed the strike to semi-failure.'

It is something of a simplification but it

The shop stewards and workers committee movement of the war years did indeed make a great advance. It was forced on them by the active collaboration of practically the entire officialdom with the government and the employers. The famous statement of the Manchester conference in 1916: 'We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers but will act independently immediately they misrepresent them' is still today an excellent guideline.

The shop stewards and workers committee movement itself did not survive very long. The 1922 lock-out in the engineering trades, where its main forces were, finished it off. But out of it came an important section of the cadre of the Communist Party.

They carried over into it important elements of a critical understanding of the role of labour bureaucracies and an emphasis on rank and file organisation. Moreover, the CP's attempt to establish a rank and file oriented industrial movement from 1924 on coincided with (and to a limited extent caused) the first period in which a group of left officials played a leading role in the TUC.

These officials, or some of them, had a considerable reputation for militancy and class consciousness. AJ Cook, elected general secretary of the Miners' Federation early in 1924, had been prominent in the bitter Cambrian strike in 1910 and had become one of the leading left wingers in South Wales.

George Hicks, who had been a leading militant in the building trades in London and conspicuous for attempts at amalgamation, was now general secretary of the AUBTW (bricklayers). Alf Purcell of the furniture trades had a long history of involvement in socialist causes in Salford. Alonzo Swales (AEU) had been prominent in the amalgamation movement and was reputed to be a reliable ally of the CP.

All these men (except Cook, who favoured biblical rhetoric) spoke the language of Marxism. Cook and Purcell had joined the CP at its foundation or soon after. Significantly, both had left as the party began to exert some discipline on party union officials.

Nonetheless, it was an impressive looking crop of lefts, certainly nothing quite like it

had been seen before and, in the crucial years from 1924 to 1926, Cook, Hicks, Purcell and Swales played a leading role in the TUC, whose general secretary Bromley and his deputy Citrine were also reckoned as adhering to the left.

This leftish leadership was confronted by the ruling class offensive of 1925-26, which aimed, first of all, to break the power of the Miners' Federation, then the biggest union, as a means of bringing the rest to heel.

It responded, at first, with apparent vigour. The mine owners' ultimatum of June 1925, demanding pay cuts and increased hours, was met by the decision of a conference of executives to call for a total embargo on the movement of coal.

The government backed down to gain time. The mine owners withdrew their ultimatum and were awarded a subsidy for nine months to enable a Royal Commission to report. A temporary victory had been gained without a shot being fired.

Of course, the struggle had merely been postponed. The government set out to prepare systematically for the inevitable confrontation. The TUC, including its left wing leaders, talked left and did nothing at all. A combination of militant rhetoric (the September 1925 TUC was, in words, the most radical ever) and practical passivity prepared the way for the sell-out of May 1926.

The effect of the left leaders was twofold. They raised expectations and so, to some degree, willingness to fight and at the same time disarmed criticism and spread illusions. As Page Arnot, the first CP historian of the general strike, wrote in 1926:

'Knowledge of the existence of this left wing was at once a stimulant and a narcotic for the masses. It gave them a rallying ground, lent confidence to their leftward mood; but then it put vigilance to sleep and led to overtrustfulness.'

When the general strike was actually called, the lefts collapsed completely and, with the exception of Cook, joined the right in the catastrophic sell-out of 12 May when the strike was ignominiously called off.

It was not a matter, as it might appear in retrospect, of a conscious conspiracy to sell out. There were real conflicts between the left and the right-wing bureaucrats but they were conflicts within the framework of trade

union assumptions. The lefts, no less than the right, shrank from a showdown with the capitalist state.

Trotsky accurately described them, a few months before the general strike:

'The left faction of the General Council is distinguished by its complete ideological shapelessness and is therefore incapable of organisationally assuming the leadership of the trade union movement.'

Some of the lefts were intoxicated by their own rhetoric; all hoped and believed, or half-believed, that bluff and deception would shatter the walls of the capitalist Jericho. Sober calculation, realism and ruthless determination—all qualities displayed by the bourgeois leadership—were completely absent. And so, in the time of crisis, the left leaders proved worse than useless. They betrayed their own past as well as the working class and yet, at the same time, they were true to themselves. Left officials they had been, officials they remained.

Ultimatum

The great crisis of the middle 20s led to a shattering defeat for the working class and a prolonged period of right wing dominance in the unions. Not until some forty years later, in the late sixties, did a new group of lefts, the Scanlon-Jones leaderships, become temporarily dominant in the TUC. The outcome was a less spectacular but no less real betrayal—the Social Contract and its result, the weakened and rightward moving TUC of today.

The point, for revolutionary socialists, is that the betrayals were not primarily the consequence of individual lack of moral fibre. They were a function of the very nature of labour bureaucracies of whatever political complexions and *therefore* of the necessity to build independently of the officialdom, without any ultra-left ignoring of the (real but limited) struggle in the union machines.

Trotsky's brilliant criticism of the British CP's policy in 1925-26 with its slogan 'All Power to the General Council' was not centred on the fact that the party supported the left officials against the right (it had to), but on its *reliance* on electing left officials at the expense of its own struggle for leadership through rank and file organisations. His summary of the outcome is very pertinent to the attitude revolutionaries must have to the Broad Left Organising Committee and similar operations.

'(They were) actually subordinating the Communist Party to the Minority Movement...The masses knew as the leaders of this movement only Purcell, Hicks and Cook, whom, moreover, Moscow vouched for. These "left" friends, in a serious test, shamefully betrayed the proletariat. The revolutionary workers were thrown into confusion, sank into apathy and naturally extended their disappointment to the Communist Party itself, which has only been the passive part of this whole mechanism of perfidy and betrayal.'

It is very tempting, when shopfloor activity is hard, as it is today, to see the election of left officials as a short cut. We must remember where it is a short cut to.



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The fall of the Raj

The recent television series *The Jewel in the Crown* was based on a book by Paul Scott, the book is a fascinating study of the Raj. Here Sue Cockerill looks at Scott's Raj Quartet.

'India's always been an opportunity for quite ordinary English people — it's given us the chance to live and work like, well, a ruling class that few of us could really claim to belong to.' (*A Division of the Spoils*).

Paul Scott's four books about the end of British rule in India, upon which the TV series *The Jewel in the Crown* is based, are very much about class. Not class struggle, but class.

Of course, that in itself is not unusual in English novels. What distinguishes the Raj Quartet from a lot of modern novels—which tend to be about the marital problems of middle class couples — is the context of India in the years 1942 to 1947.

The book deals with the effect of war and political upheaval on the British in India, whose way of life is threatened by the Japanese and by the Indian nationalist movement. On the other hand the gulf between them and 'home', Britain itself, is beautifully illustrated over and over.

The war brings an influx of the 'wrong' kind of people into the army, even as officers 'appalling chaps, the sort you see in pubs along the Kingston bypass' as well as terrible dilemmas about how to exclude Indians from social situations even though they are commissioned officers 'doing their bit'.

News of the 1945 election which brought the Labour Party a landslide victory emphasised this gulf:

'The story that three senior members of the Bengal Club promptly died of apoplexy, although not without a certain macabre charm, proved to have no foundation in fact, but there was no doubt that for several days relations between many British officers and the rank and file of conscript British soldiers serving their time in India, who had voted by post and proxy, were a little distant.' (*A Division of the Spoils*).

The history which in part the book retells is history from a British point of view, or points of view. As such the nationalist movement itself figures only in terms of prominent individuals — especially the Moslem Congress politician Kasim — and as the subject of anxious speculation by the British.

Nevertheless it told me a lot I didn't already know and made me want to find out much more.

The structure of the books is rather complex, as they consist of a series of narratives by different characters. The same events — for example the story of Daphne

Manners and Hari Kumar — are told several times from different viewpoints. Believe it or not, this doesn't make the book boring, but instead allows Scott to shift perspective and time and introduce minor masterpieces like the 'unpublished memoirs of Brigadier Reid' in the first book.

Reid is almost a caricature of the stiff-upper-lipped British imperialist who thinks you just have to take a firm hand with the natives.

Entitled 'A Simple Life' these fictional memoirs deal in part with the arrest of the Congress leaders in 1942 and the events which follow. Reid expresses his view of Gandhi's call on the British to quit India like this:

'It was clear to us, however, that chaps like Gandhi had got on to our scent and were in full cry, heedless of the ravenous yellow pack that was onto them, indeed on to all of us. On 6 April a few bombs fell on Madras. Even that didn't seem to bring the Indians to their senses. In fact they blamed us more than they blamed the enemy. Inspired by Mr Gandhi they had got hold of the idea that there was no quarrel between India and Japan.' (*The Jewel in the Crown*)

Scott has captured very well the kind of mystified indignation which people like Reid must have felt at the strange unwillingness of Indians to fight in another British war.

Patriotism

At the heart of the four books is the figure of Hari Kumar. He is the central symbol, though not the central character. He represents the failure of the Raj in its own terms. In his experience, particularly at the hands of the policeman, Merrick, he brings out the most brutal aspects of British imperialism.

His existence causes the liberals intense guilt and the racists intense hatred. He should be the liberals' ideal — the English educated cultivated Indian. A symbol of the best the British have to offer.

So his fate, to be ostracised from white company, living in the squalor of the Indian side of town, and then flung into prison for a crime he didn't commit, causes the liberals among the British severe moral discomfort.

For the racists, Hari is an anathema. He went to a better public school than they did. He has the arrogant self confidence of a member of the British ruling class. But he's black.

For Merrick, in particular, whose background is lower middle class, Hari must be crushed, because he threatens his belief in a racial superiority which is essential to his place in the world. A place his class would definitely not give him.

The female characters are also exceptionally interesting. They are in their different ways very fine portrayals of the way women are trapped into certain kinds of be-



haviour. One of the most important people in the books — Sarah Layton — is trying to rebel against her role but is trapped by a sense of duty to her family.

Her sister, outwardly the ideal colonel's daughter, pretty and lively, suffers a breakdown and nearly kills her baby.

The strength of the books — this detailed portrayal of the British — is also their weakness. Indian workers and peasants figure only as a passive mass or a threatening force. British imperialism is also shown mainly as an *idea* which is discredited, not as a social power.

Scott seems to see the British as floating on the surface of India rather than as transforming a great deal of it. He is much better at showing what imperialism does to the imperialists than what it does to the ruled.

He clearly thought that the British in India were doomed and unlike a lot of nostalgia for the Raj which has been popping up lately, he obviously thought they deserved to be.

He also realised that they were getting out mainly for economic reasons, not because Gandhi beat them with moral superiority. At the same time he viewed the Indian ruling class without much enthusiasm.

Using the description of a series of political cartoons, Scott traces the events of the final stages of the war, through the revolt which ended the trials of captured leaders of the Indian National Army, to independence:

'For instance there was this one, in 1946, at the time of the short lived but tricky mutiny at Bombay in the Royal Indian Navy ... it showed an Indian frigate, controlled by mutinous ratings who had trained the ship's guns on the Royal Yacht Club and were about to open fire. Bursting through the gangway was Patel, in full Congress garb, waving his arms hysterically. The caption ran: "What are you doing, for God's sake? One day we may want it ourselves".'

A pretty accurate view of India's future, except that the working class is missing. In spite of that, and even if you're watching the (so far) excellent TV adaptation, the books are well worth reading. They can all be read separately so if you can't face all four you'll still get a lot out of any one, but particularly the first and the last.

The classical economists and Marx

In the first of an occasional series on Marxist economics, Pete Green looks at the relationship between Marx and the classical political economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Lenin wrote that the three sources of Marxism were 'German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism'.

The most important figures in the formation of classical political economy were Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). The first was Scottish, born in Kirkcaldy and spending much of his life as a professor at Glasgow University. The second was born in London but came from a wealthy Portuguese Jewish banking family.

It was not an accident that the science of political economy developed most rapidly in Britain. By the middle of the 18th Century it was already the most developed capitalist country in the world, and the dominant trading power. Commercial relationships, the production of goods for sale on a world market, governed the fortunes of both town and countryside.

The working-class had not yet been thrown together in mills and factories. But wage-labour was widespread. Many workers engaged in production in their own home or in small work shops, often owning their own tools or spinning wheels. But they were increasingly dependent upon the merchant capitalist who provided the raw materials and purchased the finished product. Labour driven off the land by the enclosures and clearances of the Agricultural Revolution was readily available to the emerging class of industrial capitalists.

Laissez-faire

All the material conditions which were to produce the industrial revolution were present. In Scotland in 1750 the development of trade, shipping and industry around the port of Glasgow with its North American connections, was especially rapid. When the inventor of the steam engine, James Watt, was in trouble with the local guild over his experiments, his friend Adam Smith helped him out. The restrictions on trade imposed by the guilds, controlled by owners of small workshops using traditional methods of production, would be fiercely attacked by Smith in his major work, the *Wealth of Nations* published in 1776.

Adam Smith saw himself quite consciously as spokesman for the new forces in society. He was not simply a representative of the bourgeoisie. Rather he expressed the interests of the most advanced sections of

that class, the new industrial capitalists. His sustained defence of free trade and attacks on monopolies, was directed not just at the guilds with their restrictive practices, but at the combination of merchants, large trading companies and the state which restricted the development of the market. He was as critical of the monopoly of particular commodities and trading routes granted by the state to the East India Company as he was of the combination of workers in unions.

Smith in other words was the great theorist of 'laissez-faire', of minimal interference by the state with the operations of market forces. His underlying philosophy was thoroughly individualist. He believed that the pursuit of self-interest lay at the

'We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines that masters rarely combine is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and everywhere in a combination not to raise wages.'

Adam Smith

basis of all societies. It was in the interests of society as a whole to allow the 'natural instinct' to truck and barter and exchange free rein, because on this basis people would work hard and the efficiency of production would be maximised. He wrote:

'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.'

Smith, generalising from what he saw developing very rapidly around him, regarded an ever greater specialisation, or division of labour, as the key to the increase of production. The market and free trade were justified because they facilitated this

elaborate and increasingly worldwide division of labour. Interference by the state with the market was seen only as a means of benefitting special interests and hampering the emergence of the new industrial methods of production.

In this perspective the market worked as an 'invisible hand', adjusting the production of goods by innumerable separate producers to the demands of consumers. The pursuit of individual self-interest worked harmoniously in the interests of everyone.

These, of course, are ideas which are defended most vigorously today by right-wing apologists for the system. The Milton Friedmans, Keith Josephs and Adam Smith Institutes use them to justify dismantling the welfare state, and a world in which a few are free to accumulate vast wealth whilst the weak, the poor and the unemployed are left to fend for themselves. Smith's latterday disciples are crude and hypocritical by comparison with the man himself. They will attack the monopolies and restrictive practices of trade unions, but not those of General Motors, Shell or ICI. They would never even hint, as Smith did, that:

'We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, upon this account, that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise wages above their actual rate. To violate this combination is everywhere a most unpopular action, and a sort of reproach to a master among his neighbours and equals. We seldom indeed hear of this combination, because it is the usual and one may say, the natural state of things, which nobody ever hears of.'

Classical

Yet the question remains what could Marx have learnt from such a committed advocate of the interests of the bourgeoisie as Adam Smith, or from Smith's most prominent successor, David Ricardo?

Marx, of course, had little sympathy with the underlying philosophy or conception of history of the classical economists. In the early works in which he first considers what



Boom...

they have to say, such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* it is on this that he concentrates his fire.

The economists Marx argues, assume an individualism which is itself the product of historical development. They take for granted those features of society such as private property, competition and exchange which in reality express an alienation of labour, a distortion of the essential characteristics of social and co-operative human beings.

Thus Marx attacks Smith for assuming that people will only work if they are forced or bribed to do so, that is for assuming that we all have a natural aversion to labour. By contrast Marx sees labour, in the broadest sense of social, productive activity, as fundamental to what human beings are. It is only because labour is alienated, because workers have no control over what or how they produce, and work is extremely specialised, boring and unpleasant, that people have to be compelled to do it.

In his early work therefore Marx attacks the classical economists' view that capitalism was the culmination of history because it conformed most closely to the 'natural' instincts of human beings. On the contrary, Marx argues that capitalism is thoroughly

'unnatural'. But this criticism merely counterposed to what existed an alternative vision of a world in which the abolition of private property and the market made possible truly human activity and relationships. In his later writings Marx moves to a scientific appraisal of the merits of Smith and Ricardo's analysis of how capitalism actually works.

The most basic difference between Smith and his followers of today is that Smith was expressing the interests and ideas of the most progressive force in the society of his time. The Milton Friedmans and Keith Josephs are essentially backward-looking, seeking a return to the golden age of 'free enterprise', along with the Victorian values, poverty, and brutality which went with it. Smith, for all his limitations and confusion over many issues, was committed to an honest investigation of the conditions necessary for the fullest and most rapid development of industrial capitalism. That in turn meant that he was capable of generating new and far-reaching insights into the way capitalism worked.

Most fundamentally, Smith was the first economist to attempt a systematic analysis of society tied together by the impersonal mechanism of the market. For Smith, society

is governed by laws which govern what individuals can do, regardless of what they think or intend. An individual is 'led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention'.

Correspondingly, Smith is the first person to clearly distinguish the different social groups amongst whom the product of society is distributed. Despite his individualism he is forced to recognise that the distinction between wages, profits and rent corresponds to a deeper division within society.

Thirdly, despite his stress on the market, Smith is aware that it is the production rather than the exchange of wealth which is decisive. The market and trade are necessary only because they are the basis for the division of labour which Smith sees as the key to an increase in the capacity to produce things. Smith here confuses the division of labour within a workplace (the allocation of different tasks to individuals) with the division of labour in society as a whole (the division between different enterprises each selling on a competitive market).

Smith also reveals his limited grasp of the significance of the emerging industrial revolution by underestimating the role of machinery, and new forms of energy and

technology in increasing the productivity of labour. It was in this development that Marx saw the possibility of both general affluence and the abolition of an extremely rigid and fragmented specialisation of tasks. Capitalism would thus itself undermine the necessity of the division of labour and system of exchange from which it sprung.

But on the critical issue for classical political economy, the question of the source of a surplus, of wealth in general and of profits, Smith made a crucial step forward.

An earlier school of economists, the Mercantilists, saw profit arising from what they called the 'alienation' of trade. Essentially they saw it as a result of buying cheap and selling dear. This fitted the perspective of merchants for whom profits could only be made at the expense of other merchants, or other sections of society, but who were not themselves engaged in producing things. In turn this theory provided a justification for companies, or whole nations seeking to monopolise particular areas of trade in order to maximise their share of what was available.

The Physiocrats, a school of French economists who were contemporary with Smith, broke with this tradition by stressing the physical production of a surplus by agriculture. But they saw all other forms of activity including industry as being parasitic upon that surplus. Smith took up their idea and generalised it. He saw industry or labour in general as the source of wealth. In other words, he developed the first systematic version of a labour theory of value.

Productive

Smith went beneath the surface of the confusing and complex world of buying and selling to locate the process of production as the essential basis of all societies. I Rubin, in his *History of Economic Thought*, puts it:

'The Smithian conception of society as at one and the same time a labour and exchanging society can be expressed by the following two propositions: 1) what appears as a market exchange of commodities for money is in reality the mutual exchange of the products of labour of the different persons who, between them, perform the whole of social labour; 2) the exchange of the products of the different people's labour reduces itself to the mutual exchange of the producers' very labour. With the first proposition Smith took his distance from the Mercantilists with the second he differentiates himself from the Physiocrats.'

This in turn led Smith to make a rather different distinction, between productive and unproductive labour. This stressed the difference between labour engaged in industry producing commodities for sale, and labour employed for parasitic purposes, especially by the state, such as tax collectors, soldiers and servants. Smith was, as usual, not entirely clear on this. He tended to assume that only labour producing material things as opposed to services was productive. But the political significance of the distinction was clear, and expressed the attitude of the new industrial bourgeoisie to the old ruling class.



...Slump

Smith's use of a labour theory of value was by no means consistent. There is not space here to investigate the contradictions in his thought adequately. Readers who want to pursue the matter further should look at Rubin's excellent book, or Marx's own critique of Smith in *Theories of Surplus Value*.

Suffice it to say, that Smith ends up saying that the labour theory of value only fully applies in societies in which workers themselves own the means of production. 'In that early and crude state of society which precedes both the accumulation of stock (ie capital) and the appropriation of land, over time goods will tend to exchange in proportion to the different quantities of labour required to produce them. Thus in Smith's famous example:

'If among a nation of hunters, it usually costs twice the labour to kill a beaver which it does to kill a deer, one beaver should naturally exchange for or be worth two deer. It is natural that what is usually the produce of two days or two hours labour, should be worth double of what is usually the produce of one day's or one hour's labour.'

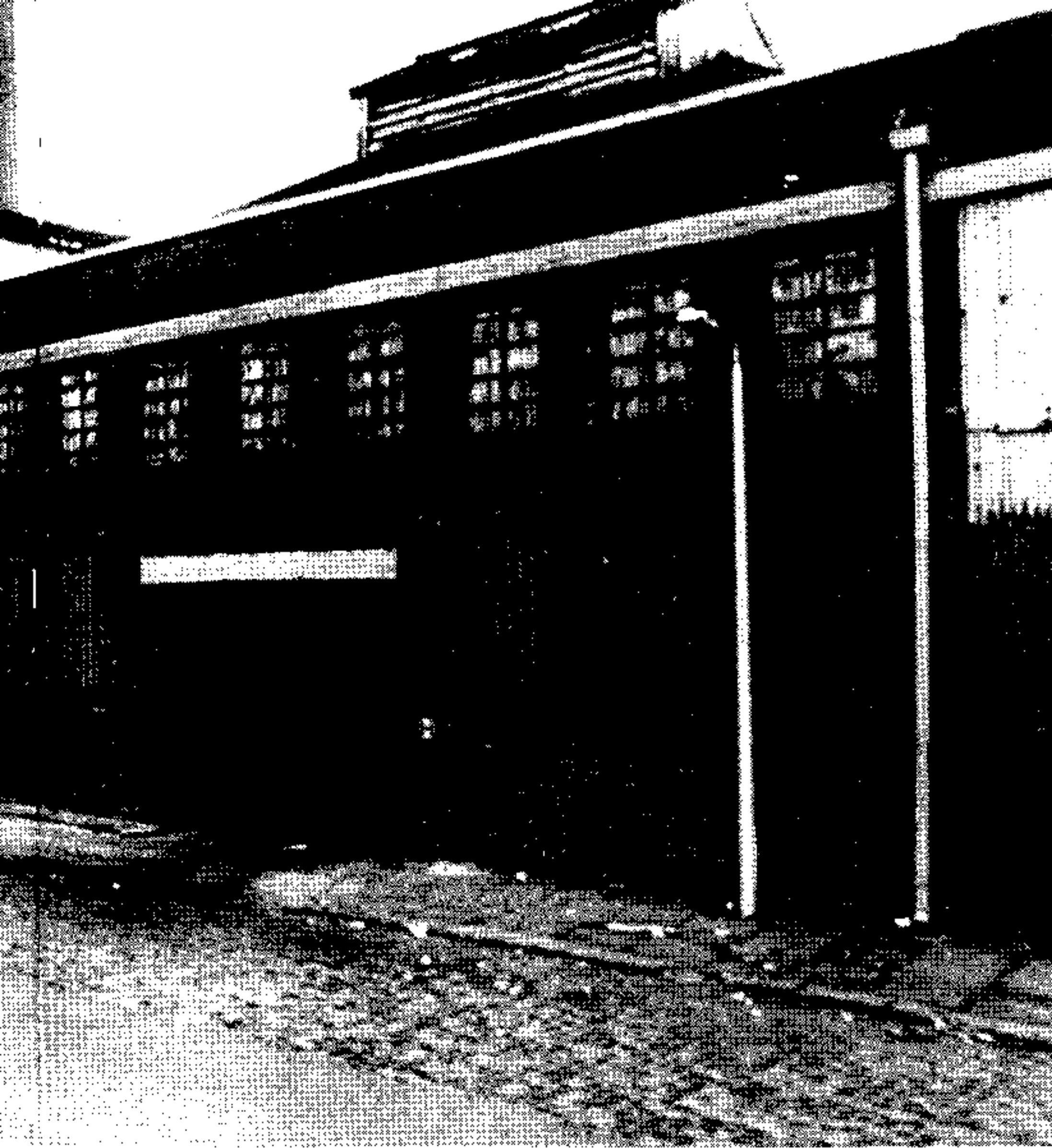
But once society has developed to the point where 'stock has accumulated in the hands of particular persons', a process which Smith is quite incapable of explaining, this theory of value no longer applies. Instead Smith argues that wages, profits and rent

have to be added together, 'as three component parts', to explain the price of commodities.

The very basic problem with this as an explanation is that it does not explain the most critical thing of all. What determines the level of profits and rent? For any individual good being sold, where we can assume that the capitalist simply adds on to his costs of production a standard mark-up for his profit, it can seem very plausible. But what determines the size of the mark-up for the society as a whole?

One answer is to assume that each part of the price represents a different cost of production, a very convenient line for those who wish to defend the interests of land-owner and capitalist. But nobody has satisfactorily shown what these costs are which profits supposedly cover. The actual cost of the stock, or purchases of raw materials and machinery, is covered by payment for those purchases before the profits are reckoned up. What is it that enables the landowners and capitalists to claim an extra share, other than the fact that they have been able to seize control of the land and the means of production, without which nobody else can work at all?

Smith's inability to answer these questions, meant that he ended up trying to hold together two quite incompatible theories of value. One was a theory based on labour as the essential cost to society of production. The other was a theory which sees



the final product, but that is easily accounted for.

Profits and rent do not therefore represent additional sources of value on top of that contributed by labour. Rather they represent shares in or deductions from the total value which labour creates. Thus if wages rise profits will fall, and vice versa.

The significance of this was emphasised by Marx. Whereas Smith had continually confused the analysis of the underlying fundamental relationships, with the way things appear to the 'unscientific observer' on the surface:

'... Ricardo steps in and calls to science: Halt! The basis, the starting point for the physiology of the bourgeois system — for the understanding of its internal organic coherence and life process — is the determination of value by labour time. Ricardo starts with this and forces science to get out of the rut, to render an account of the extent to which the other categories — the relations of production and commerce ... correspond to or contradict this basis ...

'Closely bound up with this scientific merit is the fact that Ricardo exposes and describes the economic contradiction between classes — as shown by the intrinsic relations — and that consequently political economy perceives and discovers the roots of the historical struggle and development.'

But Marx, having paid homage to Ricardo's legacy, was not the man to spare the criticism. He proceeds to expose the limitations and contradictions of Ricardo's ideas in enormous detail. The main points Marx makes can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, Ricardo had little understanding of the historical development of society. In particular, he fails to distinguish between societies in which commodity production is dominant and societies in which it is not. Like Smith he tends to think in terms of the natural laws of economics applicable to all societies. He tends to assume that the buying and selling of goods on a market has always dominated economic activity, and always will.

Planning

Consequently Ricardo fails to make Marx's basic distinction between concrete labour and abstract labour. Concrete labour refers to the distinctive physical and mental activity involved in any particular task, the labour of the carpenter, or lorry driver, or nurse. Abstract labour refers to what all the different types of labour have in common when they are all subordinated to the necessity of producing goods for sale. Whereas concrete labour is performed in all societies abstract labour only arises when workers are tied together through the impersonal mechanism of the market and money. For Marx abstract labour which creates value is historically specific. It is the product of a society in which the pursuit of money, rather than conscious planning to meet human needs, dominates production.

Even more seriously, Ricardo never produces an adequate theory of exploitation. The elements of such a theory are present in

capital, land and labour as contributing independently to the overall costs of production.

It is the latter theory which, of course, triumphed in the textbook versions still found today. But it was the former which testified to the scientific insight of Smith, at a time when the bourgeoisie had less need for apologetics.

It was the great merit of David Ricardo that he clearly located the contradiction in Smith's ideas, and sought to apply the labour theory of value consistently to all societies in which goods were bought and sold as commodities.

Ricardo was himself thoroughly committed to the class interests of the bourgeoisie. At the age of 25, after making a fortune on the Stock Exchange, he retired to devote himself to scientific study, although he later became an MP. He first made his name as a participant in the raging debate over the Corn Laws. These prohibited the import of cheap corn from the Continent. This was to the benefit of the English landowning class which remained very influential. The industrial bourgeoisie opposed them on the grounds that, by forcing up the price of bread, the Corn Laws made it difficult to cut wages.

Ricardo's famous defence of free trade and opposition to import controls thus conformed to the interests of the new class of factory owners. But in the process of investi-

gating the issue he was led to consider the manner in which a rise in wages or rents would cut into profits. This in turn led him into a reappraisal of Smith's theory of value in terms of a fundamental conflict of interests over the distribution of the total national product.

'*The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*', Ricardo's main work is much narrower in scope, and much more austere than the *Wealth of Nations*. It lacks the broad historical sweep and wealth of factual material which Smith provides. But what it loses in colour it gains in the rigour of the analysis. Marx himself had enormous respect for Ricardo's scientific ability. By this he meant in particular Ricardo's ability to abstract from the everyday flux of events, the chaos of the market, and the fluctuations of supply and demand and prices, to get to the essential underlying causes of things.

This was especially true of the first two chapters of the *Principles*. There Ricardo restates consistently the labour theory of value. Drawing on Smith's argument about 'early' societies, he then applies it to a society of capitalists, landowners and wage-earners as well. A mere change in the ownership of the means of production cannot affect the question of the creation of value, although it will greatly affect the distribution of what is produced. In all societies the labour devoted to the production of implements and tools has to be taken into account in the value of

his work. What is missing is an explanation of wages and profits in terms of the underlying social relations of capitalism. We have a conflict over the distribution of what is produced, but no analysis of the distribution of the means of production between classes which generates that conflict.

Thus Ricardo sees capital and labour as eternal categories which have always existed. He confuses capital as the material instruments of production, the tools, raw materials etc, with capital in the sense that Marx uses it, as a social power belonging to the class which controls those means of production. Correspondingly he fails to consider the specific social conditions, in which workers are deprived of all property other than their own capacity for work, or labour-power, which leads to wage-labour.

Such contrasts between Ricardo and Marx are commonplace now in the literature. Less clearly understood is that Marx made some fundamental criticisms of Ricardo's interpretation of the labour theory of value itself. Marx argued that whilst Ricardo successfully insisted on the starting point for analysis being labour, he was much less successful at relating that basis to the actual complexities of how capitalism worked. Crudely, whilst Ricardo could get to the bottom of things, he could not find his way back to the surface again.

Individual

For Ricardo, the term 'value' is identical with what Smith called 'natural price', the point around which prices for particular commodities tend to fluctuate. For him as for Smith the labour theory of value was primarily about why one thing tends to cost more than another in the shops. The theory is about the relationship between the *individual* amounts of labour contained in a commodity and its *individual* price. The trouble is that under capitalism there are all sorts of reasons why commodities do not sell for prices which match up with the labour they contain — the competition between different capitals, monopolies, government legislation and so on. Some things with a lot of labour might sell quite cheaply. Some things with very little labour might be very expensive.

For Ricardo's interpretation of the labour theory of value such variations cause all sorts of insoluble problems. They are insoluble because Ricardo could only see the relationship between the value of a commodity (defined in terms of the labour necessary to produce it) and its price, as a matter of what happens in any particular case. He could not see that what counted was the relationship between capital and labour, profits and wages, and prices and values, in the society as a whole.

For Marx the question of variations in individual prices, about which so much fuss is still being made in countless academic tomes, is not a serious problem at all. This is because what matters is that money is understood as a claim on the labour performed in the society as a whole. Money represents abstract labour time.

Suppose therefore that the owner of a commodity, be it a work of art or a motor car, is able to sell it for a lot of money even

though its labour content is minimal. All that means is that the lucky owner gets a bigger claim on the labour performed in society and everybody else gets less. If some goods are sold for more than their value, others must be sold for less. In the aggregate, in total, the sum of prices will correspond to the sum of values.

For Marx what mattered about the labour theory of value was not its ability to explain why butter costs more than margarine, or any other such triviality. What mattered was being able to understand the fundamental class relationships of capitalist society, and its 'laws of motion'.

Ricardo, for all his achievements, was unable to understand either. It is true that he went much further than Smith in grasping the conflicts which capitalism generates. But

'For Marx what mattered was being able to understand the fundamental class relationships of capitalist society, and its laws of motion.'

these conflicts between industrialist and landowner, and between worker and employer, were in his writing abstracted from history, and turned into an eternal state, without possibility of resolution.

Moreover, Ricardo shared Smith's harmonious conception of how the market worked. He denied the possibility of general crises in the system. There could be over-production in particular industries, he argued, but not in all industries at the same time. Limited by his own class position and by the point in history at which he lived when capitalism was expanding rapidly, he had no sense of the way in which the expansion of the system undermined itself, with booms culminating in slumps.

Nevertheless Ricardo represented the highest point of classical political economy. After his death the Ricardian school disintegrated into two very distinct groups. The division was itself a response to the growing intensity of class conflict. The working class, including both the domestic workers and artisans displaced by the industrial revolution, and the new factory workers, began to assert itself independently of the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie.

By 1832 a number of bourgeois economists were beginning to see disturbing consequences in Ricardo's theory. As one John Cazenove wrote in that year:

'That labour is the sole source of wealth seems to be a doctrine as dangerous as it is false, as it unhappily affords a handle to those who would represent all property as belonging to the working classes, and the

share which is received by others as a robbery or fraud upon them.'

Or as the American, Henry Carey, author of a book called *The Harmony of Interests* wrote in 1848, the year of revolutions and the *Communist Manifesto*:

'Mr Ricardo's system is one of discords ... its whole tends to the production of hostility among classes and nations ... His book is the true manual of the demagogue who seeks power by means of agrarianism, war and plunder.'

On the other hand within the Owenite movement and in Chartist circles more radical interpretations of Ricardo's ideas became widespread. Writers such as Hodgskin, Thompson and Bray began to invest the labour theory of value with a political significance. They concluded that if labour was the source of value, then labour had a right to the full product.

The use of the language of 'right' indicated some of the limitations of these thinkers. Hodgskin harked back to a mythical world in which all workers possessed their own individual plot of land or their own means of production. Bray believed in cooperatives operating within what was still to be a system of buying and selling. None of them developed the science of political economy very far. But their ideas were an expression of a rebellious ferment within the working class, of a popular resistance to the claims of capital and the ravages of the industrial revolution.

Produced

It was in response to such currents that the successors of Ricardo began to retreat back to Smith and the logical absurdities of profit as a cost of production. Some were truly imaginative in their explanations of why profit was necessary. They produced, for instance, the abstinence theory — that profit is compensation for the capitalist not consuming all of his wealth but devoting some of it to making even more money.

Ingenuous or not these were theorists for whom a defence of capitalism had become the prime purpose of economics. As Marx put it in his 'Postface to the Second Edition of *Capital* (Volume 1)':

'From that time on (1830) the class struggle took on more and more explicit and threatening forms, both in practice and in theory. It sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economics. It was henceforth no longer a question whether this or that theorem was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, in accordance with police regulations or contrary to them. In place of disinterested inquirers there stepped hired prize fighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and evil intent of apologetics.'

The task of developing the scientific study of political economy thus fell to Marx himself. But this was a matter not just of brilliant ideas or honest inquiry. It depended upon a break with the standpoint of a class which having attained power and consolidated its rule was no longer capable of even that consciousness of the nature of capitalism that Smith and Ricardo displayed.

Talbot a tale of shame

There seems little doubt that the Talbot workers' defeat has knocked the stuffing out of the fight against redundancies in the French car-industry.

Though the principal blame can be laid on the strong-arm tactics of Peugeot (who own Talbot — they bought it off Chrysler in the late 70s), they also have the shabby behaviour of the Socialist/Communist government and of the trade union leaders to thank for their victory.

Talbot has been a bit of a test case for French capitalism. With Talbot's share of the domestic market down sharply from 8.7% to 4.5% over five years, here, more than anywhere else, management *has* to succeed if it is to recover lost ground in a highly competitive and cut-throat industry.

According to the original plan, Peugeot were to lose 8,000 jobs in order to make the company competitive. At Talbot 2,905 jobs were to go out of a total of 17,000 employees, of whom about half are immigrants.

But the government intervened, worried at the social cost and the political unpopularity of such huge job losses. However, they fully accepted the 'overmanning' argument: after all, they too are committed to restructuring the French economy in order to make it internationally competitive, at the cost of workers' interests.

Occupation

So they tacked and veered. They set up a commission to see whether redundancies really were necessary. Its unpublished report seemed to say yes. But the Communist minister of employment, Jack Ralite, while agreeing to early retirement, refused any sackings in the absence of a 'proper' plan (an ambiguous response which continued to defuse any major opposition from workers).

By early December, the rumour went round that now that Peugeot had reformulated its plan redundancies would be accepted. This was enough to provoke unofficial strikes and a factory occupation by immigrant workers at Talbot. Immigrants in particular knew they were first in the firing line, and that, with few legal rights (not even the vote) and few prospects of alternative employment, they had no option but to stand and fight.

By mid December, the government announced that it had reached the best possible deal with Peugeot — 'only' 1,905 (instead of the original 2,905) jobs would be lost.

Having a Communist minister make the deal was a brilliant stroke. On the one hand, the CP genuinely shared the same economic nationalism as their senior partners in government — so they too saw no alternative to some shake-out of jobs.

On the other hand, their determination to hold on to ministerial portfolios had made them directly responsible for a nasty deal —

On Thursday 5 January, the long-running battle between strikers and management at the Talbot car plant near Paris came to an abrupt end after a brutal assault by company 'union' goons, and the bringing in of the riot police. Gareth Jenkins looks at the role of the left in the dispute.

so there could be no wriggling out of commitment to carry through government policy.

No doubt, the government also hoped that with the CP's control of the CGT — now the majority union at Talbot, a position gained ironically on the basis of militancy — they would, given their reputation for discipline, be able to ensure acceptance of the deal by the workers.

Unfortunately, those directly affected failed to see things in the 'spirit of constructive joint action' urged by the comrade minister. Every attempt by the CGT representative at Talbot, Nora Tréhel, a hard-baked and utterly loyal CPer, to promote the deal and get a return to work was met by hostility and rejection.

Successive manoeuvres by the CGT to use backward sections of the workforce failed; but they did have the effect of isolating the resistance and eventually letting the



company 'union' take the initiative — with devastating consequences.

This rank and file resistance led an exasperated Krasucki, the Communist leader of the CGT nationally, to stab the strikers in the back publicly — on the very day when they had already been brutally assaulted by fascist elements connected with the company 'union'.

On 5 January, he denounced them in the following terms:

'For several days, acts of violence aimed

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at preventing immigrant and French workers from calmly working out a positive and realistic solution have come from a group of some 150 extremists manipulated by outside elements, supported up till now by the CFDT (the Socialist union) and complacently presented as "strikers" by most of the media.'

After this smear (which cleverly insinuated that 'ultra lefts' were responsible for racist tension), Krasucki went on to stress the importance of a referendum to get workers back to work.

This championing of democracy was because the CGT wanted to use a secret ballot so that the passive and unorganised could serve as a counterweight to the strikers. However, the idea that the proposal received 'massive support' was a lie, as the TV pic-

tures of Nora Tréhel being greeted with hisses and boos from 2,000 strikers proved.

As for the CGT's opposition to racism, it has to be said that it was a monster their actions helped feed. For in arguing that redundancies were inevitable, they had no effective answer to the racist idea that immigrants were the root cause of the 'overmanning' problem.

Once the CGT refused to organise, the tensions inherent in the situation were bound to explode in fury against the immigrants for 'holding up' the apparently eminently sensible Talbot survival plan.

And the eagerness with which the government was prepared to bargain over the cost of voluntary repatriation (and are still doing so — £3,300 per worker is rumoured to be the latest government offer) indicates how deeply the racist poison has bitten into the

reformist parties. That some immigrants have raised the demand does not alter the fact — it is a product of despair at the failure of the reformist organisations to defend them.

But it would be wrong to single out the CP and the CGT for special blame in their determination to impose the Peugeot-government deal.

The Socialist Party, if less directly involved in forcing it down workers' throats (except at the point of a riot-police gun), was equally enthusiastic and not one statement by leading figures showed any peep of dissent.

And the government spokesman, Max Gallo, eager to demonstrate concern for the plight of those thrown out of work, had this comment: 'You can't just take a man, squeeze him like an orange and throw him away, even if he is a North African.' That 'even if' revealed what he really thought about immigrants.

However, the strikers did find support from the main union rival to the CGT, the socialist CFDT. Much of this was genuine — especially at a local level. The CFDT representative inside Talbot, Jean-Pierre Noual, was able to give leadership by total opposition to all redundancies.

He also got support from Daniel Richter, a widely respected militant and union full-timer responsible for Renault-Flins.

However, the question of support for the strikers from higher up the CFDT was a decidedly different matter.

The national leader, Edmond Maire, denounced the agreement between the government and Peugeot on the grounds that it had been reached over the heads of the workers. On 20 December, as the crisis in the car plant reached its first major conflict, Maire said:

'It is to be expected that things don't work. That's healthy, very healthy. It proves that workers exist...'

But Maire's attitude was pure hypocrisy. His 'left turn' was pique at the government's exclusion of his own union from talks about implementing the agreement with Peugeot. (The government recognised that the CFDT was unreliable: undisciplined local activists might resist. They were right.)

Elections

Maire also saw a chance to make political capital at the expense of the CGT's 'moderation'. A 'maximalist' stance — the accusation is Krasucki's — would help him strengthen the CFDT's position in the car industry generally, and at Talbot in particular, where in the September 82 union elections the CFDT had only won 8.75 percent of the vote.

The sharp contrast between the two union leaders, with the usually right wing leader more to the left than his opponent, led to the unusual spectacle of the national secretary of the Socialist Party, Jean Poperon, warmly congratulating the CP on proving their devotion to government policy. At the same time he bitterly attacked the Socialist union for having suddenly abandoned their call for 'necessary deployment'.

In practice, Maire had no intention of abandoning 'realism'. He eventually made it

socialist

REVIEW

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perfectly clear that he believed there was overmanning at Talbot, and the relevant section of the union discontinued support for both 'zero redundancies' and any further strike action.

Maire's temporary willingness to back opposition at Talbot was a manoeuvre to remind the government that if they wanted social peace they would have to deal with him as well as the CGT. A more cynical exploitation of workers' struggle it is difficult to imagine.

However, this is not the end of the political gyrations. Having delivered its end of the bargain, the CP is now under some pressure not to buy its respectability too dearly. So, Marchais, the CP leader, has executed a 'left turn' under the slogan 'No more dismissals, no more unemployed'.

He wants to reassure the faithful that the party is not simply the government's poodle, while at the same time, reminding the government that he can wield an influence they cannot afford to ignore. Again, the cynicism, after selling a militant group of workers down the river, is staggering.

So, if Talbot was a test case for Peugeot, it has also been something of a milestone in the degeneration of French reformism — as the conduct of both Socialists and Communists shows.

British

The consequences are plain. The government (and the ruling class) have tested the resistance of the working class — and found it relatively easy to push aside, thanks to the behaviour of workers' own organisations.

With many more 'restructuring' plans in the pipeline — in the shipyards, chemical industry, car industry, steel and coal — the state and private bosses are heaving their first cautious sighs of relief.

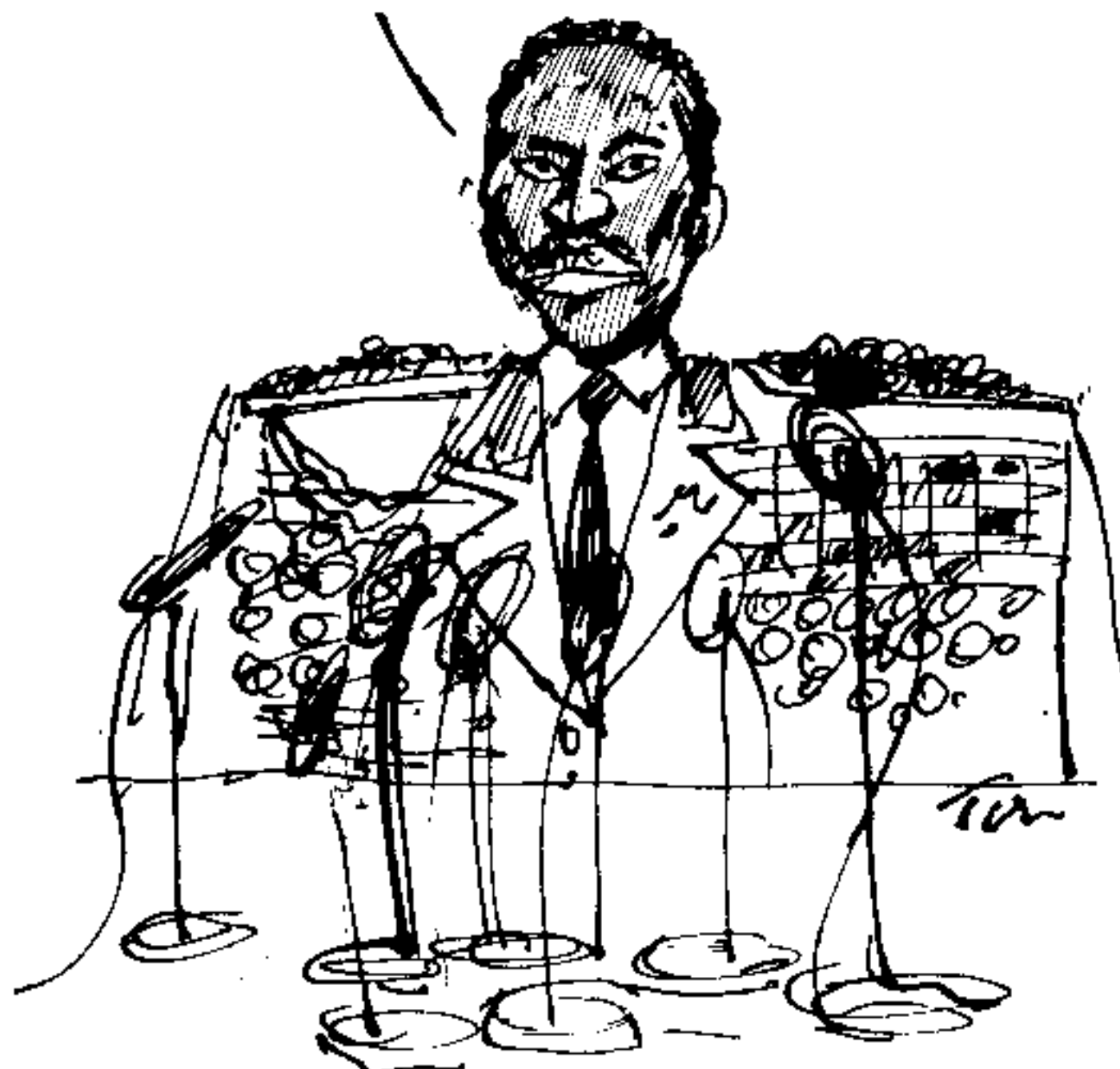
Clamping down on 'unpopular' social conflict won't do anything to increase the government's survival chances, either. The irony is that their 'realism' will accelerate the process of working class demoralisation that is so evident in the rapid growth of racism and of support for the fascist right.

The ruling class will be quietly pleased to see that the Socialists and Communists are getting away with what the right wing parties hardly dared attempt under the previous president. Just as Callaghan paved the way for Thatcher, so Mitterand is preparing for Jacques Chirac's triumphant reinstatement of Gaullism.

Nor is the government's victory without consequences for us in Britain. Talbot does, after all, have plants in this country. And the French government's success in getting workers to accept sacrifices so that their economy can fight off *foreign* (including British) competition will have a domino effect. Peugeot's ability to cut costs will force Ford (and British Leyland, and Vauxhall) to resort to exactly the same redundancy measures in order to remain competitive. And British trade unions will parrot exactly the same arguments about protecting home industry as their French counterparts.

In this vicious, beggar-your-neighbour circle, it is the workers of every country that are the real losers.

AND NOW MY BELOVED
NIGERIAN PEOPLE, WE
HAVE REPLACED THE
CORRUPT CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT
WITH A CORRUPT MILITARY
ONE.



Crisis and coup in Nigeria

Nigerian 'democracy' is the latest casualty of the slump. Peter Alexander looks at the background to the recent coup and at the possibilities for workers' struggle.

In his first broadcast to the nation Major General Mohammed Buhari provided three reasons for the coup: economic chaos, corruption and ballot rigging in last year's elections.

The Supreme Military Council (SMC), Nigeria's ruling body, are not planning a quick return to civilian rule. It would seem, then, that they have at least solved the problem of ballot rigging ... no more ballots! Whether or not the SMC can now retain support for their government will depend principally on their ability to deal with the twin problems of corruption and the economy.

There is nothing specifically Nigerian about corruption — indeed it is a worldwide phenomenon, a feature of capitalism. It occurs or has occurred in Labour controlled councils in the north-east, in Christian Democrat governments in Italy and, if *Gorky Park* is to be believed, in the hierarchy of the KGB.

Bribery always requires two parties, and some of the biggest scoundrels are well established, well respected multinationals. Lockheed, for instance, paid out \$3.6 million to win a \$45 million contract in Nigeria.

What is special about Nigeria is the extent of corruption. It is perhaps more widespread and more open than anywhere in the world, and there are a number of reasons why this is so.

Firstly, the Nigerian ruling class is very young and has not yet developed the degree of class discipline which exists among capitalists in Europe and America. In addition, the Nigerian ruling class is particularly parasitic on the state, which acts as a conduit for oil money, thus placing a premium on non-commercial forms of competition. Finally, the ever deepening recession both intensifies that competition and places increased pressure on low-level, poverty stricken officials.

Not long before the coup, Shagari introduced yet more measures to deal with the problem of corruption. But there is no reason to suppose that they would have been any more successful than previous ones.

In 1982 he formed special 'X-squads' to deal with import irregularities, but within two months it was business almost as usual, with black market gin still available for instance, but with the price increased from N6 to N7.5.

Nor is there anything special about military rule. Buhari and other members of the SMC held leading positions in Nigeria's last military government, when corruption was equally widespread. Perhaps the most famous example concerned the unnecessary importation of N600 million (about £450 million) of cement. This blocked Lagos harbour with 400 ships which had to wait for up

to a year (at Nigeria's expense). In opposing corruption, the SMC like the earlier civilian and military governments, will use punitive measures to back up its moral appeals. Like the earlier governments it will fail, because corruption is part of the structure of capitalism.

Nigeria's economic problems are simple enough to understand. They are the problems of a country — like Mexico — which has a massive population and an economy dependent on oil. In recent years income from oil has accounted for 90 percent of foreign exchange and 75 percent of government revenue.

In the 70s, this provided the basis for a big increase in state spending and the expansion of industry. But in the last two years oil prices have been halved and production has dropped from more than 2 million barrels a day to an OPEC agreed limit of 1.3 million.

The government's biggest headache is the rapidly rising burden of debt. Including short-term trade payments Nigeria now owes in the region of \$20 billion, and the interest payments will absorb about 30 percent of this year's foreign exchange earnings.

The response of the SMC has been to pay off what they can, be seen to be helpful to the creditors, increase import restrictions and avoid taking the kind of really drastic measures which the IMF would like and which would be unpopular amongst Nigerian businessmen. This is precisely the kind of policy which was being pursued by Shagari. Two days before the coup he introduced an austerity budget which aimed at cutting imports by 40 percent and capital spending by 30 percent.

Whether the government is run by politicians or soldiers, Nigeria's working class are the losers. The import restrictions lead to scarcity and inflation, dislocation of supplies and redundancies, short-time working and non-payment of wages.

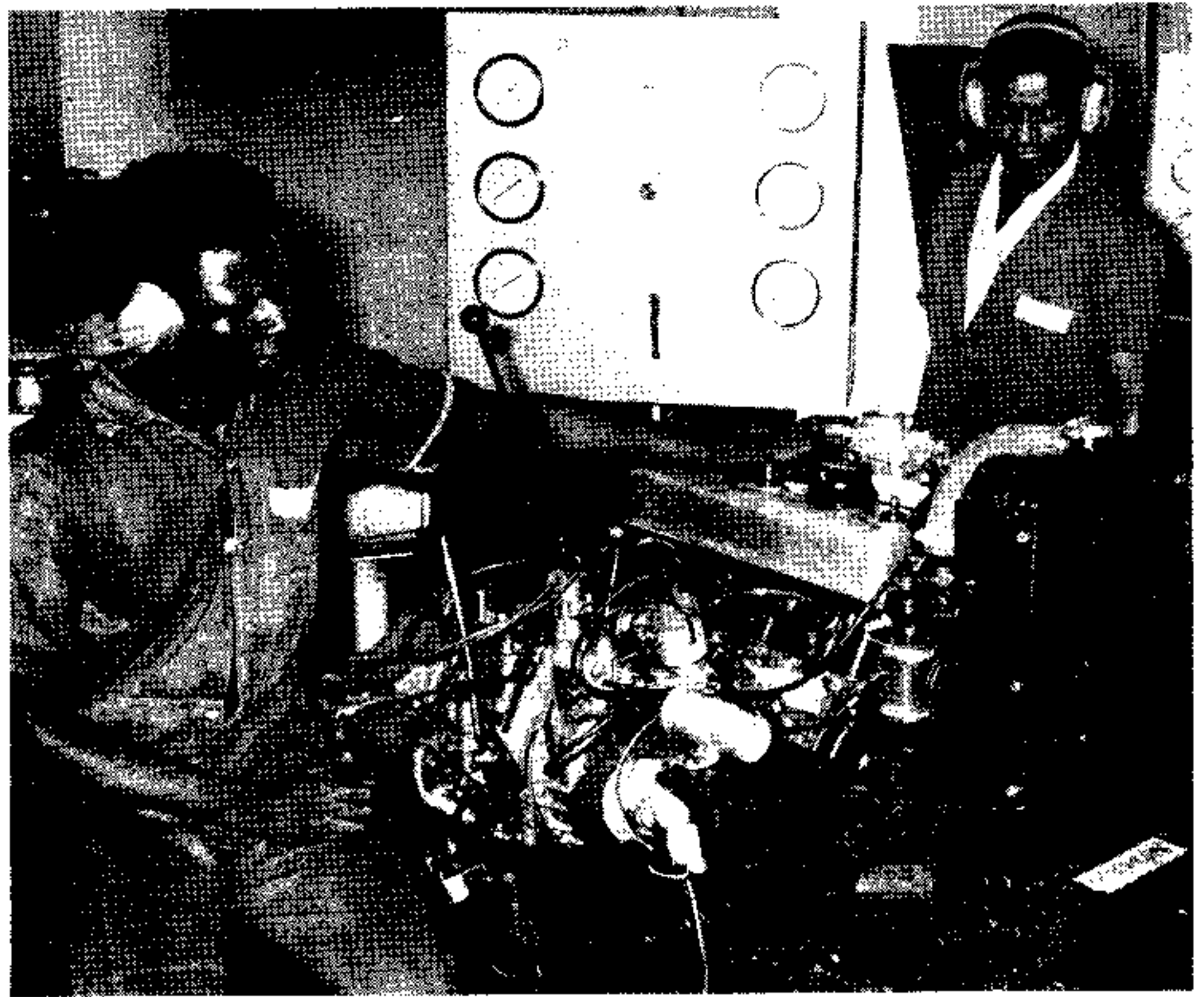
Workers

It can be seen that the key feature of the coup was its extreme conservatism. It aimed to change nothing. It was quite different from for instance, the Rawlings coup in neighbouring Ghana. The comparison is significant in the light of recent reports in the *Guardian* that junior officers had planned their own coup.

Such a coup is likely to have been a more radical affair, not only because the junior officers would have been more attuned to the problems of poverty amongst their rank and file and the workers, but also because they would have had to remove the generals to succeed.

The coup aimed at halting the growing dissatisfaction in the ranks and amongst Nigeria's workers. It can however, only be a temporary palliative, because it cannot resolve the underlying problems of Nigeria's economy.

Nigeria's workers were not opposed to the coup. Nigerian 'democracy' with its limited constitution and fraudulent elections, provided no tangible advantage and some disadvantages. But they were not enthusiastic supporters either, and they will, in time, turn against the SMC. What form will



Engine test bed at the British Leyland plant at Ibaden

that opposition take?

If one lesson should be clear from the recent coup it is that there is no peaceful road to socialism in Nigeria. Prior to the 1979 and 1983 elections many reformist socialists wasted time trying to form either a 'workers' party or a faction in one of the big bourgeois parties. The Federal Electoral Commission refused to register the 'workers' parties and the bourgeoisie had little problem in dealing with the 'entrists'.

Since the military will only hand back power to civilians on a similar basis to last time the future looks bleak for any reformist workers' party.

Conferences are popular with Nigerian socialists. Recently those conferences have shifted their emphasis to a consideration of the lack of politics in the trade union movement and the lack of economic power in the student movement. Their conclusion is that there needs to be greater unity between the two wings of the movement, uniting political and economic elements of the struggle.

It would appear that Hassan Summonu, President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, has now endorsed the call for political, trade union struggle. At the first joint meeting of the NLC and student leaders, held a few days ago, he is reported to have said:

'The politicians have had two opportunities to govern this country. Also the military is having a second opportunity to rule. The NLC warns that when the present military government fails, it shall be imperative that the working class will govern the country.'

It would appear this shift in approach — towards seeing *workers* as the *vanguard* in a *struggle* for socialism — is now widespread among the left in Nigeria. It is a positive and welcome development.

The change has occurred following the rapid growth of the proletariat (now about

20 percent of the population) and the increasing importance of workers' struggles in Nigerian politics. Those struggles have been dominated in the last twenty years by two general strikes and two other mass strikes.

The first, and perhaps the most important was in 1964. It was associated with the refusal of the government to implement the recommendations of the Morgan Commission on wages and salaries.

The strike, which ended in victory, lasted two weeks, resulting in up to 14 million man days lost. It brought the economic life of Nigeria to a halt. By the end of the first week even the schools and hospitals were closed.

There are still some idiot sociologists who argue that in Africa, unlike Britain, there is no working class. Some are even paid good money to write bad books attempting to prove this thesis. In Britain, you would have to go back to 1926 to discover a display of class consciousness on this scale.

It is estimated that in 1964 there were only one million wage earners in Nigeria. At that time there were about 300,000 trade union members, although the numbers increased as a result of the strike. The strike, however involved 800,000 workers and one rally attracted a crowd of 250,000.

It would seem that the strike action acted like a magnet for lumpen and semi-proletarian elements in and around the major towns. It is a good example for those socialists who plague themselves with fears about the inability of workers to relate to other oppressed sectors.

In those days there were over 300 active unions in four trade union centres. It was pressure from below which forced the leaders to form a Joint Action Committee, and it was this body which was responsible for calling the strike, despite the divisions.

At all levels workers appear to have voted

for leaders quite irrespective of 'tribal' affiliations. This is despite the fact that ethnicity is an important issue in Nigeria.

There was very little violence. In part this is because the strike was so widespread and in part because the demands were of a limited nature. Nevertheless, it is clear that the strikers saw themselves as fighting for more than just money. As the strike wore on speakers increasingly attacked privilege and corruption, and spoke in favour of a Labour Party.

1964 was also a general election year in Nigeria. In one survey of workers' voting intentions held just after the strike 43.2 percent said they would support a Labour Party (there were two on offer) and only 9.6 percent an 'ethnic' party. But when it came to the elections only 8.9 percent actually backed a workers' party and 49.1 percent an ethnic party.

Elections are a crude head count where one peasant equals one worker. In Nigeria the sheer weight of the countryside pushed the workers into backing the most suitable 'ethnic' politician. Although in elections labour was not a serious alternative for most workers, in mass strike action the workers' struggle provided an alternative even for non-workers.

The 1971 and 1975 mass strikes had similarities, in that both were spontaneous outbursts in response to government pay reports — respectively Adebo and Udoji. In both cases the strikes were successful. The Adebo strikes were probably more violent. The Udoji strikes, although slower to take off had a very broad coverage.

Dominance

Although the strikes demanded improvements in pay it is clear that generalised political discontent was not far below the surface. A detailed report on the effect of the Adebo strikes in two factories shows that workers consciously saw themselves as fighting against the bosses' privileges and exploitation in general. The Udoji strike focused on who should get the 'oil money' — the rich or the poor.

The 1981 strike was officially called by the NLC, and it involved 700,000 workers for the two days of its duration. There was popular support for the NLC's demand for a N300 per month minimum wage, particularly as the politicians had just voted themselves N1250 per month. Although there was widespread discontent with the settlement there was no alternative leadership to carry the movement forward.

It is clear from looking at these four mass strikes that the dominance of the state in the economy provided an all important national character to the disputes, although this operated as a focus for more widespread political discontent.

In 1961, Tony Cliff wrote an article on the tradition of the mass strike in Belgium, which he analysed in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of the Belgian working class. Eight such strikes occurred between 1886 and 1959, mostly around political demands for electoral rights etc.

To understand the mass strikes it is necessary to come to terms with the deep divisions

in the Belgian working class: the Walloons and the Flemish speakers, the heavy industrial south and the agricultural north, mass support for the socialists and mass support for the Christians. Even today these divisions are important.

The existence of the division handicapped the development of workers' political organisation, since the socialists could never win a majority, and severely weakened their sectional trade union organisation, because there were three groupings of trade unions. In these circumstances the 'one big strike' was a particularly effective weapon. Cliff concludes that:

'Above all, the factor that made general strikes endemic to Belgium, as distinct from other labour movements ... also impeded the development of general strikes beyond themselves.'

The conclusion is useful in relation to Nigeria, because it is possible that in situations where the political organisation and sectional trade union strength of the workers is relatively weak, mass strikes can be hijacked by reformist leaders for their own purpose. It is worth recalling that in Belgium the socialists put the mass strike to good use in winning reforms which they could not secure through parliament.

The alternative to parliamentary cretinism, one which has been grasped by many Nigerian socialists and is rooted in the experience of Nigerian workers, is the alternative of mass militant working class struggle. The immediate analogies are not, however, with Belgium but with Lech Walensa in Poland, and Lula in Brazil.

Solidarnosc was a magnificent expression of workers' unity and organisation, but when it came to the crunch it lacked the politics, discipline and flexibility which only a revolutionary party possesses, and as a consequence it failed.

In Nigeria the argument for a revolutionary party should be more obvious, particularly because the distinction between the bureaucracy and rank and file in the unions is clearer—clearer even than in Britain.

In 1976 the government reorganised the unions into 42 industrial based units, introduced the check-off and gave the NLC a N1 million donation.

Since 1974 Hassan Summonu has been the leader of the NLC. He has a reputation for being a left socialist. This is based on his origins in the pro-Moscow trade union bloc and his battles with the right wing in the NLC. However his record is deeply scarred.

In 1977 he opposed pay increases for workers at a time when even the head of the Nigerian 'CBI' accepted that pay would have to be improved. In 1978 when students were killed in demonstrations he failed to express support for them. Last year he opposed a series of wild-cat strikes and complained that:

'Strikes procedure is too slow. Union leaders are not able to contain the anger of their workers.'

Rosa Luxemburg said of the mass strike: 'In order that the working class may participate *en masse* in any direct political action it must first organise itself, which above all means that ... it must overcome the split between workshops which the daily yoke of capitalism condemns it to.'

Of course any mass strike in Nigeria, even one led by Summonu would represent an advance. However a strategy for socialism which is based only on mass strikes, albeit for directly political purposes, is doomed to defeat.

Intervention

Mass strikes contain, in addition to the element of rank and file rebellion, an element of bureaucratic control which can limit the scope of the strike — revolutionary and reformist elements are mixed. If the revolutionary element is to win out it requires the active intervention of conscious revolutionaries opposed to bureaucratic control.

As time proceeds we will find that our main arguments with 'Third World' socialists shifts away from third worldism, with its emphasis on peasant vanguards and guerrilla struggle, towards an argument for building a revolutionary party and against *the new reformism*. The fact that such an argument is occurring is an advance. Only such a party can undermine the hold of reformist trade union leaders, link up the struggles of workers with discontent in the army, and organise an insurrection.

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US and them

The United States hope that forthcoming elections in El Salvador will allow them to 'clean up their act'. Dave Beecham examines their dilemma, and the general picture in Central America.

Elections are once again due to take place in El Salvador. In March, the Reagan administration hopes, its chosen man, Nelson Duarte will emerge as President restoring a 'clean' christian democratic image.

This would allow the military and its US advisers to get on with their operations, and pave the way for a land reform without which the mass of the rural population cannot be wooed away from active or passive support for the opposition.

The US hopes continued pressure and limited destabilisation of Nicaragua will further restrict the Sandinistas' support for the FMLN guerrilla forces in El Salvador.

The guerrillas can be forced back deep into their strongholds in the mountains while a new 'reformist' regime can carry out a hearts and minds campaign among the peasantry and rural proletariat.

The counter-revolutionaries operating from Honduras might be able to achieve their aim of grabbing a slice of Nicaraguan territory, including a town in which to establish a 'provisional government'.

How does this sort of strategy fit the reality of a stronger Nicaragua?

Contadora

The first point to note is that the past few months, particularly since the US invasion of Grenada, have seen a diplomatic strategy of alliance with 'friendly regimes' adopted by the Sandinistas, under direct pressure from Cuba. This has been aimed at the so-called Contadora group of countries, dominated by Mexico and Venezuela, and their proposed peace plan for Central America.

To secure these countries' backing the Sandinistas have proposed elections for next year, placated internal opposition, avoided any suggestion of military conflict with Honduras, confirmed their allegiance to a 'mixed economy' solution for the country — and substantially reduced their commitment to the struggle in El Salvador.

Of course some of the changes have been symbolic more than anything else — notably the closure of the offices of Salvadorean opposition groups in Managua and their removal to Mexico. But the symbolism is important. The Sandinistas have now more than ever retreated into a position of defence of national boundaries.

They are ever more in hock — not to the Russians nor even the Cubans — but to the Mexicans. Mexico has taken over the US's

former position as Nicaragua's largest trading partner and it is looking more and more likely that the Sandinistas are modelling their particular brand of national liberation on Mexico.

The result for the time being is a much stronger Nicaragua in military and diplomatic terms. A country developing political links which are proving a severe embarrassment to the Reagan government — especially with a newly-elected social democrat government in Venezuela, and, of course, the election of a civilian government (also broadly social democratic) in Argentina. The Latin American tour of the Sandinista backer Daniel Ortega, culminating in his warm welcome at the inauguration of President Alfonsín in Buenos Aires, seems to have isolated Reagan somewhat from his Latin American allies with the sole exception of Chile and Uruguay.

As the Sandinistas and their new friends see it, the possibility of a US invasion of Nicaragua has been largely averted.

We should not pretend that this diplomatic offensive is entirely 'mistaken'. Supposing the Sandinistas were revolutionary socialists, aiming at spreading their revolution to the other countries of Central and South America, such diplomatic manoeuvring might be an essential tactic aimed at gaining time.

The difference is of course that for Nicaragua everything is already subordinate to the national solution. The FMLN in El Salvador has been told that it's on its own and indeed that a negotiated settlement would be the best solution. The weak left wing forces in Honduras have been given no more than verbal support (and little of that in fact).

Any links with the Guatemalan guerrillas have been discounted.

Far from the diplomatic approach being a tactic it is in fact the Sandinistas' main strategy — to secure acceptance for their government from more or less liberal or nationalist regimes in the hope of securing aid for national development.

All this should not surprise us too much. The Sandinistas have *always* insisted that they are building a mixed economy; that their aim is national development; that their struggle is exclusively anti-imperialist.

It is their supporters in other countries (particularly on the US and European left) who have peddled the notion that this was somehow a fully-fledged revolutionary socialist regime bursting at the seams to spread the flame of insurrection throughout the isthmus.

Though the Sandinistas' recent moves present some diplomatic problems for Reagan, nevertheless US policy has successfully helped to box them in. The rocky road of national development as pursued by Nicaragua will make the insurgent movements in the other countries think very hard

about the value of the Sandinistas' victory.

It should incidentally be noted that the Kissinger Commission's report on Central America does *not* exclude Nicaragua from participation in the proposed Central American common market (though nor does it exclude invasion).

There is a crucial component in US policy-making which argues that a 'corralled' Nicaragua could easily be accommodated within an overall framework of regional development under US hegemony.

Thus far so good for Reagan, it might seem. But the other half of the equation — El Salvador — is utterly different. Far from US policy succeeding there, it has suffered a series of major political and military setbacks which suggest that short of actual American intervention — either with troops or saturation bombing — the FMLN will continue to gain ground steadily.

US direct intervention in El Salvador is such an explosive question that it was ruled out by the Kissinger Commission — in contrast to Nicaragua where they were prepared to 'in the last resort'.

Militarily, US policy has been to pour in arms, hoping to contain the FMLN forces in the underpopulated mountainous regions of Northern El Salvador, Morazan and Chalatenango. And to do this for a sufficiently long time to train up elite combat units in the various camps in Honduras, Panama and the US itself.

Guerrilla

This policy seemed to be bearing fruit during 1982 and then again in mid-1983. Though the FMLN had suffered no serious defeats, the Salvadorean army was conducting major operations to push them away from provincial capitals. But in the spring of last year and again more recently the guerrillas have been able to take and hold substantial towns in the richest agricultural areas, departing subsequently into the surrounding countryside.

The FMLN liberated zones have grown in size. Guerrilla operations against prime strategic targets, such as the main bridge on the Pan-American highway which links the East and West of the country, have been carried out with considerable losses and demoralisation on the government side.

Sections of the army have deserted or refused to fight. Officers have been accused of deserting their men in mid-combat. The elite US-trained and guided forces have not shifted the military balance for more than a few weeks at a time.

All this must have sounded ominously familiar to Kissinger in his examination of the military options. It is precisely what happened in Vietnam, except that the rapidity of the military collapse in El Salvador could become catastrophically quick, given the small size of the country and the potential support for the FMLN among the landless population.

The Commission's call for more aid has slowed the tide of the FMLN advance, no more. And the 'human rights' factor is a sick joke. First because the landowners and the far right have no intention of letting-up on their terror campaign; secondly because the

army itself relies intrinsically on death-squads and the right's network of informers; lastly because American strategy is merely aimed at legalising wholesale murder.

The second and ultimately crucial obstacle to US policy in El Salvador has been and remains, the impossibility of land reform. About 60 percent of the population live in rural areas. But two percent of the population (roughly 200 families) owns 60 percent of the land. From the 1960s on, US policy has been to try and secure some minimal redistribution but without much success.

In fact the key development in the last 20 years has been the growth of the rural proletariat coupled with the migration of the landless to the shanty-towns of San Salvador. Roughly one in ten of the peasantry was landless in 1961. Ten years later this proportion had risen to nearly one in three. By 1980 the proportion was estimated to be as high as two-thirds.

The agricultural labour force has meanwhile become increasingly proletarian, while those remaining 'colonos' (renting land) were squeezed into marginal areas, where it is impossible to make a living.

The policy of the Christian Democrat Party (notably Duarte) actively backed by the US has been a three-stage agrarian reform: the first stage covering estates of 500 hectares or more, the second 150-500 hectares and third allowing colonos to receive the formal title to their lands after 30 years.

All these proposals are extremely limited. They provide for full compensation of course and tenants were to be required to purchase. Even so all have foundered.

Stage 1, in 1980, had some success, though large landowners affected slaughtered cattle and removed farm machinery.

Stage 2 was 'indefinitely postponed', while Stage 3, aimed specifically at the peasantry in the main guerrilla areas, was perhaps 5 percent implemented.

Rabbits

The strategy was refreshingly simple: 'There's no one more conservative than a small farmer. We're going to breed capitalists like rabbits', in the words of one US official. The problem is that it comes up against the entrenched and violent resistance of the extreme right, the very social forces with which the US, like it or not, has to ally.

The swing to the far right by the middle class in the 1982 elections, resulting in the election of Major D'Aubuisson as president of Congress, has been followed by systematic opposition to any land reform. Most recently the Congress vetoed the proposal to parcel out some of the large estates into landholdings still of some considerable size.

The christian democrat peasant union still the largest nominal force on the land, outside the FMLN-held zones, declared as a result that it would refuse to support the March elections. It is on such forces that the *entire* US political/military strategy relies, and this declaration — whether realised or not — represents perhaps the single most serious blow to US policy since the beginning of the all-out civil war in January 1981.

A victory for Duarte in the March elec-

tions would represent a breathing space for the US. But the room for manoeuvre is limited. As in Vietnam, the Americans are finding that their own allies are a major obstacle to any strategy, and every month that passes without some progress towards land reform must result in hundreds of recruits to the guerrilla cause.

American policy is thus at an impasse. To go further in pacifying the isthmus requires the sort of military adventure the government is enormously reluctant to undertake. It is all very well exorcising the frustrations of the Lebanon with a quick embarkation in Grenada (though even that took more than a week). It is quite another proposition to commit US forces to a bloodbath in Central America.

We may therefore be seeing a long escalation of US efforts in the region, with the expenditure of \$25 billion in economic 'aid' envisaged over the rest of the decade, and the inevitable involvement of more and more men and machines in repression.

It is not excluded that the US might take the plunge and confront Nicaragua. But the costs of such a struggle would be enormous. Over 50,000 people died to free Nicaragua from Somoza. It is likely the US would have to face killings on at least that scale to restore a US-backed regime.

The problem is rather that US policy is likely to rely on a tightening stranglehold on Nicaragua. The Sandinistas, whatever their private views and hopes for the country, will either be forced into an uneasy semi-colonial relationship with the Russians or, more likely, given the direction of Cuban policy, into a client relationship with Mexico.

That would suit Mexico's 'radical' foreign policy concerns and would give the Nicaraguan government the independence it craves. What it would not do would be to provide any long-term hope for the working people of Nicaragua and Central America. They would remain circumscribed by international capitalism despite rhetoric of national liberation and development.

The tragedy is that those fighting so bravely for their freedom in El Salvador have exactly the same politics and perspectives as the Sandinistas. True, the traditions of workers' struggle are much richer in El Salvador (and richer still in Honduras and Guatemala) and there is a tradition of socialist organisation. But the aims of the parties behind the FMLN remain those of national development not international revolution. Despite the achievements of the Nicaraguans and the courage of El Salvador's guerrillas, this is the road to defeat.



Repression in China

As China is integrated more and more into the world economy its rulers are tightening up labour discipline. **Andy Williams** reports on their new campaign.

During the course of the last six months the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has set about implementing a set of repressive policies designed to complement the economic reforms which form the basis of China's 'Four Modernisations'.

In order to achieve and sustain projected growth rates China needs to substantially increase its level of overseas trade. To make any inroads into what remains a stubbornly stagnant world market China must significantly improve both the quality of goods produced and the overall efficiency of production. Most importantly, labour productivity must be forced up to a maximum.

These facts have been readily accepted by China's ruling class, who have already embarked on a programme combining economic reform with cruel repression in an attempt to achieve economic growth.

The reforms are based on the principle of increasing the role of the market in the distribution of resources (a move away from centralised planning in the collective and individually owned sectors of the economy) and increasing the economic responsibility of individual units of production.

Medium and small size enterprises which fall into the category of collective ownership have been made solely responsible for their own profit and loss. Central authorities have recently been refusing to subsidise consistent loss makers.

Collective

In Jilin County the dissemination of responsibility has even gone as far as the introduction of 'Factory Banks' in some enterprises. Under this system each workshop is individually responsible for profit or loss according to the factory budget. Those sections recording a profit will be able to redistribute those profits in the form of bonus payments, while those recording losses will be forced to borrow from the factory bank.

In the agricultural sector the introduction of the responsibility system has led to an end to collective farming and the division of the land into private plots according to family size and number of workers.

The purpose of such widespread economic reforms is to increase levels of production while at the same time increasing the proportion of the product going into the pockets of the state. This cannot be successfully achieved without the risk of accompanying social unrest. Hence the repression which now provides the strong arm back up for the

economic reform is of a severity unseen since the overthrow of the 'Gang of Four' in 1976.

Three campaigns are being conducted simultaneously in order to maintain the stability of the working class: the crackdown on criminals, the rectification of the Party; and the campaign to wipe out mental pollution.

Of the three the first has received most coverage in the Western press, but commentators in Peking have failed to convey the magnitude and ferocity of this campaign. Since 1 August over 1,000 people have been executed and a further 200,000 arrested and sentenced to periods of re-education in the labour camps of China's remote Western provinces.

The campaign has two main thrusts. The first, which has been given much coverage in the Chinese press, is directed against members of the state bureaucracy accused of various corporate crimes and using the power of their position to defraud the state of vast sums of money. A comparatively small number of such instances have so far been uncovered and those found guilty of serious offences have in some cases been executed.

However the significance of this side of the campaign, is its contribution to the general offensive against opponents of the current regime, rather than a serious attempt by the bureaucracy to rid itself of corrupt elements. Much more significant are the massive waves of arrests that have swept the country since the beginning of August. The sight of convoys of lorries full of youths, heads shaved and pushed forward by armed police or army guards have once again become a common sight in new China, as have the parades of convicted criminals on their way to be shot.

Fundamental to the drive for increased productivity is the need to deal with the problem of over-manning in Chinese industry. The recent trimming down of the workforce has exacerbated the many problems caused by the high level of urban unemployment. The crackdown on criminals is a crude but effective means of dealing with the growing numbers of disaffected youth on China's streets.

Any young person who has come under the scrutiny of the Public Security Bureau (China's secret police) or the police is liable to become a victim of the campaign. While most are charged with petty criminal offences, evidence that you have been associating freely with foreigners is enough to book you a one way ticket to a Qunghai labour camp.

The policies being carried out today bear a remarkable resemblance to the policy of 'Xiafang' adopted during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, under the auspices of which hundreds of thousands of youths were sent down to the countryside and safely dispersed among the peasantry. Any threat to the system from this

potentially volatile section of society was thereby averted as were the economic strains caused by urban unemployment. It should be added, however, that the victims of 'Xiafang' were at least granted equal rights with the peasantry, a luxury which will not be given to 'convicted criminals'.

While the main rhetorical and judicial force of the campaign has been directed against thieves, rapists, and other criminal offenders, there seems little doubt that the first people to be dealt with were those who had come into contact with the Public Security Bureau by virtue of their involvement in organised political opposition to the Chinese Communist Party and the state. These were the remaining activists of the Democracy Movement.

The Democracy Movement grew out of the official opposition to Jiang Qing and 'The Gang of Four'. However, following the reinstatement of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, some groups of dissidents continued to retain a critical stance towards the Party. Unofficial literature was published expressing dissatisfaction with the system and in some instances attacking the Party from a genuine Marxist position.

Some dissidents were actively involved in organising fellow workers to fight for their economic and political interests. The unique characteristic of China's dissident movement was that 90 percent of the activists were factory workers, many of whom had received their first lessons in the rudiments of political activity as Red Guards during the early days of the Cultural Revolution.

Penetrates

Their attempt to build a workers' opposition was nipped in the bud in mid-1981 when the Party followed up their ban on all unofficial publications by arresting the 25 leading activists along with an unknown number of others. At the time it seemed as though the Democracy Movement would continue to survive thanks to the middle layer of activists who were at that time undetected. Now it has to be said that it seems unlikely that many will have survived the latest bout of arrests, and any that have will have little opportunity for activity in the current climate.

While the cutting edge of the repression is undoubtedly the crackdown on criminals, the two other complementary campaigns ensure that the scope of the policies crosses the boundaries of criminality and penetrates deeply into every aspect of Chinese life.

On 13 October the *People's Daily* carried the central committee resolution regarding the 'Rectification of the Party'. Over the next three years a purge is to be carried out at every level of the Party organisation, in order to rid the Party of factionalists of both left and the right. Any Party members who are discovered to have been seriously implicated in the activities of Jiang Qing and the 'Gang of Four' will be expelled from the Party. In the event of being found guilty of having committed crimes against the state they will be tried according to the laws of the state. In some cases conviction could lead to the death penalty. Many more members, guilty of mistakes rather than crimes, will be re-



habilitated through a process of criticism and self criticism.

The rectification where it is aimed at the so called 'left' within the Party is clearly intended to rid the ranks once and for all of the lingering influence of the Cultural Revolution. It is difficult to predict exactly how successful the purge will prove to be. Certainly inside the Central Committee stronghold of Peking, heads will roll. Two of the editorial staff of the *People's Daily* have already fallen foul of the campaign, for concentrating all their attacks on the left and failing to draw attention to the failings of the

right 'deviationists'. The campaign against those who have walked too far down the capitalist road, is now being intensified with the recent commencement of the campaign to eliminate mental pollution.

This mental pollution allegedly arises from an adherence to or, alternatively an over-exposure to Western ideas and values. This in turn can lead to the development of such dangerous trains of thought as 'humanitarianism' or 'bourgeois liberalism'. The campaign is being conducted for the most part at a fairly abstract theoretical level, but has also found concrete manifesta-

tion in the repression of 'modernist' schools in the fields of literature and the arts. These started to develop during the period of comparative liberalisation since 1978. Any free expression in the arts now falls under the category of 'mental pollution'.

For the ordinary Chinese worker, the rhetoric of this campaign has little to add to the crackdown on criminals which preceded it, other than to make it unmistakably clear that the cultivation of Western habits and ideas is no longer an acceptable mode of behaviour. The campaign to wipe out 'mental pollution' provides rather flimsy ideological rationalisation for the steps already taken under the anti-criminal measures.

China's economic development plan depends heavily on the combination of an increased role for market forces inside the country with the build up of an advanced industrial sector, which, with the aid of an influx of Western capital and technology, can provide a launching pad for China into the world market. China's main advantage over many of its competitors lies in its ability to guarantee a cheap and stable workforce.

Restructuring

The leading question facing the Party today, is how to keep out the corrupting influences of the Western world while at the same time restructuring China's economy to compete more effectively with the rest of the capitalist world.

It is not just the fear of sex, drugs and rock and roll which motivates the Party. In fact it is much more the fear that as China's economy grows and contact with the West increases, workers will themselves become conscious of their central position and start to demand a greater share of their product in the form of higher wages. This would not only undermine China's economic advantages but could also seriously threaten the political stability.

The crackdown on criminals and the campaign to eliminate 'mental pollution' both attempt to deal with the contradictions consistently thrown up by the state capitalist system. They can perhaps be effective for some time, but their impact can only be cosmetic. They can only patch over the conflict between Chinese workers and their ruling class which is fundamental to all capitalist societies.

For Deng Xiaoping and for a number of the ageing leadership the sands of time present a more immediate threat to their power than the working class. Their time is fast running out. The rectification of the Party is a last attempt by Deng to consolidate power in the hands of Zhao Ziyang, Hu Yaobang and the rest of his faithful followers. It needs hardly be stated that there are no changes inside the Party that could fundamentally improve the position of the working class. That sort of change can only come from the workers themselves. However, with the level of political repression as high as it is, and with the control of the Party and the state over the working class so complete, it is difficult to envisage any change for the better in the near future.

Taking on the tyrants

When workers rose in Hungary in 1956, and again more recently in Poland, many socialists condemned them as reactionary. Andy Zebrowski reviews a book which argues that such risings were important struggles for *real* workers' power.

Chris Harman's book *Class Struggles in Eastern Europe* is about workers' power. The reality; workers fighting. And the fiction; the Eastern bloc. Using workers' leaflets and newspapers and eyewitness reports, he gives a strikingly immediate feel to the concrete struggles that took place.

The events in Berlin, 1953, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 and Poland 1980-81 are described in great detail. In Hungary and Poland particularly we see what workers are capable of when they wage war on their rulers.

Hungarian workers battled with sealed Russian tanks, armed with petrol bombs and a handful of revolvers. Police and soldiers handed their weapons over, joined the workers or remained neutral. The workers struck.

After more than 20,000 people had been butchered to make Hungary 'safe for socialism' a further general strike broke out. Altogether workers held out in general strikes for four weeks — even after the first real soviet seen in Europe for nearly 40 years (The Central Workers Council of Greater Budapest) had been arrested. 200,000 troops and 3000 tanks crushed one of the bravest and most tenacious workers' revolts in history — all in the name of the 'Soviet' Union.

Harman vividly shows how economic strikes in Poland in July 1980 led to the big political battle through which the workers won the right to set up their independent trade union by the end of August. This in turn led to a torrent of amazing strikes at a local level. Workers removed local party bosses and demanded the end of luxury villas, special hospitals and even private hunting grounds enjoyed by bureaucrats and police.

Other sections like students and small peasants, were inspired to fight back too. The whole of Polish society was shaken up, and bar a few thousand people in privileged positions wanted change. The potential for a workers' revolution in a modern industrial society was clearly there.

But revolutions don't drop from the sky. Harman gives a clear analysis of Eastern Europe and of the circumstances that led to the workers' revolts.

The state capitalist countries are not islands adrift from the rest of the world. There is one global economy.

Without exceptions, the ruling classes in

each country are forced by economic and military competition to accumulate as much surplus value as they can from the workers they subjugate.

The cause of crisis is the same everywhere. It spreads from one national economy to another because of the growing interdependence of international capitalism.

Ultimately it is 'over-accumulation' caused by the frenetic scramble to outdo other capitalists, whether states, private companies, or a mixture of both, which gives birth to the crisis. If you want a fuller explanation, then read the book.

The workers' upsurges started after Stalin's death in March 1953. The first period of intense accumulation accompanied by brutal police terror, was coming to an end. The ruling bureaucrats were split between those who wanted some measure of liberalisation and the 'old guard' Stalinists. But once there was slight movement workers turned it into an avalanche.

The Polish revolts of 70, 76 and initially in July 1980, occurred because the party leaders tried to cut workers' living standards too much. As we've seen in Holland, Belgium and Canada in recent months, mass outbursts of workers' anger are not restricted to the east European countries under these conditions.

In his new conclusion, Harman attacks the idea that economies in the east are qualitatively less efficient than those in the West. He points out that it is over-investment that causes massive inefficiencies in both areas. If the state capitalist economies are less efficient, and it's by no means clear that they are, then it is probably because they are smaller and so more vulnerable to mistakes. This point needs stressing.

Many who want change in the East believe that somehow their economies must be westernised before any improvements in workers' living standards can be made. There are also many on the Western left today who've thrown out the slavish pro-Russian orthodoxy of twenty years ago, only to adopt a position that the east European states are intrinsically more oppressive. This leads to a softness towards, or even out and out apology for the ruling classes in the West.

But the revolutionary, Harman argues, does not side with any ruling class. And he points out that the US government in 1956 declared that they didn't want anarchy in Hungary. The western banks in December 1981 were relieved that Jaruzelski had enforced martial law.

This leads us to the final, and most important aim of the book. Harman criticises all the reformist economic solutions and, at greater length, the confused leadership given to workers in their heroic battles.

As revolutionaries we do not simply wait for workers to act — we have to prepare the ground. Even when workers fight in their



millions they will eventually be defeated unless an organised minority exists who can argue with their workmates that they can create their own state and control their own lives. Such an organised minority — a revolutionary party — would have argued the following during the months of Solidarity's existence:

To spread and generalise from the myriad of local strikes that broke out in 1981 — instead even the 'radicals' thought that strikes should be curbed.

To try and split the army and police — even when police in some areas wanted to form a union, and when young soldiers protested against an extension of conscription, no one argued to back those demands.

To prepare for an insurrection (something no union can do) by secretly organising the arming of workers and building the cells in the police and army.

To spread the revolution internationally. The only way to defeat the Russian threat was to take the offensive. The fact that the Russians held off invading during the 15½ months of Solidarity's existence is an unmistakable sign of their fear of Polish workers' resistance. Russia's rulers feared the struggle spreading. There were riots against call-up in the Trans Carpathian region of the USSR during this period, for instance.

Of course, for a revolutionary party to be built anywhere is difficult, in eastern Europe doubly so. When your home is bombed to rubble by a Russian tank in the name of Marx, or your best friend has had his head split open by a ZOMO psychopath in the name of Lenin, unearthing the revolutionary tradition of the past seems virtually impossible. But it can and must be done.

In a time of workers' defeat, Harman's book provides rousing inspirations on the one hand, and a strategy to win on the other.

Fighting racism

While M Simons' article correctly criticises the Brent Labour Party's adoption of a black councillor, Mrs Neil, for her blackness rather than her politics, and for their belief that racism can be effectively fought from above, his subsequent attack on Brent's race relations' policy is so crude as to leave me considering whether he or I should be in the SWP.

Mike is mistaken about the incident at Kilburn Poly. The person involved, far from just being a lecturer just filling up a mock application form, was my *Head of Department* putting up a public notice in my staff room which equated Access students to a black dog and described them as 'mostly black all over, believes in the Welfare State, uneducated, etc.'

I put a resolution to my union branch stating that I considered this notice would encourage racist feelings and actions and that therefore he should be sacked. Oh yes, the Head of Department does claim the notice was a joke. Mike seems to suggest that this kind of 'joke' is acceptable.

Certainly, the Labour employers suspended him and then demoted him (the new Tory administration have reinstated him) but they did not sack him as Mike Simons writes. Is he stating that we should not press in our branches for the dismissal of a racist?

We pressed for the dismissal of the Chair of the National Front who is a lecturer at Harrogate Tech. Or was Mike suggesting that we cannot press for his dismissal if the Labour councillors are doing likewise? And, by the by, the porter sacked for making racist comments, which Mike also appears to oppose, is now believed to be a member of a fascist organisation.

Mike's statement that the Head's 'dismissal' encourages racism suggests that we do not get involved in anti-racist struggles. Yet in this period, there will always be some white backlash.

The history of the SWP has always been, quite correctly, to take a very hard line on racism, so that, for example, one of the few times *Socialist Worker* has opposed a strike was when the dockers marched for Enoch Powell after his 'rivers of blood' speech.

What makes me even more alarmed is Mike Simons' superficial approach to the undoubtedly contradictory issues facing revolutionaries working in education and the sorts of demands that we press for.

Of course putting on Access courses exclusively for blacks does not offer a solution to the oppression of blacks, in particular working class blacks, nor does such

piecemeal tinkering from above undermine education's recreation of class inequality. Nor does the obvious fact that a campaign for the reform of education would not bring about revolution tomorrow mean that in the past the SWP would never have participated critically in a campaign for 'reforms'.

Is M Simons suggesting we should actively oppose such schemes or abstain from the debate, and if so, why? Is it because the courses are proposed by the local authority? If so, should we also oppose comprehensives, health and safety measures, the cheap fares policy etc? Mike is confusing not agitating for a policy with opposing it.

Even if Mike correctly wishes to argue from a revolutionary perspective against a policy of positive discrimination, he cannot justify my Head of Department's racist opposition to Access courses, 'joke' or no joke.

One of the reasons for a revolutionary party is to overcome the divisions that capitalism creates within the working class. There is no easy guideline to determine how we relate to anti-racist issues in order to draw others towards the centrality of class politics. Perhaps Mike Simons did not mean to be so flippantly dismissive of the complex and very different questions raised by anti-racist work. In this sort of downturn, there is a need for political retrenchment. But many of us are working as trade unionists and having to make decisions on a day-to-day basis about dirty and compromised struggles whose terms we have not determined but from which we cannot abstain.

Merilyn Moose

Sorry and thanks

We would like to thank Merilyn Moose for drawing our attention to the details of the incident at Kilburn Poly. It is no excuse for an editor to claim that the reporter was misinformed. We were clearly wrong.

What we imagined was a 'joke' was obviously a piece of deliberate racist agitation. The SWP has always been very proud of its determined opposition to racism and there has been no change in that policy. We want to make it quite clear that we will have no truck with racism.

The incident to which Merilyn refers, however, was only one small item in a detailed article about the policies of Brent Council's Labour

Group on a number of issues, and we would like to make it equally clear that we support wholeheartedly both the analysis and conclusions contained in Mike Simons' article.

There is nothing in Merilyn's letter which persuades us that, overall, the policies pursued by that Labour Group were other than tokenism designed to assuage the conscience of reformist 'lefts' while excusing them from organising any serious fight against racism, sexism, or any other of the revolting manifestations of capitalist society.

Our attitude to the schemes dreamed up by reformists is to ask what they mean for the working class. In instances where they lead to

attacks on workers, for example the ILEA's current compulsory transfer policy, we of course oppose them and lead action against them. In those cases where they lead to actual improvements in workers' situations we welcome them.

But in neither case is our attitude to the reformists other than one of political hostility. For us, the decisive question is not this or that reform but the development and improvement of independent working class organisation.

If Merilyn agrees with us on that fact, then there is no reason for her to be worrying about either her or Mike's membership of the SWP.

Colin Sparks

Rank and file

Mike Rosen is trying to create a division between my article and the SWP where none (I hope!) exists (*Socialist Review* Jan Letters page). The core of our politics has always been rank and file activity — or to put it more grandly, that socialism can only be brought about through working class self-activity.

So nothing has changed as a result of our decision to wind up the Rank and File groups — indeed, we wound them up precisely because they no longer corresponded to real rank and file activity, and we were not prepared to pretend that they did (unlike the replacement huddles of sectarian grouplets which Mike refers to).

But that does not mean we retire into propagandism (as his accusations of defeatism suggest). There is, however, a downturn going on, and though it would be lovely to

think that our participation in the Save ILEA campaign is going to make a crucial difference to its success or failure (as Mike implies), realism — and modesty — compels me to believe otherwise.

So, what we do say is that, in these unfavourable circumstances for the working class movement, revolutionary politics comes to the fore as the precondition for rebuilding shop floor confidence, and thus a rank and file fightback. There are no short cuts.

That's why building the SWP is essential. Stressing rank and file activity (rather than relying on friendly councillors, MPs or their lordships) as the only basis for resisting Tory attacks on local government is in absolutely no contradiction to that — indeed, quite the opposite.

Gareth Jenkins

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American Nightmare

Jonathan Neale reviews *Daniel*, a film by Sidney Lumet and E L Doctorow.

For years now I have been telling people about a wonderful novel by E L Doctorow called *The Book of Daniel*. Now Sidney Lumet has made a film of the book, with a screenplay by Doctorow himself.

On my way to the cinema I remembered an old joke. Two goats are standing on top of a rubbish dump. One of them is munching his way through a reel of film. The other goat asks, 'Does that taste good?' The reply is, 'It's OK, but I preferred the book.'

I needn't have worried. The film is much better than the book. I started crying about two minutes into it and cried for most of the next two hours. And it's a relief to write a review for this magazine and not have to say this is a good film *but*, and then write five paragraphs correcting the politics.

The plot of the film is built around the famous Rosenberg case. The Rosenbergs were a New York couple who were convicted in 1951 of passing atomic secrets to the Russians.

They made ideal victims for the American government's assault on the left. They were New York Jews who ran a small radio repair shop in the slums. They were rank and file members of the Communist Party—and they were Russian spies. They were the symbolic opposition of everything John

Wayne and Ronald Reagan stood for. The government wanted to fry them for it.

The liberals and the Communist Party launched a mass campaign to prove it was a frame-up and free the Rosenbergs. The government evidence was thin, their case ridiculous. But the campaign failed. The Rosenbergs were electrocuted. They lived on as martyrs, symbols of the witch-hunting terror of the McCarthy years. They became part of the liberal mythology about the early fifties.

This mythology says it was a dark and shameful time for America, a time when the body politic seemed almost mentally unhinged. The arch-demon Joe McCarthy roamed the land, flourishing lists of hundreds of names of innocent men and women. He smeared decent liberals, hounded teachers from their jobs, broke careers and hearts.

He was a drunk, a paranoid opportunist, a liar and a fat Republican. Finally the Senate, in its decency, decided he had gone too far. Sanity slowly returned.

This mythology is rubbish. The American left was broken in those years. But not just by crazy right wing witch hunters. Walter Reuther had already cleared communists out of the militant auto workers' union. He was a 'socialist'. The Seamen's union gladly collaborated with rules that no communist or revolutionary

would ever work on board ship again.

Liberal university departments fired people. Publishers wouldn't touch established left-wing writers. Militants were cleaned out of industry. Leaders of Negro organisations fell all over themselves to proclaim their anti-communism.

These attacks weren't just directed against party members. The red scare took in every 'crypto-communist', every 'unwitting dupe', everybody who used the words class struggle or socialism. In a word, every militant.

In 1946 and 1947 the largest strike wave in human history had swept through the American factories. The working class was confident, combative, and sometimes open to new ideas. By 1952 the typical bearer of these ideas was cowering at home behind closed blinds, hoping his employer didn't find out that his wife had belonged to the American-Soviet Friendship League for two months in 1942.

The great fear worked. The left and its periphery were smashed. When militancy returned in the sixties, there was no memory of past struggle among us. There were no socialist stewards, no core of revolutionaries, no books in the libraries or the bookstore. We were condemned to repeat anew every mistake in working class history. And we were astonished to discover that we *had* a history of struggle.

The liberals and the socialists had a simple line of defence in the fifties. 'It wasn't me, boss. I am opposed to the totalitarianism of both left and right. I'm for freedom, democracy, the American way. Don't persecute us. We're innocent. We're not communists.'

Men and women who reacted in this way are deeply ashamed to this day. Out of their shame they have constructed the legend that those days were impossible to understand, that the persecutions were the unfair and unjust harring of innocent people. The Rosenbergs and their innocence have remained a symbol of this legend.

The great strength of *Daniel* is that Lumet and Doctorow make it clear they couldn't care less if the Rosenbergs were guilty or not. The story centres on 'Danny Isaacson', the fictional son of 'Paul and Rochelle Isaacson', the film's Rosenbergs.

We first see Daniel in the flower power sixties, a cynical and wounded young man in his twenties. Then his younger sister goes mad with grief for her family, and Danny sets out to clear his parents' name.

His search for the truth is intercut with scenes of his parents in the forties and Danny as a young boy. As Danny combs his memory and talks to surviving witnesses, he slowly recognises there is no point in 'clearing their name'.

His parents were good party members, fighters for the working class and the negro and the Soviet Union. He can do them no honour by proving that they *would* have been spies for the Soviet Union. Of course they would.

Doctorow and Lumet are in no doubt about the failures, the twists and turns of American Stalinism. Every major failure of the party is mentioned in a scene or a bit of dialogue. Three short scenes in succession show the young Isaacsons, very much in love, following the party line.

In 1938 they are singing lustily on an anti-fascist march. In 1940 they cheer the Nazi-Soviet pact with wild enthusiasm. In 1942 Paul comes home from Army basic training wanting nothing more than the honour of defending the Soviet Union on a second front.

Lumet shows the party's ultimate, personal failure too. The father has been arrested, the relatives and neighbours will not come near, the family

huddles in poverty. The mother is arrested. The party has decided they are unpersons. No comrade comes to take care of the children, to offer help or comfort or legal defence. It is only after the conviction that the party rallies round when it recognises the propaganda value of the case.

But the party's failures are not the theme of the film. If you don't know the history, you miss the allusions. Lumet and Doctorow are talking to a right wing American audience. A left wing criticism of the party would all too easily seem like a defensive liberal apology. Instead, the film shows why the Isaacsons were communists.

They were communists for the same reasons we are in the SWP. They meet on a union picket line. They spend their lives fighting for their class. The scenes of party life show comradeship, happy drinking at their 'Skegness', a father explaining the class struggle in simple terms to his child, the grim dedication of isolated individuals in the downturn, the enthusiastic naivete of new communists and the half-cynical and wholly committed stamina of the experienced. With all their mistakes, they were trying to fight our fight. And, Lumet says, we should honour them for it.

At the end of the film the Isaacsons are electrocuted. The father goes first. Terrified, he faints and is strapped into a medieval torture chair and fried alive. He is a victim. For a moment you can believe this is a liberal film against capital punishment.

The mother follows, erect and proud. She orders the rabbi out of the room. She is a communist. She embraces her black guard, the only other woman in the room. She stands in the centre of a knot of torturers in suits, the shortest person among them. She dwarfs them with her courage. She is a hero, not a victim.

In the last scene Danny is a grown man. He swings his own young son on his shoulders and joins an anti-war demonstration by the side of his wife. For this one family at least, the great fear has been beaten. The struggle continues.

It is no wonder the American critics hated *Daniel*. It celebrates the class struggle and savages liberal evasions. It's a powerful film; well written, wonderfully directed, beautifully acted. See it if you can.

Mao and the Time Lords

Science fiction is often a conscious, and always an unconscious, effort by a writer to sound off about present day social reality by writing about the future and unreality. From Orwell to Ursula Le Guinn the effort is obviously political. But politics also lies behind the offerings on television. Behind the monsters and space hardware lies political propaganda and a projected world view.

Still the most famous series is the ever-repeated *Star Trek*. It is an all-American import. Wearing mid-to-late 60s party gear, this is a view of the future where America has conquered the universe, almost. *Star Trek* is a product of a confident, expanding America taking the joys of the American way of life, fast foods and sentimentality, to the far reaches of the universe. It is a show in the centre of the political spectrum, with the logic of Mr Spock, the slightly hysterical and emotional liberal Dr McCoy, and the Kennedy like Captain Kirk.

Seeing them argue and fret on the best tactics and strategy for more additions to the Federation (read the USA) is like reading back issues of the *Washington Post*; the liberal centre in constant quandary. It does have its high points, though, especially the cool stare of Mr Spock against the constant crises of Captain Kirk. (Some claim to see a hidden homosexual relationship between Spock and Kirk.)

The shows now getting repeated in Britain are the older and more serious *Outer Limits* and *The Twilight Zone*. Made during the time of the first cold war these are full of liberal outcries against nuclear weapons and the cold war. Filmed in stark black and white and using the style of 'film noir' they were made using people black-listed by Hollywood. They are often of very high quality. They are small moral tales with a good liberal ending.

From the serious to the ridiculous. The British puppet creations of the past 20 years or so (*Fireball XL5*, *Supercar*, *Thunderbirds* and now *Terror Hawks*) are all very much to the right in sentiment and plot. They seem to be the puppet equivalents of the SAS. In each case a crack squad of semi-official wooden tops armed with the most advanced in puppet technology save the world from terrorism and anarchy. The makers of the series have developed great skills in blowing up models in slow motion, a spoilt child's dream, and writing plots that require the minimum of movement from its 'actors'. Perhaps they could give a few tips to the writers of *Coronation Street* for the scenes involving Arthur Tatlock and Stan Ogden.

Part of the modern trend in

Science Fiction on the big screen is to make humans behave like robots and mute robots — loveable, vulnerable and human-like. Could there be any better metaphor for alienation? In *Terror Hawks* this is carried further. We have puppets acting humans who behave like puppets and puppet robots providing the comic interest.

The one great progressive show for over 20 years is *Dr Who*. Unfortunately, the downturn has recently affected even this bastion of support for national liberation struggles.

A typical plot-line for *Dr Who* in the 60s and 70s would run something like this: Dr Who with friends, always bickering to show how human and British they are land on a planet to discover a society run by oppressive and semi-fascist creatures usually operating a system of slave labour. These creatures are trying to conquer all planets and establish their imperialist hold on the universe. Dr Who allies himself with the local resistance movement, usually fighting it out in the hills or under the city in caves. Dr Who provides the vanguard leadership to organise

the guerrillas and, together with a slave revolt, they defeat the imperialists. It is a classic Maoist text for national liberation. Power comes from the jet of a Dalek arm.

For 20 years the BBC has provided the world with a popular Maoist Sci Fi interpretation of the struggle for national liberation and revolution. Though *Dr Who* is a product of the upturn in struggle of the 60s and 70s the show remains in the elitist traditions of bourgeois revolution. The oppressed and exploited creatures who Dr Who leads time after time to victory never have any control over the Vanguard Party (Dr Who and his friends) who are in all senses of the word alien to them.

The relation to the means of production of *Dr Who* is never made clear. The role of the Time Lords is mystified. Whose surplus labour do they consume? What are the working conditions and what control does the Tardis have over society?

Similarly, the victory of progressive forces is an alliance of all classes in which class differences are masked and hidden. The victory leads to restoration of the status quo before the imperialists arrived, not to workers' control. Workers' councils are not set up. The Doctor never educates the workers to their role as the ruling class of the post revolutionary world. But, in spite of these criticisms the series is pro-revolt and anti-imperialist and a



million light years more progressive than *Star Trek*.

The first ever episode of *Dr Who* was shown the week that Kennedy was shot. The death of Kennedy is today seen as the start of unrest in America, the beginning of the turbulence of the 60s and 70s. If *Star Trek* is confident Pax America, *Dr Who* is imperialism under attack, and it is on the side of the attackers.

But all is not well with the series. Deviating from its classic petty-bourgeois revolutionary plot, it has produced an anti-*Dr Who*, the Master. Increasingly, the series becomes a rather moralistic tale with The Master and *Dr Who* flying around and using local creatures as extras in a struggle between good and evil. The downturn has caught up with *Dr Who* in spite of his time-machine.

Another programme born in the midst of the downturn, and of which I once had high hopes, was *Blakes' 7*. At the beginning I hoped that it might replace the now-flagging *Dr Who*. (Maoism throughout Europe was, after all, now a spent force). It looked as if the outer-space Robin Hood storyline would develop into a Sci Fi equivalent of the Red Brigades. A small band of 'outlaws' blow up bits of the nasty Empire in the hope of sparking off a general uprising.

The wrong politics once again, and one possible response to the low level of class struggle, but at least it was anti-Empire and pro-revolution.

This was not to be. The series became bogged down in the backbiting and infighting of both the nasties and their hierarchy and the bickering goodies. The dialogues came to resemble a bitchy cocktail party in Hertfordshire attended by the middle and upper management of a large corporation. (I assume it to be based on the BBC). The main villain was one Servalan, the only baddie ever with a name like a handcream. The overall effect was very Home Counties, with a touch of Camden Lock market for the outcasts. It was a flop on all levels. We still have the degenerated *Dr Who* but *Blakes' 7*, thank heavens, is no more.

Finally the one recent bright spot *Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy* (HHGG). This is the only programme that has used the potential of modern computer graphics and special effects. Cynical to the core, it has been a huge success in radio, book and TV form. Unlike the rest it is deliberately funny, full of wit and generally taking the piss out of the world. HHGG inhabits a galaxy that is anarchic and mad. No longer are we in a universe of logic, with struggles between oppressors and the oppressed or good versus evil. All is chaos and arbitrary madness. It is the product of a world which is falling apart at the seams. All meanings are disintegrating and there is no alternative to the chaos except a sense of humour and cynicism. It captured reality and the mood of the present brilliantly.

From Marx to mysticism

At the Rendezvous of Victory — Selected Writings Vol 3

C L R James
Allison & Busby £4.95

C L R James has a long and varied career, and is now much admired in Channel 4 circles. He is fated as a philosopher, a brilliant cricket correspondent, a prophet of Black Nationalism and a champion of the women separatists.

One stage of his development is conveniently forgotten: that once he was a revolutionary socialist and supporter of Trotsky.

It was as a Trotskyist that he wrote two of his finest works, *World Revolution* and *The Black Jacobins*. The former a courageous attack on Stalinism, the latter the inspiring story of a slave revolt against French imperialism. In the 30s it was not easy to be on the left and oppose the Stalinist monolith.

Today writings on the horrors of Stalin's Russia are two a penny. In the 30s such authoritative works from a revolutionary standpoint were rare. Trotsky, with a few reservations, praised the book. To the small group of Trotskyists

scattered over the world, it was invaluable.

Even as late as 1947 James wrote: 'Lenin's concept of the party, his insistence on rigid discipline, democratic centralism, more than ever necessary today, cannot for a single moment be separated from Marx's economic-philosophic concept of the destiny of the modern proletariat.'

He was soon to adopt a syndicalist form of rank and filism.

This collection contains numerous examples — 'We are against the concept of the vanguard party' — 'Workers in 1971 know more than any vanguard party can tell them'. Music to the ears of the fragments, who sometimes use him as a stick to beat revolutionaries with.

So why the difference? What had happened to James?

In the late 40s whilst in America he became the centre of cult based on the worship of Hegel. The intellectual conclusion of this mystical pursuit was that workers' councils without a party could spontaneously bring about socialism.

His close collaborator Raya Dunayevskaya at one stage went as far as to proclaim that the greatest achievement of the Hungarian Revolution had been that the Hegelian Dialectic had become accessible to the masses. Remnants of the Cult still produce a newspaper called *News & Letters*, a mixture of movementism and mysticism.

The late fifties saw him working for Henry Williams, the right wing ex-black nationalist premier of Trinidad. He was also closely associated with President Nkrumah of Ghana. James was now a leading guru of Black Nationalism and Third Worldism.

He was to break with Williams and Nkrumah, but not unfortunately with the muddled intellectualism that brought them together in the first place.

Having broken with Williams he took up writing and lecturing again. His writings now lack the clarity and purpose they had shown in 1937. It is mainly his later writings that are in this particular selection. Here, Lenin, Mao Tse Tung, Ghandi and Nkrumah are praised as equals in mankind's struggle for progress.

Trotskyists and Stalinists not

Challenging ideas

The Empire's Old Clothes
A Dorfman
Pluto Press (£4.95)

Ariel Dorfman writes about popular literature. He looks at the Lone Ranger, Donald Duck and a character called Babar the Elephant. He finds that the stories in which they appear peddle racist, sexist, imperialist, pro-capitalist ideas. What a surprise!

Of course Dorfman is right to treat popular literature and children's literature as seriously as marxists have traditionally taken 'great literature.' Donald Duck is probably a more widely recognised figure than Hamlet.

The book originally took shape when Dorfman was working for the Popular Unity government in Chile in the early 1970s and his most interesting analysis is of how the fortunes of a popular Chilean children's comic character, Mampato, seem to mirror the then situation in Chile. He argues that the publishers permitted stories of insurrection then in a way they would not in the period of the Pinochet dictatorship.

More generally, he finishes by saying:

'Our young ones are at this moment assimilating fiction which, under its pert and smiling guise, turns them into competitors, teaches them to see domination as the only alternative to subjection. They are

only sell each other's papers, but even edit them: 'He was a communist, a Stalinist, and I had joined the Trotskyist movement, but we never quarrelled because both of us had a political perspective; the revolutionary emancipation of the African Peoples.'

The journey is almost complete. Workers revolution with a party, now revolution without workers, without criticism of those organisations that had drowned 1917 in blood.

It was this intellectual weakness and a wish not to argue too hard with any new movement or idea, but rather to adapt that was to endear him to the swamp.

For example, he describes the cult of Rastafari as 'Horns from Elf Land' capable of bringing down the walls of oppression, as 'trumpets collapsed the walls of Jericho'.

It's a tragedy that he should now be taken up as a hero for his weaknesses. Yet those now lauding him have all those failings too, but none of his talents, early strengths and record of struggle. Don't buy this book, instead buy a copy of *The Black Jacobins*, or borrow *World Revolution*. It will be time far better spent.

A Strouthous

learning sex roles; perverse and deformed visions of history, how to grow up, adapt and succeed in the world as it presently is. They are learning not to ask questions.'

According to Dorfmann, this is not only going on with children; the mass of adults are also infantilised by the mass media.

And that leads to a question which reveals a flaw in his argument: how come he is different? Why can he see through things that other people cannot?

The answer, of course, is that he is not unique. Nobody believes everything they read. No-one is the passive consumer of ruling class ideology that Dorfmann makes out. The really interesting question is one that Dorfmann does not ask: it is not surprising that capitalist corporations produce pro-capitalist interpretations of the world, but why are they popular amongst those who do not benefit from them?

In order to answer that, of course, we need to see people as active agents, sometimes accepting the world and sometimes rejecting it, with a contradictory and confused consciousness which reflects both aspects of their situation. The problem of which one comes to therefore is not a question of cultural analysis but of revolutionary organisation.

H Brandler

Animal crackers

The Animals Report
Richard North
Penguin £1.95 **The Hunt and the Anti-Hunt**
Phillip Windeatt
Pluto Press £1.95

There is nothing the swamp like more than helping the weak and oppressed. They much prefer making reforms, giving grants and appealing to the conscience, to organising any fightback that involves self-activity and links with stronger sections of the workforce.

You can take your pick of worthy causes, and do things on behalf of passive victims. The endless list of such causes is proof of their total failure to change anything.

All isolated one-issue campaigns are attempts to achieve reforms because they refuse to generalise to the system that creates the problem in the first place. In order to get reforms they try to put pressure on anyone who might be sympathetic and powerful. They concentrate on MPs, the wealthy, the press, etc.

The narrow outlook which arises from the one-issue focus means that the activists completely lose their sense of proportion.

If there is one cause that sums up all of these traits is Animal Liberation. Their cause has a great advantage over the homeless or whatever: it can't speak or organise for itself. It is the do-gooders' perfect dream.

Lack of a sense of proportion is the most obvious problem. Even if it made sense, Animal Liberation is hardly the priority in a world riddled with war and threatened with nuclear war.

Windeatt's book is little more than an overpriced pamphlet and lacks any sense of proportion. It bemoans the fact that a dog was tried and executed in 1771 for killing a child, even though it was provided with a defence council. After pages of similar ludicrous information, we enter the world of rural guerrilla warfare.

We are told how hunt saboteurs (sabs) disrupt hunts (carry out hits): 'Over the past 18 years, however, hunt sabotage tactics have become much more sophisticated, as saboteurs have learned more about hunting and refined their tactics accordingly. The hunting fellowship is threatened by a formidable opposition under its nose.'

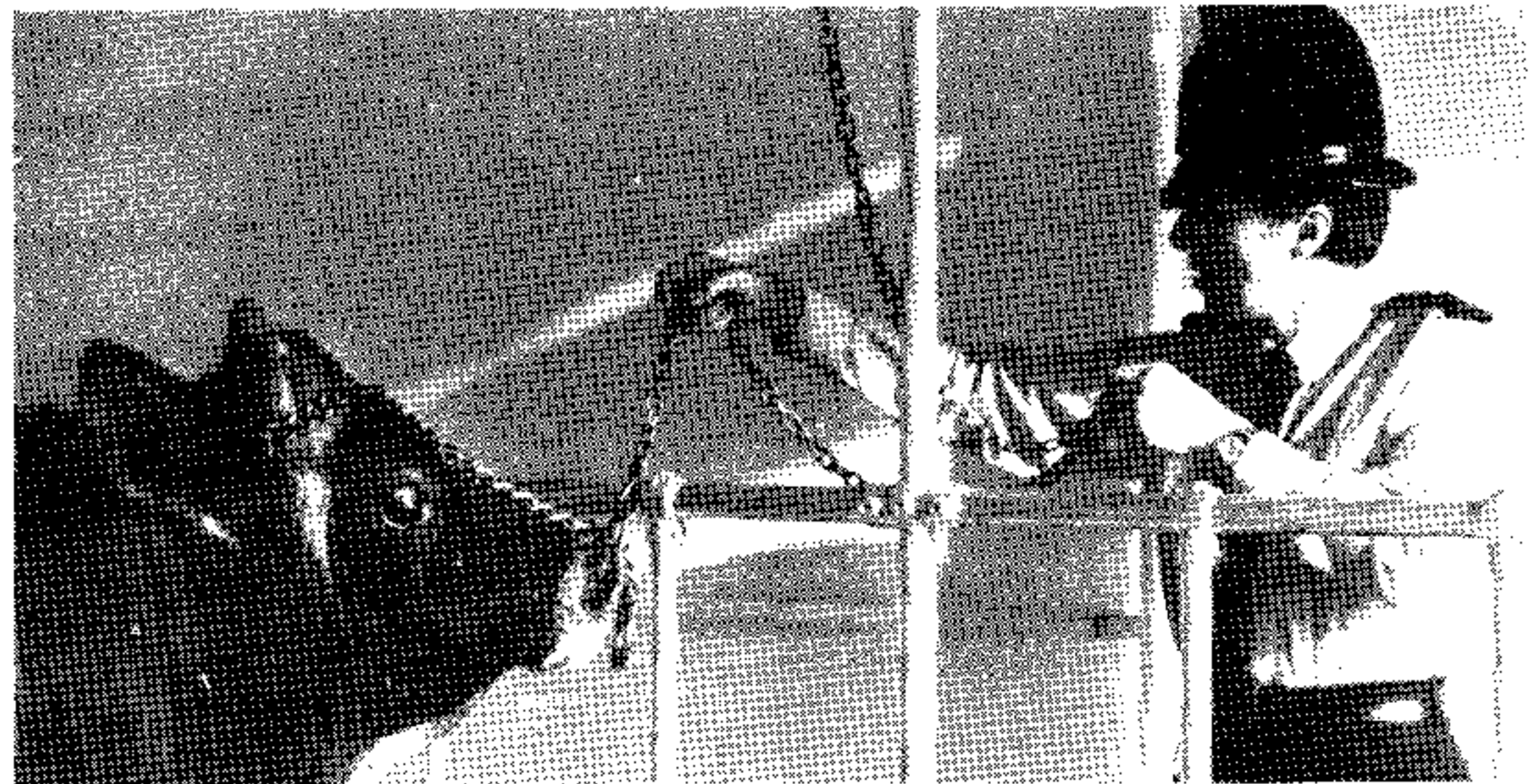
Anyone who thinks it too strong to call this a fantasy of rural guerrilla warfare should read an article published in *New Society* on 18 November 1982. One animal liberator went on record thus: 'Unless something changes soon in favour of the animals, somebody may end up getting killed.'

That is the logical conclusion of the sort of isolated and substitutionist politics that Windeatt advocates.

North's book is much more substantial, dealing with factory farms, zoos and animal experiments as well as hunts.

He would prefer that people were vegetarians and that most experiments on animals were stopped. He sympathises with the militants but prefers reason to direct action. But despite his reasonable habit of quoting from various bits of legislation, he has no more sense of proportion than Windeatt.

He thinks workers would happily pay more for free range eggs and chickens. He complements Tory MP William Elliott for boycotting veal. What does support for attacks on workers matter compared with that?



Politicians of all parties, farmers, the courts, police, the RSPCA, all get a friendly mention. The only vitriol is reserved for Paul Foot and the SWP. His view is quoted:

'I am not in favour of inhumanity to animals and am instinctively against factory farming, but I am in favour of the slaughter of animals for meat.'

To say that mankind can survive on a handful of brown rice and bananas is reactionary.'

In North's view it is better to be a Tory and kind to animals than a meat-eating member of the SWP.

He produces many fake arguments in support of vegetarianism. He says that rearing animals for food is an inefficient form of producing protein and that this means fewer facilities for grain production. He gives the impression that eating meat causes starvation.

Last year enough food was produced to feed the world twice over. The reason for millions starving was poverty. Capitalist farmers give

away neither meat nor grain. They would rather destroy both if that raises profits.

Domestic animals only exist to provide food. Liberated turkeys could not live in Britain. Who would feed the world's cattle, sheep and pigs if they were not sold for food? They would be slaughtered as unprofitable. Animal Liberation would result in Animal Genocide.

Perhaps those who are worried about grain production should start a campaign against flower growing. That uses space in which food could be grown.

It is true that many experiments on animals are unnecessary but some are useful. For example, limb transplants cannot be practised on live humans. North prefers to look back to the 'good old days' in which people were less worried about health and so did fewer experiments

on animals. People did not live so long then, either.

At the end of his book North attempts to give a philosophical overview of the relation between Man and Beast. He quotes Montaigne, Bentham, Descartes and St Thomas Aquinas. He would have profited by studying Engels.

In his book *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*, Engels argued against the vegetarians that:

'Man did not come into existence without a meat diet, and if the latter, among all the peoples known to us has led to cannibalism at some time or other (the forefathers of the Berliners ... used to eat their parents as late as the tenth century) that is of no consequence of us today.'

Neither Engels or the SWP favour cannibalism, but we both view the relationship between man and nature in terms of its actual historical development, not in a

moralistic or utopian fashion.

Man rose above the other primates because he was the only form of the species to eat meat, not because of his philosophical disposition. Humanity developed from the need of the hunter for weapons and organisation. Passive fruit eating led to the gorilla. The development needed for hunting led to other skills including fire, domestic tool manufacture and the domestication of animals.

But as Engels wrote:

'The meat diet, however, had its greatest effect on the brain, which now received a far richer flow of the materials necessary for its development, and could therefore develop more rapidly and perfectly from generation to generation.'

Man ceased to be just a part of nature and was now able to dominate and destroy it. He had power over all other animals. The increase in the division of labour led to the foundation of class societies and the domination of man over man. Alienation was complete. Man was separated from man as well as from nature.

The ruling class organises the plunder of nature, alters its balance and at times threatens its very existence. Both humans and nature are assets which create profit. Cruelty and destruction are not the aim but they are the logical consequence of class society.

The only way this alienation, cruelty and destruction can be removed is by attacking their causes in class society. One issue campaigns are a waste of time and energy. Moral exhortations and dreams of past golden ages will not change anything.

Only communist society will be able to overcome humanity's divorce from nature and develop the knowledge and resources needed to cultivate it so that both people and nature benefit. Whether people will still eat meat or hunt it is impossible to predict. That decision will be made by the workers.

Personally, I shall be voting for fillet steak twice a day.

Andy Strouthous

That Old Benn Magic

I'll risk going into print with a prediction. Chesterfield will not be another Bermondsey. So, in all likelihood, Tony Benn is going to be back in Parliament very soon (perhaps even with a swing to Labour).

From the first whiff of the possibility that Benn might be the candidate in Chesterfield it has been news. And it will continue to be news right up until Benn makes his first speech as an MP again.

What difference will it make Benn being back in Parliament? The answer is very little. The reasons for that are worth looking at.

It is not that the Benn magic has disappeared. On the contrary, the very fact that Benn got selected for Chesterfield at all is itself a sign of the magic he still has for many Labour Party activists.

Chesterfield is not a particularly left wing party. It voted for Roy Hattersley for deputy leader, for instance. It was not initially considered particularly favourable ground for Benn.

Then there was the little matter of the local executive refusing to shortlist him. And of course there was the never-ceasing advice from every quarter that Benn might lose them the by-election.

A man who can overcome all these obstacles at the first try is clearly not a total has-been.

Magic

More general evidence that the Benn magic is still around comes from the numerous public meetings he has addressed all over the country since the election. Benn can still pack them in, more than any other speaker on the left, and certainly more than the whole of the Shadow Cabinet combined.

He doesn't disappoint those who come to hear him. They go away feeling they have been personally talked to and not talked down to, or shouted at, by someone who shares their concerns, and yet who can give those concerns that little intellectual twist that they would never quite have thought of themselves.

Nor is this magic exercised at the cost of moving to the right in most of what he says. For example, while Kinnoek and the rest of them equivocated pathetically Benn came out loudly and clearly in support of the NGA at Warrington.

In some respects Benn appears to have shifted to the left in what he has said since the election. Take the issue of nuclear disarmament. While CND has been running for cover trying to be more 'non-political' than ever, Benn has been emphasising at meeting after meeting that the anti-bomb movement has to become more political. He says it has to look at the world order that lies behind the missiles.

Good stuff. But it is just about here that the problems start. For one of the most ob-



vious conclusions from what Benn has been saying on the subject since the election is that the argument against NATO must go hand in hand with the argument for unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Benn does not draw that conclusion. It seems that he still thinks we should stay in NATO. That is what he used to say before, when pushed. No-one seems to have pushed him since the election.

The same applies on other issues. The radical critique of the existing state of things is still there. In some cases it is more radical than ever. But when it comes to uncomfortable conclusions about what to do about

them, then the punches are pulled.

Of course that has always been an aspect of Tony Benn's politics. But in the period of the sensational rise of Bennism up to the deputy leadership election of 1981 one punch wasn't pulled. Benn was quite clear that the Labour government he himself had served in had managed capitalism scarcely differently from the Tories. Therefore there was the need for a fundamental change in the Labour Party. It needed to go way beyond pious empty rhetoric and resolutions traditional with the Labour Party in opposition.

Meetings

Ever since the beginning of 1982 Benn has been going back on that. The fundamental change in the Labour Party he began to claim, had already happened. It was embodied in the conference policies and the constitutional changes. And Benn stuck to this claim right through to the election post mortem. Remember his argument that 8½ million people had voted for socialism? That implies that socialism was on offer.

It looked pretty pathetic to us then, and we said so. Benn enthusiasts could however enter the mitigating plea that an election was coming and Benn was saving himself to fight another day.

Today, over half a year after the election, it just isn't happening. Although the general analysis at his meetings may have remained as left as ever (excluding of course, Chesterfield by-election meetings!) the important conclusion on the state of the Labour Party gets worse and worse.

In an interview in *A Week in Politics* early last month, Benn described Neil Kinnoek and Roy Hattersley as a 'balanced leadership'. He went on:

'The job of the Labour movement is to get Neil Kinnoek into Number 10 Downing Street as quickly as possible, to get the policy we've put forward developed for the next election and advocated with passion and commitment, to win the district elections and to win the European elections.'

That is what Benn says. What he doesn't say flows naturally from it. He doesn't draw the conclusion that a serious fight over nuclear disarmament requires a serious argument for pulling out of NATO. To do so would be to explode the total emptiness of Neil Kinnoek's more-NATO-than-thou 'unilateralism'.

Benn may say his own bit for the NGA, but he carefully avoids making any comment about Kinnoek's shameful performance over the issue.

A rather over-used piece of Trotskyist jargon comes to mind. The Benn magic is acting as a *left cover* for Kinnoek and Hattersley.

Over-used and jargon it may be, but unfortunately '*left cover*' is a precise scientific term for the role that Tony Benn is at present performing. And there is no prospect of him fulfilling any other role in the foreseeable future.

Neil Kinnoek need lose no sleep over the prospect of Tony Benn returning to Parliament.

Pete Goodwin