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MITTERRAND'S FRANCE: WHO'S PULLING THE STRINGS?

JACQUES KERGOAT



Municipal Socialism,
Steve Marks

Cliff & Zetkin, Valerie Coultas

The Police, Tony Bunyan

Labour's Youth Movements,
Julian Atkinson

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Editorial

A TALE OF FOUR PARTIES

As the autumn conference season draws to a close, it is clear that 1981 will be remembered, one way or another, as a watershed in British politics. The slow-burning fuse of Britain's political crisis has flared into open warfare in the traditional parties of government and sparked a process of re-alignment of the so-called political 'centre'.

Each party has of course conducted its own kind of battle — from Labour's trench warfare in Brighton, through the carefully camouflaged manoeuvres of the Tories in Blackpool, to the stage-managed debates at the launch of the Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance.

Labour Party

For Labour, the position remains deadlocked with neither the left or right wing willing to concede stalemate, but searching desperately for a winning gambit as the clock ticks away to the general election. The emergence of Benn from a 'no-hoper' in the race for the Deputy Leadership to a hair's breadth from victory has demonstrated more clearly than a thousand editorials the need to fight for socialist policies, and democratic structures to ensure they are implemented, right through the base of the labour movement.

But the Labour conference also showed that the left had underestimated the continued strength of the right wing inside the unions, especially among the union leaders. It was these people who engineered the defeat of the left on the NEC elections and on NEC control of the manifesto, aided and abetted by the Kinnock 'soft left' defections.

While important policy advances were made at the conference the left still has a long way to travel in building a real class struggle current in the Labour Party and the unions, and in developing popular socialist policies for a working class solution to the British crisis in the 1980s.

Social Democrats

The autumn's most interesting developments have taken place in the centre ground of British politics. For despite its consultative status, the rolling conference of the SDP has provided many pointers to the future evolution of the party. First there are the clues provided by those who attended. According to a poll carried out for *Newsnight*, some 48 per cent were senior managers or from the 'established' professions, a further 18

per cent came from the 'junior' professions — teachers, civil servants etc. Men outnumbered women by 2 to 1; ex-Labour Party members outnumbered ex-Tories and ex-Liberals by 30 per cent to 7 per cent and 7½ per cent respectively, while the remaining 55½ per cent had not previously belonged to any party.

But there were other clues, too, as to the direction of the SDP. To many peoples' surprise, Roy Jenkins has emerged the most likely candidate for party leader whatever method of election is eventually adopted. His main competitor, Shirley Williams, meanwhile looks more and more likely to be relegated to the role of media figurehead. This is not simply a matter of personalities.

The SDP comprises three quite distinct strands: those who, with some stretching of definitions, can be defined as 'radical' and 'visionary' reformists: this group is best exemplified by Williams; the other two groups are made up of those who have completely broken not only the umbilical cord connecting them to the labour movement, but every connection with even Fabian visions of social change: of these strands the time-servers and machine politicians are politically insignificant (although, as discussed below, they pose serious problems for any alliance with the Liberal Party); it is the new 'one nation' Tories — the Roy Jenkinses and David Marquands and Christopher Brocklebank-Fowlers — who have made all the running in setting the political agenda for the SDP.

Of course, in politics above all it is foolish to mistake the start of a process for its consummation; a trend for an established reality. But the evidence points strongly towards the SDP evolving into an openly bourgeois party, with no pretensions to splitting the labour movement. And this tendency will be reinforced by every month that passes without the Tories returning to a more classical 'one-nation' course.

The Tories

It has been argued, and with some justification, that the Tory Party in conference resembles nothing more than one of the rather more liberal of the Eastern European Communist Parties. Ritual speeches adulating the leader's positions are cheered; those erring on the side of criticism are given a very rough ride and the vote at the end of the day (which is

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never counted) decides nothing. Despite giving every appearance of a non-event (apart perhaps from the opening salvo of Michael Heseltine's bid for the party leadership) the relatively polite tone of debate compared to the Labour conference masked an unprecedented loss of confidence in the leadership.

The Tory conference is packed with representatives of the constituency parties in the bastions of county and shire Torydom, reinforced since Thatcher's accession by a newer suburbanite fringe. Their lack of influence in the party is so institutionalised that they are not even called delegates. The important decisions are taken behind closed doors between conferences by a self-selecting group of national party officers, ministers and elder statespersons. And the signs of dissatisfaction in their ranks were plain to see in the critical speeches by important ministers (Heseltine, Pym) and ex-ministers (Gilmour, St John Stevas) and the urgency and outspokenness of the assault by Heath.

More significant, however, were the moves in the background. Edward du Cann — arguably the most influential of the party's 'kingmakers' in his capacity as chairman of the 1922 committee of Conservative backbenchers and ex-party chairmen — on television gave an extremely lukewarm condemnation of Heath's disloyalty in speaking out in which he almost, and without prompting, announced his agreement with Heath's policies. And the hand of elder statesman Harold Macmillan in the subterranean revolt was not hard to discern in the publication by his family firm of the Tory wets' manifesto.

Whether this all adds up to sufficient pressure to persuade Margaret Thatcher to change course, or, failing this, to encourage an attempt at deposition, it is too early to say. But these are not normal circumstances — without a change of course the Tory party is threatened not just with losing an election but with relegation by the SDP and Liberals to a marginal role in British politics as the Liberals were once relegated by the rise of Labour. And the Tories have always placed the interests of their party, that great governing machine, above any ideology or policy.

Liberals

While the Liberal conference with its overwhelming support for David Steel's regroupment project appeared the least marked by internal strife, it could be argued that 1981 saw the muted opening



It's looking good for the Social Democrats

of a struggle for the soul of the party that will wrench it apart every bit as much as the Tories and Labour. For within the party there are essentially two liberalisms: on the one hand, there is the Welsh Nonconformist Presbyterian rural liberalism exemplified by the Grimond years and, with the new confidence generated by a whiff of power, today by Steel. This is a liberalism of expedience for which no principle is more important than respectability which aspires to no more than winning the confidence of the bourgeoisie.

The other liberalism is a new urban radicalism born in the youth radicalisation of the late sixties and early seventies, the lack of strength, unity and direction of the far left and the corrupt machine politics of the Labour Party in many inner city areas. If it is on the Steel current that the Liberal Party's new refreshed PR image rests, it is the radicals who have re-built the party at the grass roots as its traditional constituency has declined; they are behind the Liberals' victories in local politics and are to be found in strength in the Association of Liberal Councillors and the Young Liberals.

While some of their number will temper their radicalism for a share of power (the evolution of David Alton since his election as an MP shows some signs of this), the idea of standing down after years of patient work and campaigning for an ex-Labour machine boss now standing under SDP colours, whom they have been trying to topple for years, has little appeal.

Conclusions

As we pointed out in the last issue of *International* these shifts point to a very rapidly deepening politicisation of the

economic and social crisis — one which is long overdue. The very depth of the crisis makes 'radical' solutions of the left and the right more attractive, draws new people into political activity and tests out the various political alternatives. It seems already too late for the Tories to prevent the most crushing electoral defeat at the general election. The question is whether they will be replaced by Labour or the SDP-Liberal coalition. This will depend in part on the course of the struggle inside the Labour Party; if the right wing re-asserts its dominance and there is little to choose between the electoral programmes of Labour and the SDP, then Labour's chances will decline. A left programme, alternatively, can provide the basis for the kind of 'national crusade' that we saw in 1945, with the Tories marginalised.

But the outcome also depends greatly on the working class response to the economic crisis and anti-working class moves of the Tory government. Defeat and demoralisation will boost the chances of the SDP, whereas a vigorous fight-back will favour Labour. The outcome of the BL dispute, the struggles over the 4 per cent pay limit and the workers' occupations at Laurence Scott's and Staffa will decisively affect the development of such a fightback.

All this highlights the need for revolutionaries to simultaneously take forward the struggle inside the Labour Party — both promoting the fight against the right, while grappling with the errors and evasions of the Bennite programme — and deepening the fight against the right wing bureaucracy inside the unions. Defeating the Tories and the SDP-Liberal bloc means also defeating the right-wing saboteurs in both wings of the labour movement.

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British Features

CRISIS OF MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM

BY STEVE MARKS

Tory attacks on local government spending have reached unprecedented heights. Steve

Marks argues that Labour's traditional 'municipal socialism' will be totally undermined unless a mighty movement of opposition to the Tories is launched.

A major escalation of struggle around the question of cuts is on the way — that is if Labour conference resolutions are any guide. For the Brighton conference carried, against the advice of the platform, a motion moved by Lambeth Council leader Ted Knight, which called for 'a major campaign to defeat' the proposed new Tory legislation to abolish local authority autonomy.

Labour councillors 'must refuse to make the cuts that will be needed' if the laws go through. And the NEC should 'coordinate the struggle of Labour councillors making this stand, and call on the trade unions... to use their strength to defend Labour councils in this fight'.

Cynics might recall similar speeches from Ted Knight at last year's national conference on the cuts called by Lambeth labour movement, which was nonetheless followed by cuts and job losses in Lambeth itself. But this time the bolt-hole of rate increases as an alternative to defying the government is being removed. Calls for action to stop the cuts and defend councils which refuse to make them, must be taken seriously. But to deliver on them will involve the Labour left in organising in a new way.

Heseltine's promised new laws would stop councils from spending above government-set limits and paying for the excess out of the rates. It would leave Labour councils with no legal alternative but to carry out Tory cuts, and would turn councils into nothing more than local outposts of central government. As Ken Livingstone, the Labour leader of the Greater London Council (GLC) has rightly pointed out, this will raise the question of why the Labour Party bothers to fight local elections at all.

Behind the laws, and the new system of local authority finance which came into force for the current financial year, is a determined effort by the Tory government to cut the services provided by the local state, even where they form part of the longer-term social infrastructure needed by capitalism itself, in a desperate monetarist bid to restore the rate of profit in the short-term by cutting taxation and reducing working-class living standards.

This has involved a ruthless recasting of the financial and political arrangements for the running of local state services, in which Tory ministers have shown themselves to be admirably from their class standpoint hard-headed, and free from woolly abstractions such as 'our glorious traditions of local autonomy'.

Their opponents will need to be equally hard-headed and explain the issues in class terms, rather than eulogising a local government system which most workers, indeed most voters, see as bureaucratic and alien.

This is a feeling the Tories have so far been able to exploit to their advantage, by capitalising on the unpopularity of the anomalous rating system of local authority taxation, and manipulating financial arrangements so that the villains of the piece appear to be not government cuts but local authority bureaucratic spendthrifts.

They have done this through a new system of Block Grants, which replaces the previous method of calculating and allocating the rate support grant (RSG) from central government to each local authority.

Each year the government decides what proportion of anticipated local government spending it is prepared to subsidise. It then works out how that total subsidy will be allocated between different councils.

Under the old system, the formula for deciding how much subsidy went to a given authority had three parts. The 'resources element' was aimed at ironing out differences in rateable value between rich and poor areas, so that councils with a lot of highly-rated property in their areas would get less grant.

The 'needs element' was meant to reflect the differences in the degree of need between various areas. This was worked out by a complex system of 'regression analysis' which few people were ever able to understand, but which tried to reflect the degree to which different indicators — family size, poor housing, number of one-parent families — tended to be combined in areas of greatest need.

The formula was changed from time to time to reflect changing judgements, and the Labour government of 1974-79 was accused by the Tories of 'rigging' the regression analysis to favour Labour inner-city authorities at the expense of Tory rural counties.

To this the official reply was that the greatest need was concentrated in the inner cities, and this, rather than party, was the reason for the shift in resources to those areas. It was also pointed out that the formula was not changed back when many urban local authorities went Tory in 1977.

The third element in the RSG formula was a subsidy to domestic ratepayers to keep their rates below those of commercial and industrial ratepayers.

This element has been preserved in the new system. But the old needs and resources elements have been combined in a new Block Grant. By this system the Department of the Environment fixes for each local authority a figure which it thinks the council ought to be spending to provide an 'adequate' level of spending.

Changing the system

The government then fixes the level of rates it considers a council would need to charge to provide that level of service taking into account differences in rateable value between areas and allowing for the proportion of rate-borne spending which the government has decided to subsidise (59 per cent for 1981/82, as against 60 per cent in 1980/81, the last year of the old system).

Any spending by the council above the level which the government has decided is proper has to be met 100 per cent out of the rates, without any government subsidy at all. And if a council spends more than 10 per cent above the government set figure, it will lose some of the grant already allocated to it for its spending within the government approved limit.

The result has been to escalate drastically the effect on the rates of 'overspending' by councils above the government limit, in the hope that infuriated ratepayers will vote recalcitrant Labour councils out, and save the government the trouble and embarrassment of putting in commissioners. Thus the new Labour majority on the GLC will have found that for each £1 it spends on reducing bus and underground fares, it has to raise £1.70 from the ratepayers.

The new system also gives Heseltine greatly-increased power to punish authorities he deems to be 'overspending' by depriving them of grant, and requiring them to submit new budgets in mid-year.

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It also resulted in a massive shift of resources within the reduced total, from (Labour) metropolitan areas to (largely Conservative) shire counties. This is because the new formula calculates required spending on various services on the basis of average cost per head. This is a much cruder method than the old regression analysis, even though it is simpler, and essentially means that grants are allocated between authorities according to population rather than needs.

London in particular has lost some 14 per cent of its grant as against last year, and 25 per cent in inner London, as against an 8.2 per cent national average cut.

What is more, the degree to which the new system shifts grant away from big cities to rural areas will increase over time, as the impact of the new system was deliberately cushioned by a 'damping formula' which ensures that no authority will gain more than the equivalent of a 6p rate in any one year. While authorities due to lose grant can lose up to the product of a 13p rate in any one year till they reach their new levels.

This shift in the allocation of grant is widely believed to be part of the government's pay-off to the Tory shire counties for their help in breaking the united front of opposition to the new scheme by local authorities, and thus helping to get the legislation through the House of Lords within the Parliamentary timetable.

But there are now informed reports that as a result of the summer riots the government is thinking of reversing this trend in the 1982/83 RSG settlement. If so this could only antagonise the counties, and make it harder for the government to get its new anti-councils legislation through Parliament this winter (as local government, especially the counties, makes up a considerable pressure group among Conservative and Independent peers, as well as in the local apparatus of the Tory party).

The new system has led to such massive cuts in grant for some London authorities, such as Camden, the GLC and the Inner London Education Authority, that there is little incentive for them even to attempt to keep to the government's spending targets, since any but the most massive cuts would still leave them so much above the target spending level as to lose them all their grant entitlement in any case.

Apart from the cuts for big city authorities resulting from the new method of distribution, the 1981/82 RSG settlement also cut the overall level of grant by some 8.2 per cent.

The government claimed that the figure was only 3.1 per cent but that was based on a comparison with what authorities were told to spend in 1980/81 rather than what they actually spent and on unreal official estimates for inflation in 1981/82.

The government is clearly preparing to play the same trick next year. The Treasury maintains that the 1982/83 RSG settlement will only include cuts of 1.2 per cent. But Department of the Environment officials privately confirm local authority claims that these will in fact be cuts of nearer 9 or 10 per cent. Of this over 5 per cent will be alleged 'overspending' above government targets this year, to be carried forward for next year if not achieved. And up to three per cent could result from a new cash limit system being adopted by the Treasury by which no extra allowance will be paid for additional inflation this year. Local authority leaders have warned that cuts on this scale could mean 250,000 sackings, 100,000 of them in education.

The rates solution

Some Labour local authority leaders, such as Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight, have argued for rate increases to maintain services, pointing out that as a high proportion of rates, 60 per cent nationally, are paid by businesses the effect of rate increases to support services is to redistribute wealth between the classes. Even at the best of times, this argument must be modified to take account of the lower-than-average rateable value and the consequently high level of rates which must be charged to generate a given revenue.

But even allowing for this, Labour authorities have traditionally stood for improved services financed out of the rates, and this has had a redistributive effect to the extent that rate in-



come is mainly contributed by commercial and industrial ratepayers, and rate-borne services are largely consumed by workers.

These, however, are not normal times. The effect of the new subsidy system means that Labour councils are increasing rates not to provide extra services, but to finance Tory cuts. This hardly has a progressive effect. And newly-elected Labour authorities, which are increasing services, are having to raise rates by more than the value of those services.

At a time of falling real wages, this means that the burden of rate payments is more than many families can afford, especially when combined with rent increases. This could well lead, as in Lambeth during the GLC elections, to massive Labour losses at the polls.

In addition, the strategy of rate increases is (or was) divisive as between Labour councils, as those with lots of high-rated property could get away with rate increases for longer, while those in poorer areas had no legal alternative to cuts from the start. It is also divisive between working-class ratepayers, as even where most of the rates are paid for by business, the tax is so anomalous as between individuals, falling more heavily on working-class householders than on richer ones, that it makes it easier for the Tories to divide workers and turn ratepayers against particular groups who use council services.

The new laws might appear to make this debate redundant. ▶

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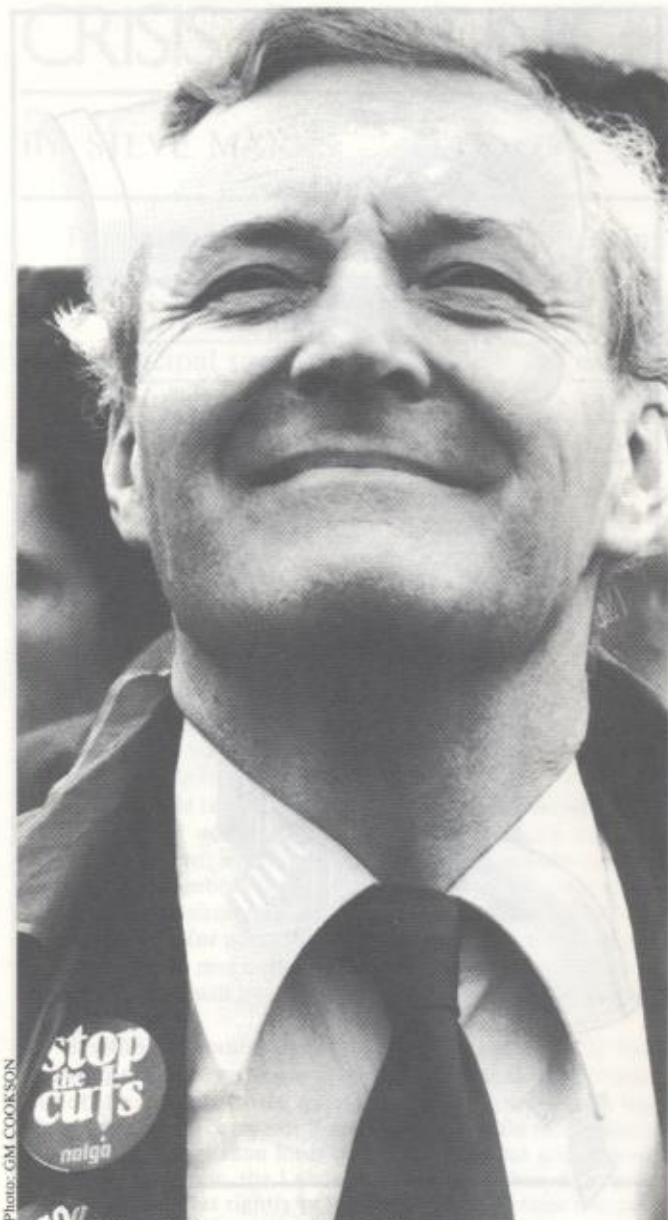


Photo: G.M. COOKSON

Will the Labour left mount a serious challenge to Heseltine?

But the ability of council leaders such as Ted Knight to deliver the type of struggle they are now calling for must be affected by their earlier decision to go for the soft option of rate rises.

There is no guarantee at all that a course of defying the government would have succeeded. But the alternative path has now failed. True, the new laws bring all Labour councils up against the crucial choice of whether to operate within the law. So it could be argued that delay and rate-rises reduced the risk of left councils being isolated. But the present 'unity' created by the Tory laws and the Labour conference vote will not stave off disaster unless left councils are prepared to give the sort of lead which they were not prepared to give when they went for rate increases. It would nonetheless, be irresponsibly sectarian to concentrate fire on left councils such as Lambeth or South Yorkshire when most Labour councils have been far worse, and carried out cuts without even a show of defiance.

The May elections

In fact it was the election of new Labour councils this May pledged to improve services, and prepared to increase rates to pay for them, which led Heseltine to seek his new powers. In June he announced that he was imposing penalties totalling £450m on councils that failed to bring their spending down to 5.6 per cent below the 1978/79 level, and called on local

authorities to submit mid-year budgets to show how they meant to reach his target. He would cut subsidy payment in mid-year for the culprits.

Most Labour metropolitan authorities simply resubmitted their existing budgets, with the increases resulting from their May election pledges. The exercise ended in projected spending up £15m, instead of down.

But Tory councils too were falling out of line. Of councils over Heseltine's limits 61 per cent were Tory-controlled, and 59 per cent of the overspend came from county councils, all but 3 of them Tory-controlled, when the budgets were fixed. True, 258 councils had cut a total of £202m by June. But 51 councils had offset this by increases totalling £208m. Of this 80 per cent was accountable for by the GLC, Merseyside and the West Midlands — all Labour gains in May.

This was one major reason for Heseltine's new law. Another, according to the government, is the crippling effect of rate increases on businesses. The CBI agrees, and joins the chorus of complaint about the damaging effect of rate rises on employment, as firms are driven into bankruptcy by 'socialist bureaucratic empire-builders who spend other people's money with no understanding of or sympathy for the wealth-creating process etc, etc.'

All very touching, but without a fact to back it up. The available evidence, according to both the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the *Financial Times*, suggests that rates are no higher a proportion of industry's turnover today than in 1975. Since 1975 they have risen less than the Retail Price Index, the price of manufactured goods, the cost of materials and fuel, or the average of manufacturing industry earnings. And between 1978 and 1980 rates rose by 48 per cent while interest rates rose by 94 per cent.

Nor is it true that industry pays an ever-rising share of the rates bill. The share of rates paid by industry and commerce has fallen each year since 1975-76: from 60 per cent to 54 per cent in 1981/82.

The real cause of industry's hubbub over rates is political. Faced with the despair of small, and not-so-small, firms at the impact of monetarism, unemployment and high interest rates, the CBI leadership has come under a lot of pressure from its members to criticise government policy. Having a go at rates is a politically more acceptable target, and one in which the government will be on the CBI's side.

'Tarzan' Heseltine makes a move

Heseltine's proposed new law will prevent these problems in future — unless councils lead successful campaigns of mass action against the government. Any authority which wants to spend more than a 'significant percentage' above its permitted level will have to raise the extra through a 'supplementary rate' of which industry and commerce will pay a smaller share, through special protecting mechanisms, than they do of the ordinary rate bill. So the burden on householders will be increased to the benefit of business, and, the Tories hope, the council will lose votes at the next elections.

But this first supplementary rate will only be able to raise a fixed percentage above the government limit. Any further spending will require a second supplementary rate to be levied in October, on the same rigged basis giving industry and commerce relief. But this time there will have to be a referendum, held on the same day in every overspending authority, with a standard question fixed by the government, and with the council sending each voter, with the ballot form, a statement of how much he or she would have to pay extra if the vote went 'yes'.

If a council loses this referendum, the Secretary of State will, in effect, take control of the council's finances for the rest of that year and for the following financial year, in that s/he will have to give advance approval before any rate for the next year can be levied.

The government will have complete discretion to decide each year what will be the level of overspend at which new rates

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and referendums will be necessary. This, it is clear, will be used to divide councils, with 'generous' limits fixed for the first year so that only a small handful of 'extremist/Marxist' Labour Councils will be affected. The Tory councils will moderate their opposition, which would never go beyond speeches anyway, and Labour's new NEC will not do anything in practice to organise opposition that goes beyond the law.

Then, the government hopes, when the Bill is law, the powers can be used in subsequent years to cut spending as much as it likes.

How to defeat the Heseltine proposals

In fact the Bill can be defeated but only if Labour councillors, MPs and constituency parties organise and act politically in a way they have never done before. The Bill is very vulnerable to disruption of the Parliamentary timetable, as it will have to be law by February if it is to have effect for the financial year starting in April.

But once it is law there is no way that local Labour councils can be saved from destruction within the law. The Labour conference resolution's reference to refusing to make cuts is not much help in itself. Under the new proposals, refusal to make cuts could only mean bankruptcy and removal from office, leaving the Tories to carry out the cuts without opposition. This, and similar proposals for Labour councillors, even when a majority, simply to refuse to form an administration and leave the Tories to do so, while voting down their proposals from the opposition benches, can at best be only a publicity stunt, and ultimately ineffective unless there is a campaign of mass action involving strikes and withholding of rents and rates, for which such gestures could raise publicity.

Ken Livingstone had the right idea when he pointed out that the battle in Parliament over the new laws should coincide with the first battles over the 4 per cent limit in the public sector, and

that this was the best opportunity for uniting the fight of council and public sector workers with the fight against the government and to defend services.

For good measure he pointed out that London Transport workers by refusing to collect fares, could lose the Tories, if they put a Commissioner into London's County Hall, more money in a week than their cuts would save in a year. And it would be popular too!

But action of this sort has to be organised now, not just by conference resolutions but by support for the struggles by public sector workers that are already under way, such as the Liverpool typists dispute. For a Labour Left which, as in London, is still almost entirely based in constituency party organisations, this will mean new and hitherto unfamiliar forms of organisation and political work.

It must be the job of Marxists in the Labour Party and in the unions to urge help and encourage them to make that leap, for otherwise Heseltine, when the dust has settled, will have destroyed the oldest arena of independent Labour representation at a stroke and without a real fight.

Before Labour representatives ever entered Parliament, workers saw the need for their own representatives on councils, instead of the shopkeepers and millowners. Once there, the argument went, they would use the power of the councils in the interests of the working people.

Marxists have never believed that such 'municipal socialism' can ever lead to a fundamental change in the class relations in society. Much worthy and useful work in improving the conditions and quality of life for working people did nonetheless result.

All that will now be ended if Heseltine is not beaten. The old reason for electing Labour councillors will simply not apply. There will be no conceivable role for them to play except to implement Tory cuts.

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International Features

FOUR MONTHS OF MITTERRAND

BY JACQUES KERGOAT

The election of Francois Mitterrand as President of France and the massive victory of the Socialist Party in the subsequent general election marked a historic watershed at the end of five years of electoral setbacks for Communist and Social Democratic parties throughout Western Europe. In this timely article Jacques Kergoat examines, in detail, the record of the Mitterrand-Mauroy government after its first four months of office.

Various French newspapers have recently started to ask if the new government's 'period of grace' has come to an end. The answer is probably not yet, but certainly four months after Mitterrand's election — four months during which the government has done a lot — its policies to solve the crisis, to ensure full employment and to beat inflation are met with a certain scepticism, inside the working class as well as outside.

The economic programme which the Socialists advanced prior to their arrival in office was very simple; a selective boost to public consumption to act as a catalyst to industrial investment which would slowly resolve unemployment. This dodged the very nature of the crisis: a growth in consumption could partially soak up overproduction in particular sectors like household consumer durables. But to go further and create new investment requires that the bosses are confident that the rate of profit will be restored. The policy of a selective boost in consumption is not enough to reassure them on this score.

Although they did not say so, the French Socialists probably expected a boost in the economy from the end of 1981 which, *de facto*, would have relegated their policies to a series of secondary measures. But, at best, there will be no growth before 1982. Thus the very poor salary increases which the government agreed in June and July, for the minimum wage and within the public sector, do not even aim to boost public consumption. Instead, the government has sought help from outside the country.

The Mitterrand government remembered that its natural partner, American imperialism, has several times in the past financed social democratic and Keynesian management of the capitalist system; for example the 1924 Dawes plan and the 1947 Marshall Plan. It was with hopes of a repeat performance that Mitterrand went to Ottawa in July. But the position of American imperialism has changed. The crisis of the international monetary system and the open economic crisis of 1974 have affected the position of the dollar. Hence the so called high interest rates policy, which aims to draw floating capital to the USA and to breathe new life into the dollar. In short American imperialism has changed from being a 'protector', ready to finance and harmonise the restructuring of capital, into a cruel and greedy competitor.

A second option existed: a very substantial devaluation of the franc would have made French products competitive on the world markets. But with the participation of the franc in the European monetary system, such a devaluation could only be



carried through the agreement of the other European states. The least that can be said is that they do not look ready to agree. When Jacques Delors, the Finance Minister, proposed at the Franco-German summit in July and again in Copenhagen in August, a concerted fall in European rates, German Chancellor Schmidt made it known that, in his opinion, this was a 'utopia'.

As for the 'new world order' and 'Keynesianism on a world scale', so dear to the heart of Claude Cheysson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the present state of things, it is a subject of children's books and fairy tales. In a context where each bourgeois state and the multinationals based in each state know perfectly well how to organise beyond their own borders to pursue their own interests, and where the leading classes of the colonial countries aspire to a redistribution of world wealth, we must expect the world markets to resemble a battlefield rather than a 'new international order'.

The road to real solutions of France's economic and social problems seemed littered with obstacles. This is why the government has so quickly adopted the policies of the Rocard minority in the Socialist Party: the pursuit of cheap and quick 'qualitative reforms'. Within a few months a series of measures of differing importance have been taken.

Many of them are undoubtedly progressive. However limited, they contribute to undoing the spider's web which has steadily been woven by the strong state to restrict civil rights. The amnesty law has been very generous — 6212 prisoners were released — but it has also been extended to include sanctions taken against trade union representatives, even in the private sector. The 'Cour de Sureté de L'Etat', a court totally controlled by whoever is in government, has been abolished. No political refugees have been extradited. The expulsion of immigrant workers has been suspended and the renewal of work permits simplified. Union rights have been steadily enlarged. The Larzac will not be transferred to the Army but will remain in the hands of the peasants. A certain measure of devolution has been introduced as a 'concession' to movements of national minorities. And it is likely that in the near future, there will be other reforms removing repressive restrictions in the armed forces, on immigrant workers and on broader democratic rights.

All these are good measures. However, while they may have kept the press busy during the summer, when they are examined with a critical eye they are at best very limited and at worst,

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fraudulent.

The most limited reform pertains to immigrant workers. While the government has stopped expulsions, it has also reaffirmed its intention to halt immigration. The 9 August circular from Gaston Defferre, Minister of Home Affairs, advocates 'not allowing entry on French soil of foreigners who use the benefits of a short stay to seek a job.' Furthermore, the government has already gone back on one of Mitterrand's promises: to give immigrants the right to vote in local council elections. While Cheysson considered it good policy to repeat this promise when he went to Algiers to court the Algerian government he was immediately contradicted by the government in France who declared that this measure would not be applied in 1983 and as the next local council elections will not take place until 1989....

The law on decentralisation must be labelled a pretence. It is not the result of any titanic struggle between 'decentralisers' and 'Jacobins'. What is more, it contains very little progress on democratic rights and remains confused on a range of issues. The method of election of the regional councils it proposes is unclear; the division of power between the departments (the French equivalent of counties) and the regions remains vague; the problem of the distribution of resources is not dealt with....

It is easy to understand why almost all the 'national' movements have kept their distance from this project. Nothing or almost nothing responds to their aspirations. As Rocard has clearly explained the central objective is to encourage private investment. The aim is not to reverse the tendency towards unequal regional development but to allow the regional councils to provide capital in the name of regional development as a means of lending funds to private firms. Furthermore the new regional authorities will provide a 'buffer' between the government and a discontented population: from now on it will be the regional and local bodies that will have to deal with unemployment.

It is in other fields that clear reversals of Mitterrand's promises can be seen. For example — abortion. The government has announced three decrees: abortion will be reimbursed via the national insurance scheme; every hospital will have to perform abortions; and the required period of residence for foreign women prior to having an abortion will be reduced. But these were not the only points in the Socialist Party programme. That document proposed that the period within which an abortion could be performed would be increased from 10 to 16 weeks; that parental consent would be abolished for minors; and that get-out clauses for doctors related to conscience would be tightened. None of these are mentioned today.

The same applies to nuclear energy. The government has stopped the construction of the Plogoff site which had become an international symbol of popular opposition to nuclear energy. But in the Socialist Party programme it was stated that 12 nuclear sites would be 'suspended' and Mitterrand repeated these promises to ensure that he won the ecology vote in the second round of the Presidential elections. To date, only five have actually been stopped and it can be safely assumed that after the debate announced for October work will recommence. With the expansion of the reprocessing plant at La Hague and the opening of the fast-breeder reactor at Malville the Socialist Party seems set to complete the nuclear programme begun by Pompidou.

Even more spectacular is the attitude of the French government to the pillars of bourgeois order — the police and the army. The Independent Federation of Police Unions, which includes 75 per cent of the police, asked for the removal of several police officials and notably the 'ten key figures in the top hierarchy'. Defferre replied: 'The unions have asked for heads. I refuse to chop any.'

As for the army, the Socialist Minister of Defence, Charles Hernu, began his term in office by stating that Mitterrand's promise to reduce military service to six months could not be implemented. He went on to say that he would 'try and ensure that the soldiers' committees (democratic organisations of rank and file soldiers) are dissolved.' Information inside the bar-

racks is still censored — nine papers, including the French Trotskyist weekly, *Rouge*, are forbidden. Finally the government has carefully avoided intervening against the bosses' private police.

With the summer over, the government is now faced with a worsening economic and social situation. Prices have risen considerably, some as a direct consequence of government decisions: 14 per cent on Parisian transport; 10 per cent on the railways; 17 per cent on electricity; and 15 per cent on gas before the government announcement of a limited price freeze in September faced with the threat of inflation passing 15 per cent by the end of the year compared to 13.6 per cent in 1980.

In July there were 1,849,000 unemployed. The present rate of increase of unemployment is 26 per cent per annum as compared to 20 per cent in the last months of Giscard. By the end of the year unemployment will top 2 million. No serious policy has been applied to deal with unemployment and once again electoral promises have been forgotten. Mitterrand has promised the creation of 210,000 new jobs per year, of which 150,000 would be in the public sector. But in 1982 the latter figure has already been reduced to 65,000. At least the government could have forbidden lay offs and closures. In fact since 10 May redundancies, liquidations and closures have occurred in quick succession. Mitterrand's '110 proposals' promised the right of veto to factory committees on issues of 'employment, redundancy, work organisation, education schemes, and new technology'. But on 6 September Mauroy declared: 'The government does not intend to question the right of the owners to make decisions. There is no question of instituting a right of veto over redundancies.'

The government invited the unions and owners to negotiate. The result was an agreement on 17 July in which the reduction of the working week by one hour to 39 hours was accompanied by a whole series of question marks against previous gains of the working class. It is clear that unless the workers intensify their pressure on the government there will be no advance on this agreement.

The Socialist programme included the nationalisation of nine industrial groups, steel, nuclear armaments, space technology, banks and insurance. The government has adopted a nationalisation bill dealing with only five groups and then only the parent companies. The economic experts of the Socialist Party write: 'The bank and finance sector is probably the only one in which it is not possible to allow any private industry' and even here 136 foreign and 35 regional banks escape nationalisation. The business interests of the banks will be ceded to the private sector. Mauroy continually repeats that compensation will be fair. This news has been so well received that industrial and financial groups are purchasing large amounts of shares in potentially nationalisable firms. For example between 20 and 27 August share values in PUK rose by 12.8 per cent and by 38 per cent in CGE.

In this context it should come as no surprise to find that the government's foreign policy remains largely dependent on the American alliance. The Franco-Mexican declaration on El Salvador which recognised the FMLN and FDR liberation organisations as 'political and representative forces' must not blind us. Far from representing a first step on the path of an authentic anti-imperialist policy it is firmly anchored in the constant preoccupation of the Socialist Party and the Socialist International lest the inflexibility of Reaganism should lead to a mass radicalisation and the extension of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions.

In all other respects we see a foreign policy more and more aligned with Washington. Felipe Gonzalez, the Spanish Socialist Democrat, declared that: 'French foreign policy as regards East-West relations is harder than that of West Germany and closer to that of Reagan.' The Americans confirm this.

France may now use more diplomacy and less military interventions, especially in Africa, but deep down little has changed. On 21 August Jean-Pierre Cot stated: 'France will

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French riot police storm the barricades in 1968

maintain its troops on the territory of its African allies until they are capable of ensuring their own security'. Did the government give a green light to the intervention of Senegal in Gambia? Did it back General Kolingba's removal of David Dacko in the Central African Republic? There are 1200 French soldiers in Central Africa equipped with anti-tank weapons and heavy mortars. And like the other 12,000 French soldiers in Africa they are there to represent French 'African diplomacy'

which, as before, mostly consists of creating and destroying governments. France remains an imperialist and colonial power. The government persists in regarding the French East and West Indies as Overseas Provinces and no steps have been taken in the direction of democratisation. French troops are still stationed there ready to break strikes while the media and press remain in the hands of the worst reactionaries.

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So far neither its pro-American foreign policy nor 'gifts' in the class struggle have been enough to change the attitude of the ruling class to the government; investment will decline 12 per cent this year and 4 per cent next. The bourgeoisie does not consider the Mauroy government as its own nor as one it could use for its own benefit. It is a government born in the defeat of the bourgeois coalition and a victory of the workers' parties. Its origins mean that it will have to make some concessions to the workers. This is not what the ruling class wanted in its attempt to restructure the economy. Its own project is clear: to make the working class pay for the crisis by increasing unemployment, lowering the standard of living of the masses and to reconstruct a more competitive economy at their expense. To do that a decisive defeat has to be inflicted on the working class. Obviously the Mauroy government is not a good instrument for this sort of venture.

A premature confrontation with the government, however, would be fatal for the ruling class; it is not a question of paralysing the government but rather of making life difficult. Rather than a test of strength the bourgeoisie is trying to show how the government is incompetent.

As far as the unions are concerned there has seemed to be a competition between them as to who could applaud loudest in the face of successive government capitulations. The CFDT (originally a Catholic union and now generally aligned with the Socialist Party) seemed to have seized the advantage by signing the agreement for the 39 hour week. Since then the CGT (the union dominated by the Communist Party) has made up lost ground and in the background of general praise for the Mauroy government it is difficult to see any differences between the unions.

In this context it is easy to understand the lack of new recruits. The rank and file are not happy. In the CFDT, many branches disapprove of the 39-hour week agreement, while in Force Ouvriere (a right-wing, class-collaborationist union) many branches have voiced their opposition to the national position against inclusion of Communists in the government.

Government policies have also provoked a response within the mass working class parties. The Communist Party leadership, never one to do things by half, having been given four minor ministries in the government, now supports the party's complete integration within governmental structures. On 26 August Communist journalists received an internal memo stating that Socialist Party policies must be considered as 'globally positive', that it has now become a question of 'enriching government policy' and that they must abandon 'the tone of the past, that of an opposition party'. Obviously these about-faces can make the membership sea-sick especially when it was only recently that they were being told that the Socialist Party Programme was 'globally negative' and that 'Mitterrand would perhaps be worse than Giscard.'

The Socialists themselves have not been spared the consequences of the Mauroy government. The party's strengths lie in its tens of thousands of new members and its large number of new deputies but they also represent its fragility. The new members want change. The young deputies feel a responsibility to their electorate for the promises that were made during the electoral campaign. More and more often Mitterrand is being forced to use the authority given him by the bonapartist institutions of the Fifth Republic both to smooth over the difficulties arising from the differing opinions of various Socialist ministers and to avoid the spontaneous amendments being put forward by the young Socialist deputies.

The major problem facing the Socialist Party is the relationship between the party and the government. If the party became a simple transmission belt for government decisions it could lose its fundamental identity as a mass workers' party. But many Ministers are fearful of the 'subversive idea' that the party might determine governmental decisions. The Socialist leaders have attempted to set up commissions to harmonise the trio: party, parliament and government. The leaders of the party are

all ministers and they never lose an opportunity to explain to their troops the necessity of solidarity with the government. Party conferences are normally presented with a range of counterposed resolutions representing the positions of the various long-standing political currents/tendencies within the party. This year the leaders of all currents have agreed to the production of one common text for the forthcoming congress in Valence with the aim of limiting the scope of discussion. The rank and file, who are unlikely to get the chance to speak at the congress, do not share these views.

For the most part the workers believe in the Mauroy government which they elected. They see the government as an ally against the bosses and obviously demand much more from this government than they ever did from Giscard. As a consequence the traditional forms of militancy have been put in abeyance. Apart from an increase in membership of the Socialist Party there have not been any major shifts or movements within the working class. But the level of class consciousness remains quite high and it would be wrong to say that the class is passive — they are just waiting.

The workers still believe in the government — even more so since the Unions keep repeating that 'the inheritance is heavy' and that they must 'wait'. Examining the most recent opinion polls it is clear that working class confidence is slightly shaken. There has been a 6-12 per cent fall in the popularity of the government but this has not been accompanied by a similar rise in the support for the bourgeois leaders. In all, 94 per cent of respondents were in favour of attacks on large personal fortunes 74 per cent were for price controls. 21 per cent felt that the government was going too far; but 33 per cent considered it did not go far enough. It is clear that Mauroy would not lack public support if his government took more radical measures.

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Polemie

TONY CLIFF'S NIGHTMARE — FEMINISM

BY VALERIE COULTAS

Tony Cliff has recently entered the debate between Marxism and feminism, but does not, argues Valerie Coultas, take it forward.

He conflates the many diverse strands of feminism, distorts the spirit of the women's movement and so fails to understand its political dynamic.

Tony Cliff only reads and listens to what he wants to read and hear. If his bold venture into the controversies surrounding Marxism and feminism is anything to go by he will end up with egg on his face. In a recent article¹ he asserts that Marxism and feminism are irreconcilable. Using Clara Zetkin and the German Social Democratic Women's Movement as his model for orthodoxy, his central argument is that working women never have had and never will have a common struggle with their bourgeois sisters.

The force with which these arguments are made suggests that the article has a functional use within the Socialist Workers Party where the dissolution of *Women's Voice* groups is in dispute. Whatever his intentions are however, the article makes interesting if controversial reading. Cliff is quite right to point out that 'to be a Marxist one must be rooted in the tradition of the Marxist movement' and that 'ignorance of our tradition on the woman question is very damaging'. But the disease is not only the SWP's. It infects many on the British left where discussion on this topic is long overdue.

One or two women's movements?

Cliff makes the following main points. Although women of all classes are alienated in the family this does not mean that they have a common struggle against that alienation: 'On the contrary, in the final analysis, the proletarian woman is spurred on by it to revolution, the bourgeois to reaction' (p. 29).

He comments on the glee with which bourgeois women, after the fall of the Paris Commune, demanded vengeance particularly against the male Communards. He goes on to assert that there have always been two women's movements: a bourgeois wing limiting itself to equal rights and a proletarian wing aiming at the destruction of women's social and economic oppression through the overthrow of capitalism.

Consequently Sylvia Pankhurst was wrong to collaborate with bourgeois feminists in Britain in the Women's Social and Political Union. This weakened the developing socialist women's movement and made her ignore women's involvement in strikes in the pre-war period. Clara Zetkin however was aware that the two movements were irreconcilable and waged a consistent struggle against any form of collaboration. 'It is not women's petty interests of the moment that we should put in the foreground; our task must be to enrol the modern proletarian woman in the class struggle.' (p.35)

Her understanding was shared by Lenin who applied the same approach in opposing the separatism of the Jewish Bund. Cliff also points out that today: 'This argument applies to black workers as much as women.' (p. 36) Implicitly the polemic is against those who defend the idea of an autonomous movement of women or blacks. This is apparently not the orthodox Marxist approach. Special agitation can be allowed but its aim should only be to win women to the 'class struggle' and of course the Party.

To avoid false polemics, it should be stressed that there are

many areas that Cliff discusses that are common ground. Most crucially there is no disagreement with Cliff or Clara Zetkin that the overthrow of capitalism provides the basis for women's liberation. It is class society based on the defence of private property and the patriarchal family that perpetuates women's oppression. The overthrow of class society has to be the goal of any fight for liberation.

Feminism and the vote

Emerging from the youth radicalisation of the late sixties the spontaneity of modern feminism had a strongly anti-Marxist flavour. Cliff refers to the influence of 'third worldism' and 'soft Maoism' in the women's movement with its prejudiced attitude towards working class women. It is also useful to recall the feminist heritage of the modern women's movement. Although the suffragette tradition lives on in the women's movement, no consensus exists about the suffrage movement and its different wings. Marxist women have tended to identify with the stand taken by Sylvia Pankhurst in setting up the East End Suffrage Federation to work for mass action by working class men and women to win the vote. It is true that Sylvia Pankhurst seemed reluctant to wage a struggle against her sister and mother earlier, within the WSPU, but perhaps she would have been helped in this if the emerging Labour Party had been more resolute in supporting women. Radical feminism suggests that both wings of the suffrage movement sold out by opposing or supporting the imperialist war since they took sides with men!

The polemics of Marxists at the turn of the century against the bourgeois feminists are useful in drawing out the condescending attitude adopted towards working women, some of which lives on in the women's movement today. Kollontai wrote:

'Women's meetings were especially numerous during 1905 and 1906. Working women attended them willingly; they listened attentively to the bourgeois feminists but did not respond with much enthusiasm, since the speakers gave no suggestion as to how the urgent problems of those enslaved by capital might be solved. ... Such needs were foreign to the bourgeois feminists, who came to the working women with their narrow concerns and exclusively "women's demands". The feminists could not understand the class character of this embryonic working women's movement.'²

Later she points out that this did not mean that working or peasant women 'remained indifferent to or ignored their needs as women'.

Sexual equality and class unity

It could be argued that the small group of feminists who charged to the head of the massively successful anti-Corrie demonstration in October 1979 — demanding that they lead the march — similarly failed to understand the class character of the embryonic working women's movement today, coming to working women with 'exclusively women's demands'. Class unity and therefore identification with the labour movement has been a feature of the radicalisation of working women in Britain and a continual source of discord within the women's liberation movement. Although Tony Cliff refers to the strikes in the early seventies for equal pay he does not draw out the political significance of the Fords Equal Pay strike in 1969 in detonating a movement led by working women to get equal pay passed in Parliament. Sexual equality as well as class unity has been a feature in the radicalisation of working women — a fact that both Tony Cliff and some feminists seem to wish to deny.

But Cliff is right to point out that there is a strong tendency for some feminists to view working women simply as victims of oppression in the home, raped, battered, sexually harassed at the point of reproduction, rather than active people, fighting as women workers at the point of production where their collective power is so strong. The pressure of class polarisation in Britain is now finding its reflection in the debates in the women's movement. Those women who are prepared to put sex, as Kollontai puts it, 'above class' find no difficulty with calling for greater censorship against pornography or the death sentence for rapists.

The analytical roots of these political ideas lie in the debates over patriarchy. Many women active within the women's movement subscribe to a concept of 'male power' or 'patriarchy'. If men, or male power, is the main target, rather than class society, how can women look to the working class as a revolutionary class? Working class men cannot be logically anything but 'counter-revolutionaries' if you adopt a radical feminist analysis which flows from this concept.

So Cliff is right to point out that we have to look beyond the phrases of feminism, to understand their 'class struggle' stance. But it is also necessary to look beyond the phrases that Cliff quotes from Clara Zetkin, Eleanor Marx and Lenin to understand the Marxist 'class struggle' stance on this question. If we do this it is not possible to endorse Cliff's main conclusion: that co-operation with 'bourgeois feminists' was at all times wrong, that Zetkin never altered her attitude on this question, that today women workers should take their distance from feminism and not get caught up in one women's movement.

A central political question — the struggle for the vote

A closer examination of the revolutionary Marxist tradition on the woman question reveals a different story to the one Cliff tells. He underestimates the specific oppression of the female sex and cannot see this struggle against women's oppression as part of the class struggle in its own right. Apart from denouncing Sylvia Pankhurst, he has little to say about the central political question that gave birth to the women's movement at the time — the struggle for the vote.

For Cliff this struggle was not a vital one for working women to be involved in. Yet Zetkin and Kollontai argued strongly at the world congress of the Second International held in 1907 that it was crucial for the class parties of the proletariat to campaign for the vote. 'Marxists know', argued Lenin, 'that democracy does not abolish class oppression ... But without the proclamation of these rights, without a struggle to introduce them now, immediately, without training the masses in the spirit of the struggle, socialism is impossible'³. This was the spirit in which Marxists approached the suffrage struggle. To prove the point let us take a few examples from the German social democratic women's movement where we should remember that we are talking of a party that could under its own banner mobilise hundreds of thousands of members on the streets.

In a polemic with the women 'Rightsters', as Zetkin called them, who wanted to make juridical rights under the existing social order the *be-all and end all* of the women's movement, the Marxist women were adamant. Women's freedom, particularly for working women, depended not simply on equal rights but the ending of their social oppression and economic exploitation through the abolition of class society. But this did not mean that Social Democracy should have no special demands for women. International Women's Day was inspired by the action organised by socialist women in support of women's suffrage in the United States. The first truly International Women's Day in 1911 was a huge success. Kollontai describes how: 'Germany, Austria ... were one seething trembling sea of women'. The theme of the demonstration was: 'The vote for women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism'.

It's true that the polemic with the women 'Rightsters' was a

sharp one. But so too was the one going on inside the parties. Zetkin insisted on the 'woman question' being an essential part of the fight for socialism and not dismissed as exclusively female concerns. This battle certainly continues today and women in the SWP, shunted into Women's Voice groups in the mid-seventies, must have experienced the frustration of women's liberation issues being dismissed as not central to party concerns. It is also true that Zetkin was politically intransigent with the bourgeois feminists. She argued that the struggle of working class women was not that of bourgeois women — a struggle for the right to free competition with men — but a struggle to end bourgeois rule. While working class women may concur with the demands of bourgeois women, for instance on the vote, they do so only as a means to an end; to raise women's awareness of their oppression and to enter the working class movement equally with men.

But Zetkin's political opposition did not blind her to the similarities in the oppression of the female sex. She is sympathetic to the intellectual strivings of the bourgeois women's movement: 'It is precisely in these strata that we meet those tragic and psychologically interesting 'Neva' figures, where the wife is tired of living like a doll in a doll house, where she wants to take part in the broader development of modern culture; and on both the intellectual and moral sides the strivings of the bourgeois women's "Rightsters" are entirely justified.'⁴



Clara Zetkin

Women's consciousness

Nothing of this is evident in Cliff's article. His sectarianism towards feminism blinds him to the common features of women's oppression, their dependency on men within the family structure. All he can say about this is that: 'The household blurs class consciousness among women workers. It is on the valley and not on the heights of the capitalist terrain'. To suggest that working women's consciousness is only affected negatively by their oppression in the home is nonsense. Working women can accept their oppression but they can also reject it. When they fought for the vote and when they demonstrated in their thousands for 'A Woman's Right to Choose' against John Corrie's anti-abortion Bill they were challenging the view of women as childbearer first, human being second. Working women's consciousness is formed and changed according to the overall relations in society not *simply* by what happens at the point of production. Zetkin, Kollontai, and Eleanor Marx all understood this. Their polemics against the bourgeois feminists were fierce because they understood the appeal that these ideas had to working women. Tony Cliff fails to understand that appeal, not because he is a man, but because of his syndicalism. He is fixated with the factory and the trade unions. He cannot appreciate the significance of political campaigns waged by women against the state.

Polemie

Zetkin's debate with bourgeois feminism

The massive growth of the German women's movement from the end of the nineteenth century up to the first world war can only be explained if you grasp this fact. The entry of women into the labour force provided the economic background for the radicalisation of working women. But the struggle against the Prussian state to win the right to join trade unions and political parties was not simply an economic struggle; it was a political struggle. It challenged the state head-on for women to be active politically. Despite repression the women's movement grew.

Cliff caricatures Zetkin's relations with the bourgeois feminists in Germany. 'Time after time the radical feminists called on the socialist women to join their demonstrations, but the invitations were always rejected by Zetkin'. (p. 40) He makes this rejection of alliances into an unassailable principle in his article. This was not Zetkin's approach. Take the example of the 1895 campaign for the abolition of the Law of Association that banned women from joining political parties. Cliff is particularly crafty here. He applauds Zetkin's warning to 'every class conscious member of the proletariat' not to sign the petition against this law which had been launched by the radical feminists. But he deliberately forgets to mention why Zetkin objected to this petition!



Alexandra Kollontai

Zetkin had very good reasons for objecting to the petition namely that: no socialist woman had been consulted in drawing up the petition, she disliked its lackey-like tone, no mention was given to the position of working women in relation to the law and their right to organise, and above all else the petition conceded the principle of duality of the legislative structure in Germany by requesting the Reichstag to send a plea to the federated German governments rather than calling for the Reichstag to put forward a Bill. German Social Democracy had consistently fought against this legislative structure which was a left-over from absolutism. Zetkin quite clearly contemplated the possibility of collaboration over this law: 'If the bourgeois women wanted temporary collaboration with proletarian women for a common goal on behalf of the petition, then it is evident that the petition would be formulated in such a way that working women could sign it'.⁵

But the most dishonest statement of all in Cliff's article comes when he tells us that Clara Zetkin only argued for special women's clubs and organisations to circumvent the Combination Laws. Even after 1908 when the Combination Law was repealed women received proportional representation on all the standing committees of the SPD, and the Central bureau for Women Comrades, led by two women with equal powers, remained in existence until 1917. The special agitation commissions set up in 1891 were not simply a legal expediency. They were seen as playing an educative role, awakening and reinforcing

class consciousness.

Neither was *Die Gleichheit*, the Social Democratic women's magazine strictly under the control of the party leadership. It was not owned by the party and Zetkin's conception of it was one of educating the most advanced women to a class stance on women's liberation issues. *Die Neue Zeit*, the SPD theoretical paper, revealed the breadth of the debate on the woman question. Many articles emphasised the need for women to be conscious of their oppression, to have a theory of equal rights rather than to concentrate on day-to-day questions as the reformist wing of social democracy wanted to do in every sphere. It is clear that the Marxist wing of German Social Democracy was anxious to come to terms with the complex problems of female consciousness.

The debate among Marxists

What is missing from Tony Cliff's article is any sense of a debate among Marxists on the woman question. And yet before the rise of Stalinism and its stultifying effect on the international socialist movement, there was a great deal of debate on the question of women. The Communist Manifesto declared itself in favour of the abolition of the family and domestic slavery. Marx called in the First International for the setting up of special working women's branches in factories, industries and cities to ensure women were participating in the labour movement. The Marxists were for equal pay, the vote, the ending of female inferiority. Lassalle and Proudhon on the other hand opposed these ideas. The proletarian women held 'domestic sway' in the family and this was where she should remain. Lassalle opposed the vote for women and urged men to strike against female labour taking their jobs. Eventually it was accepted that women were inexorably being driven into the workforce, and were joining the trade unions and pushing forward their demands. By 1891 the German Party had adopted a full programme of demands for equality between the sexes. But as with other aspects of their programme the way they pursued those demands differed. Zetkin always argued for the vote to pursue the class struggle. The reformists began by the turn of the century to argue for it as a principle of bourgeois democracy. The Marxist programme in Germany remained unchanged but its content was lost to pragmatism.

The Russian revolutionaries continued to approach the woman question in Zetkin's framework. But they took things one step further. By seizing power they were able to implement the Marxist programme on women: easily available divorces, free unions, free abortions, decriminalisation of prostitution, the domestic servitude of women. These were profoundly radical reforms for a largely peasant-based economy that had recently been dominated by a Tsarist autocracy backed by the powerful Russian church. The Bolsheviks initially advocated a communist women's movement stressing, along with Zetkin, the different class interests of proletarian and bourgeois women. But, as with the debate on the united front in the Third International, they became aware that it was perhaps not possible, given the split among socialists in the First World War and the continuing support for reformist ideas in the working class, to refuse to unite in action to fight capitalist attacks.

Lenin, in two interviews with Clara Zetkin in 1920, suggests a bolder approach to exploiting the contradictions of the ruling class on the woman question. When Zetkin tells Lenin that she has been admonished for advocating special working groups in the German party, Lenin's reply puts Cliff to shame:

'Our demands are no more than practical conclusions, drawn by us from the crying needs and disgraceful humiliations that weak and underprivileged women must bear under the bourgeois system. We demonstrate thereby that we are aware of these needs and of the oppression of women, that we are conscious of the privileged position of the men, and that we hate — yes, hate — and want to remove whatever oppresses and harasses the working women, the wife of the worker, the peasant woman, the wife of the little man, and even in many respects the woman of the propertied classes.'⁶

Clara Zetkin proposed an international conference to Lenin to promote 'ferment and radicalisation of women of all classes and sections of society. 'Lenin agreed saying that this would 'increase unrest in the camp of the bourgeoisie and its reformist friends'. Kollontai was at the same time organising conferences with non-party working women in Russia.

An autonomous womens movement

It is the latter approach that has informed the Fourth International's discussions today on women's liberation. The last World Congress expressed full support for the building of an 'autonomous women's liberation movement, proletarian in programme and social composition.' The resolution stressed the importance of building such a movement across the world to take up the different problems faced by women in Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the semi-colonial world. By 'autonomous' it meant that the movement should be led and controlled by women, not that it should be 'separatist', having nothing at all to do with men.

The women's movement it referred to was understood to be the broad movement for women's liberation — campaign coalitions, trade union and political party women's groups, lesbian groups, housewives groups, women's liberation groups, feminist collectives — all those women fighting for their liberation. The term 'proletarian in programme' referred to the need to draw out the anti-capitalist dynamic of the struggle — abortion on demand, free 24 hour nurseries, the ending of sexual harassment and degradation of women and their release from domestic slavery in the home. 'Proletarian in composition' stressed the importance of that movement reaching out to and basing itself on the experience of women workers, both as workers and housewives in order to reach its full potential.

Such a stand, which has always been the one taken by sup-

porters of the Fourth International in Britain, has meant that we have often been the focus of criticism: on the left, for identifying with feminism; in the women's movement, for invading or threatening its autonomy, by arguing for alliances with the labour movement. But the highpoints of feminist activity over the last ten years — the demonstrations and strikes for equal pay and the massive movement against restrictive abortion legislation where women united in action with the labour movement, dull these criticisms somewhat.

Why is Cliff so rigid? Why does he try so hard to suggest that the truly revolutionary attitude is to enter into no alliances with bourgeois (or petty-bourgeois) feminists? Cliff has challenged other orthodoxies in the Marxist movement. So why the timid orthodoxy on women?

Cliff finds it convenient to hide behind the 'orthodox' skirts of Zetkin to give a 'scientific' basis to his hostility and suspicion of feminism. This is not to deny that he pinpoints non-Marxist aspects in some feminist analysis: its refusal to take a class struggle stance on some questions and to view the world through the prism of sex conflicts alone. But his fear of any autonomy (self-government as distinct from separatism) leads him to draw a false historical record. Tony Cliff's nightmare will only come to an end when he wakes up and starts to see the world through the eyes of women.

Footnotes

1. Tony Cliff, *Clara Zetkin and the German Socialist Feminist Movement*, International Socialism, Series 22, no 13.
2. Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings*, London, 1977.
3. Lenin, *On Soviet Socialist Democracy*.
4. Lipow and Draper, *Marxism versus Bourgeois Feminism*, Socialist Register, 1976.
5. Clara Zetkin, *Proletarian Women and Socialist Revolution*.
6. Lenin, *On the Emancipation of Women*.

Socialist Challenge

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BY PAM SINGER

From sleazy dives in Soho to the Edinburgh Festival, audiences bored with and insulted by conventional comedy shows are experiencing a rare treat — stand up comedians who are actually funny.

They vary considerably in style and in politics. But they all try to make people laugh without resorting to cheap mother-in-law jokes and anti-gay gags.

It has been called 'new wave humour', or 'alternative comedy'. You can catch it in pubs, clubs, colleges, festivals — even radio and television — all over the country.

BEN ELTON is a relative newcomer to the alternative comedy scene. I chose to interview him not because I expected the most advanced political analysis of humour, but because in my opinion he's the funniest.

What is alternative comedy? Is it really 'new wave'?

My only definition of alternative comedy is that it's not racist, sexist, anti-gay, or bigoted towards oppressed minorities. So I suppose it's what it's *not*.

Really, we just tell jokes that comment on the unfair world we live in. But women, blacks, or, say, Irish, aren't the source of our jokes. Our humour is based either in the bigotry that produces such objectional attitudes, or it's simply 'clean', 'non-obscene' humour that doesn't offend anyone, except maybe your 'agents of oppression'.

A hallmark of alternative comedians seems to be cynicism about the world. Anyone who's pretending to be something new *has* to be cynical. But there's no 'new' way of making people laugh — we haven't gone back to Freud and found a new way of telling a joke.

Lenny Bruce was prepared to shock an audience into realising its own bigotry a long time ago. Maybe in 1981 there's a few more people doing it, that's all.

I grew up in Guildford thinking the world was divided into two classes — stockbrokers and traindrivers.

Can you tell us about the material you write and perform?

Sure. Some of my pieces are completely innocuous. I chat about anything — Guildford, jogging, the buses, about being converted to a New Romantic. They have no explicit political content.



'MY FIRST PRINCIP

My jokes are about things that amuse me, which are also the things that make me angry. I try to put across the other point of view, because the media and the press, even the dear old *Guardian* never ever do that.

Like on current affairs. When Lech was in vogue I talked about the Tories' and the press' wonderful new attitude towards unions — as long as they're Polish. And poor old Len Murray, rushing over to Somerset House trying to prove his grandma was from Cracow — 'No problem, Margaret — just fighting for my freedom!'

So your material is specifically anti-Tory, or at least has anti-Tory assumptions?

Really, what I'm saying is 'isn't it amusing that everything is just completely falling apart?' It's not so much anti-Tory as just *sensible*. I'm criticising the most unbelievably obvious things.

It may be anti-Tory in that, of course, they are the party in power, the party identified most with capitalism. But it's not pro-Labour. They weren't doing too hot either when they were in power.

If I have a pet hate, I suppose it's the press. Now I have many differences with the Labour Party, but I just weep for them in their battle against the press. And poor old Tony, they really don't give the poor guy a chance.

Sometimes I put on a beer gut, slick back my hair and take the piss out of the stand up comedians you see in clubs, mainly in the north. 'Took my wife to a jumble sale — somebody bought her'. Who wants to laugh at that?

But the acts which are dearest to my heart, and actually about my politics, are my anti-sexist pieces.

Don't you run into problems as a male comedian doing anti-sexist routines? Do you sometimes feel that you're on foreign terrain, or does your audience, particularly the women in the audience, have that reaction?

I try to make it clear that I'm well aware that I'm unqualified to comment from experience. I try to get across that this is a sympathetic and dumbfounded sketch — dumbfounded because my intelligence is also insulted by what we're asked to laugh at on the telly.

For example, I do one sketch explaining how I tried to learn to be funny by watching the popular telly sitcoms. To my 'amazement', entire sketches are based on one 'joke' — the size of women's breasts. 'I couldn't see

what was funny' — atmosphere of w to be a good joke.

I don't set my with you and par believer in the a women. It seems **Are there aspects you, as a male, see there anything to act?**

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I say, perfect know why there's no they're in all plain how and jokes.

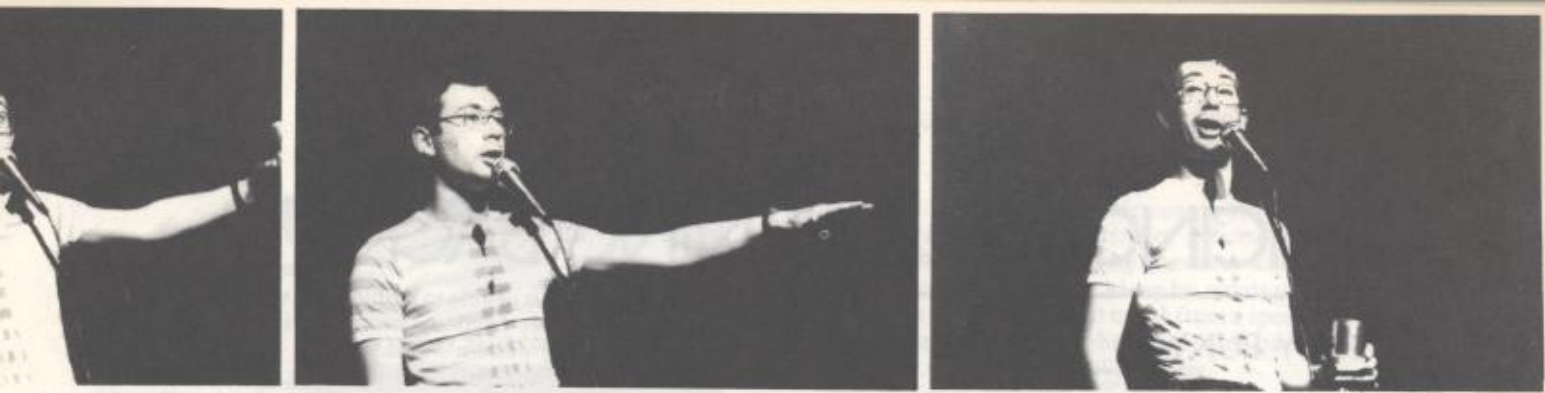
Some people titude. But when stakes aren't as b woman. So it's n courageous for m subtle act and me it'.

My targets are It's as much as I gering lack of s your average ce barely any cons humour.

But what's ironic as a man will pr the audience that Exactly. And the so long you can b and tell everyone

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So why aren't the as stand up come There are some



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women performing
women comedians

around playing to mainly women audiences,
proving of course that women are every bit as
funny as men.

But if you're a woman comedian in an or-
dinary club you've got to be infinitely better
than any man just to stay on stage. Part of the
audience will instantly start up with 'get your
knickers off, luv' even before you begin your
act.

Secondly, conventional humour is based
on male attitudes. So subject matter becomes
a problem for women. For instance, fucking
from a male point of view is considered
perfectly acceptable and 'funny' material. But
when I've heard women comedians do jokes
about periods or coils in an ordinary club, the
immediate reaction is 'ugh, another feminist
trying to gross us out, how disgusting'. Things
about women are considered taboo, unless
they're presented through male eyes.

Even if there's 50 per cent women in the
audience, women comedians are expected to
play to the men — to the male attitude which
is prevalent in our society.

So if a woman is playing to a non-sussed
audience, she has to get over the initial au-
dience hostility, and secondly she is expected
to deal with material that she may find offen-
sive, because it *is* offensive to women. It's
somebody else's sense of humour. It belongs
to a different world, a male world. And not
that many women particularly want to do
that.

*An example of 'nice' politics? Isn't it
something the way the party in
power could lose its deposit in Warr-
ington, and yet it's still a crushing
defeat for the opposition?*

**How do you get your humour and your
politics across to a 'non-sussed' audience?**

My first principle is to be funny. But maybe
one of the reasons I'm a comedian is because I
want to get certain points across. I do it
through being amusing, through cynicism,
through comical juxtaposition. Like with
Warrington.

It's pointless going out there and
assaulting your audience. They just won't
listen. You've got to work your points in
humorously. So I never end up saying: 'This is
why you should be a socialist', or 'this is why
such things insult women.' Nobody wants to
hear a boring lecture — 'I have a more ex-
panded consciousness than you'. So instead
of making a didactic point, I take the piss.

**Are you trying to change or 'expand' the con-
sciousness of your audience?**

As a stand up comic, I don't feel I can actually
change consciousness directly, or perpetrate a
political theory. But through humour, I can
win the audience over to an availability to that
theory, to make them think, and then let them
make the obvious connections.

An alternative comedian has a lot of
ground to make up for, because the bigotry in
conventional humour is so well established —
Irish people are 'stupid'. So you have to prac-
tice counter-discrimination.

Sure, in an ideal world it would be possible
to make a joke about a stupid person who
happens to be Irish. But we don't live in that
world. It's not good enough to say, 'I know
the Irish aren't *really* stupid, it's only a joke',
because then you're just perpetrating the
myth. You have to go further the other way to
dent it at all.

Sometimes I'm accused of inverse bigotry,
because my targets are the captains of in-
dustry instead of women and blacks. Or often
I'm accused of being a prude ('hey, come on,
tell us a *real* joke). And certainly, I often get
'Why do you always go on about politics?'
Well your conventional acts are about
politics, too. But from the other side.

I'm quite prepared to define my targets ac-
cording to my beliefs. I don't mind giving an
absolute tongue-lashing to the manager of
Barclay's Bank. There are certainly enough
subjects around!

**Finally, how do you define yourself
politically?**

I'm in the frustrating position of being very
certain about everything I hate, and very
uncertain about what I want.

People say we'll never have socialism
because people are too selfish. Well, we need
people to be a bit *more* selfish, to expect *more*
than they're getting out of life.

Perhaps I hide behind my humour,
because it's a lot easier to show what is silly in
the world rather than what's positive. I make
my point by showing the idiocy of the present
situation.

People on the left seem to stand for exactly
the same things I stand for. So that's where I
line myself up.

*London audiences will be able to see Ben
regularly at a new club, Comedy Cabaret,
opening at the Boulevard Theatre in Soho
on November 13. Don't miss it!*

**All photos:
COLIN HEADWORTH**



Interviews

POLICING: NO TURNING BACK

BY TONY BUNYAN

Since this summer's youth rebellion the role of the police has come under increasing public scrutiny. Shelley Charlesworth spoke to Tony Bunyan, author of *The Political Police in Britain*, about the changing role of the police today.

SC: Recently Stuart Hall wrote in *New Socialist* that the response of the left to the 'riots' led him to doubt if they had fully grasped the depth and seriousness of what had happened. Do you agree and how do you evaluate the long term impact of the 'riots' on policing methods?

TB: I don't think Stuart Hall is alone in thinking that. It has been true for a long time that questions of policing, the state and the security services have not been central issues within the labour movement or within the extra-parliamentary left, except in the most simplistic terms. What we saw with the 'riots' is another aspect of the long term neglect by the left in general of the situation in the inner city ghettos which have large black communities. A neglect not just of policing but especially of racism.

What we saw in April and July of this year was a qualitative change in British policing — the culmination of police planning over the whole of the 1970s. What was really significant was not the reaction of the police but the kids on the streets telling us that they are not prepared to be condemned to permanent unemployment, to live in the ghettos and to be policed by heavy handed methods.

SC: What do you think will be the policing response over the coming years?

TB: I think that you have to see the police in the context of society as a whole, and in terms of the role of the state. The traditional options of the past are no longer available. Today there is no way in which the government can buy its way out of unemployment or form the social conditions in which people have to live. There is only one remaining option, which is not just the consequence of a Tory government — the seeds have been there since the 1964 Labour government. The only option left is to give the police more powers, sanction new practices like driving vans or cars at high speeds at rioters and by giving them new equipments like CS gas or plastic bullets.

The old methods are finished and however liberal Scarman may seem when he reports it is already quite clear the direction in which policing is going. Just look at the equipment they are beginning to receive and bring over from Northern Ireland. Consider the tactics they are already employing in London and other cities where they are creating special 'third force' type units on permanent standby.

SC: You said earlier that you cannot analyse the police outside of a more general analysis of capitalist society. I would agree with that, but if we were to see a heavier police presence on the streets with CS gas and armoured cars, what does that imply for the type of democracy we now have?

TB: We have to recognise the extent of our economic decline. What we are now heading for is a situation in which about five million people are going to be consigned to permanent unemployment and the bulk of these will be living in the city

ghettos. Britain is unable to cushion this situation by generous benefits or welfare handouts because it is one of the poorest economies in the western world.

At the same time over the past four years we have been witnessing a gathering attack on the political rights of working people — the right to strike, to demonstrate, to picket, the rights of black people, who are already second class citizens, to stay in this country. If you combine the situation of economic decline with these political parameters whether that be around 'rioters' or 'subversives', the state in Britain is faced with an unprecedented challenge to its authority. At the legal level it is planning to meet that by passing laws, which will be coming before the next parliament, giving the police new powers — seeking to legitimise police practices and to delegitimise militants.

What we are seeing at the moment is a fundamental attack on very basic political rights, albeit as they are defined in liberal democratic terms. To express this very simply it means we are moving away from the period of liberal democracy, as we have known it from the 1920s, when all working class men and women were finally given the vote, to that of an authoritarian democracy, one feature of which is that the police become accountable to the state and the government rather than to the people who they are meant to serve.

SC: I would like to return to the police and ask you what you think, in the light of your analysis, the left can and ought to be doing about the problem of policing? We have seen a lot of Labour councillors becoming involved in their local police authorities. Do you think these struggles are important? Or are they ultimately a diversion which the left should not be involved in?

TB: I do not think it is a diversion to be concerned with trying to make the police accountable to the people. This was the original ethos of the police. They purported to serve everyone without regard to their colour, creed or class. What we witnessed in the July 'riots' is that the police do not consider themselves accountable to the people. In the end they are there to defend a particular form of society, a very particular form of economic order and a particular ruling class. So we start from a position where the police are responsible to the state and government and not to the people. However much you alter the formal structures, the Police Committees, the Complaints Board, nothing will change on the streets unless, for example, you eliminate racism from within the police force.

As to whether these issues are diversionary, socialists cannot absolve themselves from reality — where people are being mown down by police vans, murdered while held in custody, and black people are being attacked and killed by police and fascists alike — by holding out the promise that everything will be all right when capitalism is overthrown.

SC: Some sections of the socialist movement have advanced 'community policing' as the answer — that is you have a police force on the streets which is answerable to locally elected representatives. This, for example, will limit and solve the problem of racism within the police. What is your opinion of 'community policing'?

TB: 'Community policing' has a very specific meaning. The original ideology of the police from 1829, was that every police officer had a community relations role. They all serve the community. In the 1950s special community relations branches were created to deal with the problem of young people because of truancy and vandalism. In the early 1960s they added the 'problem' of the black community and particularly young black people. They too were singled out for special attention. Now that has been extended to whole communities in what they

Interviews

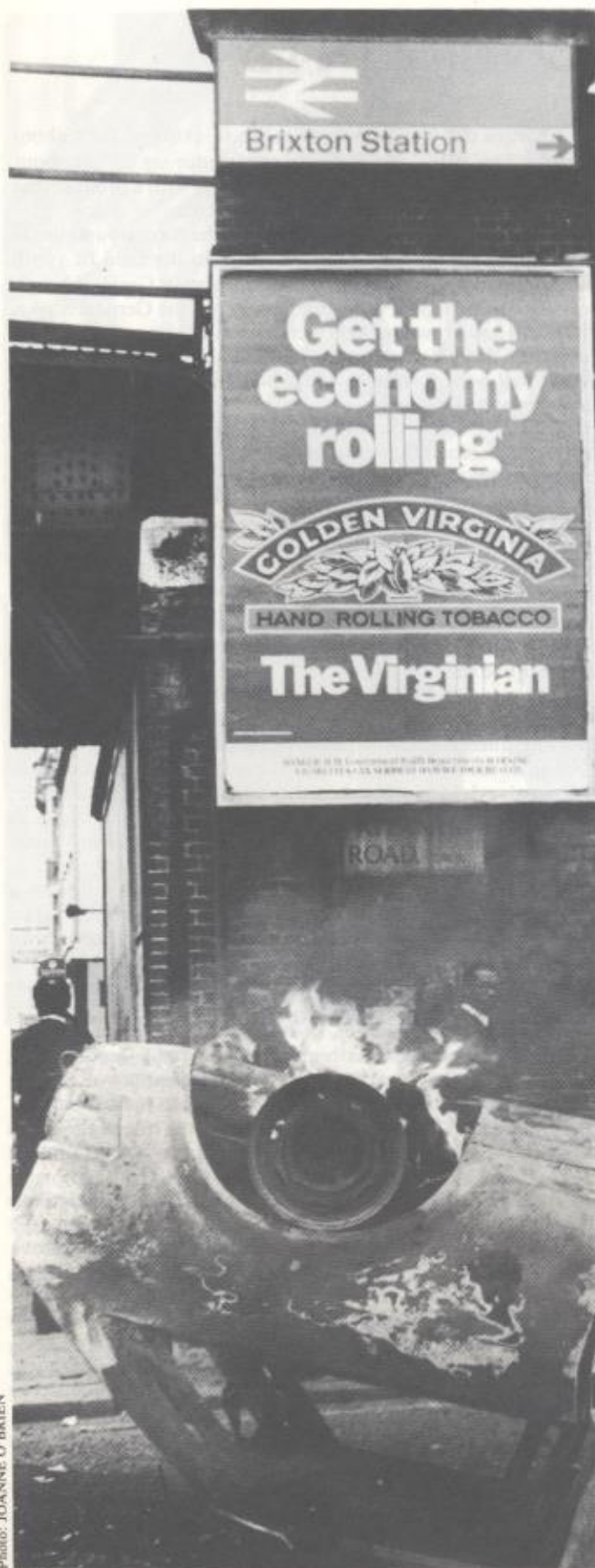


Photo: JOANNE O'BRIEN

call the 'high crime' areas — the inner city ghettos.

To understand the 'community police officer' we have to look at the ideology behind it. They are really there to spy on the community. We are not living in the time of Dixon of Dock Green, the friendly bobby on a bicycle who chats to everybody and helps old people across the road. What we are talking

about, in the words of John Alderson, is pro-active policing. What he advocates is that instead of policing by strength of numbers on the streets, which he considers wasteful of manpower, you have to find a way to use his words of 'penetrating the community'. This is a direct quote from a speech at a Ditchley Foundation Conference which was later translated into a Home Office circular to all police forces.

The old station sergeant has gone and been replaced by the police collator. Now what comes in off the beat is called 'intelligence'. It is part of their training to learn how to build up a picture of who lives in the locality, what they do, who knows who, and who is up to what. It is a system that only involves a limited number of officers. Of course they are very keen to operate this system in the inner city ghettos where they have been having trouble with 'rioters'. People who call for community policing fail to understand how sophisticated the police have become in terms of their ideology and technology. What Alderson, and others, now mean by community policing is not just having more police on the beat but incorporating other social and welfare agencies, like the probation officers, education authorities and social workers. Today in many police forces there are committees, established by the police, on which the local authorities, who control the community and social work programmes sit down with the police to determine how to collectively police their local communities. What is happening is that all the agencies of the state are being brought together to control our inner city ghettos. This has been a tendency over the last decade which is now being formalised.

SC: You have painted a very disquieting picture of the coming years with five million unemployed and more police powers and control over other agencies to contain the 'ghettos'. What sorts of demands should the left be putting forward to control the police?

TB: I think making demands for certain reforms and to defend political rights is an essential pre-condition of political education for any revolutionary change. We must start from the present situation — from the current level of political consciousness.

It is important to defend democratic rights; the right to strike; the right to picket; the right to demonstrate freely; or the right of black people to be protected from fascist attacks and police racism. And furthermore, it is important to see policing and the whole area of the secret state, which is now directed, in an unprecedented way, against the extra-parliamentary left, as major issues for people whether they are inside or outside the Labour Party. These issues must be part of any socialist programme. I would like to add that I think that there is an element within the extra-parliamentary left which sees fighting for civil liberties as reformist. But these are going to be issues in any socialist society and they cannot be left for the future.

SC: I agree with you about the defence of civil liberties. What are the lessons that we should learn from the 'riots'?

TB: In concrete terms we can support calls for local police authorities to control police operations. But this will mean nothing unless at the same time the police as an institution is taken on — as part of a particular kind of state — and the attitude of the police to strikers, pickets and black people is tackled.

The kids on the streets in the 'riots' were telling the Labour Party and the 'white left' that they are now taking the defence of their communities into their own hands, and that the message should be seen by socialist organisations as an indication of how far removed they have become from major sections of the working class. A message that the dispossessed peoples of the ghettos will not accept their lot lying down, one that the left will ignore at its peril, for the seeds of fascism as much as socialism, can grow from such conditions.

British Features

LABOUR'S YOUTH MOVEMENTS

BY JULIAN ATKINSON

Julian Atkinson argues that the past of the Labour youth organisations can be seen as a possible future of the Labour Party as a whole, in the first of a two part series on the history of Labour's youth movements.

The Labour Party has a dual nature: its programme, and even more clearly, its practice have been pro-capitalist, but at the same time it partially represents the interests of the working class and gains its support from that class. This class divide within the Labour Party means that it would be split if an authentically socialist current were to gain control. The pro-capitalist sections of the party would try to destroy it rather than allow this to happen.

This scenario is not some abstract speculation when one examines the history of Labour's youth organisations. On a series of occasions the Labour Party leadership have played Herod to their own youth.

Right from the start the Labour leaders have been suspicious of youth. After the First World War a number of Socialist Youth groups were spontaneously formed around the country. One of the most active of these centres was in Clapham, where the Young Labour League was formed. The YLL approached Arthur Henderson, secretary of the party, with the aim of getting Labour Party help in forming a national organisation.

Arthur Peacock of the YLL described the meeting with Henderson thus: 'He listened attentively, told me as party secretary he did not encourage outside organisations but wanted all the various activities to be with the party machine, and promised to bring the matter to the notice of the National Executive.'¹

The League decided that it would receive no help and it decided to convene a national conference on its own. In June 1922 the conference was held and twenty groups attended to set up the National Young Labour League with its own paper *Young Labour*. There is little evidence to suggest that the politics of the NYLL could have provoked the hostility of the Labour apparatus.

The League helped Labour Parties, organised social events — especially cycling — and had a hard fought debate over whether to produce their own distinctive blazers. The Labour apparatus was suspicious of youth movements as such.

It was not until the 1924 Labour Party conference that it was decided to set up Young People's Sections. The age limit was from 14 to 21 and youth were to work within the party and not be part of any national organisation.

The sections 'should be mainly recreational and not too much attention paid to politics. However, in relation to election work, there was to be full advantage taken of young people's energy and desire to serve.'²

The restrictions on age, role and structure were resented by the NYLL who had not been consulted. A meeting was held with Herbert Morrison: 'He did not understand why we were so angry. The Executive thought we would welcome the scheme. We suggested there should be a national conference, a national committee, a youth secretary. Again Mr. Morrison said "No" and "No" very emphatically.'³

The following fifty odd years in the history of the relationship between Labour and its youth were to hear again and again

the echoes of that 'No'.

Changes did occur however in the thinking of the Labour leaders. The 1926 Labour Party conference set up a Labour League of Youth with an age limit of 26 and with a promise that the League would have an annual conference.

The most convincing explanation of the turn-around lies in the competition that existed to Labour in the field of youth work. The Independent Labour Party set up its Guild of Youth in 1925. By 1926, due to its intervention in the General Strike, the Guild had grown to 9000 members in 182 branches and was attracting the left wing youth. The Young Communist League, which had been formed in 1922, had a membership of nearly 2000 by late 1926.

By 1927, when the radical tide was receding, Transport House had second thoughts. Henderson explained that a youth conference was 'too expensive and the 229 League of Youth branches were too small to warrant it.'⁴

After pressure the first conference of the League of Youth was held in January 1929. A committee of the League which was purely advisory was elected to the Labour Party NEC. It would have no secretary of its own but rather the NEC would appoint one. The League slowly increased its membership and in 1930 some 330 branches were in existence, but by 1933 this number had fallen to 300.

The crisis of 1931 and the split of MacDonald produced a short term left shift within the Labour Party. The rise of fascism, unemployment and the peace campaigns, radicalised a section of the left. But all this took place against a backdrop of the massive defeat inflicted on the unions in the General Strike.

In 1932 the ILP split from the Labour Party and began its process of decline which especially affected the Guild of Youth. From 1932, the League of Youth began to move to the left.

In January 1933 the League of Youth was allowed a newspaper *New Nation*, but its three editors were appointed by Transport House. The League of Youth conference immediately called for control of *New Nation* by the membership and for the right of conference to discuss politics and not just organisational matters.⁵

Many of the League of Youth were in favour of a united front of all working class organisations to fight fascism. *New Nation* was the spearhead for official disapproval of the United Front but the letter columns were open to both sides of the argument. There was such disgust over the role of the paper that some branches wrote letters calling for a boycott of *New Nation*. The letters column was closed.⁶

Arthur Peacock, now an editor of *New Nation*, described the situation: 'The "left" members wanted full autonomy for the League. They seemed to think that the only way to prove their personal sincerity was to attack Transport House increasingly. They attacked *New Nation* — the League organ which I edited. They declared the Labour Party exercised censorship over it. The reverse was the case.'

It was my job to submit proofs of the paper to Will Henderson, chief of the party's publicity department. He was concerned solely with ensuring that nothing was published in opposition to the official policy. He never was a dictator. Now and then he would send for me and talk about paragraphs which he thought offended and say, "Well, brother, we can't have that, can we?" and usually he was right.'⁷

The League became more active and was in the thick of the fight against Mosley's fascists as well as the campaign against the means test. The greater political involvement caused the League to grow and in March 1934 there were 25,000 members in 440 branches.⁸

The inability of the League to discuss policy resolutions became an intolerable restraint. This was exacerbated by the controversy over the United Front. In early 1934 the ILP and the Communist Party approached the Labour Party with a re-

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Photo: NIGEL HENDERSON

quest for a united front to counter the threats of war, fascism and unemployment.

Within the Labour Party the left wing Socialist League of Cripps and most of the League of Youth supported the United Front. *New Nation*, as might have been expected, unswervingly supported the Labour NEC even when it proscribed the 'Relief Committee for the victims of German and Austrian Fascism' in the autumn of 1934.

The left in the League of Youth began to organise and produced a duplicated magazine called *Youth Forum*, which involved both Trotskyists and supporters of the line of the Communist Party. At the end of 1935 the latter group split away to produce a paper called *Advance*. The two main points raised by this paper were the United Front and self-government for the League of Youth.

As the months passed the call for a United Front of the working class became turned into a demand for a Popular Front of all patriotic British, including progressive Tories, to rally behind the League of Nations and collective security to contain the fascist threat. The influence of *Advance* grew rapidly and it was run by monthly editorial meetings in London, Glasgow and Manchester to which all branches of the League of Youth were invited to send delegates.

The Trotskyists, opposed to the Popular Front policy now being put forward by the Communist Party, and to support for the League of Nations, now formed their own group and began publication of a duplicated paper *Youth Militant*, with Roma Dewar of Balham and Tooting Labour League of Youth and Alf Hasler of East Islington as editors.

The League of Youth grew in 1935-36 with the *Advance* tendency as the dominant one. But the Trotskyists also grew slowly in strength and influence. At the 1936 conference of the League, Roma Dewar was elected to the NAC, all the other positions being won by *Advance*. *Youth Militant*, whose editorial board had now been joined by Charlie van Gelderen (East Islington) and Fred Emmett (Peckham), now went into print.

Both the NAC and the resolutions passed at the League conference were unacceptable to the Labour leaders. A memorandum was drafted by the NEC for the 1936 Labour Party conference. This proposed that the NAC be disbanded, the 1937 League conference be not held, *New Nation* should be closed down and the age limit lowered to 21:

'For some time the NAC, instead of devoting themselves to the organisation of the League have spent their time in criticising the NEC and party policies, encouraging the branches in this opposition.. There is clear evidence that the idea has been fostered that the League should be a 'youth movement'. This is contrary to the original concept of the League as laid down in 1926.⁹

By August 1936 over 100 Constituency Labour Parties had come out against the memorandum. The NAC announced that it would not accept it: 'The NAC is still solid and determined to meet and function.' It would press ahead for a merger with the Young Communist League, Co-Op Youth and the Woodcraft Folk and, 'bring in Liberal and religious youth into the fight against fascism.'¹⁰

The 1936 Labour conference endorsed the memorandum

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but the majority of the League followed the now 'unofficial' NAC that turned *Advance* into its 'official' paper. The history of the unofficial League of Youth was a mixed one. Initially due to its vigorous campaigning, the League of Youth grew.

The League ran activities around the Hunger Marches, unionisation drives, the means test, and filling a food ship for Republican Spain. It is doubtful whether 'Labour' youth organisations before or after, were ever again so outwardly oriented and dynamic.

But there was another side to the coin. The League stagnated, then rapidly declined as the Transport House ex-communication was imposed in the localities. The *Advance* group leadership of the League closely followed every twist and turn of Stalinist policy. This meant that demoralising positions were taken on the Spanish revolution and *Advance* carried hysterical anti-Trotskyist attacks, most viciously mouthed by (Lord) Ted Willis. In this witch-hunting atmosphere there was a sharp fall in democratic norms.

On the advice of their CP advisors the NAC, in March 1937, made the first of a series of approaches to Transport House to heal the breach. This in itself was quite permissible, but increasingly it became obvious that the NAC would pay any price.

In May 1937 a national unofficial conference was held with 175 delegates from 125 branches. The conference had positive features such as the emphasis on an industrial orientation for the League, but the atmosphere was poisoned by adherence to the Moscow line, even including support for the purge trials.

The early advances made by the independent League stopped. Willis and the *Advance* group decided that a compromise had to be achieved with Transport House and the League had to be made official at any price. The negotiations allowed the NEC to report to the 1937 Labour Party conference that a sub-committee had collected information on the League and had decided there was enough support for its continued existence. Accordingly an Administrative Officer was to be employed and the NEC would appoint a National Advisory Committee for the League of 'appropriate persons' who were to include some actual League members. The League would lose its representative on the NEC but would be allowed a national conference.

The ugly reality of the deal became fully apparent in March 1938 when the League conference took place. No resolutions were allowed from branches. A NAC of 18 persons was set up: 8 were elected by the League, 3 from the NEC, and 7 were young people appointed by the NEC.

The line of the *Advance* group was to avoid any fight. Instead they asked Transport House to make *Advance*, which was selling 15,000 copies a month, into the official journal of the League. In May 1938 this was done and a joint editorial board of five people was set up, 3 of whom were appointed by Transport House.

By July 1938 *Advance* was selling 25,000 copies a month. The *Advance* group controlled the base and operated a tactic combining Popular Front policies with lots of social events. The League grew significantly and a paper membership of 150,000 was claimed for late 1938.

Of course the politics of the League did not help a real fight against war and fascism, but spread illusions about 'Patriotic Tories'. Also the League was never prepared to resist any further attacks by the Transport House hatchet-men.

The trigger that caused the next onslaught on the League was the crisis in the adult party. After the faint flickerings of radicalism in the immediate wake of MacDonald's defection, the right wing took over total control within both the TUC and, in their majority, the constituency parties.

In May 1937 the Socialist League was proscribed and it dissolved itself. In 1938 the Popular Front came to the fore and in Oxford and Bridgewater the local Labour Parties endorsed independent Popular Front candidates.

In early 1939 Cripps and other lefts made an appeal for all CLPs to support the Popular Front. The NEC meeting of March 1939 expelled Cripps, Bevan and the others. Almost as

an afterthought the League was swotted; the NAC was suspended and the League conference cancelled.

Some of the Leaguers recognised the failure of the NAC to defend the League. In April an emergency conference of Midlands Leagues passed a motion of no confidence in the ex-NAC: the NAC 'utilised the militant feeling within the League of Youth in 1935 to climb to the leadership, betraying every principle on which it was elected.'¹¹

In June Ted Willis announced his intention to join the Communist Party. The *Advance* group had decided to end its operation inside the League. Leading officers and federation secretaries joined the Young Communist League, and some branches went over wholesale. By the end of the year the malediction could be pronounced: 'That the League of Youth has been well high annihilated is a undoubted fact.'¹²

The experience of the pre-war League of Youth was seared into the collective consciousness of Transport House. All of the prejudices that had been exhibited when the concept of a youth organisation was first mooted were triumphantly confirmed. A crucial part of the apparatus that dominated Transport House in the fifties, sixties and even into the seventies had been politically formed in the 1930s.

A collection of repentant ex-Lefts was assembled whose welcomed pennance was the most vigorous prosecution of the current leftists. The feared Sara Barker had been a member of the Socialist League. Len Williams, who was to become secretary of the party, had been a Trotskyist and a writer of inflammatory pamphlets.

Reg (Lord) Underhill once, while chiding the author about some supposed left manoeuvre whilst secretary of the Labour students, revealed that he knew all about trickery since Reg, when in the Clarion Clubs, had tried to claim left delegates for general management committees (and I have no doubt that he carried through that operation with customary efficiency).

This coterie was absolutely opposed to Labour youth organisations and when, reluctantly forced to organise them, did so with a wary and scarce-veiled antagonism.

After the war, the League began to reform in a spontaneous way and by 1946 some 250 branches were in existence. The 1946 Labour conference formally recognised the League but sought to clip its wings by setting age limits of 16 to 21 and by not allowing any national or regional structure. A further problem for the League was the introduction of conscription in 1947 which removed male League members for two years.

By 1948 the League had only achieved a total of 260 branches and was effectively stagnant. At the 1948 party conference Ian Mikardo attempted to remedy this by getting the following resolution passed: 'This conference calls upon the NEC to provide the money and facilities necessary to co-ordinate the League into an effective national body, with an upper age limit of 25, and with a democratic structure and an organising staff.'¹³

Political measures were taken to satisfy the letter if not the spirit of this resolution. A paper, *Labour Youth*, and later *Socialist Advance*, was brought out and a National Consultative Committee was set up, to which each Labour Party regional council appointed two members of the League of Youth.

In spite of the 1948 resolution being implemented in the most minimal form, the League grew and in 1949 had 507 branches. But as it grew so did the demands that it must have a national status. To let the pressure subside, Transport House organised a rally at the Filey holiday camp in September 1949. A representative from the International Union of Socialist Youth, the Second International body, attended and could scarcely conceal his amazement at the short leash on which the League was held:

'A National Consultative Committee was composed, consisting of League members. This committee has no chairman, secretary etc, and none of the League members is a paid functionary of the League. All the potential work is done by the

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functionaries of the Labour Party, just as *Advance* is a publication of the Labour Party. Our readers therefore will not be surprised that this conference at Filey was not a delegate conference; nor could resolutions be passed; no vote could be taken. Every member received a copy of the NCC's report and was allowed to speak for five minutes.¹⁴

If case-hardened young bureaucrats of continental social democracy were amazed by the lack of democracy in the League, then the Leaguers themselves were outraged. The Filey rally ended up in a slanging match as the chairman ruled out of order attempts to refer back the NCC report. The result of this experience was the setting up of a 'National Status Movement' that called for a national self-governing League with a national conference and control of *Socialist Advance*.

The National Status Movement grew as the League itself grew in the late 1940s. Its appeal was not merely that it raised the democratic issues but that it could open the door and allow the Leaguers to play a campaigning role. The restraints on the latter were immense: in 1947 when some League members announced that they intended to oppose conscription they were simply and without a lot of fuss, expelled.

In November 1949 and again in April 1950 the NCC called for a national delegate conference and both times the requests were turned down. The Wandsworth League convened an unofficial conference in June 1950 which some 300 Leaguers attended representing 59 branches. Wandsworth was disbanded but, after a lot of protests, was reinstated.

The persistent calls for control over *Socialist Advance* were partly a function of the abysmal level of the paper. One issue contained as major features: 'My home Rhyll', 'It's your library', and as a concession to the hard-bitten politicians, 'Crusade for World Government'.¹⁵ In October we get: 'Their lot is a happy one' — an article in praise of the police. But the issue is a milestone in that for the first time letters are allowed.¹⁶

There were lighter moments such as the satirical review of a *Tribune* pamphlet on football: 'What a decadent state soccer has reached in this capitalist imperialist country of ours'.¹⁷ Even the spiritual needs were catered for as in the article by Bob Mellish, 'We were never anti-God', which ends up as a triumphant denunciation of communism and all its works.¹⁸

The pressure for national status began to win support, first within the Leagues, then within the party at large. Eventually in September 1950, it was announced that the League would be allowed a national conference. Len Williams, the then youth officer, conceded the point but with grudging ill-grace: 'Though the conference may be regarded as an experiment, it does mark an important stage in the development of the League of Youth. The national conference will have to face the problem of making the League a stable organisation and an effective means of mobilising the young electors behind the Labour Party. It cannot be said that the three pre-war conferences were of much use in this connection, because they led not to the growth of the League but to its disintegration.'

Len Williams, a less than inspirational herald of the new dawn, ended by noting that previous conferences had been attended by those who sought 'a platform for attacking the party they were pledged to support'.¹⁹ This little game was to be stopped by not allowing League branches to directly elect delegates but inviting the constituencies to appoint a youth delegate.

The first post-war conference of the League took place in London during Easter 1951. It was a success. The League had grown and there were some 25,000 members in 820 branches. Although there was disappointment that the conference had not been able to discuss political resolutions, the overall atmosphere was optimistic. It was also noticeable that the Left, while still in a minority, was growing in influence. The Bevanite revolt was to increase the impatience of Transport House with even the existence of a youth organisation.

The election defeat of 1951 increased the internal divisions within the Labour Party. The proposed Easter 1952 League conference was cancelled. The first the NCC of the League

knew of the decision was when they read it in the *Daily Herald*. The 'conference' was then 're-arranged' to be part of the Labour Rally at Filey in June.

The League had started a process of decline. There were 670 branches in existence and only 190 delegates attended Filey. The conference demanded autonomy for the League, the right to discuss politics and to run its own affairs. Great concern was expressed at the falling membership.

One delegate said: 'At the present moment what we can say to young people is "come into the League of Youth and have a wonderful conference — discussing our organisation". That's not right. We should be able to say "Come into the League and discuss matters affecting youth — conscription, votes at 18, equal pay and so on". Comrades if we go on discussing only our internal structure, the League of Youth will collapse.'²⁰

John Lawrence perceptively explored the declining spiral into which the League appeared to be falling: 'They (the Labour leaders) regard them (the Leaguers) as a threat rather than an asset. Consequently they have limited and restricted all the efforts of the League to work out its own contribution to the mass fight against capitalism. With this result — some members

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have fallen away disgusted, few recruits can be made and those who remain have become 'ultra-revolutionary' cheering every attack on the leaders, desperately demanding 'socialist' solutions, although I suspect with little confidence in getting them.

'In this kind of atmosphere it is not surprising that a somewhat exotic brand of pure socialism has developed in which the construction of "socialist" programmes tends to take the place of a mass campaign against Toryism.' By January 1953 the number of branches had fallen to 538. The League overwhelmingly supported the Bevanite revolt.

One of the most glaring political divisions between the League and the party came over conscription. The League was opposed to conscription and campaigned against it. A number of Leaguers went to prison rather than be called up. One such was interviewed, with his head poked between the cell bars, shouting: 'Tell my comrades I am sticking to my principles. I shall refuse a medical even if this means an increased sentence... it is only by personal sacrifice that we can show our determination to prevent another war.'

But of course Gaitskell and the Labour leaders supported the Korean War and the rearmament programme. This meant that the editorial comment in *Socialist Advance* on the interview was appropriately balanced, moderate and statesman-like: 'While the Labour Party fully endorses the necessity for increased defence preparations in the present international situation, it is at the same time vigilant in its championship of democratic rights, both in peace and in war.'²²

By 1954 the crisis in the League was well advanced. The League conference of that year was the most turbulent. 122 delegates attended from 384 branches. Emergency resolutions were tabled on German rearmament, the H-bomb and Bevan's resignation. They were refused by the standing orders committee and its chairman resigned in protest.

After a 15 minutes cooling off period the League chairman Ron Keating had to inform conference that if conference persisted then the party might not allow a further conference. Conference contented itself by passing a resolution calling for the right to discuss political resolutions.

The NEC fraternal delegate to the conference, Percy Knight, managed to bring things back to the boil again by dismissing the conference as a 'safety valve'. But a concession was offered in that the League would be able to choose four subjects for debate and the party would then pick two of these to be discussed at the next League conference. The proceedings ended with 90 of the delegates signing a declaration of support for Aneurin Bevan.²³

There were some ominous signs for the League. The Labour Party paper *London News* printed an article by a full-time agent entitled 'Is the League of Youth out of date?' The article appeared to be the result of a conference of Labour agents. It began: 'Controversy about the League of Youth still continues within the party and it appears to some that the League of Youth is out of keeping with the present conditions.'²⁴

The one ray of hope was that the League at the 1954 conference had won the right to run a 'cut the call-up' campaign. Most Leaguers wanted an end to conscription but this gave the branches a chance to turn outwards and build. All over the country branches repounded. Throughout the summer, meetings were held and petitions circularised, and in September a week of action was held around the slogan 'Two years is too long'. Then the campaign was rapidly wound up.

The Parliamentary Labour Party had come out in support of the Paris Treaty that supported German rearmament and a two year conscription period for the next forty four years. Two years was just right. Six MPs who voted against the Bill in Parliament were expelled from the PLP.

In 1955 the witch-hunt entered the League. The southern region committee of the League was closed down. Expulsions were carried out in Norwood League. It is worthwhile recalling the genteel courtesies of inner-party democracy in the days of Gaitskell before the 'Bennite bully-boys' moved in.

The NEC ordered the expulsion of 3 Norwood members after a subcommittee of Alice Bacon, Sara Barker and the London Regional Organiser Jim Raison had sniffed out a 'disruptive faction'. The constituency Labour Party refused to act. The London Women's Organisation and the Norwood agent were sent from door to door to get members to ward meetings. Eventually an emergency general council was held.

With Raison present, a motion was put endorsing the expulsions. No amendment was allowed. 'It was made quite clear from the chair that to vote against it was inviting expulsion. It was carried 22-16 with six abstentions. Still the bureaucrats weren't satisfied; they had to have their Pyrrhic victory complete. The 22 who had not favoured the motion were told to stand up in turn and state whether they would now vote for the motion, and if not, why not.'

'First came an 18 year old League member, a girl who had only joined the Labour Party about a year before, with a belief that it stood for freedom and democracy. Think of yourself or other League members in this situation!'²⁵ She held her ground and refused to recant. As Raison continued his interrogation some, including a councillor, capitulated. Eventually the meeting broke up in chaos and some members tore up their Party cards.

The writing was now on the wall for the League. First the League conference planned for Easter 1955 was cancelled. The party conference settled the matter. Alice Bacon wound up the League in her NEC report. Youth sections were to be organised in each constituency under the control of subcommittees set up by the constituency party. National structures were to end.

Socialist Advance, now redundant, sang a characteristic and optimistic swan song: 'The 1955 Labour Party conference has laid the foundation stone for a bright and expanding youth organisation for Britain's young socialists. Opportunity is knocking for thousands of potential Labour Party members.'²⁶

It was not a foundation but a grave stone. Paddy Wall, a NCC member, gave the following obituary in an afterthought: 'All sections of the Labour Party experienced a decline in activity during the years 1951-55. The young and weak League suffered more disastrously than any section of the labour movement and it would be more true to say that at the 1955 conference Alice Bacon buried the corpse of the League rather than build a flourishing organisation.'

End of part one

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International Features

THE SANDINIST REVOLUTION

BY HENRI WEBER

The overthrow of Somoza in the Nicaraguan revolution opened a new chapter in the history of Central America. In a new book *Nicaragua: The Sandinist Revolution* Henri Weber examines the Nicaraguan revolution in detail. Below, with the kind permission of New Left Books, we reproduce a short excerpt from the book's fourth chapter, *The Transition to Socialism*.

At first sight, the government established in Managua on 20 July 1979 seemed to hold out every guarantee to the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and its international allies.

The Government of National Reconstruction and the staff of the various ministries included a great number of reputable figures: Roberto Mayorga Cortes, former general secretary of the Central American Common Market and now minister of planning; Noel Rivas Gasteasoro, ex-president of the Chamber of Commerce, a prominent member of the Conservative Party, and minister of industry; Manuel José Torres, a big Christian Democrat landowner now presiding over the destinies of agriculture; and Bernardino Larios, a former colonel of the National Guard involved in a murky coup affair in 1978, who was of course minister of defence. A newly-adopted Code of the Rights and Safeguards of Nicaraguan Citizens was not a whit inferior to the Code of the Swiss Confederation. And the 'Fundamental Law of the State', a preconstitutional document, was inspired by principles dear to the founding fathers of North American democracy. FSLN representatives held only three of the eighteen ministerial posts, and the June 1979 agreements between the various resistance groups envisaged that they would also be a small minority in the future Council of State.

In reality, of course, both executive and legislative power resided in the Government Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN), where the FSLN had an effective majority despite the presence of Violetta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo, since Sergio Ramirez, a 39-year old writer and doctor in law, representing the 'Group of Twelve', and Moises Hassan, a 38-year-old doctor in mathematics of Palestinian origin, representing the MPU, both fully supported the positions of the FSLN. However, it was anticipated that general elections, due as soon as possible, would allow the situation to be normalised.

A huge public sector was created. But JGRN Decree No.3 restricted nationalisations to the financial system, mining, and fisheries, as well as industrial, agricultural, and commercial enterprises belonging to Somozists. The private sector still largely held sway, and no fetters were placed on its activity. Indeed, the FSLN ordered all citizens to hand in the arms they had seized from the National Guard barracks in July. It was time for reconstruction.

Impressed by all these timely gestures, the Inter-American Development Bank granted Nicaragua a \$500 million loan to be spread over three years, with \$200 million available at once. The episcopal conference voiced its enthusiastic support, and exhorted all Christians to work hard. The Socialist International started collecting funds.

'Implacable in struggle, generous in victory': the FSLN seemed to be applying Sandino's motto to the letter, not only in its humane treatment of former Somozist guardsmen, but



above all in its relations with the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, which, rights and property guaranteed, was given a significant place in the state administration.

Indeed, so generous was the FSLN that there was reason to wonder whether history was about to play another of its tricks, whether the anti-Somozist bourgeoisie, which Carter had vainly tried to hoist into power, would eventually carry the day through the derailing of the Sandinist revolution. Once the initial euphoria had passed and the country began to confront its enormous difficulties, would not the anti-Somozist bourgeoisie gradually impose a Portuguese-type solution? Might it not superintend a modernisation of the Nicaraguan society and State within the orbit of North American imperialism, merely rationalising the model of neo-colonial development with its growing inequalities, its oppression of the masses, and its incapacity for nationally-centred growth?

Would this Castroist-led revolution, which had triumphed at the cost of untold suffering and sacrifice, be taken over, as had so often happened, by its age-old enemies and last-minute converts?

A number of doctrinaire leftist currents, both in Nicaragua and abroad, did believe that this would happen, and they accused the FSLN of 'construction of a bourgeois society and state without Somoza'. Thus James Petras, who dubbed the Terceristas Social Democrats, went so far as to prophesy: 'Nevertheless, this regime will be unable to solve any of the fundamental problems of the masses. On the contrary, in order to curry favour with its outside benefactors, it will have to demobilise the masses, limit change, and demand sacrifices, while restructuring the old class society — thus provoking mass protest. In these circumstances, the petty-bourgeois regime will resort to the old ploy of attacking counter-revolutionary forces of the extreme right and left. But in effect this will be a transitional regime facilitating a drift to the right — in much the same way that the Soares regime in Portugal was used as a means of stopping the revolutionary drift to the left and eventually discarded for an outright rightist regime.'

More serious, and therefore more finely nuanced, was the position of Jorge G. Castaneda, a Mexican Marxist economist. In his view, the FSLN's conciliatory attitude to the capitalists would increasingly demobilise the masses and strengthen both the bourgeoisie and bourgeois pressure on the FSLN. Blinkered by an 'economistic' approach to the problems of transition, the Sandinistas were not paying sufficient attention to the existence of antagonistic classes. But as always, the class struggle would take its revenge on the FSLN itself, which would be shaken by 'a real class struggle between bourgeois and revolutionary

International Features

tendencies'. 'We are not referring,' Castaneda made clear, 'either to the problem of the old tendencies within the Front, whose unity is by now firmly established, or to the fact that there are individuals of bourgeois origin in the Front... The point is that different political lines, representing antagonistic class interests, coexist within the Sandinist Front. And their coexistence is by no means peaceful: the two lines are irreconcilable; of necessity one must prevail over the other.' Unlike Petras, however, Castaneda was confident that the revolutionary wing would emerge victorious.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International showed greater prudence and optimism in its declaration of October 1979: 'The nature and history of the FSLN leadership, as well as its role in the first phase of this revolution, show that it would be an error to draw an a priori limit beyond which decisive sectors of the FSLN cannot go as the process of permanent revolution unfolds.' The declaration characterised the situation in Nicaragua as a peculiar type of dual power: the FSLN controlled the coercive state apparatus, but the bourgeoisie retained considerable power in the economy and the state administration. Nevertheless, the United Secretariat went on: 'It is not the case that two centralised powers confront each other (as in the Russian Revolution, where there was a potential conflict between Kerensky's Provisional Government and the Soviets); and the final outcome will not be decided through a central confrontation between two powers. In Nicaragua, as in Cuba in 1959, "real power" is in the hands of the Sandinistas and if the process continues to follow the same dynamic, further political developments may well be a question more of form than of essential content.'

Now, even if we bear in mind the predominance of the private sector in the economy, this 'dual power' thesis has never seemed very convincing.

It correctly sought to emphasise the open-ended, contradictory character of the situation after July 1979. The bourgeoisie, it was said, retained such enormous power that it could halt the revolutionary process in its liberal-democratic phase, waiting, as in Portugal, for a strong-arm solution to ripen. And it was not certain that the FSLN would be prepared to counter bourgeois plans. The fate of the Nicaraguan revolution, then, was still an open matter. The bourgeois-democratic revolution might, as in Cuba, develop into a socialist revolution; or it might slide back in a neo-imperialist direction, as happened in Bolivia and Mexico. The compromise instituted after the victory over Somoza was highly unstable, and would inevitably lead to decisive class conflicts involving a redivision of power.

All these points are entirely relevant and have been confirmed in reality. Nonetheless, the concept of 'dual power' does not seem to me applicable to the political situation during the first year after July 1979. For this concept refers precisely to situations in which two independently organised class powers confront one and other: for example, the liberated against the occupied zones in China and Vietnam; or the federation of workers' councils against the Provisional Government *resting on the Tsarist state apparatus* in Russia between February and October 1917. Dual power appears at the climax of a revolution when an autonomous bourgeois power resting on a state apparatus and, in particular, an armed force, stands opposed to a working-class counter-power in the process of organisation and centralisation. If the bourgeois power is still imposingly strong despite the intensity of the crisis, this is precisely because it controls the old state apparatus, which, though shaken, has by no means collapsed. It is around this apparatus that the forces of reaction reorganise themselves. Destruction of this apparatus, above all its repressive bodies, is therefore a crucial task for the revolutionary movement. Unless it is achieved, there can be no revolutionary outcome to the situation of dual power.

Now, conditions in Nicaragua after 19 July 1979 were characterised by the actual destruction of the Somozist state apparatus — and not only its military-police component. Functionaries and administrative personnel with an uneasy conscience took flight as soon as the dictatorship collapsed. Those

who had not fled in time took refuge in various embassies, and 919 of these obtained safe-conduct out of the country in February 1980. What remained, then, of this bourgeois 'second power', with no army, no police, no judicial apparatus, and no hierarchical body of functionaries? *We must not confuse 'dual power' and the subordinate presence within the state of politically dominated classes.*

The bourgeois-democratic state, for example, is not a monolithic instrument in the hands of the ruling class. The relationship of class forces is refracted *within* the state.

The dominated classes, and non-hegemonic fractions of the ruling classes, also occupy positions within it. The bourgeois democratic state is not merely the object, but the actual terrain of the class struggle. Its class nature does not refer to complete and undivided service of the dominant fraction of the dominant class, but to the fact that this fraction and this class occupy the strategic positions and real centres of power (which are not always designated as such), whereas the dominated classes occupy subaltern, mainly supervisory positions.

In Nicaragua, most strategic points were occupied by the Sandinists on 19 July, and other such positions — in the administration and the economic apparatus — were taken over a few months later. The real centre of political power, both legislative and executive, has always been the National Directorate of the FSLN. One would have to be more than naive, for example, to imagine that ex-colonel of the National Guard Bernardino Larios actually controlled the Sandinist People's Army — an army composed of former guerrillas and partly structured according to their record of service. This is not to say, however, that the bourgeoisie's trusted men were there merely for show. By no means were all their posts purely honorific. Indeed, they enabled them to exert pressure on the real centres of power, to drag their heels, to place a force of inertia in the path of the revolutionary process, and to serve as a Trojan horse for the counter-revolution. These posts did not, however, enable them to promote an independent policy in the service of bourgeois class interests, or to mobilise the apparatuses of power for the implementation of such a policy.

It is true that the private sector was far more important than the public sector, and that there was no juridical barrier to the accumulation of capital. But this did not make it a situation of 'dual power', not even a very peculiar or 'sui generis' one. Conversely, the massive nationalisations and the existence of state planning do not make the economy socialist or transitional to socialism. The decisive questions are: Who commands the state? What dynamic does the relationship of class forces set in motion? If state power is in the hands of revolutionaries, and if they base themselves on mass mobilisation in order to counter the logic of profit and tailor economic policy to the basic needs of working people, then it is not of decisive significance that the private sector begins in a dominant, the public sector in a minority, position. For the dynamic thereby unleashed should soon reverse the relationship between the two.

There was no more a dual-power situation in the Nicaragua of 1979-80 than — to take the opposite case — there was in Germany and Austria in the twenties, when coalition governments were formed between bourgeois and Social Democratic parties, or in the France of 1945-47, with its Communist and Socialist ministers and its string of nationalisations.

Dual power — and to some extent even war communism — did arise in Nicaragua during the climactic insurrectionary phase of the revolution. Then, a workers' and peasants' counter-power, with its counter-administration (the CDCs), counter-justice and counter-army, really did stand opposed to the Somozist regime. And it emerged victorious after a bloody 45-day trial of strength. The ensuing revolutionary power, dominated by the FSLN, set itself the goal of a transition to socialism in Nicaragua — the complete recasting of the political system and mode of production. Such a regime is what revolutionary Marxists term a 'workers' and farmers' government.'

LATIN AMERICAN STRATEGY

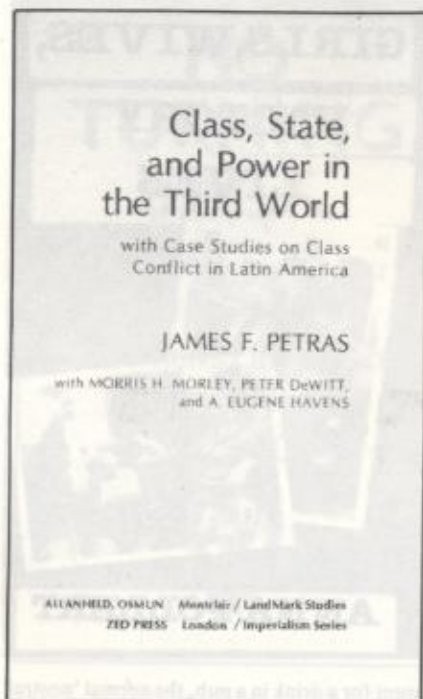
BY RONNIE MUNCK

James Petras: *Class, State and Power in the Third World — With Case Studies on Class Conflict in Latin America*, Zed Press, 1981, £16.95

In the wake of the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 there has been a renewed interest in the Latin American area. Petras has written widely on agrarian reform and imperialism and this book collects his most recent articles on class conflict (a number of which appeared in *Monthly Review* and other journals). Overall there is a clear break with Gunder Frank's version of 'the sociology of underdevelopment' and a partial endorsement of the concerns of revolutionary marxism.

The first set of essays take up various aspects of 'the Imperial State (ie the USA) and World Economy', such as the changing pattern of US investment in Latin America, the role of the Trilateral Commission, the prospects of a new international division of labour and so on. Two more political essays examine the increased role of Social Democracy in Latin America, and provide a rather questionable analysis of 'The Revival of Fascism'. This last article shows up the strengths and the weaknesses of a 'critical sociologist' like Petras: there is a clear-cut condemnation of the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone which other academics have politely dubbed 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' regimes; on the other hand, there is a lack of historical and political clarity which allows him to transpose a category (fascism) to a quite distinct situation from that of Nazi Germany.

The second part of the book is undoubtedly much stronger. Two articles on Peru examine the peasant movement and urban radicalism respectively, and a broad survey of 'Socialist Revolutions and their Class Components' is reprinted from *New Left Review* (No 111). These are sound but not exceptional pieces of work. To my mind the best articles are the ones on Cuba, Argentina and Nicaragua respectively, which in different ways raise some of the fundamental tasks of Latin American socialists. The Cuban Revolution is shown to be more than just a handful of guerillas descending from the hills; rather the urban working class had become the driving force of a broad social movement from the aborted 1933 revolution onwards. That the popular anti-imperialist rising of 1959 became a socialist revolution was due precisely to this social and political presence of the working class. The workers stamped their class content into the emerging democratic forms which arose after the fall of the Batista dictatorship. Twenty years later the Nicaraguan revolution provided similar lessons and revived the hopes of those who had suffered at the hands of the bloody dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and elsewhere. Both guerrilla organisation and the mass urban insurrectionary movement were necessary ingredients to sustain each others struggles. The previous



debates that counterposed one approach to the other have been surpassed. The mass organisations that were instruments of struggle against the dictatorship are now becoming the instruments of the socialist reconstruction of Nicaragua. Petras says rightly that the Factory Defence Committees, the Civil Defense Committees and the militia, which were the parallel power to Somoza, are now 'ensuring that the revolution continues uninterrupted.'

To my mind the best article is that on the rank and file organisation of the working class in Argentina. According to Petras the left in Argentina has two faces: a 'political class' composed of trade union and political leaders, intellectuals and all those in formal organisations, and a 'rank and file' working class with its own social, political, and family networks. This explains why the Argentine working-class struggle continues, despite the savage repression of the formal organisations and the all-pervasive activities of the 'security forces'. The 'informal' working class maintains a strong sense of class solidarity through an intricate web of relations between family, neighbourhood and work place. The organisation has roots in the first Peronist government (1946-55) in which unionisation advanced by leaps and bounds and powerful shop stewards committees ('Comisiones Internas') were formed in most workplaces. Throughout successive military governments from 1955 onwards this hardy rank and file organisation has been the backbone of labour resistance. Petras places a welcome emphasis on the internal organisation of the labour movement and its own working class culture, but he tends to neglect some major political questions. Basically the social strength of the

Argentine working class has not been matched by political clarity. The dominance of Peronist populism over the labor movement even after the death of Peron in 1974 is a basic impediment to further advance by the working class in Argentina.

Petras has moved away from the rather global critiques of the 'dependency' theorists and from their neglect of the class struggle. Classes and the class struggle are at the very centre of his analysis. Some of his themes — dual power, workers' councils, permanent revolution and so on — show a welcome engagement with the classical debates of the international workers' movement. He even mentions that 'the Stalinist takeover transformed Marxism into an ideology of the State', and criticises the utopian/reactionary notion of 'building socialism in one country'.

However, there are number of problems with his analysis. It divides 'economics' and 'politics' into separate chapters as though they could be divorced in real life. His new-found enthusiasm for Marxism, as with many radical US academics, tends to be rather simplistic, as though it were just another brand of sociology. A more nitty-gritty criticism is that the fifteen chapters try to cover too much ground and jump from one question to another without an overall guiding theme. When all is said and done, however, this is an excellent introduction to the Latin American situation.

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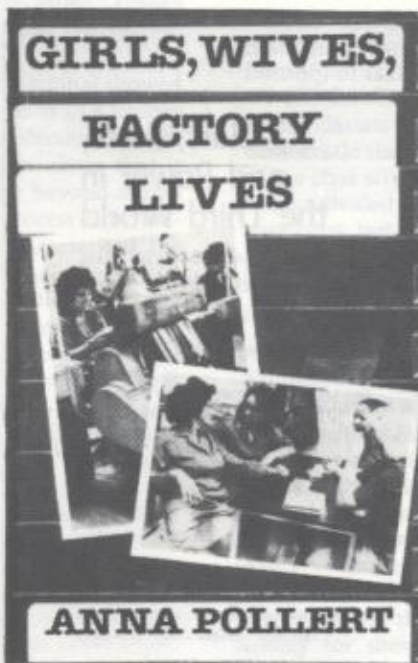
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SHOPFLOOR WOMEN

BY DODIE WEPPLER



Anna Pollert, *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* Macmillan, £3.95.

The gate of a small factory owned by Imperial Tobacco used to be on the plain brick side of St Thomas Street in Bristol. Before its closure in 1974, 130 women rushed through those gates just after seven o'clock each morning.

Every effort was made to snatch a cup of tea or at least a fag before work. But more than likely it was a mad rush to the clocking-in machines, a hasty change into the royal blue overalls, and a defiantly nonchalant walk to the machines or work benches to arrive spot on time.

Starting time was dreaded. Empty hours stretched ahead of a seemingly endless repetition of intricate and soul-destroying so-called 'women's work'.

In the world of the factory, the most minor incident will spread around the workers like wildfire. And no matter how insignificant the matter at hand, no one refrains from throwing in their tuppence worth. Quite simply, anything out of the ordinary provides the mainstay of factory life — the welcome relief from the drudgery of the work.

In 1972, one of those welcome incidents must have been the arrival at this Bristol factory, Churchman's, of a sociologist with management's permission to interview the workforce over a period of three months. This sociologist, Anna Pollert, has just published the fruits of her investigation.

In her study Pollert aimed to go beyond the concerns of other recent works on similar themes. She recognises the validity of exploring the interaction of social class and sexual division in the context of two worlds — 'the predominantly male world of wage labour, and the female world of the home'. But Pollert wanted to emphasise the *common ground* of wage labour, between men and women, the interaction of female exploitation and oppression, of their experience at work and home. Above all, she was interested in how these social relations are likely to change consciousness.

Her book, *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* only partially achieves this aim. There are several reasons for the weakness in her study and she recognises an important limitation early on in the book. 'To begin with,' she notes, 'I was naturally scrutinised with a mixture of hostility, suspicion and curiosity... As my motives became clearer — that I really felt most people who had not worked in a factory had no idea of what it was like, and that this is what I wanted to communicate, suspicions softened to incredulity, some amusement and some sympathy.'

Being an 'outsider' who had come to scrutinise had another disadvantage — in a study designed to gain an insight into the relations *between* work experience in the factory and outside it, Pollert had no involvement in the home, community and social life of her subjects. 'It was simply not on to suggest we

meet for a drink in a pub, the normal 'neutral' meeting place for men. And I did not have the gall to invite myself into people's houses for tea, or tag along like a chaperone to dances down in the Locarno or the Heart Beat Club'.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations of being an 'interventionist researcher', as Pollert describes herself, the book *does* manage to grasp the multi-faceted and often contradictory ideas and concerns of the women interviewed.

One problem is simply the time it takes to get to these meaty chapters! The first third of the book is preparing readers to get on to the 'real stuff'. There are a dozen and one annoyingly brief thumb-nail sketches of every subject remotely connected to the book's themes. We learn in a mere two or three pages about the past and future prospects for the entire tobacco industry; or of the history and structure of the Bristol working class extending from the days of Chartism right up to contemporary times; and so on.

The final two thirds of the book makes it worth a read. Pollert presents an extensive cross section of the views of women, interspersing them with analysis, commentary, and conclusions. By and large she avoids a sentimental, romantic, 'plight of the woman worker' approach. Instead she records the fragmentary and often different ideas women expressed about their immediate home situations, their femininity, their union, their self images, their attitudes to management, and to male workers.

But only in the chapter which deals with a one day strike over pay is there a glimpse of the women's ideas on a range of issues not directly related to the immediate experience. For most of the women the strike — which ended in a sell-out by the union leaders — was one big 'non-event' when they had a day at home. These women rapidly slid back into

what one of them called 'the humdrum, day to day nothing'.

The strike took others 'outside of their own machine crew, their own department, their own factory.' It opened up a search for general answers that steered their discussions towards 'broad ideological questions' including the Queen, Parliament, the Labour Party, Enoch Powell's racist views, and so on.

Sadly, however, the book fails to link up the potential for change expressed in often a contradictory way by the women themselves, to the broader goal of a socialist society. Pollert stresses the benefits and necessity of electing a woman to represent them. But the need to build a new leadership from the ranks of women workers ends up as a problem separate from any overall political strategy.

Pollert concludes by pointing towards a fusion between women as an oppressed group in society tied to the family and their role as workers 'in a man's world'. She argues that at work women break out of their isolation and however much they are cut off from men, they still exist in the same world of wage labour.

Such an approach entails a clear link between fighting for policies which promote the right of women to work, and those like work-sharing with no loss of pay which began to *challenge* the way capitalist society is organised.

But rather than mapping out her views on the policies which are vital if the fragmentary and contradictory consciousness in the working class is going to be altered, Pollert seems to leave behind the women workers, to conclude with strategic implications for the women's movement.

No one could deny that active feminists should re-orient their activity towards the workplace and 'away from an exclusive pre-occupation with domestic and personal experience'. The fight against the Corrie anti-abortion Bill demonstrated the enormous potential and sentiment which exists among women at work.

But this re-orientation does not stem simply from a general need to win working women to feminist ideas. It is vital because today women workers in their struggles at places like Lee Jeans or Royal Pride are providing a lead not only for the 'man's world of wage labour', but also *for the active feminist as well*.

At a time when the stakes are so high — when entire industries are under attack, not just the odd department — the road to consistent socialist ideas is doubtless a complex one. But there is no doubt that Pollert's 'fusion' process is occurring among significant numbers of women workers. Because of the depth of the crisis, women are taking their rightful place as leaders of their class. And it is on these women that our vision of the future women's movement — if it is to be of mass proportions — must be based.

DOCUMENT OF DECLINE?

BY JUDITH ARKWRIGHT

No Turning Back — writings from the Womens Liberation Movement 1975-80, Women's Press, 1981, £4.95

No Turning Back is confidently described as a 'major event'. In fact, it is a document of the declining fortunes of the women's liberation movement.

The book is the third in a series which together paint a fairly accurate picture of the debates, divisions and activities of the women's movement in the last ten years. *The Body Politic* (recently republished) and *Conditions of Illusion*, however, are more representative of a movement unified in its structures and in political demands.

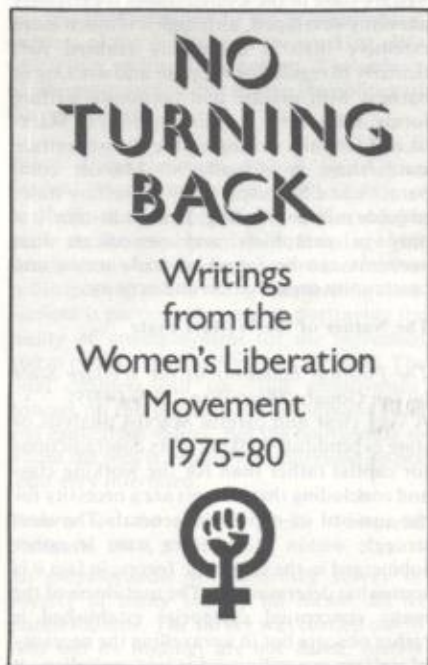
The period covered in *No Turning Back* was an important one. 1975 supposedly saw the full implementation of the Equal Pay Act. The TUC, which had refused to have any mention of contraception and abortion in its charter for working women in 1975, by 1979 was forced to call a mass demonstration to defeat the third of a succession of anti-abortion bills. The last five years have seen more and more unions adopting policy on questions like abortion, sexual harassment and positive action. Sexism and male chauvinism are now words which most people understand, and the whole of issue of violence against women was brought to national prominence in the latter part of 1980.

The period was, however, also marked by the split in the women's liberation movement at what turned out to be its final conference in 1978 which was wracked by seemingly irreconcilable difference. What was the reason for this and what was the source of the differences? *No Turning Back* reflects some of the debates but it does not paint the entire picture.

The main debate running throughout the book is the old, old one of whether the sphere of domestic activity — that is of women's role within the family, of the production of ideology and so on — is a sphere of political activity, and, if so, where is this activity directed, what demands does it encompass, who is it a struggle with? For example there are at least five articles taking up the question of patriarchy, questioning whether it is possible for women to form an alliance with working class men in order to fight their oppression. Two arguments are put forward on this score which are equally problematic.

In her essay, Anne Phillips explains the ideas (though does not endorse them) of Christine Delphy who argues that there is a 'family mode of production' within which married women carry out a series of domestic services with pay for men. She claims that it is not capital which benefits from women's provision of these services but men, and that therefore men have an interest in maintaining women's oppression.

In other words there are two modes of production and reproduction which have existed alongside each other for centuries and a



change in one will not necessarily mean a change in the other; they are two entirely separate realms of struggle. But what is the motor force of this mode of production — how will it be destroyed apart from by destroying men? How is it possible to have a fixed structure of patriarchy which has not changed? The only answer to this is of course that the material basis of such a mode of reproduction is women's biology. This is a very pessimistic outlook.

In Barbara Taylor and Sally Alexander's article there is a more subtle definition of patriarchy which also has to be rejected for all that it is in a socialist feminist framework. They argue that the 'concept of patriarchy points to a strategy which will eliminate not men, but masculinity and transform psychosocial relations.' In other words patriarchy is not a mode of production but a system of ideas, of ideology. Again, the problem is that this ideology of masculinity seems to exist in isolation from society and to have an independent existence as a system from the mode of production.

The argument continues that there must be a separate sphere of feminist activity autonomous from the class struggle. It reduces the struggle to a struggle to change men's ideas. The struggle to change the consciousness of working class men is of course very important, but surely the struggles of the women's movement directed toward an alliance with the labour movement in action is the most effective way of achieving this.

There is a third line of argument not unrelated to the above put forward by Zoe Fairbairns which sees the struggle in the 'domestic sphere' as being centred around the struggle for a living income in their own right for women or men who care for dependents at

home'. This is not, the author takes care to mention, the same as wages for housework since it would be a benefit system for women who chose to claim. She argues that housework cannot be abolished in the near future — that the tasks are ones which someone has to do and if some women want to do housework they should get paid for it.

But the real problem with housework is not that it is unpaid but that it is isolated and unproductive and should be socialised. This may be a long term goal but there must be some relation between our long term goal and what we do now. The main issue is that women are being made unemployed and forced into exclusive domestic work. The Tories in the present context would be rather encouraged by the demand for some kind of payment for these tasks since that would make it easier to keep women unemployed and cut back on the welfare state.

What none of these arguments understand is that the family under capitalism has specific features which we can and must take advantage of. It contains within it a contradiction which is too big for it to survive: it creates the conditions for women to be involved in social production and this conflicts with the longstanding division of labour and with the need of capitalism to maintain the family. This contradiction has not existed so acutely before and in this sense neither has the possibility of getting rid of women's oppression.

The domestic sphere is a sphere of political activity but it is not divorced from the struggle 'outside'. It seems to me for example, that the struggle for a woman's right to work must become a crucial one in our current strategy because the contradictions outlined above are now coming into play in the most acute form.

Unfortunately none of the essays in *No Turning Back* point a direction for the women's movement. In fact the two essays on the abortion struggle express a very one-sided picture of the achievements of the women's movement in this period by downplaying the importance of the alliance achieved with the labour movement. In an essay entitled 'I call myself a radical feminist', Gail Chester laments that the women's movement has now become so broad that groups 'such as the Working Womens Charter and NAC claim the right to be included under the affiliating banner of the 'women's movement'.

We should on the contrary welcome the fact that so many women from so many different spheres are sympathetic to the ideas of women's liberation and are, on occasion, prepared actively to organise around them. Surely this is the type of women's movement we need in this country: a mass movement full of debate and discussion not a small movement based on narrowly-defined 'pure' political goals.

Reviews Reviews Reviews

THE WELL INFORMED MILITANT

By Norman Ginsburg

The post-war extension of state involvement in social security, education, housing, health and land use planning is over. The welfare state, however, is not dead; rather, its new 'slimmed-down' form, in which private provision is encouraged for those who can afford it and simply 'going without' for those who can't, is struggling increasingly hopelessly with the enormous human and financial cost of unemployment benefits, work experience programmes, and the broader welfare consequences of mass unemployment and falling living standards.

As social reformers have documented for decades, welfare benefits and services have been consistently inadequate and more beneficial to the middle classes than the working class. More recent socialist writers have shown how the welfare state stigmatises and disciplines the poor, discriminates racially, reinforces the primacy of domestic and material duties for women, and provides poor working conditions and low pay for the bulk of its workforce.

The welfare state developed in response to a huge variety of struggles and pressures generated 'from below'. The withdrawal of these benefits and services has had a devastating and disabling material impact on the working class. But while it is necessary to defend the present provisions, this is not sufficient on its own. As Elizabeth Wilson has written: 'It is never enough to ask for more of the same when it comes to welfare. The left must fight for welfare provision that does not rely on the unpaid work of women and does not sustain the present unequal family'.

Struggles in defence of services can and must challenge the disciplinary, patriarchal and undemocratic forms in which services are produced and delivered. Despite many fierce and bitter local struggles, campaigns and occupations, however, the unpalatable truth is that the majority of the organised (ie employed) working class have, thus far at least, accepted the recent decline of the 'social wage' in exchange for false promises of job security and 'light at the end of the tunnel'.

The literature on Britain is dominated by social democratic, empiricist approaches. There is a tendency to look at the British welfare state as the definitive capitalist welfare state, but there is no such thing. The balance between public and private provision, the degree of racist, sexist and repressive administration, the extent to which services meet basic needs, the degree of inequality in access to and distribution of services — all these vary enormously from one country to another.

Comparisons are difficult, for the British welfare state is very much impoverished in relation to the other social democratic states

of Western Europe, where, however, the class structure of inequality is much more directly reflected in the graduated inequality of many benefits and in the use of welfare services. The welfare state in the United States is extremely unevenly developed, although it is much more extensive than is commonly realised particularly in regulating the poor and working in harness with private and corporate welfare forms. While there is a growing body of Marxist and feminist writing on the British welfare state, there is virtually no Marxist comparative and historical study of welfare states to guide militant reading. Even in Britain, it is only in pamphlets and periodicals that accounts can be found of trade union and community organisation and activity.

The Nature of the Welfare State

The Political Economy of the Welfare State by Ian Gough (Macmillan, 1979 £4.95)

A very clear and careful Marxist analysis of state expenditure looking at its contradictions for capital rather than for the working class and concluding that the cuts are a necessity for the survival of capital in general. The class struggle within the welfare state is rather submerged in the economic forces; in fact it is somewhat deterministic. The usefulness of the many conceptual categories established is rather obscure but in unravelling the necessity of welfare expenditures for late capitalism, it is excellent.

Women & the Welfare State by Elizabeth Wilson (Tavistock, 1977 £3.60)

A bold and imaginative book which originated as an even better Red Rag pamphlet. It has changed the face of social policy courses with its argument that 'social welfare policies amount to no less than the State organisation of domestic life'. It offers a socialist feminist history of the ideologies of domesticity and the patriarchal family as transmitted by welfare policies and social workers. Unfortunately it is confusingly organised and theorised, but nothing's perfect!

Society & Social Policy by Ramesh Mishra (Macmillan, 2nd edition, 1981, £4.95)

This is a useful, critical guide to the leading sociological paradigms for the study of the welfare state, including Marxism. It deals particularly well with the empiricist tradition and with Marx's analysis of the Factory Acts. The second part embarks on an international comparison of modern welfare states using a vaguely Weberian model. It does not work too well, but it's a brave attempt.

Ideology & Social Welfare by Victor George & Paul Wilding (Routledge, 1976, £3.50)

A systematic account, based on primary sources, of four major ideologies: anti-collectivism (Thatcherism), reluctant collectivism ('the wets'), Fabian collectivism (social democracy) and Marxism. The first three are very effectively presented, though the ideas are organised around Fabian categories. The importance of the distinction between reluctant collectivism and Fabian collectivism is overemphasised, and the chapter on Marxism is poor, partly reflecting the poverty of Marxism in this area.

In & Against the State by the London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (Pluto Press, 1980, £2.95)

An accessible if somewhat self-conscious discussion of the oppression of workers and consumers in, and the possibilities for challenging the capitalist form of the welfare state. This expanded edition is much more coherent than the original pamphlet, arguing that class struggle exists in a myriad of everyday, hidden resistances against and beyond the welfare state. It advocates a political practice which goes beyond demanding more welfare resources and involves building new social relations. As the postscript admits, much of the space for this has been swept aside by monetarism but this remains absolute priority reading for activists.

International Perspectives

Northern Ireland: Between Civil Rights & Civil War by Liam O'Dowd, Bill Rolston & Mike Tomlinson (CSE Books, 1980, £3.95)

A readable and original set of essays on Northern Ireland, particularly on the restructuring of the state apparatus since the 1960s. The post-war social democratic, welfare consensus was never established in Northern Ireland where the Catholics were largely excluded from the welfare state. Since the emergence of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the subsequent war, British governments have attempted to construct or impose such a consensus, particularly through housing policies. The drastic and inevitable failure of such attempts and the consequent strengthening of the sectarian statelet is well documented. The book conveys all too clearly the utter bankruptcy of British social democracy in Ireland, but leaves the reader in no doubt as to the dominance of sectarian division over class unity in the six counties.

Regulating the Poor and Poor People's Movements by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward

These two books, particularly the second, are written for the militant. The message is that 'poor people's movements' (for example the militant welfare rights movements of the 1960s) are destroyed by incorporation into the web of conventional pressure group politics and the bourgeois process of social reform. The authors show that throughout American welfare history, relatively spontaneous and locally organised explosions by the poor have provoked progressive reform. Then, as the pressure from below ebbs, the reforms are bureaucratically manipulated in order to 'regulate' (ie. discipline and police) the poor. Both books deal in depth with the crises in poor relief of the 1930s and the 1960s, the former concentrating on relief policy reform and the latter on the rank-and-file organisation of both workers and the poor. Neither book is officially available in paperback in Britain (although Blackwell publish a hardback of *Poor People's Movements* — ironically at £10). The American paperback editions (published by Vintage) are generally available at about £2.95 each from Compendium, 234 Camden High Street, London NW1.

POLAND'S POLITICAL REVOLUTION

BY DAVY JONES

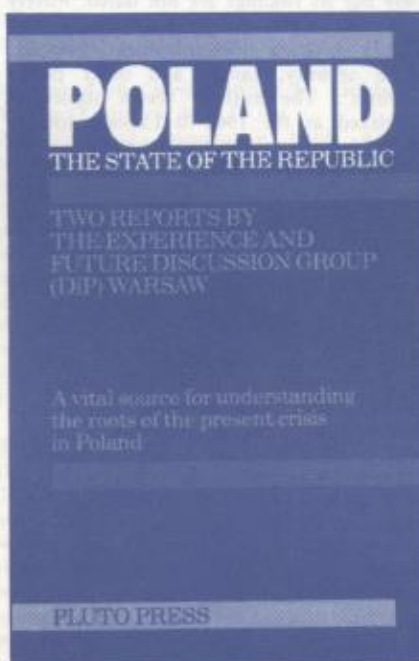
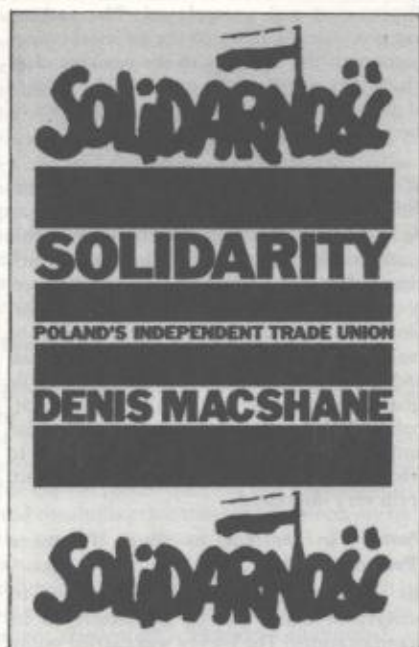
Solidarity — Poland's Independent Trade Union by Denis MacShane, Spokesman Books, £3.50; *Poland — the State of the Republic*, two reports by the Experience and Discussion Group (DIP) Warsaw, Pluto Books, £4.95.

It must surely be the rapidity and unpredictability of the last year's events in Poland that has prevented their political significance being reflected in the volume of books on the subject. Both these contributions are therefore welcome — MacShane's no-nonsense account of the growth and functions of the first independent union in the 'People's Democracies', and the DIP reports' thorough and scathing critique of the political and socio-economic relations in Poland prior to the 1980 summer revolution. Both will have their special audience — MacShane for the trade union activist, and the DIP reports for the 'experts' on Poland. But it must be said that neither possess the same political insight as Daniel Singer's *Road to Gdansk*, nor do they adequately convey the extraordinary political importance of Poland's last eighteen months.

MacShane chronicles the previous workers' upsurges of 1956, 1970 and 1976 and the student revolt of 1968, as well as the phases of Solidarity's own development from the signing of the Gdansk Agreement to the registration of the union, from the Bydgoszcz crisis to this summer's relative stability. He examines the major forces which have shaped the Polish drama — the Church, the KOR, the ruling Communist Party, and Solidarity's leaders like Walesa. He also has an interesting chapter on the mass media, detailed accounts of the union's scrupulous regard for internal democracy, and a welcome appeal for international workers' solidarity with this second largest independent union movement in the world.

The weakness of his approach becomes most clear in the section on 'Solidarity's Achievements'. Not only is this curiously the shortest chapter in the book, but the title of its first sub-heading gives the game away — 'Health and Safety'. MacShane really does treat Solidarity as if it were just one big new trade union to be welcomed into the international workers' fold. And while this may be done with the most honourable of intentions — to persuade the sceptics in the ranks of our own labour movement of their international duty of solidarity — nevertheless, the result is a crucial misunderstanding of the dynamic of the Polish events.

Poland is not a socialist or communist country, despite the nationalisation of its industry and the state monopoly on foreign trade. But neither is it a capitalist country with all the 'democratic' trappings that normally go with capitalism in the advanced countries. It is a society in transition, where capitalism has been overthrown but the resulting potential for workers' power has been stifled by a huge party and state bureaucracy. The stag-



gering size of this layer is graphically demonstrated by the list of posts subject to party appointment — the 'Nomenklatura' — which is reprinted in MacShane's book. The specific feature of this political system is the total monopoly of political power exercised by the ruling bureaucracy over the working class. Any form of independent working class political action threatens the whole political edifice. *In other words independent trade unions are incompatible with the system.*

The international labour movement welcomed with open arms the new mass union movement in Spain as it emerged from the Francoist dictatorship. But this development

in no way threatened to turn world politics upside down in the way that the Polish events have done. The reason is simple: mass independent trade unions are basically compatible with capitalist democracy in a way that they are not for the so-called 'People's Democracies'. And the extraordinary significance of the Polish events is that for the first time for generations the workers of the world are seeing a genuine alternative to capitalism and Stalinism being born in one of the most advanced industrialised countries of the world.

The background to this exciting development is detailed in the DIP reports on Poland, compiled through an analysis of questionnaires completed by intellectuals and party members in the late 1970s on the state of the nation. The overwhelming sentiment of the report is that the whole of Polish society is malfunctioning in a 'state of extreme moral and physical exhaustion', that all forms of authority particularly the mass media, lack basic credibility and that the inequalities of the system have robbed it of its most powerful argument over the capitalist system. The bureaucratic centralisation of the system is documented along with the resulting sense of powerlessness felt by the Polish people: 'A Polish citizen experiences the meanderings of politics and planning more or less as he experiences changes in the weather, as important changes he must adapt to but whose causes, wholly external, are not worth exploring more deeply, since he has no way of influencing them.'

But the Polish workers have shown that through united independent class action they can influence things; indeed that they can reshape society in a new image. Here is the weakness of the DIP reports in the light of the last eighteen months in Poland. They were able to articulate the profound sense of dissatisfaction with the prevailing system and its stultifying effects on all aspects of Polish life; they were even able to forecast that 'the nadir of crisis' was approaching, 'perhaps more profound than those of the past'; but they were singularly inadequate at pointing to the agency that would point a way out of the crisis.

The need for trade unions to be genuinely representative of the workers, for free elections and mass media, and for the restriction of the 'Nomenklatura' system, are all highlighted: but these changes are always seen as coming from a liberalisation of the existing regime through a reformist wing of the bureaucracy. It is the Polish workers who are now making these same demands and who are using their strength as workers to achieve them. Having started down the road of independent unions, each new confrontation with the authorities and each new congress resolution points to the inescapable conclusion: that the only real way out of the Polish crisis is not for Solidarity to become a better trade union or to seek a liberal wing of the bureaucracy with which to ally, but for it to systematically build the only alternative political power: workers' socialist democracy.