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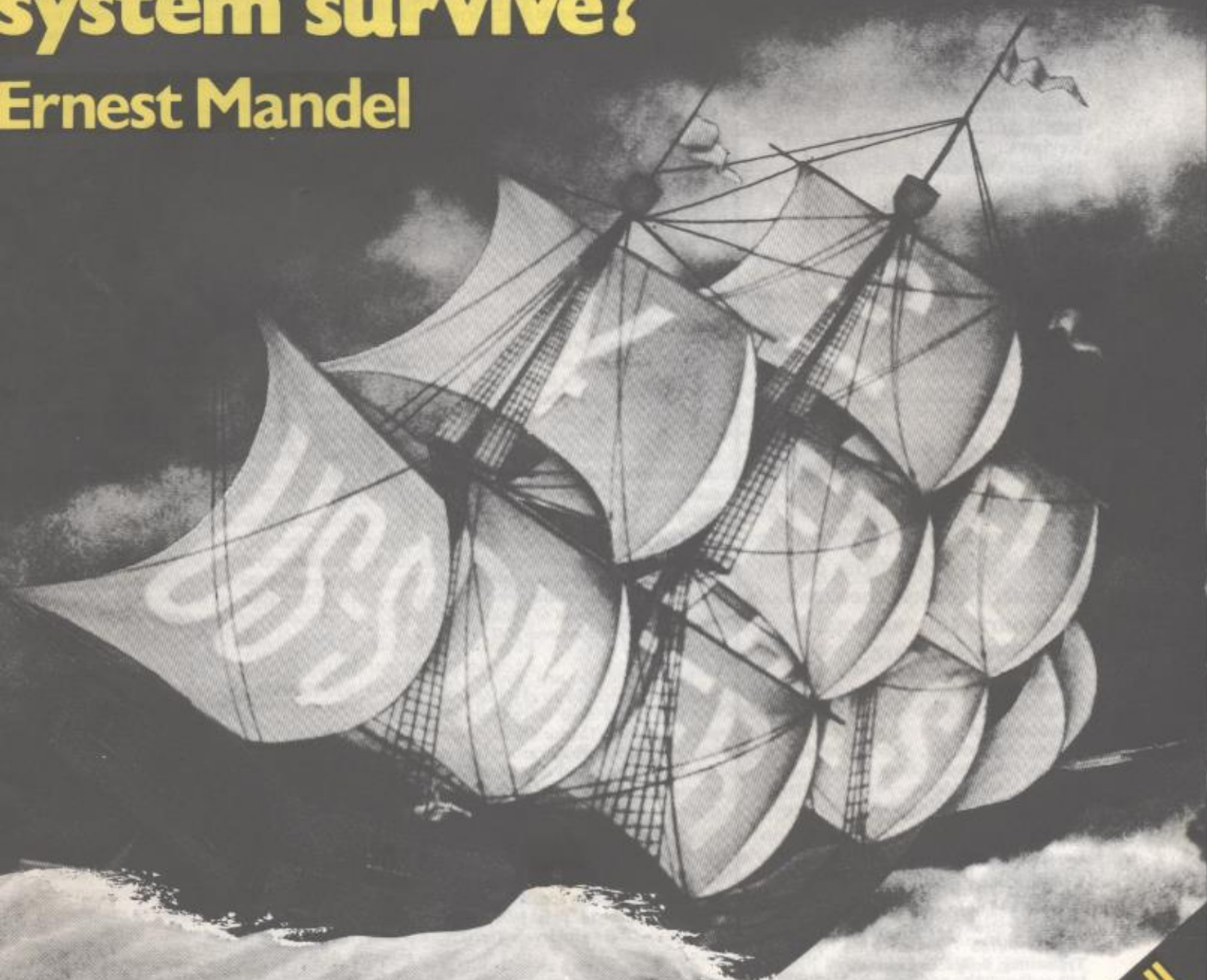
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International

Can the monetary system survive?

Ernest Mandel



Ron Brown MP
Building a mass Labour Party

Oliver MacDonald
Poland: one year on

Sarah Roelofs
Women's committees and democracy

Cartoonist Steve Bell
Interviewed



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International

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Editorial

THE BATTLE FOR LABOUR

Not long after the great financial panic of 1920 a joint stock company raised substantial capital for an immortal purpose: 'to promote an undertaking of great advantage, no-one to know what it is.' Has the Labour Party leadership taken its cue from the directors of this short-lived enterprise?

There is room enough for forthright leadership. A fortnight after Thatcher decided interest rates could float, world investors decided the pound should sink. It is now backed by Tory resolution, invisible income, and an oil industry the Tories can't even sell to their own supporters.

To paraphrase, Britain's economy is not just ripe for socialism; it is somewhat rotten. The true measure of Thatcher's economic progress is a stark fact: in October, Britain bought more manufactured goods than it sold, for the first time this century.

Two questions arise: why does the wealthy Briton stay with Thatcher, and why doesn't the poor one turn to Foot?

They both have the same answer. The Tories' economic sabotage is justified by their one success: the series of political defeats inflicted on the working class. As long as railworkers, health workers and miners fall prey to the disastrous leadership of the TUC and Labour Party alike, the bankers and businessmen will cling to Thatcher's coattails. As long as the Labour Party offers leadership that would put Buster Keaton to shame, industrial disputes will run to stalemate or defeat because no serious alternative to Thatcherism is on offer.

What should the Labour leadership do? No-one expects the leopard to change its spots. We are not surprised that it doesn't nationalise the banks, institute workers' control, open the empty books of British industry or support Gerry Adams even half as warmly as his voters.

But to win the next election Labour's leaders don't need to do anything so advanced. They don't need to campaign for unpopular causes. Labour's leaders need only launch a mass campaign around the socialist policies like unilateral disarmament adopted at recent conferences and stop witch-hunting those socialists in the party who support them.

Why won't Labour's great pragmatic leaders do the obvious pragmatic thing? Why have they spent three NECs at the opening of an election campaign apparently being bounced from pillar to post by a group they themselves label an irrelevant Trotskyist sect?

It is because much more is at stake in the coming General election than Thatcher's future. Also up for grabs is the Labour Party itself. Eighty years of its history are ending with the death agonies of the Empire which financed its reforms. The historic compromise of 1914 — you support our wars, we'll pay for your programme — is ended. Michael Foot is the Empire's last Labour scoutmaster, a pathetic survivor of the Woodcraft folk, left over from a previous era.

Two roads now stand before the party.

One, the handmaiden of industrial capital, the loyal exponent of easy credit, cheap pounds, low wages and state assistance. This is Healey's road.

Healey's plan — for it is his, and not Golding's — demands an all-out and cynical attack on everything the most militant and conscious activists have won in the party and unions over the last three years — including even the prospect of a Labour election victory. The extent of Healey's cynicism is demonstrated by his sordid demand for an early by-election in Bermondsey. Such a man is willing to risk losing an election rather than give in to his left wing: as long as he doesn't have to take the blame.

In the 1960s Gaitskell got away with such an outrageous assault. Now even Healey's Neanderthals have to answer to party members for a single demand — *win us the next election*. The longer they continue the witch-hunt and the less attention they pay to the policies demanded by their members, the more obvious it becomes that they are an electoral liability.

That is why the battle now in progress between the CLPs and the NEC is part of the central drama of British politics today, a stage on which wider conflicts are being fought out.

It would of course be a mistake to imagine that the CLPs hold the key to the transformation of the Labour Party. The road to Healey's defeat is the same as the road to Weighell's — via the unions. But equally the road to the unions has a starting point in the political conflicts now rending the first social-imperialist party in the world.

But what is the alternative to Healeyism for the Labour Party? What is implausible is that the leadership of the Labour Party, left or right, will break with capital and go over to socialist revolution. Every step they make, every concession forced on them, will have to be dragged from them by mobilisations on a completely new scale; by political mobilisations of the working class directed against the state itself.

This is the real meaning of the new phase of politics we are now entering in Britain. It demands a new style, a break with the age-old legacy of Labourism. From now on Labour governments will have to be *imposed* by main force, as in 1974, on a bourgeoisie that no longer accepts Labourism. Working class policies will have to be *imposed* on unwilling leaders, and every mass struggle will demand, as its counterpart, a titanic fight against the leaders who turn their backs on its demands.

What we demand, and expect from the Labour Party, is not a pristine new socialist instrument. There is no short cut to building a genuine socialist revolutionary party. What we do demand and fight for is that the Labour Party should serve as a *vehicle through which the working class can express its demand for change*; an instrument it can mobilise to support its actions, through which it can fight and organise for the policies it needs and the leaders to support them; through which it can organise to contend with Healey and his class by fighting his influence in our class.

International Features

WORLD MONETARY CRISIS

ERNEST MANDEL

The world watched in disbelief as the media recently discussed the possibility of Mexico defaulting on its international debts. We reproduce a talk recently given by Ernest Mandel to the recent International 'Debating Socialism' weekend on the meaning of the world monetary crisis.

To understand the threat of a collapse of the world monetary, credit and banking system we have to look at the present economic crisis as a combination of two movements. The first is the normal business cycle which has an average length of between five and seven years; the second is a long wave movement which has been a declining movement since the end of the 1960s or the beginning of the 1970s and which is interwoven with the normal cycle. This distinction is necessary for several reasons: to understand the gravity of the present crisis but also not to get carried away by the idea of an uninterrupted linear decline of output and national income. Trotsky made this same point during the big depression of 1929-1932: at that time some Marxists both within the Trotskyist movement, but more often in other tendencies referring to Marxism, particularly the Stalinist movement, thought that the crisis would not lead to any recovery even of a temporary nature through the internal logic of the capitalist economy. Trotsky opposed this argument very strongly and events proved him right for there was an upturn starting in 1933 or 1934 in the United States, Britain, Germany and all the big imperialist countries.

There have now been 21 business cycles since the beginning of what Marx called the world market for industrial goods in the early 1820s; if you work out the average length of these business cycles you will see it neatly works out to about seven years which was, incidentally, Marx's estimate of the length of the cycle in his own lifetime. In the twentieth century, the period of imperialism and especially in the period of late capitalism, the cycle has become a little less long: some five or six years. As the present recession started, say, in 1980 it is to be expected that some slight recovery will take place around the end of this year or the beginning of next year. This will mean that production will pick up a couple of per cent as will national incomes and gross national products.

This is of importance from the viewpoint of short-term trade union strategy as it is generally easier for workers to fight back against attacks on their standard of living or employment under conditions of even modest upturn and this will probably develop in a series of imperialist countries. But while the normal succession of business cycles continues, it is important to see that this happens within the framework of a declining or stagnating long wave and that therefore recoveries are short, recessions are longer and deeper, and, in particular, unemployment continues to grow even during the periods of recovery. It is now generally predicted by nearly all bourgeois and reformist experts that unemployment will continue to grow into the second half of the 1980s if not even longer. The basic reason for this lies in the very nature of investment during this whole long wave: essentially rationalisation investment, ie investment which destroys more jobs than it creates. This is linked with a long term upswing in the average productivity of labour as the third technological revolution proceeds, especially in its present microchip phase which is abolishing jobs not just in industry but also in the public service sectors which had been the largest

employment growth areas in the previous decades: banking, trade, insurance, state administration, health, education, and even the leisure industry.

While the productivity of labour grows faster than the increase in output, even if output grows, unemployment grows. We are faced therefore with the prospect of huge-scale unemployment in the capitalist countries: even leaving aside unemployment in the so-called Third World and looking at the western countries and Japan alone, unemployment is now about 30 million compared to 20 million during the recession of 1974/5 and 10 million in the recession of 1970. By 1985 it will grow to 35 million and in the next recession which will certainly come before the end of the 1980s, it will probably reach as high as 40 million, which is close to the level of the 1929-1932 crisis; several western countries already have unemployment higher than it was at that time in absolute figures though not as a percentage of the population.

by 1985 unemployment will reach 40 million in Japan and the West alone, close to the level of the 1929-32 crisis

In the United States, unemployment is now officially 11 million; trade union figures put it at 13 million and if you adjust these to include women who have been forced out of the labour market by the non-availability of jobs it is nearer to 15 million. Even this figure does not tell the whole truth because one must also consider the duration of unemployment: in the United States the situation is different from that in Europe and Japan because the turnover in jobs, and thus the turnover in unemployment, is much larger than in these countries. Some recent estimates published in the USA suggest that out of a total 90-95 million salary earners and unemployed people, only 60 million had a permanent job in the second half of 1981 and the first half of 1982. One third of the labour force were, while not unemployed, not permanently employed but in and out of work, working perhaps for two months, then being two months on the dole, then finding another job and so on.

The Monetary Crisis

This then is the backdrop to the present monetary crisis. Let us now look at its character and how it relates to the post-war boom. The big mistake which is made by most people who try to interpret the financial crisis is that they detach in a completely artificial and unscientific way the present monetary crisis from what went before. On the contrary, as we have argued many times, everything that happened after world war two led towards this kind of monetary crisis. The post-war boom was essentially inflationary fuel: to use a metaphor that I have used many times (and is borrowed from Winston Churchill), one can say that the western world floated towards prosperity on an ocean of debts, of credits and bank money inflation; and of course if you have a constant and cumulative build-up of this kind, at some point it explodes. Inflation grows from half a per cent to one per cent, from one per cent to two, from two to three, and eventually at some point an explosion is inevitable. So from a purely technical point of view one can say that the origin of the present financial crisis lies in the permanent inflation of the previous 25 years of expansion which created the momentum for the destruction of monetary stability and which at a certain point stopped providing the fuel for continued expansion and started acting as a brake upon it.

To give just one example of how this happened, probably the gravest effect of cumulative inflation for the capitalist system was the impossibility of seriously planning medium and long-term investment projects. This led to an abandonment, or

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More than four hundred people heard John Ross, Duncan Hallas, Valerie Coultas and others at the successful 'Debating Socialism' Weekend in October. A high standard of debate was registered at most of the sessions, and a welcome £500 profit made for International. Our thanks to all those who attended. See you again next year!

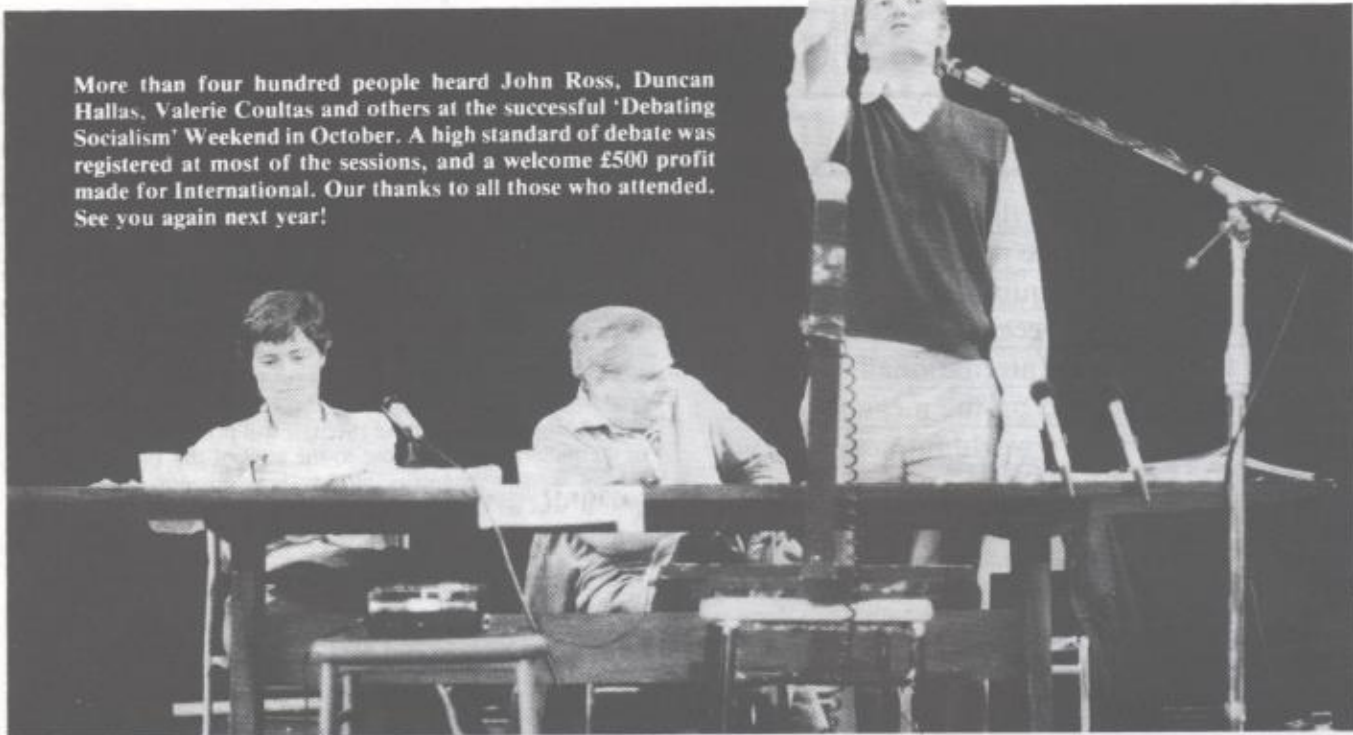


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at the very least a severe curtailing, of such projects which has been one of the main causes of the turnabout of the general economic climate. Every single one of the major investment projects started at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, from Concorde to Ariane to the new nuclear power stations in the United States and Europe, had final costs not 10 per cent or 15 per cent but 100, 150 or 200 per cent higher than originally planned. No capitalist firm in the long run can live with this sort of situation: you make investment and expansion plans, you start building new plants and then you find that you have to pay twice or three times as much as you had initially forecast. The result is either that you will cancel the project, possibly leaving unuseable a half-built plant, or complete it but make tremendous losses as happened with Concorde.

This was far more instrumental in curtailing investment in the long term than any wage explosion, any increase in nominal or even real wages, which played a role certainly in making things more difficult for the capitalist class but only a partial and subsidiary role. So when we say that monetarism represents some sort of turn in capitalist strategy, or at least in the economic policy of the main capitalist governments, this is certainly true; but it should not be seen as some sort of conspiracy — there is an element of aggression towards the working class and there are elements of long term bourgeois class objectives being followed and I will return to this later on, but this is not the central point. The capitalists are in business to make profits not to attack the working class: attacks on the working class are only ways of defending or increasing profits. If the capitalists stop investing it is not because they are scoundrels who

the permanent inflation of the past 25 years created the momentum for the destruction of monetary stability

deliberately wish to create unemployment but because investment is not profitable for them. There is no class interest, no power on earth, that will stop a capitalist from making profitable investments; they are not that class conscious, not that idealistic, not willing to sacrifice their private interests for the global interests of their class. But if they cannot profit, and indeed may even make losses, then there is no preaching by any

government, either right wing or left wing which can make them invest. They will have to be shown that investment will be profitable before it will start to pick up again. So if monetarism represents a turn it was not primarily caused by political or ideological considerations but because tackling inflation became a priority from the point of view of defending profitability.

Now this, as I have said, is purely technical. The problem appeared to be a monetary problem, a problem of balance of

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payments deficits, of rising industrial costs and consumer indices getting out of hand. It was addressed by restricting money circulation and money quantity, making money dear by putting up interest rates, and so forth; the details need not concern us here.

But there is also a more substantive element which is much more important from a Marxist point of view for understanding where we are coming from, where we are now, and where we are going. In the period of capitalist decay starting with the first world war, and especially in the period of late capitalism starting with the second world war, there are intrinsic reasons why the system through its own inner forces cannot ensure long-term profound expansion. These internal reasons relate to an excess of capital and a declining rate of profit from the long-term point of view, and express themselves in a very clear way on two fields. First, the internal resources of the system do not allow markets to grow and profits to grow at a sufficient rate to ensure even a high rate of employment, let alone full employment, of existing industrial capacity and existing labour power. If the system is left to itself, without outside intervention, without state intervention, there will be permanent excess capacity and permanent unemployment. One of the merits of Lord Keynes, and he had his merits, was to understand this fact. He was not the first to do so; many Marxists had explained before him that this was a necessary feature of declining, as op-

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posed to rising, capitalism.

The function of inflation and neo-Keynesian politics was essentially to overcome this difficulty. There is a big mythology which has been created by bourgeois ideologues, and unfortunately by some ideologues of the labour movement too, about the origins of inflation. It is not true that the arms race is the main cause of inflation. From the point of view of facts and figures, two-thirds of the debts created in the post-war expansion period were not state debts but private debts; private debts grew twice as fast as state debts. These private debts were of two kinds: consumer debt and corporate debt.

A big part of the post-war boom in consumer goods was a credit boom. Hire purchase, of cars and to a lesser extent of consumer durables, and above all home loans fuelled the boom. Company debts also exploded at the end of the second world war and especially during the 1960s creating a situation today where many companies are hovering on the edge of bankruptcy — often you can not tell if they are bankrupt or not, they could go over the edge from one day to the next.

I am not referring to small firms but some of the major multinationals. There are probably 10 or 20 of the top 100 companies in that situation today. This huge debt explosion created an expanding market and greater investment opportunities and hence the conditions for the long term boom. But this was fuelled by debts and not paid for by real resources. There was a considerable accumulation of debts in the world capitalist system which was further accelerated after 1973 by the creation of petrodollars. The banks took large deposits from the oil-exporting countries and used them as loans to firms or states for profit. There is an inner logic between the restraints, the limits, of normal, internal, capitalist expansion and the plethora of capital and the excess capacity and growing unemployment.

The threat of credit collapse

Now we can see a declining capitalism, with growing difficulties for self expansion, needing the artificial inflation of markets, allied to investment via debts. Here we have the essential and final links in the analysis. The form the inflation has taken has been an increasing quantity of money — bank notes and short term deposits — floating around. This could be stopped very easily. A deflationary government policy would bring it to zero, but at a terrible price of condemning large parts of industry to

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not far behind

bankruptcy. It is a technical possibility, but even if monetary inflation is stopped, the debts remain unpaid. Actually the more stable money becomes so the burden of debts weighs more heavily. By calculating on inflation the capitalists thought they could get richer through becoming more and more in debt. In the short-term some did, but this was a foolish long-term assessment. It was an easy trick. You obtain loans at a rate of interest of 10 per cent while the rate of inflation is 15 per cent and the rate of profit 20 per cent, hence the more money you owe the richer you become. This is fine as long as all things remain equal but if the rate of interest rises to 20 per cent and rate of profit falls to 10 per cent then you become poor. Monetary policies cannot sweep away the decline in profits or the accumulating debt charges which are weighing down the capitalist classes and the states worldwide.

The threat of a credit collapse takes the specific form of a huge accumulation of debts via different agents. Today on a world scale the banks are owed more than \$1000 billion and there is the danger that some of these debtors will be unable to pay back their debts. Who are these debtors? There are two broad categories — governments, and private firms and households.

By government we mean all governments. There is a myth that it is only the Third World countries which have huge debts. This is not true. The Danish and Belgian governments are nearly bankrupt while the British and Italian are not far behind. Overall these governments have debts totalling around \$500 billion.

The debts of private firms are also very substantial. Some firms owe more than governments. Chrysler has debts approaching \$3 billion, International Harvester and Massey Ferguson \$1.5-2 billion, etc. Overall the total runs to hundreds of billions of dollars.

Household debts, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, have a similar amplitude. It has not been such a problem in France and Italy because of different consumer habits during

outright deflation entails a collapse of the
banking system while all-out inflation stops
the system functioning

the past 25 years. Nevertheless, everywhere mortgages which are a form of debt are very heavy. These are not just consumer debts. For example, in the USA 75 per cent of all farmers are in deficit and if the banks had behaved as they did in 1929-1932 a lot of farmers would have been out of business. Instead they have not foreclosed and have allowed the debts to build up. The final form of debt, and the gravest for the system, is inter-bank debts. The banks are in debt and could be forced to close. This is a serious worry for the capitalist class and in particular they fear a snowball effect. To take an example — and avoiding the obvious case of Mexico — there was a group of small Oklahoma stockbrokers who went bankrupt when there was a rise in the interest rate. Their collapse also involved some small local banks, again completely marginal to the national economy, who had engaged in some speculative oil loans. But within one week these local bankruptcies had threatened the

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sixth largest bank in the USA, which lost \$5 billion. People with deposits in the small banks could not pay their debts and so it snowballed through the system. A large bank may have hundreds of billions in deposits, but their own capital can be as low as a few billion. A loss of \$5 billion could wipe them out and thus cause millions of people to lose their deposits.

Banking as a crime

Since the decline of capitalism the banking business borders on criminality. It is a con. The banks take in large short-term deposits and invest them long-term on the assumption that the short-term will not be withdrawn. This is not just against the law but also contravenes the elementary basis of banking. If a number of short-term deposits were withdrawn then the whole system tumbles down because the money has been invested where it is not liquid. There is no bank in the world which can repay more than one-third of its deposits. If there was panic and people were to demand their deposits then the banking system would not be capable of coping. During the collapse of the German Herstatt and American Franklin banks in 1974 the world's top bankers made a decision in Basle not to allow another major bank to go under. They agreed that the resources would be advanced to avoid such a panic which could threaten the world credit system. They took and applied that decision. During the present recession no major bank has been permitted to collapse.

Can this system continue forever? What are the limits of its application? Does the world capitalist system have the funds to save major governments, firms and banks? Until now they have done so. President Reagan intervened to save the Polish government from being declared bankrupt. Some American banks were pressing for such a declaration of bankruptcy because the Polish state was unable to repay some of the interest which was due. Reagan stepped in for an obvious reason. He knew that a small default to one small American bank

would have spread to the entire western banking system — the Polish government owes more than \$15 billion to private banks in the West. The price of some western banks also going bankrupt was too high.

The missing lender of last resort

Can the world banking system continue to roll over credits and inflate the total credit loan? I doubt if this can be done forever — perhaps for a further limited period. If they continue to do so they face two major problems. The first pertains to the distribution of risks, to inter-imperialist rivalry and the absence of a lender of last resort. This system can only be controlled if there is a world bourgeois state with a world central bank which would function on a world scale in the same way as each of the national central banks does on a national scale. That is, it would lend money to the private banks to avoid their collapse, but private property and competition prevents the creation of such a world state. Because there is inter-imperialist rivalry there can be no lender of last resort. Thus there always exists the question of dividing the risks and the subsequent costs. This is open for negotiation and horse trading. What part will the Americans, Germans, Japanese, British, French or Italians pay?

As in the 1920s there is no single imperial power which can impose such a division. After the 1939-1945 war the USA could do that, likewise prior to the 1914 war the British were in such a position. Today the inter-imperialist relationship of forces is such that the USA cannot impose anything on Japan or Western Europe; take, for example, the case of the Soviet pipeline.

If the burden of debt is only a few billion that can be resolved and divided up, but what when it is hundreds of billions? The accumulated debts of the Latin American states is already more than \$100 billion, that of the workers' states not far short, and amongst the largest multinationals in excess of \$100 billion. In Britain industrial firms owe the banks £40 billion. With no lender of the last resort the danger exists that one government will refuse to play and not help bail out another country or its banks. As the inter-imperialist competition increases so does that danger.

Deflation

The second difficulty relates to the function of deflationary policies, the rise in the interest rate and the strangling of fresh credit. These are social as well as technical policies. They are being used to weaken the working class via mass unemployment and have the long-term goal of sapping the strength and militancy of the labour movement. They also are intended, like the capitalist crises, to clear dead wood from the system. But that means bankruptcy and as I have argued that threatens the future of the banking system itself. The other question is how to discipline the banks. How do you force them to cease credit expansion while at the same time avoiding a crisis of 1929-1932 proportions?

That is the dilemma for the ruling class. Outright deflation entails a collapse of the banking system while all-out inflation stops the system functioning. Today politics are a mix of the two.

The ruling class is faced with a very serious threat from a monetary and credit crisis on a world scale. It cannot resolve it easily. It faces significant social and political resistance from the working class and the colonial revolution. Within the imperialist states there is growing rivalry. There is the clash with the workers' states. All in all, in comparison to the 1930s, the capitalist class has less control. That is why it is possible to predict that capitalism cannot resolve the crisis and that the labour movement will have several successive opportunities to resolve its way, provided there is a growth of mass militancy and the emergence of a revolutionary leadership.

ERNEST MANDEL is the author of *Late Capitalism and Marxist Economic Theory* and secretary of the **Fourth International**.

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British Features

BUILDING A MASS LABOUR PARTY

RON BROWN

From opposing the Falklands war to his angry demonstration against Margaret Thatcher, Ron Brown MP has become a well known figure on the Left.

Alan Freeman spoke to him about the role of the Labour Party in the struggle for socialism.

You took a very strong position in favour of the Argentine claim for sovereignty over the Falklands, saying Michael Foot was absolutely wrong to back Thatcher. What balance sheet would you draw now of the whole affair?

Obviously the chickens have come home to roost. We can appreciate now that Thatcher went to war quite deliberately as a diversion from mass unemployment and low living standards, saying to British workers: 'Forget all the problems, we're going to deal with these nasty Argies in the South Atlantic.' It's the old reactionary theme. The big disappointment for me, I suppose, was that the TUC General Council had the opportunity of inviting representatives of the Argentinian CGT to this country to build up links so that we could encourage the Argentinian working class to fight back. Indeed there are signs that they are going to fight back, but from our movement they've had no encouragement whatsoever. Len Murray didn't even have the courtesy to reply to our letter. But having said this I still believe that the Argentinians have a right to the Falkland Islands.

What do you think should be done now? Should the Labour Party disassociate itself from the proposal to establish a garrison of 3000 people in the South Atlantic?

The Labour Party has taken many strange positions. I'm thinking about the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) as well as the real party. Perhaps they don't want to say too much simply because it may be unpopular. I believe that we have to disassociate ourselves from this garrison and the colonialism of this society because at the end of the day we are socialists. We have got to argue a principled point. It's not going to help the Islanders or the British people to hang on to the coat tails of Thatcher's bankers and backers in big business.

The person who has gained from the whole Falklands affair has been Thatcher who is now on the verge of calling an election with Labour flagging behind in the polls. What should the Labour Party do now to pull back from this position, where there are 4 million unemployed and support for Labour policies but people are not prepared to put their confidence in the party?

It's not easy, but if you are going to fight on the issues and say that we're a fighting, campaigning party, and you go out to win their support, then they will respect you. It's no use simply sitting here in the House of Commons in these comfy chairs, drinking booze and so on. You've got to go out and speak to folk.

Go to the factory gates, street corners and urge workers to fight back, to resist. It won't simply mean that they will agree with you overnight, but I do believe that Michael Foot and others have tried to kid on working class people that you could

do certain things within Parliament. Of course you can stand up, you can ask questions, you can make certain points, you can even deliver magnificent speeches. But I'm not in that category, I'm not a speechifier. All I say as a basic working class individual is that the working class are not in this place: they're outside. They're looking for a lead, for a response from our party. We've got to give them it. It's no use simply blaming it on the press, the media. We've got to do the basic work. If we're not doing that we're not a Labour Party in the real sense of the word.

It seems to me the problem we have got to resolve is that Labour voters can't really have the confidence that Labour will carry out even the policy to which it has been committed. From your experience in Scotland do you think that is a factor influencing the way voters are responding to the Labour Party?

In part it's difficult to give a total explanation of views, simply because opinion in Scotland varies just like it does in England. But overall you can say that the present feeling is very anti-Thatcher. Indeed I'm sure it's quite pro-Labour. But I don't think we should take the working class in Scotland or anywhere for granted. The working class are looking for inspiration. They're looking for a lead. They're looking for the party that's going to come out of the corner and start challenging the Tories. And the problem has been for so long that the party has been making excuses: saying they couldn't do this, they couldn't do that. Indeed they have done the obviously wrong thing, of trying to persuade the Tories, persuade Mrs Thatcher that she was wrong, appealing to her reason.

We have an almighty crisis of capitalism in this country. It's worldwide. And the reality of the situation is that Mrs Thatcher is under pressure to resolve this crisis at the expense of the working class. So she's not interested in reasoned arguments. That might have been all right in the boom period. Today she is going to do her job of work for her backers, that is mainly the bankers. So the working class are going to suffer and Mr Foot and others can say what they like: the fact is we need to put our policies where our mouth is. We have got to organise direct action — linked obviously with action in this place. Then you win the respect and support of the working class.

I'm sure that the working class would respond to Michael Foot going up and down the country speaking to people at the factory gates, particularly those under threat of closure and so on. The tragedy of Michael Foot is that he was elected by a left-wing constituency and yet he has moved to the right. He hasn't learned from his own past that the party does win support, does win elections when it's a radical party, when it's a fighting party, a party that sets out to challenge the Tories and the capitalist system. When it's moved to the right — the last Labour government, for example — the result was a disaster. If Michael Foot doesn't realise that then he has simply sold his soul to the right wing.

You have raised the fact that there's not been a fighting lead from the Labour Party, but I think that many trade unionists would also feel that the leadership of the TUC has not exactly done everything that could be desired in the health workers dispute, for ASLEF, and so on. Do you think that this is connected with what's been going on in the Labour Party?

Yes. You have the same leaders basically, who operate within the trade union movement and the Labour Party. That's inevitable. After all the Labour Party was born out of the trade union movement. The trouble is that those leaders in the trade unions — that we have at the present time anyway — don't reflect the aspirations of the membership. The members by and large are to the left, and this is proved by most of our conferences, particularly about the EEC, about unilateral disarmament.

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ment, and so on. These leaders are certainly not in sympathy with those policies. Yet they can go to conference like Sid Weighell — Sid Weasel some people call him — and try and fix votes. Now presumably many others would like to do the same and reverse those policies to get back to what they would term the 'traditional style of trade unionism', which is to play second fiddle to the capitalist system — at the end of the day to collaborate with big business. Well that is something that we will have to face up to as socialists within the Labour Party and within the trade unions — and I speak as an AUEW sponsored MP.

The block vote shouldn't be dismissed out of hand, saying that this is total corruption and we can do nothing about it. That is far from the case. We've got to work, as we did in the Labour Party, to effect democratic reforms, to ensure that the rank and file members have a say so that policies are not just agreed but implemented. And that means that many unions have to ensure that their officials are elected or subject to re-election. But the top leadership in any case has to be accountable to the membership. In a sense we're going back to square one. Really the empires that have been built up in the past do not serve the interests of the working class. And we've got to go out, courageously, openly, to the trade union movement and explain that.

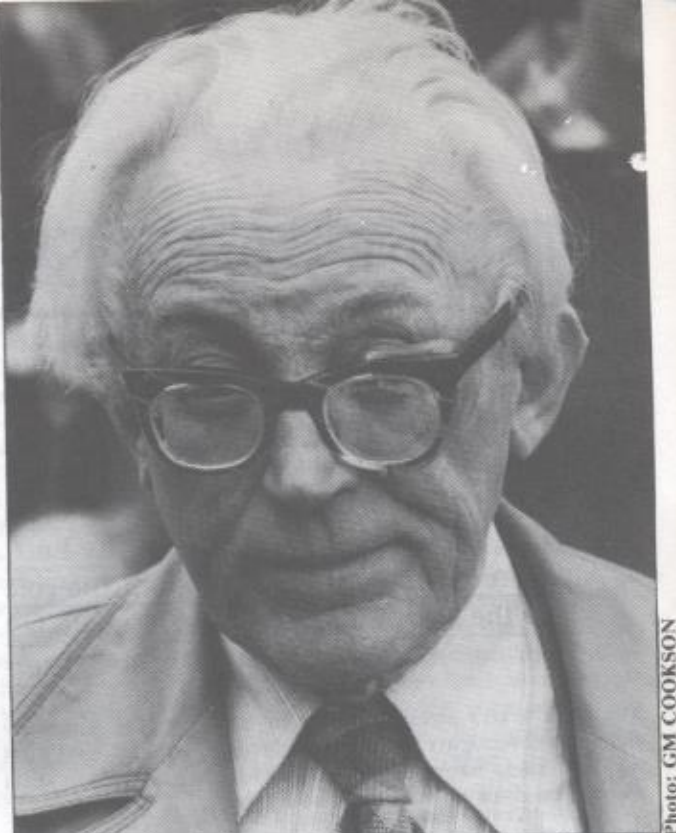
We might get vilified by the press, but the press were never in our favour. I think it was Keir Hardie that made the point many years ago that if you are ever praised by the capitalist press you couldn't be doing your job for the working class, so we shouldn't worry about that. With an almighty crisis on our hands it's only going to be the working class that will challenge the Tories, it's only going to be ourselves in particular, not because I'm an elitist or anything, who appreciates the problem. The top leadership won't do that. They will try and kid on that there's nothing you can do, that the Tories are so strong that it's impossible to challenge them in any way whatsoever.

The reality of the situation is, of course, that you've still, despite redundancies, got over 11 million organised trade unionists, and if you include their families there's far more. So the potential is there. The working class once organised, once encouraged, would be unstoppable. Perhaps that's what frightens these leaders. I'm sure it does, but nevertheless it shouldn't frighten us just because certain people put the finger on us and threaten us by saying we're left wingers, we're socialists, we're whatever. We shouldn't be frightened of their pointed finger. We should always remember that in a sense history is on our side.

But the problem is that the TUC hasn't given that kind of lead, and the Labour Party hasn't given that kind of lead, precisely because they are tied to the coat tails of the capitalist system, as you said. The Left therefore has a problem. It is saddled with a right wing majority in the TUC, the NEC, and the shadow cabinet or at least a soft left/right wing coalition. What can we actually do to organise to try and change that situation?

It would be wrong for me to suggest that we can turn the tables overnight. The working class have to become convinced, particularly those in the trade union movement, that we're in business to change things for their benefit. So it won't be easy. The one thing that strikes me at the present time is this: you go to all sorts of meetings and all sorts of left wing groups speak and give their point of view. But we don't have any basic unity. In the present situation what we've got to try and arrange is a united front. It's overdue.

We can argue the case against the witch hunt, against the register, but if we are going to take it further, and have some influence in the working class, we've got to talk about some basic issues, we've got to talk about employment, about living standards, about what we're going to do as far as the various struggles are concerned. We've got to not simply talk about what's happening in the crisis of capitalism: we've got to be involved in those struggles, to be quite clear to workers that we're with



'It's disgraceful that a leader of the Labour Party has spoken out in that way against Tatchell'

them, and however limited our resources we give them the maximum support. Certainly I think that if we show we are acting in a very concrete, basic way we can unite all sections of our movement — the political side, the trade union side — supporting us. It must be shown, overall, that we're fighting not just for one or two reforms but to change society and to see a Labour government returned pledged to socialist policies, and that if a situation develops with certain individuals who won't do the job they should be replaced, both in the trade unions and in the PLP. That goes without saying. We're not simply saying we want a Labour government, we've got to have people who really mean business. And we want individuals not just to get policies — and we know that policies are fine — but we've got to have complete commitment from all sections of the party.

No-one, by the way, should be put on a pedestal. If you look at the AUEW for example: not so long ago Hughie Scanlon was regarded as a great figure, along with Jack Jones, and really it was all about a simple fanfare in his support. The Broad left said elect Hugh Scanlon, but we've got to have control of these individuals. We've got to ensure that they do the job for the working class. But the movement is the important thing. We've got to ensure that we have an organisation that is flexible enough, based on principles which will take the working class forward, and where anybody who has an important position like an MP, official, leader, or whatever will be accountable to us.

Do you think factory branches would help?

Factory branches have their strengths. Their big weakness is that they tend to hold workers within the four walls of the factory. It's a concept that should be developed, but we should work to take the strengths of that system into the constituency parties, the GMCs so that these workers do participate and give their views about their struggles. In a sense it validates the strengths of both sides of the movement. You've got these tremendous talents in the working class. It's just that so often workers, particularly industrial workers, feel strange when they leave their factories. They feel like a fish out of water.

Isn't part of the reason that the actual purpose of the constituency parties has not been traditionally to involve themselves in working class struggles, but has been to win votes at elections? So the CLPs themselves have not been able to take up the concerns of the workers in a factory who's engaged in industrial struggle, or social struggle, or whatever.

Well, many CLPs simply wait until a local or general election

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and say 'we need support' and ask for local helpers to involve themselves. Some trade unionists have become more active as a result and been involved in the political side. Mind you, there has not been the same effort to win people as there should be, simply because, I suppose, people who run CLPs feel 'Well, that's that, the work's been done', and everything reverts to normal after a local or general election. The fact of the matter is that nothing's normal these days because of the crisis. The old ideas which perhaps worked, in a sense, during the boom period when things were relatively good, certainly don't work now.

We hope to build up a mass Labour Party, but the Labour Party doesn't help to build up resistance in the trade unions because at the end of the day, if we are saying that the Labour Party is the vanguard of the working class, it's no good for meetings to take place divorced from that working class. We've got to be effectively trying to link up with local activists, the best elements within the various workplaces, offices, factories, wherever. The fact is the working class are there, and we've got to go out to them and try and develop these links. It's a job that should have been done a long time ago.

To get back to Leith, where we attempt to do that, we do find that from some years ago when many in the workers' movement wouldn't even take leaflets, now they're taking them and reading them because they're looking for some sort of lead. They're looking for some sort of answer to this crisis. While they may have a job at the moment they could be thrown on the scrap heap at the end of the week. So, you know, we've got to appreciate this concern of the working class and do the obvious sort of things. It's not that workers suddenly get this inspiration and say: 'Well, Labour's the party for me.' It won't happen that way. They could well go to the right. They could go to the SNP, or down in England they could even go to the National Front.

This is the point, though: Bermondsey has probably been promoted more than any other by the national press for wanting to have that kind of orientation. The symbol has become Peter Tatchell for the media. He wants to take the constituency party out into the estates, into the factories, engage it in extra-parliamentary campaigning and so on, and Michael Foot virtually staked his career on saying: 'We can't have this sort of person representing us.' So you've got an immediate problem: the leadership don't want that kind of orientation for the LP.

Well, that's certainly true. Michael Foot issued a statement in the House of Commons denouncing Peter Tatchell. It's incredible that anyone should use his parliamentary status to act as judge, jury and prosecution on a party member, responding to an enemy outside the party. It's fairly obvious he felt that Tatchell was a real enemy and not Thatcher. At the end of the day, Thatcher's not going to be worried about Michael's speeches, however brilliant they are. Thatcher is not going to be moved by that, but if Tatchell promotes extra-parliamentary activity, then that is the only way you're going to change the attitude of this government: in fact it's the only way you're going to change this government. And I don't think we should apologise for saying things like that.

We should be explaining the reality of the situation, explaining that Peter Tatchell said nothing wrong and that in fact he just confirms what the working class have been doing in the past. In fact we need more of Peter Tatchell in this party. We need more individuals like him because he obviously responds to the real feelings of the folk outside. Now I don't know his area, although I did speak at one of his meetings, and it's quite evident that the old discredited right wing policies don't work. They and his views. They support him because they know full well that the old discredited right wing policies don't work. They only work for the capitalists, they only work for big business, they certainly don't work for working folk. So what he's saying is very important for us and really it's absolutely disgraceful that a leader of the Labour Party, a so called left winger, has

spoken out in that way against him.

There is a division, which has been widely reported in the press, amongst the left Labour MPs: between the old *Tribune* group which roughly reflects the views of Michael Foot, and a small group, the Campaign Group, which is more in favour of extra-parliamentary action. Do you think that the emergence of the Campaign Group represented a possible step forward, in terms of actually getting some MPs together to use their position in parliament to promote extra-parliamentary action?

It's interesting that the Left has always been accused of splitting or creating unnecessary divisions. That may have been true in certain situations. But it would be wrong to suggest that the *Tribune* group is a left wing organisation. There may still be some good individuals in it, but really it's extremely right wing with many careerists, many opportunists within its ranks. Indeed, if you look at the record of the *Tribune* group, it hasn't done much to fight against the right wing, indeed it's generally apologised for attacks on the left: justifying the register, justifying the abstention on Benn's vote, and helped many who claim to be left wing get positions at the top, playing games with us about the role of the Left. The old *Tribune* Group was in no way a radical organisation. It created the impression that it was indeed a party which felt strongly for the working class. But there was no link with the working class, and that's a crucial issue.

Now we have a group of 22 MPs, maybe less than that, we just don't know. Individuals who were clearly dissatisfied, and said so at the Blackpool conference, and they've got to make up their minds what they're going to do. It's not a question of numbers, a lot of people say, 'Only 22, maybe 12'. But at the end of the day when you're talking about a struggle against the right wing in the party, against Thatcher, against the capitalist system, it's a question of saying 'Would these 12 have more effect being in the old *Tribune* group or linked up with other groups outside the party, rank and file groups, left wing groups?' I would hope these 12, or hopefully 22, make these links so that we can develop a movement which will really transform British politics.

To us it seems that the group could play a crucial role. The bulk of ordinary trade unionists and constituency activists think that parliament is very important and can change things. Therefore they look to the MPs to give a lead, so that if a group of MPs were to say 'We are going to create, together with the trade union rank and file and the constituency rank and file, a new organisation, a united front, we're going to lend our energy to supporting anything that moves in that direction,' it would have considerable influence.

That's true. I agree with you on this, that working class people, even Labour Party activists, look to MPs as being something special. They're not of course, but we've got to accept that, it does happen. MPs have a certain influence that can help in the struggle, indeed we should be using that input to go out to the working class, even in a small number, to say that we're linking up with these organisations on the understanding that we will put up a principled fight against the Tories, against the right wing, and fight for socialist policies in this country, because we're not going to get socialist policies unless we do organise effectively, and you can't organise parliament, you organise outside. But nevertheless you use the talents, the influence, even the special abilities of MPs to do this, as part of the same team. We believe socialism comes down to team effort and really, if we bring it together, there's no way we can stop the working class and that's the whole point of any struggle: the role of the working class. If we can get that moving, and I'm sure we can, then we can really say that we've got an opportunity to bring socialist policies into being in this country. Because we won't otherwise.

RON BROWN is Member of Parliament for Edinburgh Leith sponsored by the AUEW.

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POLAND: ONE YEAR ON

OLIVER MACDONALD

One year ago the Polish army moved to the end the existence of a mass independent working class movement, Solidarnosc. Davy Jones spoke to Oliver MacDonald about the prospects for Solidarnosc's re-emergence and the lessons of the Polish events.

Could you explain the significance of the release of Walesa for the situation in Poland one year after the introduction of martial law?

The release of Walesa coupled with the announcement of the Papal visit to Poland scheduled for next summer marks an attempt by the Jaruzelski regime to regain the political initiative, to end the renewed outbreak of factional warfare within the regime itself and to prevent the Solidarnosc underground movement from regathering its strength. The immediate context of Walesa's release was the relative failure of the Solidarnosc underground's attempts to organise eight hour strikes on 10 November, the second anniversary of Solidarnosc's legal registration followed by demonstrations on 11 November, the anniversary of the independence of the Polish state in 1918.

Let's look first at the internal crisis of the regime. Jaruzelski's regime has been under basically constant pressure from the Soviet and East European leaderships and their agents in the Polish party at least since the summer. It became evident by late July that the Soviet leadership considered that Jaruzelski was placing far too much reliance on creating a stable alliance with the Church hierarchy, in order to regain some sort of popular base of support for the regime. The Czech leadership is also unhappy about this strategy when it is currently engaged in a war against Catholic believers in Czechoslovakia.

The Soviets were also concerned at Jaruzelski's inability to regain control over the working class and his ineffectiveness at stamping out and disorganising the Solidarnosc underground resistance. These fears were reinforced by the demonstrations on 31 August. The Jaruzelski regime claimed that these demonstrations had been easily handled, but the main lesson from them that Moscow drew was that Solidarnosc has organised underground networks in all the main urban centres in Poland, which were capable of mobilising over one hundred thousand people despite enormous threats and police violence against the demonstrations.

The response by the workers to the formal banning of Solidarnosc by the regime on 8 October turned this pressure from Moscow into an open factional move against Jaruzelski inside the Polish Communist Party leadership. As on 31 August this response was contained but in the view of many observers it was only just contained. The strikes began on the Monday in Gdansk in the Lenin shipyards, spread to other yards in the Gdansk/Gdynia region and there were some signs of support from other factories in Gdansk on that Monday. The strike movement also spread right along the coast as far as Szczecin, on down into the most prestigious factories, the bastions of the working class in Poznan and Wroclaw. The strike movement also spread to the mining areas of Silesia and to Huta Lenina in Krakow. However the strike wave was not coordinated, the underground leadership seems to have badly misjudged the situation, on the Monday in Gdansk urging caution against try-

ing to spread the movement into a general strike; then on Wednesday calling for effective strike action throughout the country by which time it was too late — the workers in Gdansk had felt isolated, they had not received news of the strikes elsewhere and the movement collapsed.

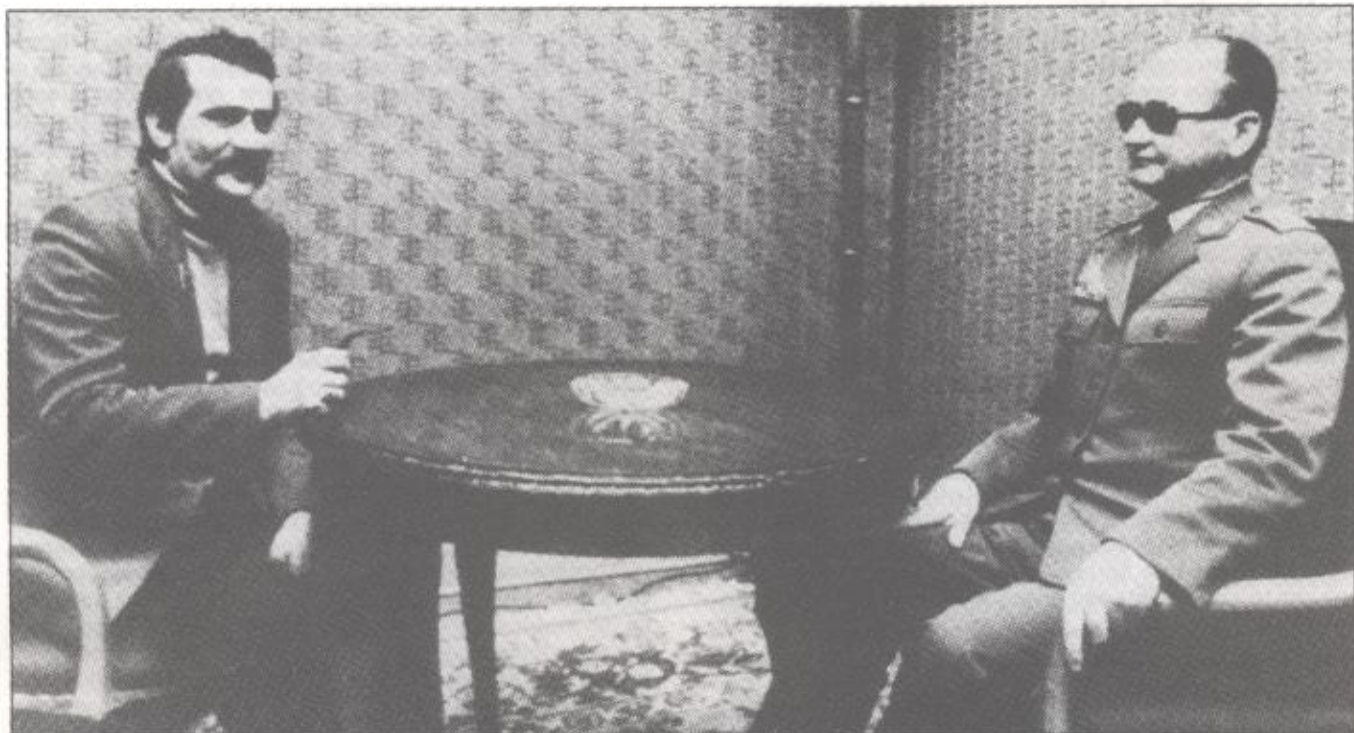
But as far as the authorities in Warsaw were concerned this was a traumatic event. It was the first time since 1 May that they had seen really mass mobilisations of workers, and the first time there had been mass strike actions, more or less spontaneously organised since the consolidation of martial law in January. It showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that the mass of the workers in the big factories remained as resolutely hostile to the new order and as committed to the idea and tradition of Solidarnosc as ever. At the Central Committee following those strikes and the banning of Solidarnosc there was the first open factional move against Jaruzelski since the Spring when that wing of the party bureaucracy fronted by Grabski issued a general denunciation of the Jaruzelski regime, saying that it was too soft on the Church and the intelligentsia while offering the working class nothing but confrontation and repression. Grabski also accused Jaruzelski that the party was collapsing, there were new figures coming forward within the regime and strong hints of possible challenges to Jaruzelski.

On the other hand the banning of Solidarnosc and the workers' response shook Jaruzelski's base of support in the pro-Catholic wing of the Communist Party and state bureaucracy and blew apart the alliance that had been tacitly operating with Glomp and the Church hierarchy for many months. This was demonstrated by resignations from the Sejm (Polish parliament), by the voting against the banning of Solidarnosc by the pro-regime Catholic deputies in the Sejm, and by the criticisms of the regime by those previously considered close to Jaruzelski — for example some close advisors to Deputy Premier Rakowski allowed a document they had written warning against the banning of Solidarnosc to be made available to the Western press. So Jaruzelski faced the danger of falling between two stools: between those in the party bureaucracy arguing for re-establishing bureaucratic control through an alliance with the Church, the middle classes and the intelligentsia against the working class, and on the other hand those arguing for its re-establishment through utilising the party apparatus, the capacity to buy off sectors of the working class through corruption and promotion and so on, along with using reactionary political mobilisations among the workers such as anti-semitism.

Jaruzelski therefore had to take some new political initiative. Otherwise this fragmentation within the regime would have continued. He was able to take the initiative of freeing Walesa and offering the Papal visit for three reasons. First, the events on 10 November showed that the underground Solidarnosc leadership was not capable of mounting an effective political challenge. Secondly, Jaruzelski had managed to achieve a far reaching agreement with the Church hierarchy, the nature of which is not yet public. They met two days before the 10 November demonstrations and we can only assume an agreement along the following lines: that the Church hierarchy was prepared to continue to work for so-called national reconciliation, ie popular acceptance if not approval of the Jaruzelski regime, despite the fact that Solidarnosc itself would be a thing of the past. That was a new position for the Church hierarchy put forward by Glomp who had just come back from meeting the Pope in Rome, and in return for this the hierarchy was demanding a greater stake for itself within the system, including the Pope's visit and no doubt Walesa's release. Thirdly, they seized the opportunity of Brezhnev's death to announce Walesa's release, feeling that they could pull it off while the Soviet leadership was totally involved in the funeral.

There is no doubt that Walesa has been relatively well

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The principal actors in the current phase of the Polish crisis: Walesa and Jaruzelski

treated. Any suggestion that he has been brainwashed should not be taken seriously. He has also been kept informed about the main developments in the situation not only by his wife who had visited him more than half a dozen times but also by Church officials who have had quite frequent contact with him. So Walesa's release is not that of a broken man. It is also highly significant Walesa has not been asked or has not agreed to make a statement before his release in some way breaking with his past. Walesa has already said: 'We must be careful, we want negotiations with the regime, we want agreement with the regime, on the other hand not on our knees, I haven't gone back on my beliefs', and so on.

There are some indications of his political orientation over and above these statements. Most important is his relationship with the Church hierarchy, especially the Pope. From early on in Solidarnosc's life this has been one of the most important compasses that Walesa has used. That is not to say that Walesa has been the pawn of the Church hierarchy but he has always sought to respect the limits which the hierarchy felt existed and has always insisted that it was both undesirable and impossible for Solidarnosc to risk a head-on confrontation with the Church hierarchy. So for example over the Bydgoszcz crisis in March 1981 when Solidarnosc activists were beaten up by the police and a general strike response was threatened Walesa's final reason for acting to defuse the situation was that it would have meant a break with the hierarchy. It seems clear that he has always accepted the basic approach of the hierarchy since martial law, which has meant a readiness to give very substantial concessions in terms of a restructured Solidarnosc, a ban on strikes for a couple of years, and so on.

He has also seemed ready to go along with warnings against actions which could lead to violence. He has been quoted as being against street demonstrations and the like. He has never given any overt support to the underground leadership of Solidarnosc. There are also rumours that he has told the Church hierarchy that he will accept any framework for negotiations that they put forward. Now that he is released it seems inconceivable that he would be able to lead a campaign for the full restoration of Solidarnosc. If he had been ready to do that the Church would not have pressed for his release and

the regime would not have released him. Further he seems likely not to press for the demand that all the leaders of Solidarnosc elected from the last conference should be with him in negotiations with the government. This was made very clear by the fact that Frasnycuk was put on trial at the very time that Walesa was released. He has said that he wants everybody to be freed but he has not gone beyond that general appeal.

We can therefore assume that Walesa's perspective must be to try to bring about some degree of change on the trade union relationships not on the basis of returning to Solidarnosc and repealing the 8 October law, but on the basis of alterations to the arrangements laid down in that law for new trade unions. The problem remains of the basis on which Walesa could negotiate with the regime, after all he is not a leader of any legally recognised organisation at the moment. Here it is significant that the Church hierarchy has suggested that he would be a member of a lay advisory council to the Bishop of Gdansk — a very conservative figure — joined by his two key former advisors from Solidarnosc, Geremek and Mazowiecki. This suggests that the negotiations between Walesa and the regime could be a Church lay council framework, rather than a Solidarnosc framework which is now illegal. One should remember that Archbishop Glemp's lay social council in Warsaw also contains a number of former Solidarnosc advisors and was responsible for drafting in the Spring the negotiating positions of the Church hierarchy.

From the point of view of the underground leadership of Solidarnosc the release of Walesa raises a big question. Their authority as an underground leadership, their right to speak for Solidarnosc to the mass of workers hinged upon the fact that they alone were free, not in jail or internment camps. Now there is a second centre of authority separate from the Solidarnosc underground leadership, namely Walesa himself. And he of course has immense authority, infinitely greater than the underground leadership among the vast majority of Polish workers. He is the one whose authority has steadily grown, particularly during his internment, and whose words carry tremendous weight inside the Polish working class. This creates a very difficult situation for the underground leadership and a potential crisis of authority.

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Now that the Jaruzelski regime has taken the initiative and got Walesa into play and the Papal visit on the agenda, it also seems likely to press that initiative further by formally lifting martial law. The question now is how will it attempt to use this initiative to gain some sort of social base for its operation, not a positive legitimacy in the eyes of the working class but at least a realistic acceptance? In my view the Jaruzelski regime wants to try and use Walesa to undermine and disorganise the underground leadership and at the same time breathe a little life into the regimes's credibility. But this would entail making concessions to Walesa about the new trade union framework, which would create difficulties for the regime itself in Moscow. The extent to which it would be prepared to risk Moscow's wrath depends partly on its assessment of the new Soviet leadership, and its acceptance of what concessions it can get from the West.

We are in a situation rather like Czechoslovakia around September 1968. The regime has not by any means found a political formula for stabilising itself. It now has a situation with some similarities to when Dubcek, the darling of the people, was back in play after going to Moscow, saying that he still defended the Prague Spring, while the Soviets still wanted to use him to gain stability and some sort of acceptance, if not approval, for the new order.

the release of Walesa creates a very difficult situation for the underground leadership and a potential crisis of authority

Could you draw out the lessons of the whole Polish experience?

Let's look first at the international lessons of the Polish experience. If the West had really feared the 'Soviet threat' to itself then they should have supported a process of democratisation in Poland. However it is increasingly clear that the West did not look at Poland from this point of view. Instead they saw Poland as an enormous threat to stability. This is a point brought out by EP Thompson and corresponds to the absolutely gut reaction from western bourgeois state bureaucracies, foreign offices and also big capital of loathing of huge uncontrollable working class movements. That was related to the potential international dynamic of Solidarnosc itself, breaking down the Cold War barriers in Europe, offering a new example to the socialist movements of western Europe of how to organise and so on.

A second response of the West was that of Reagan; namely to use Poland as a pawn on his international chess board in his global efforts to destabilise the Soviet bloc, to exert maximum pressure on the Soviet leadership. There is clear cut evidence that the Reagan administration actually wanted a Soviet crackdown in Poland as an ideological justification for launching a new Cold War, as in fact he has done. A third response from the West was an undercurrent which saw Solidarnosc as a vehicle of loosening up Comecon, to pull an element of Comecon into the orbit of the western capitalist economy. Some western bankers used this approach both to justify support for the Polish government's efforts to regain control of Solidarnosc, while on the other hand giving substantial economic assistance to that government pulling it into the orbit of the capitalist economy.

There is a very interesting recent article smuggled out to the West from inside Solidarnosc called 'Solidarnosc and the West' which precisely points out that although very many workers and intellectuals in Poland did not see the western Left and socialist movements as being their allies, looking rather towards Reagan, that experience has taught them that the real allies of Solidarnosc are the western Left despite superficial similarities in ideology to that of the Communist Party.

The big lesson on the Soviet response is that the Soviet

leadership even in the 1980s has again shown its incapacity to tolerate structural democratic reforms of the political system in Eastern Europe, and its readiness to face all the conclusions of this refusal: the enormous Reaganite mobilisation around Poland, a further dramatic loss of its own standing amongst the working class and socialist movements in the West, even the possibility of many years, even decades, of chronic underlying instability in the Polish state. Some people in the western Left don't want to face the fact that the Soviet leadership was orchestrating a campaign of destabilisation of Solidarnosc from very early on. It was helping to plan the crackdown that eventually took place. The idea that the main lesson is that the Soviets have not actually invaded Poland is ridiculous, rather it shows that the Soviet leadership has become more sophisticated since 1968, but there has been no basic change in the programmatic positions of the Soviet leadership.

The next major lesson of the Polish experience, though this would be contested, is that it is possible in principle for these relatively small countries, relatively weak states sandwiched between big powers and within the orbit of control of the Soviet bureaucracy to go a tremendously long way towards thoroughgoing democratisation, working class power, provided that this movement for change comes from below and is led by the working class. It is perhaps difficult for us to remember the attitudes that were prevalent in the West before the rise of Solidarnosc, namely that Czechoslovakia had shown that such a development was not possible. Yet now we have all come to more or less accept the permanence and 'naturalness' of Solidarnosc. In reality the whole experience dramatically showed that such developments were possible provided you had a united and politically conscious working class leading the rest of society.

The final lesson of the experience of Solidarnosc as an open legal movement is that it is not possible for a well-organised coup, a clever manoeuvre in and of itself to destroy a mass independent working class movement. The coup can create the preconditions for doing it, but to ensure the destruction of the mass movement for decades entails a bloodbath — to do a Franco, or a Pinochet. You have to convince millions of workers that a whole generation of leaders has been wiped off the political scene for good and that the regime relishes such a destruction. The coup did not destroy Solidarnosc and the Jaruzelski regime has faced the contradictions of that problem ever since, namely should it go for a bloodbath, even if it is a slow moving one over a number of years, or is it going at some stage to opt for some sort of social compromise with the working class? Now what you have in Poland is an attempt by Jaruzelski to have a bit of both. There are three thousand people already jailed, another couple of thousand awaiting trial, another six hundred interned. This is a severe blow as many of these have been picked up from the resistance and are now facing sentences of up to ten years in prison. But this savage repression is not enough in my opinion to restore political stability or to obliterate this movement. Therefore this gives us continuing hope that there is a possibility that the regime will be forced to make concessions and draw back from the endless series of wider and wider repressions. Of course this is very difficult given the economic situation for the regime cannot offer the working class economics instead of politics, but there is some real hope which underlines the importance of solidarity work with the Polish workers from the western labour movement.

Finally could you say a few words about the extent of politicisation of forces inside Solidarnosc who are capable of developing a sufficient strategy and leadership for the movement?

The biggest problem facing the activists inside the underground movement is that of historical perspective, namely how is it going to be possible to tackle the relationship of forces that exists both inside Poland but also internationally in the context of growing Cold War and class polarisation in the world?

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Where are the points of support for Solidarnosc, for the Polish workers not just immediately but also in the longer term? As Trotsky said: 'The greatest crime of Stalin was not what he did, but to do it in the name of Socialism'. This is still working itself through Poland and the other countries of Eastern Europe. The whole experience of the Polish workers teaches them that those who speak in the name of Communism and Socialism are their mortal enemies. They don't see the western Left, they see on television, in the media, in books, in the factories, on the housing estate, every day, day in day out, Jaruzelski and the so-called Communists. This means that it is exceptionally difficult for them to work out where their points of support are, which has created a great degree of political differentiation within the working class.

Some sections respond in a purely nationalist, romantic way, saying: 'We can do it ourselves, we don't need international allies, we can by some special qualities innate in Polish people defy the relationship of forces and overthrow the oppressive yoke.' Secondly there will be people following a traditional response of those in Eastern Europe suffering national oppression to look for a strong power abroad which will somehow sweep across Europe and save them. In the days of Pilsudski it was France, for Ukrainians in the 1930s it was Germany, and so on. There will be currents in Poland who in some way look to the Americans and economic sanctions, perhaps even a military showdown, to find a way out. This of course overlooks the basic realities of any military showdown, where the West would be the first to use nuclear weapons and against places like Poland and East Germany. The third option is the left option in one form or another, and which must be proven to the Polish workers by the deeds of the western Left, so that they can see who are their real allies in the struggle for their democratic and social aspirations.

The other difficulty facing the Solidarnosc activists is how to assess the real relationship of forces in Poland today. There has been considerable disagreement on this within Solidarnosc. Some have argued that a short term uprising of the Polish workers could be victorious, or at least a better way to go down to defeat than a long slow agony. On the other hand are those who have argued there is no possibility of an uprising because of the real strength of the military and the support it has from the upper middle class elements and other forces who did not look to Solidarnosc. For example at the moment there are peo-

immediate uprising.

There are of course other trends with a great deal of influence who basically argue that the only realistic alternative is to accept the framework of Jaruzelski and to negotiate on the basis of the existing relationship of forces the best deal possible. This has gone hand in hand with the idea that it is not possible in the geo-political conditions of Poland for there to be any basic democratic change. The argument therefore continues that those who think this is possible are objectively provoking

the key thing is for the workers to see an alternative to either passive acceptance of the regime or an immediate uprising

violence and further repression, losing any possibilities for concessions from the regime, however small. The problem with this perspective is of course that it hasn't worked up till now. All the Church's initiatives in this direction have failed, though the latest one with Walesa and the Papal visit is the boldest to date. What concessions the regime is likely to offer, unless through the continued pressure of the resistance movement and outside solidarity, will of course be those enabling the workers to participate in the institutions of their own political oppression.

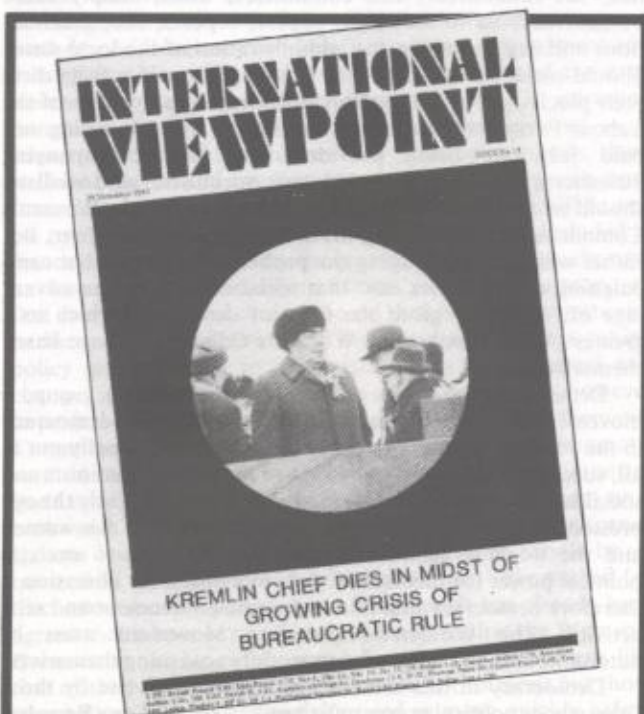
By banning Solidarnosc and at the same time by not having any possibilities over the next five or ten years of offering the Polish workers a better material way of life, the regime has effectively ensured that the traditions of Solidarnosc will be looked back upon by the Polish workers as their authentic traditions, and they will also see the crushing of those traditions as being the work of Jaruzelski, the Soviet leadership and nobody else.

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Jaruzelski had to take a new political initiative to stop the fragmentation of the regime

ple who are making quite a lot of money out of the black market, private enterprise, even some people in agriculture.

But if there is not the immediate perspective of an uprising then what perspective can be offered? Those opposed to the short term uprising approach have had considerable difficulty in elaborating a practical long term strategy for confronting the regime. One idea for example was for a very loose self-defence arrangement. The problem is that such an approach which worked in the 1970s is not so easy when one is talking about an organised working class movement which cannot operate in such a loose and disorganised way. My own view is that Solidarnosc and the working class movement in Poland has had to try and work out a practical way of continuing to engage in albeit limited forms of struggle with the perspective of re-emerging much later in the form of a second Gdansk, a second strike movement which would make a new set of 21 demands. In this longer term perspective it would be very important to combine the political demands of the working class with attempting to take up the social and economic problems which the working class faces today. The key thing is to give the workers an alternative to either passivity and acceptance of the regime, or an



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WOMEN'S COMMITTEES & DEMOCRACY

SARAH ROELOFS

The last year has seen a mushrooming of women's committees, particularly in Labour-controlled local council structures. Sarah Roelofs examines the recent experience of these committees.

The Greater London Council was first off the mark in May, closely followed by Camden and Islington Councils. Hackney and Greenwich now have Sub-Committees on Women, while Southwark has a Women's Equality Unit. It is worth noting that Lewisham Council has had a Women's Rights Working Party since 1978. These structures all, to a greater or lesser extent, have some effective power both inside and outside the council chambers. The extent of this power is to some extent reflected in their budget allocations — the amount the committees can spend, and on what, in their own right. While this latest fashion in local government politics has not yet spread outside London many other councils such as Merseyside, Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield, have expressed great interest in what have been seen as successful initiatives.

Is this outbreak of interest in women's issues only Labour Party opportunism — general electioneering on a vote-catching bandwagon of 'women's rights'? With a total of 12 jobs in three Women's Committee Support Units currently being advertised is this merely the provision of 'jobs for the girls' — for middle class feminists settling into middle age? Are these working parties, sub-committees, full committees, units, simply more bureaucracy, more meetings, papers, reports, recommendations and suggestions to the administration of the local state? Should socialists who believe in campaigning self-activity dirty their placards? I answer yes on all counts. Yes, sections of the Labour Party are being opportunistic; yes, nice interesting well paid jobs are being provided; yes, the accompanying bureaucracy is immense; and yes, socialists, all socialists, should be actively involved. This is not to say that the Women's Committees will be leading mass action in the New Year, but rather while acknowledging the problems, to argue that campaigning opportunities exist that socialists should take advantage of, especially given the form of democracy which to a greater or lesser extent the Women's Committees have based themselves on.

Democracy can make or break a campaign, a group, a movement. Of course what is defined as successful democracy in the world at large is not necessarily, indeed is usually not at all, successful for the point of view of liberation. Feminists and socialists are essentially concerned with liberation. Only the oppressed can liberate themselves, and in order to do this women and the working class must fight for the right to exercise political power for themselves. A precondition for liberation is therefore democracy that allows for self-government and self-activity. The Women's Liberation Movement must be autonomous in the sense of women-only governing themselves.

Democracy in this sense is feared above all else by those from whom political power must be wrested. As Tony Benn has pointed out, '... the establishment ... realise that ... they are facing a democratic challenge to the legitimacy of their own undemocratic privileges ... the real enemy now perceived is democracy itself.'¹ And Alan Freeman in his recently published political biography of Benn notes that 'Benn's achievement is to have re-introduced these questions (of democracy) to a mass British public.'²

Benn wants to 'see the people of this country take control of

our own destinies' by acquiring 'equality in the control of political power'. Rooted in the historical democratic strategy of the labour movement which was based on 'the idea that politics was about social justice'. Benn draws on the tradition of those 'who had no wealth or power or influence (who) were forced to organise' in campaigns against the Combination Acts for the right to labour unions and for voting rights such as those won by the Chartists and the Suffragettes. He argues the necessity to 're-establish democracy within the Labour Party so that we can develop policies strong enough to win social justice.'³ A Marxist critique of Benn's concept of democracy makes the point that the Chartists were not simply fighting for the right to vote per se, but for genuine self-representation and self-government. This can only be achieved by a new type of state based on the active participation of *everyone* in society.⁴ (Examples of states where the whole people were involved were the Paris Commune and the Russian revolution re-modelling of the Commune with soviets as the basis of the constitution.)

Stuart Hall, in a recent article in *Marxism Today*⁵ leads us in to the women's movement critique of the patriarchalism of labour movement democracy. Noting that while the forms of working class democracy 'were, at root, fundamentally democratic in origin ... in their actual operation they preserve a certain formalism, constitutionalism in the modes of operation, which may be formally accountable to its members, but which lowers democratic access and participation.' While the women's movement supports delegation and accountability it argues for, what in labour movement language could be termed 'specific mandates' ie these are limited to certain specified tasks. 'Delegates' should be rotated to allow for greater participation and to mitigate against power becoming vested in certain individuals. Feminists argue for a distribution of authority, rotation of tasks, fair and sensitive allocation of tasks with allowance for learning, development and competence, frequent diffusion of information and equal access to resources.⁶ The women's movement has always maintained open participatory democratic principles which allow for maximum involvement of the maximum number. An example of a women's movement campaign which very successfully organises on this basis while seeking active involvement of the labour movement is the National Abortion Campaign.

Democratic forms are thus crucially important — they are not simply a matter of organisation, or a preoccupation with structure, but of politics as well. The Women's Committees, coming from the Bennite Left or the so called 'hard' Labour Left, and being concerned with the stuff of women's liberation, have managed, somewhat unconsciously and very imperfectly, a fusion of the best of the labour movement's democratic traditions with the 'new' anti-patriarchal democracy of the women's movement. This is most true of the GLC Women's Committee. The fusion needs careful protection and the democratic forms need nurturing, but the basis is there for campaigning self-activity uniting the women's and labour movements. This would be an achievement indeed and such opportunities need to be seized rather than watched cautiously or dismissed for their imperfections.

An outline of the organisation and structure of two of these committees — that of the GLC and Southwark's Equality Unit — will illustrate the point. Others are roughly similar: Camden is a particularly successful model on the GLC example, particularly its recent work on prostitution. Kate Allen, the chair of the Camden Women's Committee, has issued a press statement fully supporting the recent prostitutes' occupation of a Kings Cross church in protest against police harassment. Both

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Photo: JEREMY NICHOLL

Labour conference women protest against discrimination

the chairs of the GLC and Camden Women's Committee support decriminalisation of prostitution. Additionally the Camden Women's Committee is involved in two schemes for affirmative action training, and work against single women's homelessness, and the racial harassment and discrimination of black women.

The GLC Women's Committee sought active mass involvement from the outset, by calling an open meeting to discuss the whole idea, which was primarily advertised in and around the women's movement and women's organisations in the labour movement. There was a high attendance and a considerable cross section of political views of women's liberation. Sub working groups were set up covering about 15 different areas, eg employment, transport, violence, lesbians, child-care etc. These groups are autonomous of the GLC with the aim of formulating and campaigning on policy proposals for it. The working groups are open to all women. Later a co-ordinating committee was established, aiming to co-ordinate and centralise the work of the working groups and making priority proposals and recommendations to the formal Women's Committee of the council while at the same time monitoring its progress. The co-ordinating committee sends major decisions for ratification to open meetings, of which two more have been held with a better attendance than the initial meeting. The co-ordinating committee has had a number of discussions about democratic principles and has been very concerned with accessibility. Thus while every working group is requested to send a representative, as are all women's groups in the London area, the meetings are open to anyone to attend and participate. Tasks are rotated, minutes circulated, regular reports given. Special facilities for the disabled are provided, as is a creche. Positive discrimination in favour of groups like ethnic minorities, lesbians, disabled women is a guiding principle, as is strict mandation and accountability of any representatives. Involvement across the political spectrum has continued fairly high.

In the practical operation of this organisation there are obvious problems. There are difficulties with the function of the open meetings. There are tensions between these open struc-

tures and sections of the Labour Party who are worried by the lack of formalism, the looseness of the structures and by what seems to be a fear of giving away too much power. The co-ordinating committee has been reminded that real power lies firmly with the GLC. At the same time the women's liberation movement has become increasingly worried by what these committees can really do for women given their patriarchal origins and Labour Party opportunism. Sections of the women's movement are beginning to back off. Under all these pressures there is the beginning of a tendency on the part of some of the GLC people involved to slide on some of the democratically agreed decisions under the explanation that the GLC can intervene at any time. And there is the ongoing tension between these feminists who base themselves in or around the labour movement and those who are based in or around the actual structures of the women's movement. The actual work undertaken has a marked tendency towards a very large amount of paper work. However the subject of these papers is important. Many issues have been highlighted which probably would not otherwise have received any attention, eg the genital mutilation of Third World women undertaken for enormous profit by doctors in London. Moreover one of the first things the committee did was to actively support the Women's Right to Work campaign and the 5 June Festival for Women's Rights. It is presently involved in a London-wide low pay campaign, including leafleting and a public meeting, aimed at trade unions and community groups. In addition it has joined forces with the Women's Campaign for Jobs in their protests against the insidious UB 671 form. A press conference on the effect of the form on women's rights has been held and a GLC-produced leaflet about it has been distributed throughout London.

One of the original motivations for the GLC Women's Committee was the lack of policy on women's issues in the GLC manifesto. The idea was that the working groups should produce policy proposals for inclusion in a 'Programme for Action for Women in London'. A draft has been produced covering policy on women's centres, childcare, pregnancy and motherhood, black women, disabled women, employment and industrial strategy, health, lesbians, the media and the arts, women and planning, violence, and transport. The introduction notes that a number of areas are still not covered — eg young women, older women and pensions, unions, law, welfare benefits and taxation, peace, sports and leisure, consumers, housing and new technology, but that there will be ample opportunity for proposals on these issues to be included in future drafting stages of the programme. The draft programme has been circulated initially to women's groups. It is proposed that every woman in London should then have the opportunity to discuss and contribute to it. This consultative process, taking policy proposals out to interested groups for comment and change, is a reflection of the participatory democracy, however imperfect at the moment, conceived of in the GLC Women's Committee. The basic democracy is crucial. The democratic methods and structures must be asserted and the Committee itself turned outwards. Links with the labour movement on a rank and file level should be strengthened. Constituency Labour Parties, trade union branches and so on should be requested to send delegates. A group of women have pushed for discussion around campaigning priorities: it has already been agreed that a banner should be produced so that the Women's Committee can be visibly seen as supporting campaigns like that of the NHS workers. The potential is enormous but those who believe in mass self-activity need to move quickly before the bureaucracy does.

The Southwark Women's Rights Unit operates slightly differently to the GLC Women's Committee. It has not as yet held any open meetings, but nor has it yet ruled them out. Instead it has written to 700 to 800 community groups, including women's groups, tenants associations, play groups, health centres, etc, including a standard questionnaire, information about the Unit, and requesting ideas and the opportunity to

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talk to the group. A similar questionnaire was circulated in local papers. While the response has not been overwhelming it has been enthusiastic. The issue of safety and violence came out top in the questionnaires and is now the Unit's main public campaign with the provision of women only self-defence classes, better lighting and the relocation of walkways on council estates. The Unit is planning to follow this issue up with others and to hold exhibitions, local open meetings and door to door canvassing. It is also planning an exhibition bus (Camden has a similar idea with a mobile women's information centre).

Southwark does not have any of the additional structural organisation like the GLC. But, as with the GLC, all of the formal Women's Committee meetings are open and community groups are encouraged to send representatives with the right to speak but no vote. The Unit feels that with its limited budget and resources it should feed its proposals and demands directly into the council's other committees.

Sue Goss, the chair of Southwark's Women's Committee, feels one of the most important functions of the committee is redressing the balance between women and men in terms of the social wage. She points out that the social wage is primarily produced by women and is primarily used by women. But it is men who have the decision-making power over what is produced, made available, over where resources are allocated and for what purpose, and how it is all to be consumed. She hopes structures like Southwark's Women's Unit can give women more power in these decisions, more of a say over their lives. On a more grass roots level than the GLC (which covers the whole of London, after all) the Southwark Unit is opening up power structures and making them accessible in a way that presents feminists and socialists with opportunities for grass roots campaigning.

The Women's Committees are innovative. They are the first governmental structures to incorporate 'liberative' democracy, to attempt to reach outwards, to seek to actively involve those on whose behalf governmental decisions are made in that decision-making process. The committees offer some opportunities for women to take control of their own destinies and to

achieve some measure of social justice. This is not an argument in favour of taking over the local state from the inside — rather the reverse. In order to achieve social justice, to win our demands for women's rights and liberation, we do not set up shop in the town halls just because they have opened their doors to us — rather we welcome the open doors for the access they give us to the town halls, precisely to drag the occupants from their bureaucratic asylums and out onto the streets.

Stuart Hall in the previously mentioned article in *Marxism Today* describes, in relation to the working class, that which is feared by all those opposed to real democracy because of its threat to their vested interests and privileges, '... the class must not mobilise on its own account; power must not ... seep down ... into the hands of ordinary folks. The sound of ... shop stewards getting notions of their own capacities above and beyond their station as relayers of power from elsewhere, of tenants who speak back to housing managers, ... pickets that refuse to stand still, ... women who won't settle to their familial roles, blacks who assert their own self-identities — the sound in short of the class in motion, of democratic initiatives passing to the forces below — is a sound which has made ... consciences shudder and ... nerves rattle down through the ages.' The women's committees offer opportunities for women to 'mobilise on their own account' by virtue of their democratic basis. But the opportunities must be taken, used and turned outwards for us to reap the social justice harvest.

SARAH ROELOFS has been involved in the GLC Women's Committee since its inception, and is a member of Islington South and Finsbury Labour Party.

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SOCIALISM AND OLD AGE

CHRIS PHILLIPSON

Socialists have traditionally regarded old people as intrinsically conservative with little role to play alongside the youth in the struggle for a future. CHRIS PHILLIPSON argues that this attitude must now change: the increasing proportion of elderly people in the population and the miserable conditions in which they live under capitalism demand that socialists develop demands and strategies for their emancipation.

The ageing of Britain's population is raising major issues for the theory and practice of socialism. The number of people defined as elderly (ie women over 60 and men over 65) has increased this century from 2.9 million in 1911 to 9.8 million in 1981. As a percentage of the United Kingdom's population this represents a change from 6.8 per cent to 17.7 per cent. Equally important is the exclusion of older people from work, a trend which has accelerated during the present economic crisis.

For working class people, growing old aggravates life-long problems of low income, poor housing and inadequate health care. Today, just over one in four elderly people have incomes at or below the poverty line and nearly half have neither a telephone nor a car. A substantial number live in property built before the first world war.

Severe poverty may leave the individual vulnerable to a range of social and medical conditions. During the winter of 1981-1982, it was estimated that one in 10 older people could experience dangerously low body temperatures. One GP claimed — at the height of the winter freeze — that cold-related deaths had risen to 700 a day. He also claimed that he had been refused official figures on deaths from the cold because his campaigning on the subject was proving an embarrassment.¹ In terms of broader conditions of care, a past president of the British Medical Association commented in October 1981 that some old people were being treated in accommodation that would have been considered useful for 'dogs, cats or race horses 20 years ago'.² Another doctor has suggested that waiting lists are now so long that 75 per cent of psychogeriatric patients die before they can be admitted to hospital.³

These warnings have unsurprisingly made little impact on the Thatcher government. In an interview in the magazine *Social Work Today* in October 1979, Patrick Jenkin (then Secretary of State for Social Services) was asked: 'You would put defence spending as a higher priority above the elderly, the infirm and other disadvantaged?' Jenkin: 'Of course. If we did not defend ourselves with the three per cent growth target which is the NATO target to which we are committed, then whether it is the elderly, the mentally handicapped or the ill, or Uncle Tom Cobley and all, our lives would be at great peril.' SWT: 'You personally believe in that?' Jenkin: 'Yes, of course I do.'

Growing Old Under Capitalism

Many of the problems faced by elderly people must be related to the influence of capitalism on the experience of old age. To view later life as a period where the biological process of ageing assumes a primary role is to ignore the cumulative power and significance of life in a class society. Similarly, the form which experiences in retirement take (tensions in the transition from

work to retirement and poverty in old age) are not a consequence of individual characteristics or the process of ageing, but reflect the numerous forms of inequality within capitalism; ideologies of retirement and the care of the elderly within homes and hospitals are examples of the way in which growing old is constructed through a range of policies imposed upon the older population. Two examples might be used to illustrate this point in more detail. Many of the experiences which affect women in old age appear to mark a radical break from their previous way of life. The death of partners, the mobility of families and the impact of chronic illness, appear to confirm old age as a period of loss and abandonment. The contribution made by social institutions (the family apart) to this experience, has rarely been considered in studies examining the problems of elderly people. On the contrary, social institutions are often depicted as powerless in the face of demographic pressure.

I would argue, however, that the role they play and the ideologies they hold about older women have a major influence. Many of the problems women face are not due to the effects of physical ageing or due to the shock of losing a partner, but due to the restricted opportunities available to them after they have performed their productive/reproductive roles. These restrictions are compounded via the low income and sex role conditioning which women bring into old age. Discrimination during working life results in women being less able than men to receive an occupational pension. The impact of widowhood is particularly severe (in 1975, 48 per cent of widows were living at or below the supplementary benefit level). Women may also experience removal to a home or hospital where their basic rights and freedoms are denied. Indeed, the fact that women outnumber men in old people's homes may itself explain the low standards of care and privacy; degradation on the 'inside' reflecting dominant beliefs about the role of women and of elderly women in particular.

The impact of capitalism may also be seen when we examine the question of retirement. It is common to see this period as representing a major crisis for the individual, with many people expressing a sense of 'loss' and 'regret' at being denied access to their previous employment. This is certainly an important issue for some individuals and the rights of older workers is an important area for debate within the labour movement. However, the reason why retirement leads to a period of crisis must be related to the *characteristics of wage labour under capitalism*. Thus, people have their working lives shaped by the division between mental and manual labour, the experience of alienation within the work place, and the progressive fragmentation of the labour process. At the point of retirement, the worker experiences a major contradiction between a retirement ideology which urges activity and participation and the conditions of wage labour which have denied her/him adequate financial support for old age and access to a range of skills which can be transferred into retirement. This process is reinforced by the management of retirement during periods of economic crisis. Viewed historically, we find the development of compulsory retirement on the one hand, and on the other, attempts to circumvent the retirement age, either in terms of encouraging people to remain longer at work or to retire early.

Thus, despite the emergence of a fixed retirement age, there has remained a flexible policy over when it is socially acceptable to retire. One outcome of this process has been the emergence of older people as a reserve of labour. In periods of slump, they are likely to be drawn out of the labour market more quickly than other groups (particularly unskilled and semi-skilled older workers); in periods of labour shortage, the justification for

Socialist Policy

retiring and becoming a 'non-producing consumer' may be questioned as part of a campaign to call-back or retain people in the labour force. The possibility of older people acting as a reserve of labour expresses in economic terms a historical consistency in attitudes towards the elderly. This amounts to an ambivalence regarding how far older people have a right to share and enjoy material resources without being engaged in full or part-time work. In British society, the growth in the number of elderly people has created dilemmas over the distribution of resources. Unlike children, the elderly will play no further role in production: they consume with no prospect of producing. That they have spent the bulk of their lives creating wealth is ignored. In social policy terms they are viewed as an economic burden, a group for whom financial support must be strictly rationed and controlled.

The Left and Old Age

The Left in this country has generally regarded older people as conservative and apathetic, disinterested in challenging their inferior economic and social position. Ageing itself is seen to 'explain' political indifference, a move to the political right being viewed as a 'natural' part of growing old. There are, however, alternative ways of analysing old people's apparent conservatism. Why is it that past experiences become so important for the elderly. Is it simply through the physical and psychological side-effects of ageing? Or is it a consequence of insecurities in the individual's present life? If older people sometimes seem authoritarian and racist (although these characteristics are surely shared with other groups) might this not arise through the pressure associated with having a standard of living some 20 years behind the rest of the population? Low income, poor housing and deteriorating public services, cause feelings of great bitterness amongst pensioners. In some cases this resentment acts as a spur to political action. But more often it leads to a sense of betrayal, of rejection by a labour movement whose activities and goals no longer reflect their own experiences of life. In this respect, the elderly represent a group of trade unionists who no longer have a trade union. Old people may not lose their identities as workers, but the insecurities of old age can lead to significant changes in consciousness. Although still supportive of labour at one level, many older people become hostile to groups who appear to be damaging their material interests.

The problem here is one of access to alternative explanations. Older people spend more of their time at home and mix less with other people than other age groups. They therefore become more reliant on the media for interpretations of political issues and disputes. This reliance itself may reinforce their isolation and lack of involvement. The social and economic pressures on elderly people indicate the importance of support from socialist and trade union bodies. However, there are other arguments for making work with the elderly a greater priority.

First, the development of an ageing population creates a source of differentiation within the working class. The distinction between a 'worker' being 'retired' is given considerable emphasis by the state; the expansion of early retirement schemes is a significant part of state strategy in the current recession. Even more important is the danger of divisions being fostered between workers and pensioners. This is highlighted during major strikes, where cynical appeals about the suffering of the old are now commonplace. Of course, we know that the crisis of old age is experienced on a daily basis, reflecting as it does, major contradictions within capitalism. However, the implications of this argument must be turned into radical policies which can be supported by elderly people.

Secondly, retirement is now a major period in the life-cycle, one which the individual experiences for 20 years or more of her/his life. This is giving rise to a new range of political, economic and cultural demands which may affect a transformation similar to that produced by the women's movement. Pensioners are beginning to demand both changes in their



The Left has generally regarded older people as conservative and apathetic'

material status and in their position as a subordinate social group. The argument for freedom from stereotypes of ageing may become as politically and morally compelling as existing slogans in the struggle for women's liberation (indeed, given that the bulk of activists in pensioner groups are women, the two movements share much common ground).

Thirdly, we are already seeing the formulation of political demands by a number of pensioner groups. In fact, the emergence of such groups dates back to the 1930s, when working class pensioners mounted a number of campaigns to improve the basic pension. During the 1960s and 1970s, older people, stimulated by a rise in social and political activism, have themselves formed more radical groups. In America, the Grey Panthers organisation is a militant group which campaigns against all forms of age discrimination. Campaigns have been mounted on a range of economic and social issues: full employment, national health care, housing and mandatory retirement. In Britain, the emergence of the British Pensioners' Trade Union Action Association (BPTUAA), has been particularly important. The growth of this organisation has been quite rapid and it now has fifty regions and branches. An important aspect of its work has been to develop links with trade unions at local, regional and national levels. This relationship has had practical benefits in the current crisis over welfare expenditure, pensioners being involved in struggles to prevent the closure of hospitals, homes for the elderly and charges for home helps.

Political Demands for Old Age

Where the Left has raised the issue of old age, it has usually concentrated solely on the area of state pensions. However, from our analysis we can trace a range of both immediate and transitional demands in relation to the elderly. A starting point for the former comes from the list of minimum demands put forward in the BPTUAA Pensioners' Charters. Amongst the

Socialist Policy

demands we find:

1. A state pension of 75 per cent average industrial male gross earnings (for a married couple); 50 per cent for a single pensioner.
2. Guaranteed housing standards and services in the home.
3. Pensioner power in decision-making (for example on relevant local authority committees).
4. Immediate implementation of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act.
5. Staff reductions and the closure of hospitals to end immediately.
6. Access to a range of educational and leisure opportunities.
7. Public transport authorities to ensure that transport facilities meet the needs of the elderly infirm.

Since the preparation of the Charter, the effect of public expenditure cuts has made collaboration between the Left and pensioner organisations increasingly urgent. Following the election of the Thatcher government, older people have experienced a deterioration in a range of vital services. These cuts have placed a major strain both on staff in residential homes and daughters attempting to care for an elderly patient. Already, the effect of the cuts have led one union branch (Birmingham NUPE) to protest at the excessive use of drugs to control patients who are receiving inadequate care — because of staff shortages.

This situation is likely to worsen given the projected growth in the very elderly (those 75 plus) and the Tory commitment to dismantle huge chunks of the welfare state. A recent discussion document by Oxford's Regional Medical Officer asks: 'How can treatment and care be rationed (my emphasis) among the elderly to a level well below that which with its many deficiencies, now exists?' A discussion paper from the government's 'think tank' has raised the possibility of the NHS being replaced by private health insurance and of ending the rise of social security payments (including pensions) in line with inflation.⁶ The need for a clear socialist response has never been greater.

Another important issue which the Left needs to tackle concerns the enormous power wielded by pension funds. Some key questions here are: how to increase access to the investment decisions made by these funds? how to develop alternative investment strategies for the wealth controlled by the funds? how to use pension fund money to meet the social needs of employees?

In terms of *transitional demands*, a number of areas can be identified. We must begin to challenge the use of older people as a *reserve of labour*, to be expelled or retained in the labour force according to the needs of the economic system. On the one hand, the rights of older people who wish to remain in work should be safeguarded. However, the right to a secure retirement should also be placed on the agenda. This period will require a massive extension in educational and cultural facilities. Elderly people should have the right to attend — without charge — classes and seminars at colleges and universities; they should also have the right to determine a range of educational programmes suitable to their particular needs. This development would encourage a movement away from the age barriers characteristic of a capitalist society, barriers which are highly destructive to unity within the labour movement.

Pensioners must also be supported in their desire to *take control of the ageing process*. At present, and in numerous ways, capitalism undermines the individual's control over major areas of later life: for example, via the over-prescribing of drugs, the denial of health facilities and the experience of poverty. This process undermines the resistance of many people, causing them to feel useless and rejected. Unfortunately, instead of focusing their anger on the capitalist economy, many pensioners view their plight as part a natural process of ageing for which nobody is to blame. There is, however, nothing natural about poverty, bad housing or inadequate health care. These are social phenomena which result in much distress and suffering amongst the elderly. A major demand must be for

pensioners (particularly those from the working class) to take control of the appropriate economic and political resources which can transform the experience and expectations which people have about growing old. Finally, the ageing of the population reinforces the view that *social needs* should dominate priorities within the economy. Factories need to produce a wide range of goods to enable the disabled to be active within the community; new transportation systems will be required to meet the needs of a less physically mobile population; socially induced conditions such as hypothermia will need radical changes in the field of housing and heating (eg free gas and electricity to groups such as pensioners).

The range of demands emerging from older people is clearly going beyond anything which capitalism can satisfy: the yearly debate about hypothermia illustrates this in the most poignant fashion. While profit remains the driving force of the system, it is inconceivable that the demands for items such as meals-on-wheels and help for the blind will be adequately met.

Socialism and Old Age

Briefly, in conclusion, it is worth asking ourselves what socialism could provide for old people. In relation to retirement, unlike the present system of compulsion, individuals would be able to retire in line with their own capacities and state of health. Moreover, with a radical change in the division of labour, there would be a progressive reduction in the amount of time people spent in jobs harmful to people's health. This policy, together with other improvements in the standard of living of working class people, should help to correct the wide inequalities in life expectancy whereby today a manual worker in social class V has a mortality rate 26 per cent higher than the national average.

Secondly, in contrast to existing 'socialist' societies, the nuclear family would no longer be the central unit of social life. The ageing of the population reinforces the general need for a variety of living units, a move which requires equal diversity and creativity in collective provision.

Thirdly, a socialist social policy would be built around democratic structures, through which elderly people determined both the shape and character of financial and social service provision. These structures would encourage non-bureaucratic, non-sexist and non-ageist relationships. For the first time in history, people would grow old without, at the same time, experiencing old age as an economic and social stigma.

Fourthly, in old age, people would retain a range of political, educational and cultural commitments. At the present time, the poverty of many elderly people combined with the negative stereotypes attached to growing old, hinders their social participation. In a socialist society, old age would represent a continuation of life-long interests and ambitions, free of daily commitments to work.

Finally, these changes would take place within a positive commitment to supporting older people and a rejection of views which represent them as an economic burden. In our society, old age is a period which many people still fear, in part because of the *social pressures* which they experience. The *first* priority of a socialist society must be to remove this fear. A man of 70 can expect to live for another nine years and a woman for twelve. They cannot wait too long for socialism to be achieved.

CHRIS PHILLIPSON is a researcher in old age and retirement at Keele University. His book *Capitalism and the Construction of Old Age*, some of whose themes are developed in this article, was published by Macmillan Press on 11 November at £4.95.

1. *The Sunday Times*, 10 January, 1982.

2. *The Guardian*, 23 October, 1981.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Social Work Today*, Vol 13, No. 48, 1982.

5. *The Health Services*, 15 October, 1982.

6. *The Economist*, 18 September, 1982.

Interviews

PICK UP A PENGUIN AND

STEVE BELL

Harry Hardnose, Hedgehog Benn, the Penguin, the Turkey Trot ... these are some of the famous characters in cartoonist Steve Bell's repertoire. Hilary Driver interviewed him for our Xmas issue.

It was obviously not going to be easy interviewing a socialist cartoonist for *International*. The great Marxist classics have little to say on the subject of radical cartoons, and the readership of *International* are a formidable audience. However, armed with much advice and no tape recorder I set off to meet Steve Bell in his home town of Brighton.

For the reader who is not yet part of the growing cult of SB supporters or who is unfortunate enough to live north of Watford Gap, I should explain that Steve is the cartoonist and political satirist responsible for the 'IF...' strip in the *Guardian*, and 'Maggie's Farm' in the London magazine *City Limits*. Steve lives with Heather and their young son, William, who all share their front room with a two-foot high inflatable penguin sent by a fan.

I began by asking Steve how he started out on his cartooning career. 'I was at school in Slough and then went to Middlesbrough to do a Pre-Dip course for a year.' (The pre-diploma is done by art students before going on to specialise in a 3 or 4 year course). 'The Pre-Dip was very intensive and they made us work like crazy — some days we were doing 12 hours of life drawing. Then I went on to Canterbury but jacked it in after only 3 weeks, and started a year long job at the ICI fertiliser division, drawing cows and manure and things for £13 per week! I finally went to Leeds for a 4 year fine art course which was half academic and half practical. I also did a film course at Leeds which included making some 16mm films plus studying the history and theory of film-making.'

comics now aren't half as good as when we were kids

Schools' careers counselling is not so hot on developing the talents and aspirations of erstwhile cartoonists, most of whom lack a burning passion for the trade in their early years, but just drift into it. Steve was no exception, having begun his art at school caricaturing teachers but never really knowing what he wanted to do, even when he'd finished at Leeds. 'The experience of working for a year changed me a lot. I started to get interested in politics — particularly in anarchism. Lots of their ideas still appeal to me, but I wouldn't define myself as an anarchist. I met a lot of people at Leeds between 1970-74. The influence of '68 was still very strong. I had friends in the IS, IMG ... and the SLL — God bless their hearts! There was always one

SLL member who would get up at every meeting and say the same thing over and over and over. After Leeds I worked in a bookshop, did some part-time teaching and eventually decided to do a Post-ed teaching course at Exeter which was OK. Heather was working in Birmingham so I moved up there and got a job as an art teacher in a Comprehensive in Aston. It was hard work and I realised quite soon that I wasn't cut out for teaching but I stuck it for a year. I prefer to work on my own.

'While I was teaching I did some cartoons for Birmingham *Broadside* in particular one strip called "Maxwell the Mutant". I started freelancing having made the decision to earn a living doing paid drawing work. My first regular paid job was for an IPC kids comic called *Whoopee!* — a poor imitation of the *Beano*. Some things about comics are offensive, but it's a good way of learning the trade and I really learnt a lot doing that. Comics now aren't half as good as when we were kids. In its heyday the *Beano* sold millions, now its circulation is down to around 100,000 copies. Now they're more like illustrated gag-writing. When I was there I met some of the old-timers who'd been working doing the same sort of thing for years. There's something depressing about it.

'At the same time as the comic work I was doing some serious illustration for *Social Work Today* (I felt schizo!) and also alternative stuff for *Broadside* and *The Leveller*. Now I'm not doing the diversity of work I was then. You find out you're better at some things — for me it was strip cartooning. Good

the popularity of the penguin and Kipling was undoubtedly that they represented voices expressing opposition to the war

one-off visual statements are hard to come by. I made more contacts through work for *New Society*, and then, just after Thatcher was elected, started "Maggie's Farm" for *Time Out*.'

I asked Steve if he found it hard to find ideas for his work? 'I don't find it too difficult. A strip obeys its own laws, its own insane logic. Over the years I've built up a stable of characters. For example, I first used Badger Courage in Leeds (he was a constable then!). The name came from a cops recruiting poster which said "Wear the badge of courage"! Harry Hardnose first appeared in *The Leveller*. I don't envy cartoonists who do one-off "joke" cartoons — you have to cope with a very big rejection rate. Tom Johnson now does a one-off cartoon in the London *Evening Standard*. In 1978 he produced five issues of a cartoon magazine called *Duck Soup* some of which was pretty bad, sexist for example. In general though, I like his work. You always get some people who dislike aspects of cartoons.'

Did Steve ever get complaints? 'One or two people have written to the *Guardian*: "Dear Editor, please get rid of this strip...". When I was doing the "Lord God Almighty" strip for *The Leveller* a big debate broke out



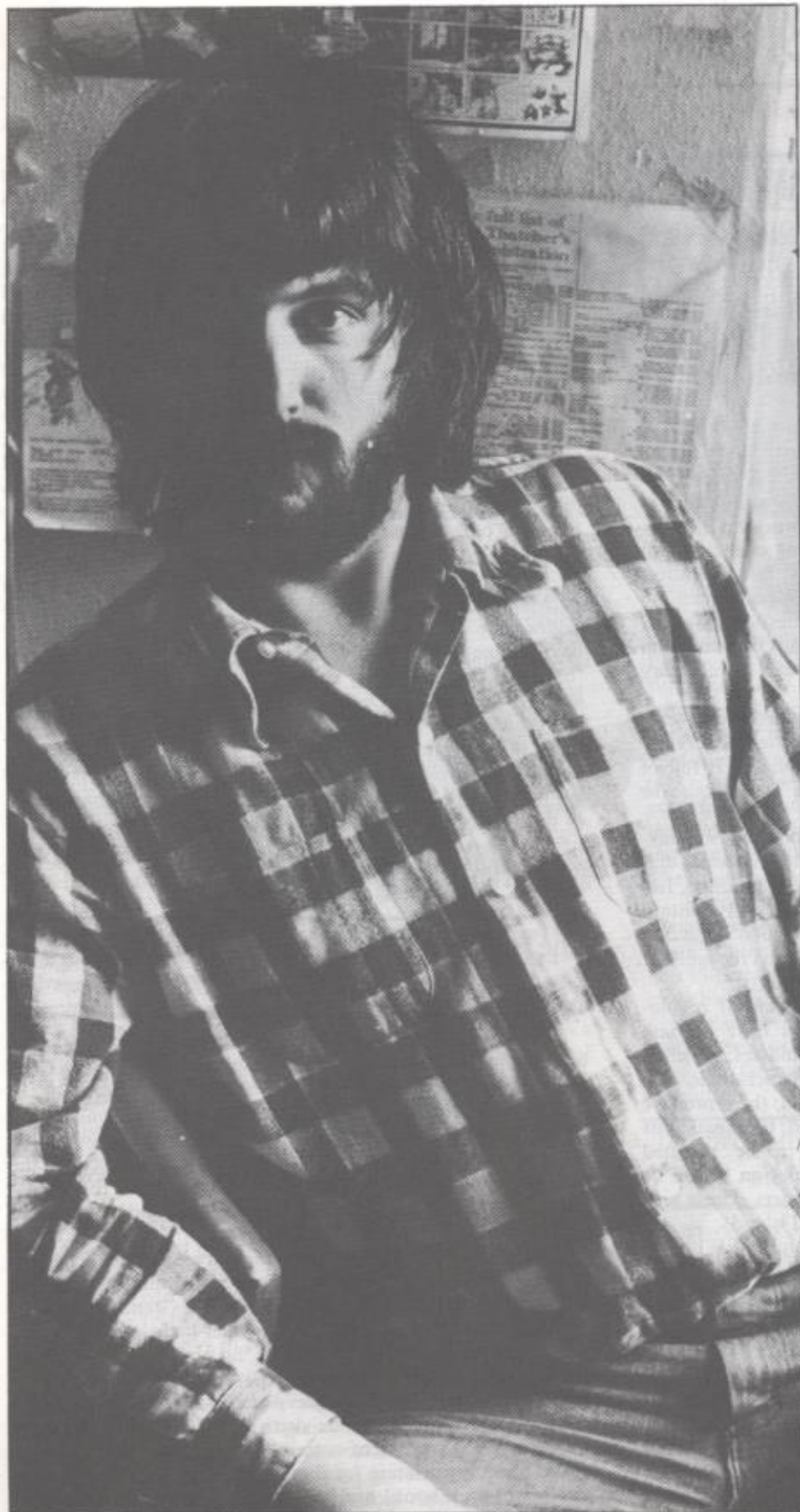
about one of the strips. At *The Leveller* people were divided into two camps over the strip, those who hated it and those who liked it, with the latter just prevailing. One of the strips contained a character called Bella — the lucky housewife, who was approached by Saatchi and Saatchi about doing a testimonial for the Tories. The editorial collective first rejected it and then printed it inviting comments from readers.

'An illustration I did for Liberation Films to advertise a season of films about women was rejected because someone had said it might be construed as offensive — without actually saying why. The illustration was of women on a march, white, black, young and old women. The problem may be that with cartoons you're always dealing in stereotypes — big noses, caricatures, etc. There's more discussion of this in the left press — people working for the straight press expect to be edited. To a large extent I operate self-censorship. I know if I wrote "shit" or "fuck" in the *Guardian* it would get rejected.

'I was influenced a lot by underground comix like Gilbert Shelton and Robert Crumb (of "Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers" and "Fritz the Cat" fame). I don't find Crumb as offensive as the sleek dolly-bird images thrown at us by the media every day, but underground comix are flawed because of sexism and very violent images.

'The *Guardian* have only rejected two strips to date. One was the strip of a series of explosions (BOOM! WHAMM! THUDD! PYM!) which was due to be published the same day the paper was carrying photos of the HMS Sheffield blowing up, and they thought it would be distasteful. The second was one of the early strips introducing Badger Courage — about him being corrupt which they thought could be libellous, as Badger has some resemblance to Anderton! Mind you, I've done much more libellous things than that in "Maggie's Farm".'

Interviews



Steve Bell himself

Steve's favourite cartoonists include Leo Baxendal who invented the Bash Street Kids, Minnie the Minx and Little Plum in the *Beano*, and Cormac who does strips in *Republican News* and *Socialist Challenge*. 'I like Cormac's stuff, I saw a lot of it for the first time in the compilation of his work that's just been published. I don't often see *Socialist*

Challenge — being a slow reader!'

We began discussing the 'IF...' strip in the *Guardian*, and I asked Steve why he concentrated all his fire on the SDP and the Tories and not the Labour bureaucrats? 'I was written to by a kid a few months ago who said why didn't I do Benn, Foot and Cyril Smith. I wrote back and said I'd do Cyril, but there

was no point in me slagging off Benn, Foot, etc because the majority of the press spends most of their time doing it anyway. That's not to say that I agree with them, especially not Foot. Now with the register and the witch hunt I think I'll have to do something on Golding and those other bastards.

'I don't think cartoons have a direct political impact, a direct effect on what goes on or making people act differently. Cartoon strips are different from one-offs. People pick up on a strip — it's like a contagious disease, you get hooked. Too many so-called political cartoons aren't that at all, they're not much more

now with the register and the witch-hunt I think I'll have to do something on Golding and those other bastards

than a good gag. In the States political cartoons are much sharper. The political cartoonists in the national press don't care about politics, you just get the feeling they're politically inept. Brétecher is very good on the other hand. The *Sunday Times* have now dropped her, I imagine because she was a bit too near the knuckle and a bit too sharp for the package of drivel they produce every week.'

Steve was surprised at the success of Mr Kipling and the penguin: 'I think it's because I used them to think aloud, they were saying what I thought about the stupidity of the war in the Falklands. The "IF..." strip has changed since then, I think people take it much more seriously now.'

The popularity of the penguin and Kipling was undoubtedly because of the fact that they represented almost lone voices in expressing minority opposition to the war. Fans will be sad to know that Steve is giving the pair a holiday for the time being, after the excitement of the Peckham by-election.

For anyone who is hooked on Steve Bell's cartoons, they should demand from their friends and comrades Xmas presents of the two anthologies published so far, 'Maggie's Farm' books One and Two, available from The Other Bookshop, 328 Upper Street, London N1 2XP. Prices are £2.75 and £2.95 respectively, published by Penguin (!) Books.

Photo: BRIAN HOMER



International Features

GRENADA'S BIG REVOLUTION

PAT KANE

On 13 March 1979 the working people of Grenada, led by their revolutionary party, the New Jewel Movement, overthrew the pro-imperialist dictator Sir Eric Gairy.

Pat Kane, recently returned from Grenada, analyses its revolution.

This revolution sent shock waves throughout the Caribbean. For the first time ever, a black English-speaking country decided to reject the road of neo-colonial development offered by the imperialists. Westminster-style democracy was rejected, in favour of the direct involvement of the working people, through their own organisations, in the running of their country. The revolution not only overthrew Gairy, but its leaders decided to chart a completely new course of development — one which challenged imperialism and the domestic capitalists. They decided to reject the failed reformist path of Manley in Jamaica and Allende in Chile, and to follow the revolutionary road of Cuba.

This was a genuine revolution, which smashed the governmental power of the local capitalists, and installed a workers' and farmers' government. The Grenadian revolution is full of valuable lessons and examples for socialists throughout the world.

Grenada is an island of 110,000 people. Some say it's tiny. Well, there are ten times more people than in the Malvinas and it's just as close to vast oil fields in Venezuela and Trinidad. Imperialism has already spent billions of dollars in military manoeuvres against Grenada, Nicaragua, and Cuba. Thatcher and Reagan recognise what the leadership of Cuba recognised, that 'Grenada is a big revolution in a small country.'

Size does not remove fundamental problems of revolutionary strategy. To make a revolution you have to base yourselves on the revolutionary action of the masses; on small islands, trade unions have reformist and bureaucratic leaderships which have to be confronted and replaced: the repressive state power of the old regime has to be smashed; the creation of new agencies of workers' power have to be planned beforehand; the military defence of the revolution has to be planned and installed by the revolutionary leaders. These problems do not evaporate when you reach small islands.

So, first of all, this was a proletarian revolution. When 47 members of the New Jewel Movement stormed the barracks of Gairy's army, and later seized the radio station, they were beginning the revolution. These militants judged three things before acting in such a bold manner. If they had been wrong, they would all have lost their lives.

1. They judged that a majority of Grenadians would actively join the revolution
2. They assessed that Gairy's minority political base would not oppose the overthrow.
3. They estimated that within the army and police, morale was so low that they would offer only minimal resistance.

They were right on all three judgements.

On 12 March 1979, Gairy left the island to address the United Nations Outer Space Legal Sub-Committee. He was a firm believer in Unidentified Flying Objects, and he spent more time money on UFO research than on medical research. But despite his eccentricity he was given a knighthood for his services to British and later American imperialism.

He left instructions that the leadership of the NJM had to be

executed. Maurice Bishop, now the island's Prime Minister said later: 'It was either them or us, and we didn't plan on it being us.'

In late 1978, workers at Barclays Bank had struck for the recognition of their union, which was and still is led by militants of the NJM. This strike received huge support and solidarity, the results of years of agitation by the NJM. It convinced the NJM leaders that the time was ripe for revolution. The NJM moved forward — boldly — to seize the power, and forged their partnership with the Grenadian people which has survived three years of the revolution and is now stronger than ever.

When the Grenadian people heard over the radio of the NJM's victory, thousands took to the streets. The call for a strike in support of the revolution was supported by nearly 1,000 of the island's workers, a majority in the capital city St Georges. Telephone workers seized the switchboards, and used the telephone system to track down Gairy's ministers. Then they went out in their own cars, and arrested them. There are hundreds of similar stories of mass involvement in the revolution.

Gairy stayed in America, a guest of the US government. On 20 March he announced his formal resignation. Two huge rallies were held in different parts of the island, on different days. Some 20,000 people attended the rally. They chanted 'Freedom come — Gairy go, Gairy gone with a UFO.' When asked to vote on the 'Declaration of the Peoples Revolutionary Government,' every hand shot up. The Grenadian people had made their revolution. Revolutionary Cuba, which had inspired Grenada's revolutionaries, had a new ally. Fidel Castro announced 'we are no longer alone,' and told the Cuban people of this 'big revolution in a small country.' For only the second time in the Americas, the struggling masses had carried through a successful revolution which established, what we can call a workers' and farmers' government.

the rally chanted: 'Freedom come, Gairy go,
Gairy gone with a UFO'

The tasks of a workers and farmers government were outlined in the 'Theses on Tactics' adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. They are 'to arm the proletariat, to disarm bourgeois counter-revolutionary organisations, to introduce the control of production, to transfer the main burden of taxation to the rich, and to break the resistance of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.' As we will see, the Grenadian government has done all these things, and many more besides in its three years of existence.

The NJM did not hold parliamentary elections. The new revolutionary government had an overwhelming majority of NJM supporters, and two members of the Grenada National Party, the main pro-capital party which had opposed Gairy. They were judged by the NJM to be 'no obstacle to the revolutionary process.' Immediately the government had to face the reaction of US Imperialism, which sent East Caribbean Ambassador Frank Ortiz to visit the PRG. Ortiz demanded that the new government cease all contact with Cuba. When asked for compensation for the years of Gairy's rule, he pulled out his cheque book, and made out a cheque for US\$5,000 from his discretionary fund. He made it clear — no more aid while the government developed links with Cuba. Despite the desperate need for aid, the Grenadians sent him home, announced next day across Radio Free Grenada that the Grenadian revolution would pick and choose its own friends and that 'Grenada was in no-one's backyard.'

A whole programme of legislation was embarked on which strengthened the organisation and confidence of working people. All Gairy's repressive legislation was repealed. The right to

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Maurice Bishop and Grenada's ally, Fidel Castro

strike was established in law. It became compulsory for employers to recognise unions. Equal pay, maternity leave, and laws against exploitation were all passed. They were all included in the 1973 manifesto of the NJM.

But laws by themselves mean nothing. Proletarian parties have to organise them. This is the crucial difference in revolutionary Grenada — it is a workers' and farmers' government that acts to use legislation and governmental power to advance the workers' struggles, and defends them against the capitalists who still exist in Grenada. In every single dispute between capital and labour since the revolution, the government has intervened on the side of organised labour, women or the youth. The government has called on the trade unions to struggle to implement basic minimum wages and conditions in the small private sector.

At its founding conference in 1973, the NJM declared that after the revolution, the new government would rest on and encourage the development of a new system of popular assemblies, which would eventually elect a national assembly of delegates to run the country. They viewed the government as a transition towards such a structure, with its immediate task of creating the foundations of this future system through mass involvement of all Grenadians in the affairs of the country. This government has kept its promise, and encouraged the development of local assemblies throughout the island. Workers, women and youth have additional geographically based meetings.

Trade unions have registered growth from 30 to 80 per cent of the workers and these new unions have had to confront the old leaders and remove them. This has been done by the NJM organising broad coalitions to democratise and involve the unions in the revolutionary process. The NJM consciously rejects economist views of trade unionism.

Agricultural workers were won to a new union after the revolution. Fitzroy Bain, President of the Agricultural and General Workers Union, explained to me their trade union policy: 'We told the agricultural workers of the great importance of the relationship between government and trade unions. From the very first day, we told them that our path would be a revolutionary trade union, not a union of the past that works only on the economic side of life, but one that looks at the whole social, political, and all-round being of the worker. We do not believe that a trade union is one that goes every three years, and asks for higher wages, and you do not keep up with the cost of living or solve the workers' daily problems — their children, education and things like that.'

The struggle against the right-wing, whether Gairyites or leaders who supported the overthrow but not the subsequent

direction of the government, has been waged in all of the unions established under Gairy. In all instances they have used methods to strengthen the democratic organisation of the rank and file, and have never resorted to repression or coercion. Even when the right wing leaders of the dockers' union, who supported the overthrow of Gairy, organised at their third attempt a strike against the revolutionary government, the broad masses were mobilised to isolate these right wing leaders.

Counter-revolution has been organised, and terrorist attacks were frequent in 1981. The pro-worker stance of the government had angered the island's capitalists, who can see their influence draining away. Sections of them supported these terrorists including a capitalist member of the government. They put him in jail, along with terror gangs he supported.

The old army has been smashed, and replaced with a revolutionary army based on the island's militant youth. The sight of black youths with Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles, chanting anti-imperialist slogans in English, inspired me, as it inspires every black youth in London's ghettos, who finds out about the Grenadian revolution. Unlike Grenadian youth, if London's black rebels were given rifles they would use them against the state. In Grenada the youth support their government and revolution.

the pro-worker stance of the government has angered the island's capitalists

The police force has been disarmed, and the most corrupt officers sacked. I once had occasion to call the police, something I wouldn't do in London, to intervene with a small car rental firm. The policeman arrived, a member of the National Youth Organisation, and sided with us. He was worried that it would affect our view of Grenada. He thought we were tourists. He said: 'You have to realise, comrades, that the manager is a capitalist, and one day the revolution will sweep him away. Just now we have enough problems, but one day we'll get round to organising him.' Again, given the choice, this young Grenadian revolutionary, like his government, sided with us, not the capitalist.

The terror campaign led the NJM to extend and strengthen the mass organisations, to ensure that the working class and its allies had the strength and clarity of political ideas to stand up to this type of destabilisation. The National Youth Organisation, and the National Women's Organisation were turned outwards, and their membership increased by thousands. Their members became activists, fighting to implement the gains of the revolution throughout the island.

Moral and political appeals were only one part of winning

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new links, and consolidating old links between the revolution and the broad masses. The masses had to be shown, in a practical way, that the revolution and its government were indeed different from other regional governments. The government had to provide the material basis to transform the living standards of the Grenadian people. That meant organising the economy in which capitalist relations still predominate. Social and economic advances in a developing country are very closely linked. Free milk, education, health care, the expansion of culture — all products of the revolution — have to be paid for. Grenadian capitalists are mainly concerned with the service sector and agriculture. Their importance in the economy is decreasing.

The state and government take all the initiatives in the development of the economy, and last year 95 per cent of investment in the economy was from the state. They now have the first ever domestic bank, and state property is expanding rapidly to all sectors of the economy. It is not possible to discuss every aspect of this process of economic development, only its



'The revolution is a model from which socialists can learn'

highlights. What are they?

Well, today, Grenada is a country where any school child can explain economic terms like the social wage or the gross national product. The mass organisations, formed in the revolution and strengthened afterwards, are the cornerstones of this process. Grenada is an agricultural country, still dependent on and affected by the economic crisis of capitalism.

Yet they have introduced a whole range of welfare benefits never seen in the Caribbean and it all has to be paid for. Alongside this are their attempts to lessen the domination of their economy by the imperialist markets, and to develop new markets and products. Imperialism grossly distorted the island's economic development, and squeezed it into its own international division of labour. This meant that a Caribbean island was prevented from processing its own agricultural product and having a modern fishing fleet, and it took a revolution to end the situation where a majority of its fish was imported from Canada.

The PRG has demystified the process of economics, by involving the broad masses in every aspect of debate about the future of their island. Since the first days of the revolution, they have struggled to introduce planning and budget control. This year they have now embarked on their first one year plan, and this very minute they are working on their first three year plan, to be introduced next year. These plans do not descend from on high, but are the conclusion of a dialogue between the masses and the government. As the planning has been extended so has the number of people involved increased, until over 30,000 peo-

ple took part in the discussions around this year's budget. This process attacks one of the fundamental pillars of capital, business secrecy. When the Grenadians use the phrase 'opening the books', they really mean it.

When the Grenadians use the phrase 'opening the books' they really mean it

During the budget preparations, all the local assemblies and workplace meetings received preliminary reports on plans for the economy. The government declared 1982 the 'Year of Economic Construction'. All the mass organisations elected delegates, including ordinary soldiers from the Army units, to a conference to discuss the economy. One thousand attended from a population of 110,000. After the conference, every delegate reported to their organisation. Then the broader masses were involved again through the local assemblies, called Parish Councils.

As a result a whole series of committees have been established in state workplaces to monitor and control production. The government has called on the unions to struggle in the private sector to establish similar committees. They have reduced taxation for workers by 25 per cent, and have refused to increase taxes to pay for the country's social wage. Instead, they have chosen to increase productivity and expand the economy. Capitalists who do not co-operate face a whole system of punitive taxes, introduced at the insistence of the masses during the Parish Councils. They call this the carrot and stick approach.

the Grenadian leadership is constantly learning from the achievements of its people

None of this could be possible without the existence of a revolution which is still moving forward, which has a revolutionary leadership, which exercises the power of organised working people through a workers' and farmers' government.

This revolution is a model from which socialists can learn and it has lessons for people struggling against capitalism everywhere. It is not only how an experienced leadership leads the government, but how revolutionaries can organise working people in democratic mass organisations; how we can mobilise and educate masses of people, and move them along the road to an understanding of the tasks of a socialist revolution; how to do this by standing firmly on their own organisations, engaging

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these organisations in activity, and through these actions raising and developing consciousness. The Grenadian leadership is constantly learning from the achievements of its people, and we should do the same.

The leadership of the NJM are proletarian revolutionaries, and there are lots of lessons in their experiences. The revolution was the result of years of struggle by the Grenadian people. From its foundation in March 1973, the NJM had developed proletarian methods of struggle. Che Guevara was their hero, but they rejected strategies based on guerilla warfare. Instead they organised mass mobilisations to confront the dictatorship, and to extend the self organisation of the masses.

Alain Krivine, interviewed George Louison, a government minister and a central leader of the NJM for the French Trotskyist paper *Rouge*: 'We have never hidden that we are struggling for socialism', Louison told Krivine. 'This is our programme, and we consider our party to be a vanguard socialist party. Because of the anti-communist campaign carried out by the dictatorship against our party, a minority is still opposed to socialism. But the workers have confidence in us. Our relations with the bourgeois parties are non-existent... we always preserve our independence as a party.'

Bernard Coard, now the Minister of Finance pointed out: 'That kind of (elaborate) party organisation was forced on us by the making of our newspaper illegal, by the refusal of permission to use the loudspeakers, by the refusal to allow us to hold public meetings, to demonstrate and so on. The other side of the coin was that it forced us to be a disciplined tightly knit security conscious party... to call on our people... and to move swiftly'.

In April 1973 workers staged a huge strike against the police murder of a youth, one month after the formation of the NJM. On 10 May the NJM called its first mass rally. Ten thousand attended, ten percent of the island's population. They organised a general strike which lasted four days, which revealed their weak links with the organisations of the urban workers. On 4 November they organised a second mass rally, bigger in size, and called on Gairy to resign. The general strike that followed was defeated through repression and the collaboration between the right wing leaders of the trade unions and the regional supporters of imperialism.

The NJM drew a balance sheet — their organisation was only a year old. It had grown out of the black power movement. Its leaders were young professionals, who had been radicalised through their experiences in Britain and the United States. They decided to make a turn to consistent work among the urban workers and within their unions, towards establishing stronger links with the youth and women who had been in the vanguard of the struggle.

They stood for parliament, and used it as a platform to mobilise working people. They established a rank and file paper inside the unions called *Workers Voice* and challenged the collaborationist leaderships. They studied Marx, Engels, Lenin, Che and Castro. And finally, they developed a military wing under the control and direction of their party. The Grenadian revolution is not some insignificant and isolated exception. Its importance is threefold.

First, it is part of the revolution of the region. It has close ties with Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador. These other leaderships observe and participate as equals in each other's revolutions. Grenadians are in Bluefields, on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, winning black English speaking Nicaraguans to the Nicaraguan revolution through the literacy campaign. Hundreds of Grenadians are in Cuba, and hundreds of Cubans are in Grenada. They learn from each other and compare their different processes. Most important is that they defend each other against imperialism and reject every attempt by the imperialists to divide them up.

Secondly, it is a revolution of the Caribbean, but because of its historical development there are strong links with the freedom fighters of black Africa. It is a different model of

development and hundreds of Africans visit to observe and learn from the revolution. Grenada is itself deeply committed to international solidarity with Africa and the revolutions in the region. Bishop sums it up as a 'beacon of hope, and alternative to neo-colonialism and colonialism, to nineteenth century capitalism' for the whole region.

Thirdly, it is an ex-British colony, and hundreds of thousands of Grenadians live abroad in Toronto, New York and London. But more than this obvious link, it is seen by the Grenadians as an international revolution, and they identify with struggling people everywhere. The struggles of the Grenadian people inspire black and oppressed people throughout the world, including in the imperialist countries.

Grenada is deeply committed to international solidarity with Africa

So what conclusions can we draw from this? This revolution shows the positive example of working people seizing their own destinies and moving forward. This leadership shares with Lenin an orientation to solving problems through the mobilisation and involvement of the working people.

They promote class independence and reject class collaboration. They create huge organisations which elect their own leaders, are self-financing, and have no material ties to the state. They see their future through the international extension of their revolution.

Recently British imperialism was at war in the South Atlantic. War is the acid test for revolutionaries. In Britain, the Labour Party leadership were in favour of sending the task force, but against it being used. They could only give Thatcher advice on how to conduct the war, not how to stop it. The Militant tendency within the Labour Party was in favour of a federal socialist republic of the Malvinas, Argentina, and wait for it, capitalist Britain!

But most importantly the government and people of Grenada opposed the war. Lech Walesa, at the time of the signing of the Gdansk agreement, answered his ultra-left critics by saying: 'It's easy to be uncompromising when there's no compromises on offer'. Every day, imperialism offers the Grenadians either compromise or aggression. Their price would be their principles. They passed another test of their political principles in their attitude to the Malvinas.

Imperialist military activity in the Caribbean is massive. Thousands of French troops are in Martinique. American military forces are pouring into the pro-imperialist islands, and the CIA is overtly active. Reagan and Thatcher constantly make attacks on Grenada, because they see Grenada as an example for working people everywhere.

You can't lead a revolution through all its twists and turns without a strategy, and the strategy of the NJM can be described as revolutionary, using a Marxist framework. They are revolutionaries, firmly committed to Marxism, and this is what makes the Grenadian revolution such a huge event, for the Grenadian revolution broke the isolation of the Cuban revolution.

Immediately after the 13 March revolution, both British and American imperialism discussed, and fortunately rejected, overt military action against Grenada. On 6 June 1979, the *Washington Post* revealed that the US National Security Council had discussed the idea of blockading Grenada. This committee is the most powerful military committee in the world today. They recognised the importance and example of the Grenadian revolution. They know that by basing itself on the mobilisations of the oppressed and representing the interests of the workers and peasants of Grenada, the workers' and farmers' government formed by the New Jewel Movement, has opened the possibility for the first workers' state in a majority black country. And that is why Thatcher and Reagan are so terrified of a tiny Caribbean island.

PAT KANE spent several months in Grenada as a reporter for the socialist journal *Intercontinental Press*.

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BRITISH TROTSKYISM'S BIRTH

HARRY WICKS

Fifty years ago British Trotskyism was born. A founding member was Harry Wicks, along with Reg Groves, Hugo Dewar, Henry Sara and others. A former railway worker he soon established his potential in the young Communist Party. Sent to the Lenin school in Moscow he witnessed at first hand the struggles in the Russian Party and the Comintern. In Britain he played a leading role in the Left Opposition, helping to launch *The Communist* and the *Red Flag*. We reprint below an article written by Harry for International Vol 1 No 4 (now unavailable) on the early years of British Trotskyism.

Like the Bolshevik Leninists in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) the opposition developed out of a struggle within the Communist Party itself. Unlike the CPSU however the British Communist Party was not rich in theoretical Marxism. In fact, the British movement as a whole for generations was devoid of theory, one could almost say contemptuous of it. What Deutscher terms the 'classical Marxism', those debates that occupied Social Democracy before 1914, scarcely found an echo in this country. So not surprisingly, the Communist Party, formed in the halcyon days following the October Revolution, was equally indifferent to Marxist theory, to an extent insular in outlook, and devoted itself to giving a militant left wing edge to trade union struggle. Profiting from the 3rd Congress of the Communist International, particularly its thesis on the Party and Organisation, Dutt and Pollitt produced a report to the Battersea Congress (1922) which aimed to build a centralised party. The core of that report was that the Party was to be organised into working groups oriented to a specific function. The positive side of this organisational plan can be seen, the party membership was a working membership, coherent and unified within a particular field of activity. The negative feature, which aroused opposition at an early stage, was that the membership was deprived of an essential element of political life, that of discussion. Policy discussion became the prerogative of the leadership at national and district level. Only at times, by means of aggregate meetings of the membership, was it possible to hear political debate on a wider sphere than one's working group.

It was in such an aggregate meeting of the London membership that the issue of Trotskyism first arose in the British Party. At an extended Party Executive meeting held in January 1925 it was decided to endorse the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) decision condemning Leon



Trotsky for the publication of *The Lessons of October*. This blanket endorsement was questioned by the London District Party Committee. What was it about? Where was the information? This doubt resulted in the first and last discussion of Leon Trotsky's viewpoint in the British Party. An aggregate meeting of the London membership heard AE Reade, a member of the London District Party Committee move an amendment to a resolution submitted by Rothstein and Murphy. Reade's amendment was:

'This aggregate meeting of the London District membership of the CPGB joins with the District Party Committee in regretting the hasty vote of the Party Council in condemning Comrade Trotsky without full information: and this meeting at the same time takes the opportunity to express the London membership's emphatic support both of the left wing's minority fight in the Russian Party against bureaucracy, and equally of the Comintern's struggle against right wing divergencies from Leninism in the French, Bulgarian and German sections.'

Workers Weekly, 23 January 1925

According to that report the Rothstein/Murphy resolution was carried with only ten voting for the Reade amendment. What was significant was that the following week, 30 January, the *Workers Weekly* carried a correction to its report which stated that 200 were present at the meeting and the minority was 15. Further, at one stage in the debate, a motion to adjourn the debate (in order to be informed of the LT case) was defeated by 81 votes to 65. This episode in the Party's history revealed a party leadership supporting the Stalin line in the Comintern whilst at the same time starving the membership of information as to the issues in dispute. This practice was again repeated in 1929, this time on the Bukharin expulsion from the CPSU. At a London aggregate meeting held on 12 July 1929, a resolution was passed critical of the CC draft resolution for the Leeds congress. The London membership aggregate declared that the CC draft, 'presupposes that the Party as a whole has a fair knowledge of the inner Party situation of the sections (of the CI). This information the Party has not got and for the Party to understand this statement it must have in its possession more complete information.' (Com. Rev. November 1929)

The cumulative effect of the decisions of the 9th Plenum (Jan 1928), the 6th Congress

of the CI (July 1928) and the 10th Plenum (July 1929) produced in the British Party complete ideological confusion. The 9th plenum pushed the Party to assert itself against the Labour Party on the parliamentary election front, the 6th Congress announced the Third Period, the eve of revolution. The 10th plenum declared that Social Democracy was social fascism and it was now the tasks of the Communist Parties to independently lead the masses. The Leeds Congress met in December 1929 with the Party at its lowest ebb ever, and the membership in ferment. Those comrades who wish to deepen their understanding of the nature of ultra leftism as applied to British conditions, I recommend the study of the British Party history for the years 1929-33. From this inner party struggle of that period emerged the Groves, Sara and Purkiss group which probed deeper for the reasons of the crisis within the CI and the Party. Within a year these comrades were studying the writings of Leon Trotsky which were being published in America. By early 1931 Groves was a correspondent for the American *Militant*, and preparations were under way to renew the fight against the ultra left line of the CI.

The Balham Group and the Communist League

In November 1931 Max Schachtman visited London and at a meeting of Groves, Sara, Purkiss and myself discussed the formation of a Left Opposition group in this country. Schachtman proposed that one of us should 'stand on the altar' for demonstrative expulsion as a declared Trotskyist. This we objected to. We saw our task as that of attempting to win a wider group of party members to challenge the leadership on the fateful line of the CI. From the autumn of 1931, when unemployment reached its peak, we conducted a widespread unemployment agitation in South London. In spite of the 'social fascist' theory and the Party's attitude that the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was the 'left hand of fascism' we initiated discussions within the ILP branches in South London to clarify a policy to meet the crisis.

In the spring of 1932 the CI announced an International Conference against War, not called by organisations but by a manifesto under the name of Henri Barbusse. This substitute for the Leninist united front was forcibly denounced by Leon Trotsky and the International Left Opposition. The Balham Group tackled the task of building a South West London Anti-War Committee on a representative basis. The *Daily Worker* reported the widespread meetings of solidarity with the German workers which were initiated by the SW Anti-War Committee under the chairmanship of Reg Groves. Throughout the early summer of 1932, when the German elections were revealing the threat of fascism in Germany, the Balham group campaigned unremittingly for a united front in Germany and against the line of the Party on the Amsterdam congress of Barbusse. The trade union policy of the Party was criticised and the group demanded the convening of a party conference. A notable success was achieved by the *Daily Worker* publishing in full with bold headlines the resolution passed by the SW London Anti-War Committee *The Militant Mandate for Delegates*. This mandate embodied the salient points of the declaration

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of the International Left Opposition.

Three days later the *Daily Worker* with equally bold headlines carried an article by JR Campbell denouncing the *Militant Mandate* as not being militant but mischievous, and concealing Trotskyist phrases (*DW* 16 Aug 1932). On Monday 15 August the Politbureau announced the calling for October of the 12th Party Congress and the opening of the most democratic pre-conference discussion. Three days later the *Daily Worker* announced the expulsion of Groves, Flower and Wicks for factional activity against the line of the Party. Within a week, Stuart Purkiss and B Williams, two railway militants, were expelled and Henry Sara. At a specially summoned meeting of the Balham Group the remaining members were presented with an ultimatum: repudiate the line of the group or face expulsion. With one exception, all chose expulsion rather than capitulate to the disastrous line of the party leadership. To some of those comrades the Party was their life, but no recidivists were among them.

The Group replied to the expulsion policy with a declaration explaining to the membership the issues that had been fought for, and the problems that faced the Party and CI in the existing situation. It listed the names of the expelled, together with their years of party membership, and ended with the declaration that we would appeal to the now announced 12th Party Congress. Refused the right to appeal to conference, Groves and myself distributed leaflets from outside. Apart from the attempted rough hand we witnessed the unedifying spectacle of Rust, the Political Bureau member, taking from the assembled delegates, even Central Committee members, our published statement before they entered the conference hall.

The Communist League (1933-34)

The voice of the International Left Opposition was by no means muted by our rejection in December 1931 of the Shachtman proposal for a demonstrative exit from the CP. From early 1932 *The Communist* was published, which printed in duplicated form all those writings of Leon Trotsky addressed to the German proletariat before Hitler's conquest of power. Trotsky, in a letter to us at the time, praised 'this excellent duplicated publication'.

On 1 May 1933, the first issue of the monthly paper the *Red Flag* appeared dedicated to the task of regenerating the revolutionary movement. Its first editorial declared:

'We do not, at this stage, seek to form a new Party or a new International, we are a group of revolutionaries who have been expelled from the Communist Party for advocating the policy and principles upon which the Communist International was founded. Our object is to win the Communists back to that policy, and such an object concerns all working men and women, since without a functioning effective Leninist International we cannot hope to overthrow capitalist rule.'

With the publication of the *Red Flag* as the organ of the Communist League, our appeal and the writings of Leon Trotsky reached out to a wider public. Some notable successes were recorded. Two worthy of mention were the *Open Letter to Tom Mann*, and the effective clarification of the implications of the United Communist Party proposal campaigned for by the Revolutionary Policy Committee of the ILP.

For the younger comrades the letter addressed to Tom Mann was on the occasion of the arrest of Chen Tu Hsiu, a founder member of the Chinese Communist Party. The Comintern and its International Labour Defence organisation uttered no protest. The reason for this silence was that Chen Tu Hsiu had written that the Chinese events of 1927-28 had tragically confirmed the analysis of the Russian Opposition. Tom Mann, like our Comrade Sara, was a member of the Comintern delegation to China in 1927. Tom Mann wrote to the *Red Flag*:

'I count it my duty to continue to develop opinion till it shall be equal to demanding and securing the release of our comrade.'

Red Flag, 7 Sept 1933

Following the disaffiliation of the ILP from the Labour Party (1932), the Revolutionary Policy Committee within the ILP was campaigning for a United Communist Party. The basis of this unity was to be the programme of the Communist International. Through the *Red Flag* and active discussion with the ILP militants, the Communist League urged the revolutionary workers in the ILP to fight for their organisation to declare itself openly upon the main political questions of the time. The problem posed by the German debacle, the united front, the question of the situation in the USSR. By our active intervention, the militants in the ILP were inoculated against Stalinism and only a fragment followed J Gaster into the Communist Party.

At the end of 1933, the International Secretariat of the Left Opposition suggested that we should liquidate the organisation and enter the ILP to win them over to the Fourth International. After a thoroughgoing discussion this view was rejected by a substantial majority, thereupon the minority entered the ILP and the status of the Communist League was reduced to that of a sympathising section.

The Marxist League

The immediate aftermath of the German defeat, 'the Communist International's Fourth of August', as Trotsky expressed it, raised the question for all revolutionary Marxists: can the discredited Communist movement be regenerated? Throughout the Left Opposition a vigorous debate proceeded. Trotsky projected on an international scale a new orientation for the movement; the need to build a new International. Experience had convinced us that it was necessary to look beyond the discredited Communist Party for fresh forces. In that situation the *Red Flag* (Oct 1934) stated:

'For the victory of the British workers there is a need for a Marxist leadership; this does not exist today in an organised form within the labour movement, neither is it to be found in the Communist Party of the ILP. A new Party cannot be built by proclamation; a leadership does not spring up over night ... For this reason the CL seeks to unite the advanced workers within the already formed organisations for the winning of the mass of the workers to revolutionary principles and understanding.'

With the aim to return to the grass roots of the movement, and a declaration of principles for which it would struggle, the main force of Trotskyism in this country concentrated its energies in the Labour Party, the trade unions, trades councils and the Labour

League of Youth. The *Red Flag* continued to be published, but now as the organ of the Marxist League. The Popular Front strategy of the Communist Party met within the wider labour movement itself an articulate opponent. In the Socialist League, the Unity Campaign of the ILP, Communist Party and Socialist League, was opposed from a revolutionary Marxist position. The Communist Party's efforts to silence criticism of Soviet foreign policy and the critics of the Moscow Trials through the Unity Committee encountered formidable opposition. This

the Trotskyist Groves was selected in face of Transport House opposition to fight a parliamentary by-election in Aylesbury

episode ended by Cripps succeeding by a narrow majority in liquidating his own organisation. It was in this period that Groves was selected, in face of considerable opposition from Transport House, to fight a parliamentary by-election in Aylesbury. The *Daily Worker* excelled itself in its attack on the Trotskyist Groves as a Labour candidate. In the interest of the Popular Front the Communist Party in this by-election urged the workers to vote Liberal. To the dismay of the CP and the unrecorded views of the Transport House leadership, Groves considerably increased the Labour vote in that constituency. The Moscow Trials of August 1936 were a stern test for our movement. Both the *Red Flag* and *The Fight*, the journal of the Marxist group within the ILP, found difficulty in preserving regular publication. The Communist Party conducted a most slanderous campaign against the Trotskyists within the labour movement.

An effort was made to initiate in this country a broad committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky analogous to that formed in America. Despite the most painstaking efforts to win support for the elementary idea of an inquiry into the Moscow Trials through an international commission set up by the international labour movement, the movement preferred to remain silent on that obscene episode in the history of Stalin's Russia. The appeal for a Provisional Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky was finally published in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Herald* in December 1936. With few exceptions the left intellectuals preferred to remain silent.

Years later I passed to the Revolutionary Communist Party the files of that voluminous correspondence between the Committee of which I was secretary and the 'left' intellectuals of that day. It represented to me a pitiful picture of how even 'great' minds are intimidated by power.

This apparent isolation of the Trotskyist movement on the issue of the Moscow Trials did not deter us from rallying to the defence of Leon Trotsky. Every opportunity was sought out to explain the significance of the Moscow Trials. In the big Communist meetings, against the Campbells, Pritts and Sloan we took the platform. Our own meetings, despite the fused efforts of all the groups, were significantly small. The years from 1936 to 1939 indicated that we were swimming against a strong current. Our movement, it would be true to say, was stagnating.

Culture

LEGENDS OF KING ARTHUR

JOHN ROSS

Fairy tales are among the most significant, influential and important pieces of literature.¹

John Ross examines the legends of King Arthur.

Any story which is told literally millions of times, continues to exist for a long period, and circulates among enormous numbers of people, must touch something very deep in human minds, and express something very significant about a society. This is also the case with myths of other sorts, as well as great works of literature that are read and performed over long periods.²

The legends of King Arthur — most recently retold in last year's John Boorman film *Excalibur* — must have originated some time before the earliest versions to have come down to us, which date from around the year 600 AD. The last major collection of the legends as current literature, as opposed to conscious antiquarianism, was Thomas Malory's version published by Caxton in 1485.

So these stories were repeated and developed over 900 years — significantly more than twice the time which separates us from Shakespeare, and considerably longer than the time since major bourgeois literature began with Dante in 14th century Florence. The legends also had an extensive geographical spread. Versions of the tales, with significant extensions and reworkings, come from Britain, France and Germany. Together with the not dissimilar legends of *Roland* and *El Cid*, they constitute the most widely repeated literature of feudal Europe.

The legends also changed significantly over time, from the earliest versions in which Arthur is simply a battle lord who slaughters large numbers of his enemies, to the elaborate and overtly mystical 13th century French *Lancelot*, the equally mystical but very different 12th and early 13th century German *Parsifal* of Wolfram von Eschenbach or *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg, to the solid, almost 'realist' final version of Malory.³

To study such a universal literature not only tells us a great deal about feudalism. It can also give us insight into many key questions for Marxism, such as the relationship between biological and social elements in human behaviour, into the idea that 'human nature cannot change', into the ways that human relations are lived in different societies, and into how objective social structures are internalised into value systems.

To understand the framework of the Arthurian legends we must consider the society in which it was produced.⁴ Feudalism was above all a militarised society. Land was distributed to lords who had the right to their own armed force — one of feudalism's unique features. Within that system, for almost its whole history, the decisive military weapon was heavy cavalry — the knight. The peasant producers, typically serfs, existed to supply the food and other needs of these forces. As the amount of land a lord possessed determined how many knights he could support, expansion of territory possessed was the key to power, and the aim of war.

Moreover, feudal Europe for most of its history was besieged by the military forces of alien social-economic formations; tribal invasions from the east, Moslem Arabs from the south, Ottoman Turks from the south east. This enhanced the military aspect of feudal society and created shock forces such as the Teutonic knights of eastern Germany, to fight against forces coming from present-day Russia, and those used

in the wars to reconquer Spain from the Arabs. These social features were naturally reflected in its ideology, political theory, and its literature.

The ideological cement of this feudal society was medieval Catholic Christianity. The hierarchical pyramid of the Church reflected that of feudal society. At the top was God, below him the Pope, then the bishops, the lesser and local priests, monasteries and convents, down to the ordinary Christian people. Political and religious orders were explicitly interlinked, the Pope speaking in the name of God, and the twin pillars of Papacy and Holy Roman Empire as the dominating powers of the European feudal order. Reality, needless to say, was more complex, but this was the ideal picture of feudalism⁵ and was that expounded by its philosophers and writers⁶.

Needless to say, any notion of popular sovereignty and democracy was not only absent but inconceivable and downright dangerous. The whole system was a well-ordered hierarchy. The two great personifications of evil in this system, as faithfully portrayed in Dante's *Inferno*, were therefore Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed the Son of God, and Brutus and Cassius, who had rebelled against Caesar.

Finally, and crucially, feudalism knew that it had developed out of a previous system of chaos, in the invasions following the decline of the Roman Empire. It constantly faced external military threats, as well as recurrent internal wars created by its decentralised military structure. The threat of chaos and disorder was therefore ever present and explains the great prominence in its mythology of those figures, and above all the emperor Charlemagne, who had created feudal stability out of the preceding disorder.⁷

From this it is easy to see the first key elements of the Arthurian legends — the pulling of the sword from the stone, the sword Excalibur itself, Arthur's struggle to establish his kingdom, and the Round Table of knights. All the key figures of medieval legend were *knights* — the most admired military element that was the lynchpin of feudal society. Furthermore they were typically engaged in what were seen as the most decisive struggles — those against the non-Christian, and therefore non-feudal, threats to Europe.

Thus Roland, the great vassal and hero of Charlemagne is killed in the struggle against the Arabs in Spain. Similarly El Cid is portrayed as the great knight involved in the reconquest of Spain from the same Arabs. Thus these great hero figures received both secular and religious approval — secular because they were defending Europe against non-feudal threats and religious because they were defending Christianity against the Infidel. Arthur shares similar origins. Historically he was probably a west British local Celtic warlord who defeated the pagan Saxon invaders around the beginning of the sixth century and for a period held off their incursions into England.

From this flows the central feature of the Arthur legend. He is portrayed in the earliest versions chiefly as a successful, bloodthirsty king and knight who smashed the enemies of his kingdom, which is shown as of the feudal type.

As Arthur becomes the symbolic figure of a feudal king so he must have ascribed to him all the virtues that go with the position. He becomes wise, generous to his feudal underlings, and all powerful in battle. This theme is taken up for example by Malory. Faced with the collapse of feudal stability in the civil 'Wars of the Roses' in England in the 15th century, Malory invokes the legend of Arthur as the great symbol of feudal stability — the need for a strong feudal king to restore order and tranquility.

This is also the source of the legend that Arthur will 'come again'. For a society beset with periodic tendencies to disintegration, outrageous and inept monarchs, and epochs of disorder, Arthur is the symbol that the 'good days' of feudalism will be restored. Rather as the 'second coming' of Christ is the hope of Christianity so the myth that Arthur 'is not dead' but will 'come again', which is central in all the developed versions of the legend, represents the hope of restoration of stability of the feudal order.⁸

The knight

From this social structure comes the second great common element of the original Arthur legends and of all similar medieval heroes. Under capitalism great virtues corresponding to its competitive structures are supposed to be such things as 'rising to the top', office boys becoming millionaires, triumphant assertions of individualism, etc. Thus the announcement of capitalism in literature and art is always expressed in great affirmations of individual human power or beauty — for example the hero of such a play as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, a figure such as Michelangelo's David. Such assertions of individualism are not possible in feudalism however. Indeed they are positively dangerous to the social hierarchy and are therefore abhorrent. The great virtue in feudalism is therefore *negation of individualism* and above all *loyalty* to the king, Lord, or Pope. All the great figures of the feudal legends are therefore displayed as quite unprecedentedly loyal and self-abnegating in relation to their own king even where they possess personal pride. In addition to *Roland* and the *Cid*, Hagen in the *Nibelungenlied* is another example of a supremely loyal vassal. We will see the same elements in others of the Arthur legends below. In return for unswerving and uncompromising submission and loyalty, the king in turn is bountiful, generous and merciful.

Out of this system arise not merely the individual features of the Arthurian knights but the entire myth of the Round Table, another common element in all major versions. Arthur is king, although not recognised as such at first, by virtue of all recognised rights of feudalism — by birth, power, and by being chosen of God. These are joined in the great symbol of his power common to all versions, and the inevitable symbol of power in feudalism as the instrument of military might, the sword Excalibur.⁹ He draws this from a stone when no-one else can — the sign of appointment by God. He uses it in the struggle to defeat all those who dispute his claim to the title — thus establishing himself as the most suitable, because greatest, knight and military power to occupy the throne. After this however his military strength, and goodness and wisdom as a king, establishes feudal stability — with freedom from the threat of civil war. These knights are then portrayed as embodiments of different aspects of feudal virtue, including loyalty, in a series of heroic episodes.

The first part of the Arthur myths therefore portray feudalism's perfected image of itself. Out of chaos and disorder a great military king and his knights arise. They conquer external enemies and establish internal peace. Bravery in war, loyalty to the ranks above them, and in return beneficent charity exist. All this is blessed by God. In all a perfected expression of the quintessence of feudalism — so perfect that it would almost be possible to 'decode' the entire nature of the society from these stories without any other knowledge of its structure.

No wonder that they provided such a common language of medieval society, a sort of common framework from which endless variations could be developed. Not through the work of any one single genius, but through repetition literally millions of times, with each retelling and subtracting elements until the final finished forms were arrived at, a society reflected in its legends a perfected image of its own structures. It is one of the most supreme examples of production of an ideology in a cultural form that can be studied.

If they remained at this level of their first nucleus however, the portrayal of perfected feudal society, the Arthur legends

would probably be of little interest to us today except in an historical sense of the study of the society which produced them. But feudalism faced not only external but also *internal* enemies — above all the rise of capitalism. As they developed therefore, the Arthur legends, the critical literary reflection of feudalism itself, became increasingly absorbed with the struggle of feudal society to defend itself against the bourgeois order that was disintegrating it internally. From the early heroic glories of his rise the Arthur legends became increasingly absorbed with his end — the death of Arthur and the collapse of his kingdom. In these the internal representation of how feudalism conceptualised the forces destroying it comes to the fore.

It is around these stories that the second representative set of the Arthur legends are created — not only the famous death of Arthur himself, but the great romances of Tristan and Isolde, Lancelot and Guinevere, and the quest for the Holy Grail (the Parsifal/Galahad legends). These provide not only some of the great love stories of feudalism and capitalism but even, via William Morris and his *The Defence of Guinevere*, pass into a framework of thought which becomes socialist.¹⁰ In order to understand these legends and their significance however we have to go back and look at other features of feudal society which flowed from its basic structure — above all its portrayal of relations between men and women in its upper classes.¹¹ It should be noted that this second cycle of Arthur legends only appears *long after* the original series — at the beginning of the great feudal crisis of the late 12th/early 13th centuries.

Sex, love and marriage in feudal society

In order to illustrate this second series of legends we will briefly outline the features of sexual love under feudalism and capitalism. The need for sexuality is obviously a biological element present in all human society. Any account of historical materialism which ignores that, and believes it is simply 'social' and 'ideological' has to explain why human society has succeeded in surviving for more than about fifty years. The forms in which this need is expressed differ immensely from society to society. The idea that there is one eternal form of human emotion expressed in 'love', leading to one man one wife plus 2.4 children and stable mortgage, can be held only by those bourgeois who have never bothered to study more than about four hundred years of west European civilisation out of the context of nearly one million years of humanity and its entire world-wide society.¹²

The subjective living of these 'sexual' and other emotions, their form and significance, is integrated into, and determined by the general structure of society in complex ways. A very brief, and necessarily incomplete, outline of the portrayal of these emotions and their significance in the feudal ruling classes will illustrate this point. It is also necessary for understanding the second cycle of the Arthur legends.

In their treatment of love, sex and marriage feudal and capitalist society stand in radical opposition to each other. Its precisely *individual* nature means that capitalism exalts as one of its supreme ideals individual 'romantic' human sexual love. This provides a crucial ideological expression of its individualist values (unashamed thirst for money scarcely being a subject to celebrate given its only too clear consequences!) Furthermore this principle of individual sexual romantic love is *unique* to capitalism compared to preceding societies — in slave society women were simply objects, in the most literal sense, for sex and pushed out of all public life. Feudalism had different organising principles of sexual relations which we discuss below.

This value of individual romantic love is therefore advanced as a great *positive* theme by capitalism, one of its 'warm' 'progressive' universal values against the harshness of society, and its most frequently discussed element in literature (something not at all true for example in feudal or tribal society). Although the forms changed and developed with time

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(tending to become more and more unrestrained) sympathy is completely placed in favour of the individuals in love. Furthermore as it develops to its finalised and morally sanctioned form, overcoming the early tendency to unrestrained celebration of sensuality, the perfect expression of love is portrayed as consummation in marriage (prevention of this in various forms constituting a great tragedy, frustration or source of displaced inspiration.). The goal of the bourgeois love form is therefore that one man loves one woman. This is expressed in sexuality and marriage, and these are portrayed as integrated in the expression of the bourgeois principle of individualism.

Feudalism's structure was necessarily totally different in both upper and lower classes — although here we can deal only with the upper. The principle of accumulation of power was possession of the largest possible landed property so as to be able to deploy the maximum possible armed force. Marriage was a crucial instrument in this. By marriage landed estate, even kingdoms, could be joined, and the loyalty of favour of those below or above secured through territory. The last thing that feudal marriage was based on therefore was emotion, or sexual attachment. It was totally irrelevant to the goal of marriage and was treated as such. Not infrequently the man and woman would not even have seen each other before the marriage, 'couples' were married before they were five years old, and grotesque disparities in age were permitted. For example in the famous case of Don Carlos, portrayed in the play of the same name by Schiller which is itself a study of the opposition of feudalism to capitalism, Elizabeth, princess of France, was engaged to the son of King Phillip II of Spain and then due to diplomatic needs was suddenly married to his father instead! Naturally except by pure chance, and therefore extremely infrequently, human emotional, sexual relations were not produced, or needed, in such a situation.

This was reinforced by the whole social system arranged around such marriages. The husband and wife in the richest layers, notably the kings and high nobility, would maintain separate households, not necessarily even geographically in the same place, and meet infrequently — the chief purpose being to ensure the production of heirs. The concepts of 'love' and 'marriage' therefore, far from being integrated as under capitalist value systems, were necessarily totally separated in feudalism.

Naturally this system did not prevent sexual attraction, and all the other elements making up an emotion of 'love'. It simply meant it was quite separate from marriage and had different forms. Therefore in feudal literature, in polar opposite to capitalism, romantic love is always portrayed as *outside*, and incompatible with, marriage. Marriage is made for land, and love necessarily finds its expression elsewhere.

This emotional system produced by the basic feudal structure was furthermore integrated with another element — the idea of 'courtly' (non-sexual and non-married) love. This concept, which occupies a vast range of feudal literature, cannot exist in capitalism but plays a key function for feudal ideology. At its social level a knight would take a woman, normally the wife of a great lord, as his official and openly acknowledged 'inspiration'. This played an evident role as a supplementary (although probably not crucial) ideological current of a great noble tying his vassals to him. Thus for example in the Arthur legends Lancelot, who together with Tristan is portrayed as the greatest of the purely human knights of the Round Table, is both the champion (personal representative in combat) of Arthur and had as his official inspiration Guinevere, the wife of Arthur.

This whole system is of course extremely alien and appears ultra artificial, to present (capitalist) concepts. A feudal knight was integrated into three systems of relations in adulthood with women — marriage (no love and infrequent sex without passion), courtly love (love but no sex and no marriage), sexual relations (no marriage, love being optional). Although it appears strange to present day ideas, this system must not be

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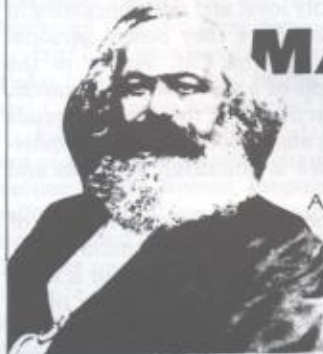
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regarded at all cynically, or conceived of as not involving deep emotions and intense human personal experiences. Ideology is not something superficial and external but experienced, lived and profoundly believed in.¹³ The emotional and ideological systems of feudalism are alien to present ideas but could be, and were, lived with the same depth and intensity as any contemporary one. Furthermore they just as much expressed, and condensed, profound elements of expression of the nature of the social structure as do present bourgeois ones.

From even this brief outline it can be seen how the feudal and bourgeois concepts of individual romantic love contradicted and confronted each other. They therefore were expressions of entire different systems of values and therefore different social structures. The celebration of individual sexual human love could be used as a great banner and expression of the bourgeois order precisely because, together of course with other things, it was totally in contradiction with the feudal order and its system of values.

It is therefore not surprising to find that each period of upsurge of nascent or developing capitalism within feudalism portrays in the forefront the individual principle of human sexual love. The first great announcement of this, although still within a feudal form, comes with the development of the Troubadour movement within the highly developed area of southern France. This is the first recognisable, although not developed, embryonic bourgeois art.¹⁴

Finally as each society enters its period of bourgeois employment within feudalism it announces this in an outburst

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of material glorifying not only the much more concrete portrayal of human beings, and the gigantic 'personalities' typical of bourgeois individualism, but also romantic love as an ideal. Thus for example the work of the first great capitalist author, Dante, is openly inspired and dominated by his love for Beatrice. Elizabethan and early Stuart England sees the open sexuality of the poetry of Donne and the most famous of all bourgeois love stories in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and in Germany the great thunderclap announcing the mass advent of bourgeois literature is Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* in which a young man kills himself for love.

What is glorified for capitalism however is anathema and must be struggled against for feudalism. This latter social system has no place within its structure for individual romantic love consummated in sexuality — it is in contradiction to its entire organising principles. What capitalism portrays as a supreme human relationship must be rooted out by feudalism as an embodiment of the ultimate sin of individualism.

Within this framework we can see the ambiguities and tensions of the feudal concept of courtly love — the key to the later development of the Arthur legend. According to this system the knight was allowed to develop and express the most extreme sentiments of romantic love towards his 'lady'. Accounts of knights dying in combat, undertaking tasks of extreme arduousness and anger for love of their chivalrous female object, are frequent and there is no reason whatever to doubt the intensity of the sentiments — as we said ideology is always internalised and lived with real and not imaginary passion.

Despite the intensity of the emotional relationship permitted, and even required for an effective ideological bond to the lord, actual sexual relations were absolutely excluded. These would have totally disorganised and disrupted the system — as always the goal of the family is to maintain the preservation of property and supply heirs which embody it. Sexual relations (for the women) outside marriage were incompatible with this need and with the stability of feudal values. The system was thus in total contradiction to bourgeois concepts in which the drive of individual romantic sexual love finds its goal and logical culmination in real sexual relations and marriage based on emotion. In the fields of its emotional and sexual relations and values the principles of capitalism and feudalism therefore stand in complete opposition to each other and as bearers of quite different systems of social relations. They can be, and therefore are used to express, the conflicts of the entire value systems of society.

Lancelot and Guinevere

Within this framework the nature of the core elements of the second cycle of Arthur legends can be understood. Its key episode is the love and sexual relation of Lancelot and Arthur's wife Guinevere. This is the nucleus around which all the other episodes are organised and which precipitates the downfall of Arthur's kingdom and his own end.

In order to understand the significance of this romance it is necessary to grasp that Lancelot and Tristan, who is the bearer of a parallel myth, are portrayed as the greatest embodiments of feudal virtue. Thus for example in his version Malory has Merlin prophesy the prospect of 'the greatest battle betwixt two knights that ever was or ever shall be... And there Merlin wrote their names upon the tomb with letters of gold that should fight in that place, whose names were Launcelot de Lake, and Tristram.' Furthermore Lancelot's, which is the core legend, is at the centre of the entire feudal system in his portrayed position. He is the greatest knight, the appointed champion of his King Arthur, and his lady is Guinevere, the wife of the king. In the relations Arthur-Lancelot-Guinevere is therefore portrayed the core elements of feudal society. Lancelot's and Guinevere's love breaking out of the bounds of purely chivalrous love, and taking a physical sexual form, breaks the order of the Round Table, unleashes civil war, and culminates in the death of Arthur and the destruction of his kingdom.

The symbolic nature of this history, the counterpositions of

feudal and individualist forms of love, first makes its appearance in the 11th century — the earliest surviving version being that of Chretien de Troyes in his *Lancelot*. From this point on it is developed at enormous length in the Arthur legends — in the final versions, such as the French prose *Lancelot*, enormously surpassing in length the original stories of Arthur himself. Parallel with this development, and necessarily so, the struggle of feudalism to defend itself, and to maintain its values against the totally different value system represented by the relation of Lancelot and Guinevere becomes more and more extremely expressed. By the time of the French prose *Lancelot* of the 13th century, it becomes completely tedious from a purely literary point of view. Virtually every five pages in the *Queste del Saint Grale* some ascetic hermit or other pops up to explain at extreme length, and with extreme violence, the virtues of chastity, and the need to reject sexuality

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in all forms.

This story of the decline of the feudal virtues in Lancelot and Guinevere (the 'negative' version) therefore also begets its inverse (the 'positive' one) in the search for the Holy Grail — the cup from which Christ drank at the last supper. This incorporates the supreme affirmed virtues of feudalism in loyalty, honour, and service to God in an even stronger form than the original Arthur legends. Not surprisingly therefore, the price for achieving this quest is the renunciation of sexuality (the capitalist principle and virtue) and the essential requirement for the knight who achieves this supreme task of feudalism is therefore chastity. Indeed, where the early histories of this legend, for example Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parsifal*, show a figure of considerable psychological interest, the final versions, where the hero becomes Sir Galahad, portray a figure of such sublime purity and inhuman character that he appears tedious even for the authors who in fact simply leave him out of most of the story.

This conflict also explains why in the successive versions of the legends interest is increasingly displaced from Arthur himself, or Galahad, on to the knights — and in particular Lancelot and Tristan. Arthur himself is a relatively static symbol (of feudal perfection), as is Galahad (of Christian purity). Lancelot and Tristan however, wracked by the contradictions of different social and emotional principles and systems, undergo immense developments and are of enormous psychological interest. It is also for the same reason that Morris could choose as his early poem collection title 'The Defence of Guinevere' — a defence of the principle of human emotion and love against the austere features and rules of feudalism and also in his interpretation of capitalism.

Finally, we can clearly see why it is precisely the love of Guinevere and Lancelot, a theme introduced only in the second phase of development of the Arthur legends, that provides the key link in feudalism's vision of its own destruction. The perfect feudal kingdom is overthrown not by external destruction but by the development of forces internally dissolving its principles — the principles of individualism and its supreme manifestation in individual human love. It is this which creates the great cataclysm of La Morte d'Arthur (The Death of Arthur). The supremely powerful feudal order, impervious to external attack, is destroyed by forces developing in its own very core.

No wonder the frenzy of the hermits preaching the need for chastity to maintain the ordered hierarchy and values of feudalism in a final effort to hold off the dissolving order! No story for children this, but a social order's vision of its own destruction.

It can therefore be seen how the Arthur legends, starting with the most primitive versions of stories, are built to organise around the key common elements of their legends the entire history of a society. Not merely its birth and flowering but also its end — and finally of course the pathetic hope that it will one day 'rise again' in Arthur himself. Little wonder these stories could dominate literature for 900 years and give rise to an endless variety of development, ornamentation and extension.

In conclusion

In the space available here we have only been able to touch on a tiny part of the wealth of the Arthur stories — some of those that reflect essentially specific elements of feudalism itself and its contrast to our present values in capitalism. There are, as with all great works of art, innumerable more layers than this however. For example while distinctly different to our present family the feudal order precisely did have as one of its constitutive elements a *family*. Therefore a whole series of other elements of the legends are concerned with this — stories and themes that are common to all class society and some of which are explored in Freudian psycho-analysis, and the 'Oedipal complex'. Thus a whole series of the heroes — Arthur himself, Lancelot, Tristan — are precisely without fathers and from this

derives their supreme fearlessness and power. A whole series of other themes derive from the conflict in all society to the present between the social duty and emotional needs of the figures and individuals in it — a theme beautifully dealt with by Boorman in his film in Guinevere's parting words to Arthur: 'I loved you always as King and sometimes as husband' — and the great inner struggle of Lancelot between his honour as a knight and his love for Guinevere. But to explore these themes would take another long article of its own.

One thing however we hope to convey here. Next time you see a representation of Arthur and his knights on the television, see a film on them, or pick up a book pay a little more respect and perhaps interest. These are no silly stories of 'knights in armour'. They are one of the great creations of world culture. A literature in its own way every much as deep, even if very different, to anything produced by our own age. In the story of the boy who pulled the sword from the stone is the birth, life and death of a whole society and the immense human passion and struggle that went with it. No wonder those legends lived for so long and still exercise a fascination, even if harder to understand today: a story of infinite fascination for Marxists.

JOHN ROSS is a leading member of the Fourth International, currently working on a book on the Tory Party for Pluto Press.

1 See Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment — The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Penguin Books, London, 1979.

2 For an extremely interesting and classic study of myths see Abraham; *Dreams and Myths*, Maresfield Reprints, London, 1979.

3 For an account of the origins of the Arthur legends see for example Cavendish; *King Arthur and the Grail*, Paladin, London, 1980.

4 The classic analysis of feudalism is Bloch; *Feudal Society*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1978. For a recent theoretical study see Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism and Lineages of the Absolutist State*, New Left Books, London, 1974.

5 See for example Barber; *The Knight and Chivalry*, Cardinal, London, 1974.

6 See for example Ullmand; *Medieval Political Thought*, Penguin, London, 1970.

7 Thus Engels notes in the *Chanson de Roland* the portrayal of, 'the unity of France, represented in the person of Charlemagne, an imaginary, ideal feudal monarchy, is celebrated in this *chanson*.' Marx and Engels; *On Literature and Art*, Progress publishers, Moscow, 1976, p231.

8 In the words ascribed to his tomb 'Rex quondam Rexque futurus' — the 'once and future king'. It is a theme incidentally given an interesting twist later under capitalism when it becomes distorted to that Arthur will come again when Britain has need of him. Here however a profound piece of feudal mythology has been transformed into a vulgar chauvinist piece of idiocy.

9 This point incidentally is rather worth making against the sillier types of so-called Freudian interpretations. Evidently a sword is a phallic symbol but have you ever tried waging a medieval war with a short, round, unpointed sword? Far more important in certain key symbols is their social nature and function — which does not of course prevent them being combined with various other psychological symbolisms.

10 This relation between conscious medievalism and early socialism is of course brilliantly explored in EP Thompson's entire *William Morris*, Merlin, London, 1976.

11 The 'lower orders' needless to say do not enter into the story in the legends of feudalism. However sex, love and marriage were equally experienced very differently among the rest of the population in feudalism than in capitalism. See for a survey of this M Anderson; *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914*, MacMillan, London, 1980.

12 This is of course a key point explored correctly by Kollontai and others. Unfortunately her best writings on this are not available in English but see Kollontai; *Conferences sur la Liberation des Femmes*, La Breche, Paris, 1979.

13 Anyone who does not understand that should firstly consider the depth of their own emotions in purely bourgeois concepts of 'love', and consider not how merely the working class but tens of thousands of sons of the *bourgeoisie* advanced armed with pathetic weapons to 'die for their country' in a conflict such as the First World War.

14 It is furthermore no accident that the French name for the perfected bourgeois literary form the novel ('roman'), derives from the same root as 'romantic' and begins to develop out of the sexualisation of the stories of feudalism during the 12th century.

AGAINST 'SOCIALIST' FAMILISM

Margaret Coulson

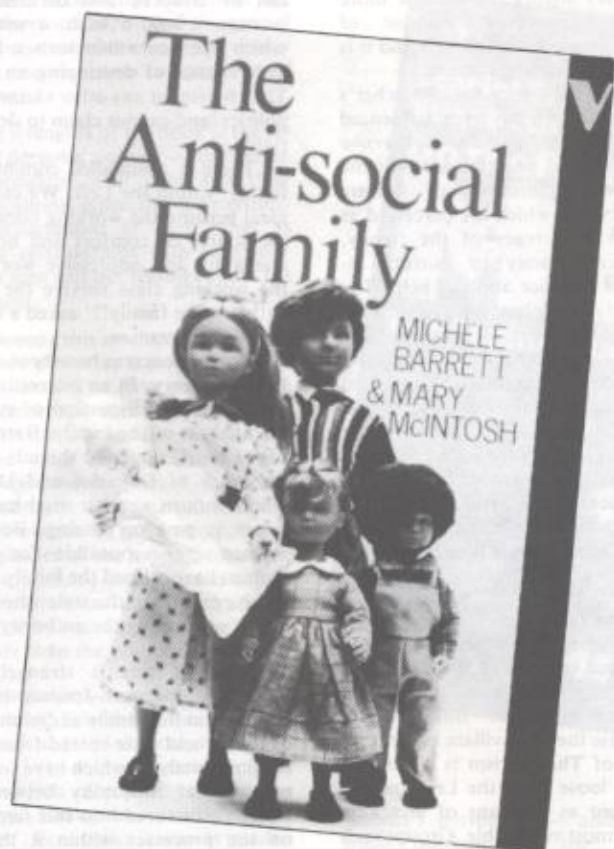
Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh: *The Anti-Social Family*, Verso/NLB, 1982, £3.95.

The idealised picture of the family composed of responsible breadwinner, caring housewife and (two) bright and happy dependant children, living together, in sickness and in health, in their own neat home, smiles out at us from the advertisements. Politicians — Tory, SDP, Labour — smile back. Houses are built for this family, social policies constructed around it. Trade unions have struggled for a family wage for it. Churches bless it. It is the foundation of 'western civilisation', the most precious institution of the ideal society.

Yet most of the time people in this society do not and cannot live within such relationships within a nuclear household. According to one recent estimate, out of the whole economically active population only five per cent are married men with a dependant wife and two dependant children. Dependant children grow up, married women move into paid employment, divorce and death break up households, there is a growth in households of single people and of single adults living with one or more children. In addition this ideal family is white. It denies the existence of family ideals and relationships which do not take their inspiration from white western christian 'civilisation'. White racism both ignores the diversity of family and household patterns in black communities and attacks black people in the context of their family relationships as in their work places and communities; this produces a particularly oppressive, complex and contradictory dynamic around black families. The heterosexist structure of this family ideal makes lesbians and gay men invisible, except perhaps as sexual deviants and social isolates.

The ideology of this 'normal family' may not be powerful enough to force us all into its household form but it is powerful enough to invalidate and marginalise alternative ways of living and relating. We have to understand the considerable appeal of this often unattainable (or unattainable) nuclear ideal in relation to the immensely privileged position which it commands. The ideology of familism pervades this society and engages commitment at all social levels. It is embraced by the labour movement and extends far into the Left. Feminist critiques of the family as the site of women's oppression have sometimes produced embarrassment on the Left at the extent to which this ideology has been swallowed; but little more than this. Any attempts to reclaim the slogan from Marx and Engels 'abolish the family' is dismissed as ultra-left, adventurist, utopian. Nor is there one agreed feminist position on how to confront 'the family'. Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh 'believe that in the long term socialists and feminists must develop a political consensus on the family and that the pre-condition for this is more open debate on where we stand'. (p7)

Is this just a plea for more academic discussion? I think not. Ultimately the development of any constructive relationship



between socialism and feminism must depend on developing a clearer critical politics on 'the family'. More immediately a revolutionary politics of the family is needed as part of a critique of Thatcherism in Britain. While the rise of right-wing Toryism and the emergence of the SDP have appeared to indicate both a fragmentation and a polarisation within British bourgeois politics, an underbelly of political consensus has been preserved. 'The nation' and 'the family', patriotism and familism, are vital to the popular appeal of the Right.

Thatcherism and 'the family'

As Barrett and McIntosh point out, the growth of the new Right in the USA, in particular the moral majority, has involved clear, direct and vicious attacks on gains which the women's and gay movements had made since the sixties. In Britain there has been a more diffused and covert process of turning against, undermining or simply ignoring issues of women's rights. An explicitly pro-family commitment is only now emerging as a central part of the rhetoric of Thatcherism. But it is important to examine Thatcher's increasingly articulate attachment to familism. In doing this we have to take account of the horrible contradiction of Thatcher herself as a woman prime minister, for this has given a quite peculiar edge to her moral-political mission and to responses to it.

It is because she is a woman that Thatcher's frequent use of the family/nation analogue both emphasises her authority and strengthens the common sense appeal of her argument. With the nation's budget as with

the family's 'we all know' the importance of living within our means; we cannot abandon the medicine (high unemployment for example) just because it is bitter, it must be taken until the sickness is cured. (Never mind if families do live on credit, if machines kill as well as cure — the common sense may not be very profound).

In presenting herself as a *woman* prime minister Thatcher has always defended traditional maternal and wifely responsibility. So she has shown us that a woman with ability can climb to the top of the public world and that she has achieved her position without neglecting her duties as wife and mother in her family. The theme of maternal and parental responsibility has been well used; where these are properly developed the family is its own welfare state, where they are not problems erupt which disturb the entire society. At the time of the urban uprisings last summer in Brixton, Toxteth and Moss Side, Thatcher and Whitelaw were repeatedly pushing the blame towards the failure of parental responsibility — these youth had not been properly disciplined, were not being adequately supervised.

Although Patrick Jenkin has explicitly preached that a woman's place is in the home, the attacks on women's rights to paid employment have mostly been more indirect and insidious. Thus the DHSS redefinition of 'availability for work' which penalises women with children, the attacks on the sectors of higher education in which women are mostly found, the taken for granted sexism of TOPS and MSC courses, the contraction in areas of traditionally female employment, the tighten-

Reviews

ing of regulations around maternity leave, the reductions in welfare state services. Together these raise the hurdles which women must get over in order to get back into paid employment; this is very significant because more women leave employment because of pregnancy than through redundancy and it is being made more difficult to return.

The growing coherence of Thatcher's family policy has apparently been influenced by Ferdinand Mount's book *The Subversive Family*. This confirms one rationale for the reduction and reorganisation of welfare benefits and services, which are perceived as intrusions into the privacy of the family, undermining its capacity to nurture individualism, self sacrifice and self help. The idea of the family as a refuge both against the bureaucratic state and against working class collectivism is important in conservative ideology. ('A vote for Scargill is a vote against your family' proclaimed the *Daily Express* on 27 October.) Yet these ideas have a wider resonance in that the welfare state has set up bureaucratic and oppressive structures, and there are divisions within the family, particularly the family of breadwinner and dependants which the Left has been reluctant to recognise.

The Left and 'the family'

'Like society in general the contemporary left is familiarised and sections of it are familist' (p40). The Left is in a weak position to challenge Thatcherism on this ground. Moreover because the chief villain in the reactionary drama of Thatcherism is a woman, misogyny is let loose from the Left and the labour movement as a means of attacking Thatcher at her most vulnerable. Groups such as Women's Fightback have challenged this within the Left but this reactionary con-

sciousness is resistant to change. In October posters depicting Thatcher on a broomstick ask us to 'Defend Militant, Burn the Witch'. Clearly within a misogynist culture Thatcher can be attacked and derided for being a woman: a hag, a bitch, a witch but a Left which operates within such a framework has little chance of developing an alternative to Thatcherism or any other variant of bourgeois politics and cannot claim to defend women's rights.

There is a muddled commitment to 'the family' within the Left. We can't attack this ideal because the working class needs it; it is the source of comfort and humanity in an alienating and oppressive world. 'How will the working class survive the present crisis without 'the family'?' asked a recent letter to the *New Statesman*.

Similar concerns have been reflected at the level of theory. In an interesting and not entirely negative discussion of recent work on the analysis of the family, Barrett and McIntosh identify common threads in the influential work of Donzelot and Lasch, both of whom mourn a rather mythical family form which is past or passing. Both imply that women are responsible for this process; women have opened the family door to the intrusive experts of the state who violate family privacy, usurping the authority of the father.

Some of this is strangely similar to Mount's thesis. Anti-feminist interpretations of trends in the family and in the relationship of family and state spread from right to left. Feminist analyses which have focussed on the relations of inequality between men and women structured into this family form and on the processes within it through which masculine and feminine identity are established are rejected or ignored.

Do we need 'the family'? What do we need?

Drawing their main inspiration from feminist analysis and debate Barrett and McIntosh argue that 'the family' is anti-social. The family gains at the expense of the collective and at the expense of the majority who live, at any one time, outside its idealised nuclear household form. 'Caring, sharing and loving would be more widespread if the family did not claim them for its own.' (p.80) It could also be argued that the taken for granted view of the family as the basic unit of society blocks our political understanding of what capitalism does to children, to women, to men; it blocks political understanding of racism, of sexism and of class.

But the idea of the anti-social family is not likely to have great appeal within the labour movement or even on the Left. Throughout society there is popular support for the family. Although alternatives may be minimal people do make choices for marriage, for nuclear households, for children. Personal relationships, identity and achievement are measured against its ideals; law, social policy consumption are organised around it; other ways of living and relating are difficult to establish and overwhelmingly evaluated as poor substitutes. Is the family — social or anti-social — unavoidable and inevitable? Is it possible to open up a socialist debate on this issue that does not just become a tug of war between feminists and socialists?

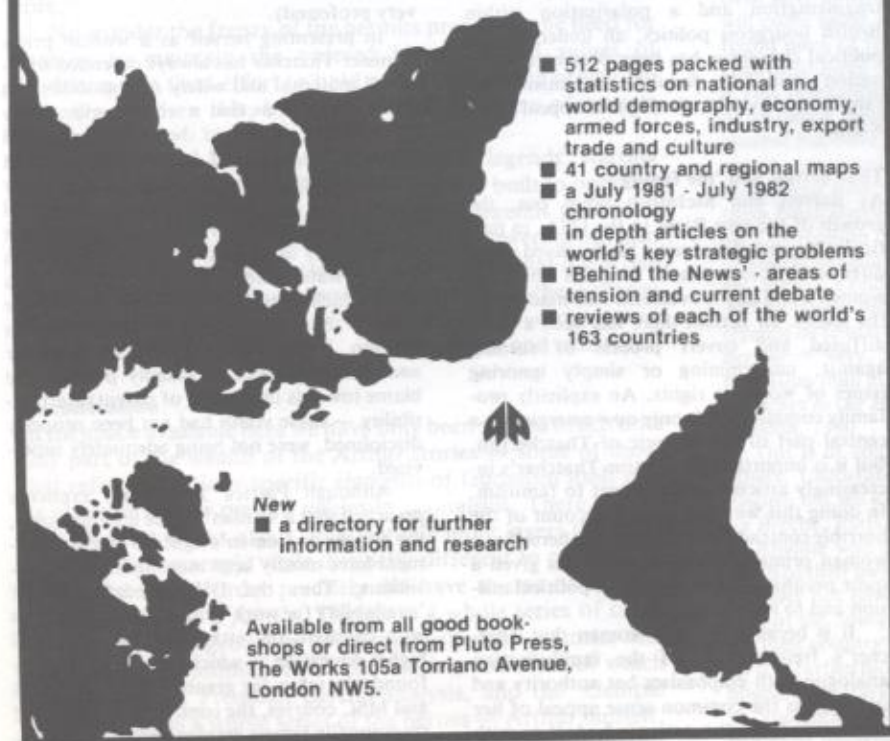
Although its commitments are clear, *The Anti-Social Family* does offer the possibility of discussion which goes beyond this sort of deadlock. It does this by trying to disentangle the various relationships, experiences, identifications, assumptions, hopes and fears which are knotted together in the mythologised ideal family of capitalism. In addition it tries to identify the principles which might inform a socialist strategy in relation to personal life. The two-fold principles suggested by Barrett and McIntosh are: '(1) we should work for immediate changes that will increase the possibility of choice so that alternatives to the existing favoured patterns of family life become realistically available and desirable; (2) we should work towards collectivism and away from individualism in the areas now allocated to the sphere of the private family, especially income maintenance, the work of making meals, cleaning and housekeeping, and the work of caring for people such as children, the old and the sick or disabled.' (p.134)

Thus a framework is proposed within which the family can be analysed and within which practical and specific issues can be examined. For example: Should socialists and feminists make a political decision against marriage because marriage is an oppressive state institution? What is involved in abandoning the concept of the family wage? Or in demanding 'disaggregation' in relation to social security? It is important that these questions are taken up more widely and seriously within the Left. Clearly the anti-social family cannot be transformed or transcended in isolation. Personal life can only become more social in relation to changes in all structures of society. But while recognising this we cannot pull conservatively around bourgeois ideals at the level of personal life and expect to build a movement capable of challenging the capitalist economy and its state system.

Margaret Coulson has been active in women's liberation for many years.

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THE PROBLEM OF MEN

Judy Watson

Scarlet Friedman & Elizabeth Sarah (eds): *On the Problem of Men*, The Women's Press, 1982, £4.95

On the Problem of Men brings together papers from two feminist conferences both organised by the Women's Research & Resources Centre: the first 'Heterosexuality, Couples and Parenthood' in 1979 and the second 'The Women's Liberation Movement & Men' in 1980. Parts are very passé and certainly many feminists reading the book will find sections to yawn at. But at the same time certain essays, or lines within essays, come across as a breath of fresh air — memories of the stimulation and exhilaration of discussing new ideas for the first time. Hopes for change.

Underlying both conferences was a steady stream of radical feminism with only a smattering of socialist feminist analysis. Perhaps this reflected where feminists were 'at' during this period. While some were becoming involved in campaigns — anti-Corrie was big at the time — others continued to try to come to terms with the problems that had been thrown up in the previous decade of interaction between socialist feminism and revolutionary feminism.

One of these problems was MEN. And obviously revolutionary and radical feminists, as they were grappling with theories of patriarchy, were the ones making the running at these conferences. Socialist feminists, especially those from revolutionary socialist organisations, were few and far between and this is reflected in the essays.

The two conferences deal with different aspects of the 'problem'. The first tackles the institutions of marriage, heterosexuality, coupledom and the family and the role of men and patriarchy therein. The second focuses on feminist forms of organisation, on the importance of autonomy, and fundamentally on our relationships personally and politically with men.

Two conferences — two aspects. The problem of men for women, as individuals, and the problem of men for women, as a movement.

In the first half of the book, analyses of rape, marital violence, sexual abuse of children and pornography take us back to the embryonic ideas of revolutionary feminists which have developed over the last three years especially within Women Against Violence Against Women action groups. Likewise, sexuality (in its gendered formation and its control by science), motherhood and fatherhood are all explored. One essay which leapt out of the book at me — in fond memory of a long lost topic — and one of the few within a socialist feminist framework considers the politics of monogamy: 'Monogamy by its very rules, produces and enacts sets of priorities that connote the power and control which capitalist relations demand.' Privatisation, individualism, mysticism, competition, non-collectivity ... the essay explains how as

socialists we need to challenge more than just the state: 'The personal is political since social relations comprise roles which are not simply imposed by a coercive state or some eternal male triumvirate.'

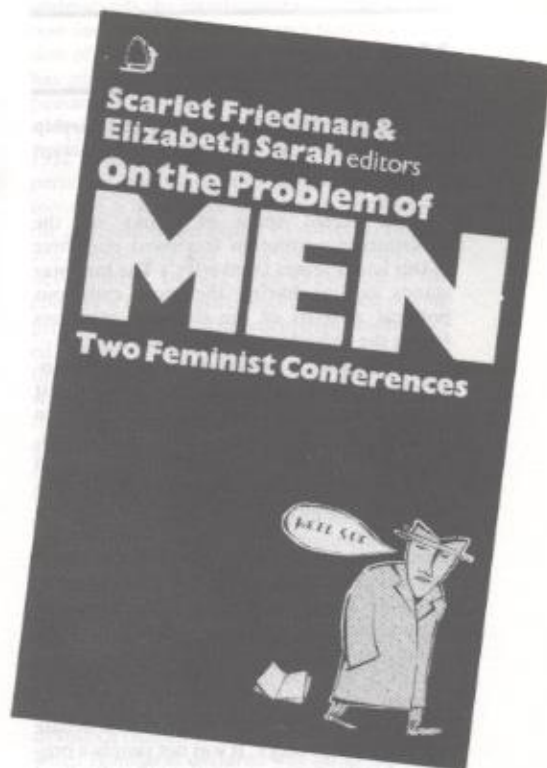
One of the strengths of the book is the re-emergence of *personal politics* — discussion of our relationships with men and their political implications, especially in heterosexuality; our expectations of each other as feminists; our relationships with sons; our work with gay men and our feelings about the men's movement.

However among this myriad of essays, the concept of male power as a force in and of itself predominates. The first essay in each part sets the tone and acts as a theoretical framework for the discussions that follow: both refute a class analysis of women's oppression, rejecting the 'belief that class oppression was more fundamental than the domination of women by men' and pointing to the 'inadequacies of the marxist economic reductionist approach', inadequacies which 'have led many feminists to seek the cause of male domination of women in some determining factor other than the economic system.'

In 'Heterosexuality, Couples and Parenthood' by Scarlet Friedman, three sets of theories are looked at: biological, functional and marxist. The author concludes that women's oppression cannot be explained by either 'biology, economics, psychology or sexuality *per se*'. Economics is seen as insufficient when 'men (are) creating and perpetuating their position ... (knowingly or unknowingly, but benefiting all the same)'. In this first essay Friedman raises some interesting insights into marxist analyses: 'The sexual division of labour is the first form of the division of labour ... Sexual division and exploitation can thus be seen to be at the root of marxist theory.' However along with most of the authors she fails to explain *why* men took power and frustratingly leaves the reader with a set of open-ended questions (which were obviously of more use in the conference!).

Likewise in 'Female performers on a male stage' Elizabeth Sarah, exploring the first women's movement (1890-1930), concludes that male power and the lack of women's autonomy were the reasons for its failure. This analysis completely counterposes a patriarchal analysis to a class one — seemingly if only women had recognised and fought for autonomy, all would have been well: an alternative to the 'line' that blames the movement's failure on not making links with the labour movement and uniting in their 'class' interests. Both explanations seem embarrassingly simplistic and inadequate — a feeling which re-emerges when reading 'Male feminists and divided women'. According to Diana Leonard: 'We do know that gender cuts across race and class.'

Agreed! But we also know that class cuts across gender and race (just think of Mrs Thatcher and Mrs Gandhi) and (even!) that race cuts across gender and class (think of all the black women who are alienated by and critical of the insensitivity of the 'white'



women's movement — and likewise black trade unionists of the 'white' labour movement). While reading most of these essays I longed for a more rounded approach that explained how to challenge *patriarchal, racist, class society* and didn't simply collapse all into one.

None of the essays explained *why* our society is 'run by men' and where 'male power' sprung from. I kept hoping for an insight into the *material* reasons for male power and obviously radical feminist frameworks (often refuting marxist materialism) wouldn't provide that! But I felt disappointed in analyses that kept coming back to male power as an inexplicable force that existed *per se*. It seemed that human megalomania was innate and men were the ones who got to harness it as they had the physical strength and women were incapacitated by child-bearing and rearing.

I kept wanting expansions on the ideas and more explanations — but there again, collections of conference papers are not intended to be definitive statements. The book is useful to make one explore radical feminist analysis and understand why so many women these days (socialists included) agree with Amanda Sebestyn when she says: 'I want men to stop being men any more.' But if you want ideas on *why* confronting male supremacy is crucial for socialists too and suggestions on what to do you are better advised to read Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today* or the essays in Lydia Sargent's collection *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*.

Judy Watson is women's officer in Camden Council responsible for campaigns, and an activist in the women's liberation movement.

Reviews

REVOLUTION IN EL SALVADOR

Megan Martin

James Dunkerley: *The long war; dictatorship and revolution in El Salvador*, Junction Books, 1982. £5.95

Of the recent spate of books on the Salvadorean revolution (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) James Dunkerley's *The long war* stands out as having the most conscious political analysis of the strategic questions facing the Salvadorean revolution.

The Fourth International is at present involved in a discussion of the new non-Stalinist revolutionary leaderships that are emerging in Central America and the Caribbean. Dunkerley's book assists this discussion in that it provides a valuable account of this process in El Salvador. He explains that the contemporary Salvadorean revolutionary organisations had their origins in the severe internal crisis faced by both the Salvadorean Christian Democratic Party (PDC) and the Salvadorean Communist Party (PCS) at the end of the 1960s. He explains that the crisis in the PCS was the most severe and of the greatest consequence for the Left since it was extended and was expressed through a debate over Leninist strategy. It was not simply a process whereby a new generation of radicalised youth took the path of armed struggle out of frustration and voluntarism.

The central strategic question was the question of armed struggle but the framework of the debate was the character of the revolution in El Salvador: a stagist conception of the revolution (first the bourgeois-democratic revolution and then the socialist revolution) versus a conception of permanent revolution (whereby the bourgeois-democratic revolution grows over into the socialist revolution in an uninterrupted process). Dunkerley outlines the electoralist strategy of the PCS, its bourgeois-democratic path, and he charts the development of the opposition within the party to this path.

The opposition characterised El Salvador as a dependent capitalist country. They rejected the PCS thesis that El Salvador was semi-feudal and that a national bourgeoisie existed that could still play a revolutionary role in the establishment of a bourgeois-democratic regime that would allow the rapid development of capitalism by the national bourgeoisie and with this the development of the working class as the stage before the initiation of the revolutionary struggle towards socialism.

The opposition analysed the character of the revolution in El Salvador as one in which the 'people's revolution accomplishes anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist tasks throughout its development' and that this revolution would be 'travelling towards socialism in its development'. It said that this revolution could only be led by the working class and that there was not a 'national' bourgeoisie because the Salvadorean bourgeoisie was not independent of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

The rebellion against the party's line came early in 1970, sparked off by the party's support for the war with Honduras, when the op-

position (led by the party's general secretary, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, a veteran trade union leader) split to form the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación — Farabundo Martí* (FPL). The formation of the FPL was the most important landmark in the development of the Salvadorean left and it remains today the most influential force within the revolutionary opposition.

The FPL's programme was significant in its rejection of the Stalinist policies of class collaboration as practised by the Latin

return to the masses. Their strategy stood in stark contrast to the strategy of *foquismo*.

There are four other revolutionary organisations in El Salvador and Dunkerley gives an account of the strategic orientation of these groups too, albeit a less detailed one. But even more important, he explains how the guerilla groups, two of whom consciously saw themselves as a party in embryo, made the transition from being an extreme form of vanguard to mass organisations. This is very important. From the standpoint of Europe it



American Communist Parties. But at the same time the FPL also rejected the tenets of *foquismo*, the other school of thought about revolutionary strategy in Latin America.

Foquismo had acquired enormous popularity amongst the Latin America left in the 1960s largely as a result of its identification with the victory in Cuba. Its central tenet was that the insertion of a small nucleus (*foco*) of revolutionary fighters in the countryside would act as a spark for mass peasant rebellion. The experience of the campaign would proletarianise the revolutionary vanguard and the peasantry, with the guerillas acting as a substitute for the Leninist party.

The FPL drew a balance sheet of the experience of the *foci* in Guatemala and other Latin American countries and of US intervention and concluded that it was up against not only its own bourgeoisie but also US imperialism. As Dunkerley explains, the FPL studied the experience of Vietnam and derived from this the strategic lesson that the people's war was of necessity extended and had to derive from a

is all too easy for armchair observers of the revolution to explain this transition by reference to the hot climate, the Latin temper and the excessively rotten nature of the local bourgeoisies. Dunkerley explains that the Salvadorean revolutionaries resolved this problem by developing, ironically, the method used by the PCS to circumvent its illegality: a mass front or 'popular organisation' linked through the programme to the politico-military vanguard but dedicated to popular organisation rather than guerilla activity.

From an account of the rise of the Left Dunkerley moves to an account of its unification, including the continuing struggle within the revolutionary forces over the clarification of the line of march of the revolution and the formation of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR).

The FDR brought together all the opposition forces in El Salvador, the revolutionary organisations and the reformist ones, including the small Salvadorean Social-Democratic party and the Popular Social

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Christian Movement, a split from the Christian Democrats. Dunkerley's assessment of the FDR is contradictory. On the one hand he argues that the platform of the FDR was 'as accessible to a "democratic" reading as it was to a "revolutionary" interpretation' and points out that the first head of the FDR was Enrique Alvarez Cordoba, a member of one of the oligarchic families and ex-Minister of Agriculture in the October 1979 junta. He all but characterises the FDR as a popular front. But at the same time he acknowledges that the political authority within the FDR lies with the FMLN, the unified guerrilla organisation.

He warns against the project of European social democracy which, while opposed to the interventionist project of US imperialism, re-

mistake this point of convergence, and agreements at a military level with the bourgeois forces in the FDR, for the existence of a common strategy for the revolution as a whole.

Dunkerley begins this book with a prediction that soon the social and political conflicts in Central America will go beyond the colonial boundaries established in 1841 when the short-lived experiment of a Federal Central American Republic collapsed. The conscious revolutionary strategies being pursued by the new leaderships in Central America will be the basis of a new socialist federation of Central American republics. The unresolved factor is our ability to mobilise a massive anti-intervention campaign.

& Murdo Ritchie

Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk: *El Salvador: the face of revolution*, Pluto Press, 1982, £3.95; Liisa North: *Bitter grounds; roots of revolt in El Salvador*, Zed Press, 1982, £4.95; *El Salvador; background to the crisis*, Central America Information Office, 1982, £2.95; Cynthia Arnsen: *El Salvador; a revolution confronts the United States*, Institute for Policy Studies/Transnational Institute, 1982, £3.95.

The large number of books that have recently appeared about El Salvador reflects the suddenness of interest in this tiny country which many people had never even heard about until the assassination of Archbishop Romero in 1980. It is this small country that is now presenting the biggest challenge to US foreign policy of any country in the world.

The current crop of books is a mixed bag. There is not among them any 'definitive' book which describes adequately the history, politics, economy and the struggle of the people of El Salvador. But they can be used to complement each other in various ways.

El Salvador: the face of revolution is written by two staff writers for the North American Congress on Latin America who have been involved in research on El Salvador for many years. They rattle off facts in a machine-gun fashion and combine this with an analysis of every important point in the country's development. They deal with the history of the country from the destruction of the communal lands to the growth of the coffee oligarchs. They give an account of the collapse of the coffee markets in the early thirties which paved the way for the insurrection of 1932, the genocidal 'matanza' which followed and the beginning of half a century of military rule.

But the book excels in its coverage of contemporary events, particularly its description of the mass organisations which make up the FDR/FMLN; the development of the 'death squads' and their links with the armed forces and the government; and the succession of electoral frauds. The book has a vividness which comes from Armstrong and Shenk's use of first-hand material from the participants in the Salvadorean struggle, including a passage where Salvador Cayetano Carpio of the Popular Liberation Forces explains his view on the strategy of guerrilla warfare.

Bitter grounds, in contrast, touches only very lightly and not very well on modern developments. It concentrates on the earlier

history of El Salvador and the Central American region which has shaped the present crisis. More than any of the other books it understands the significance of the land question and the crucial importance that the expulsion of the peasants from the communal lands has played in the political formation of the peasantry.

The chapter on the peasant rebellion of 1932 paints a clear picture of what imperialism means for the economic development of a dependent country. It shows how the cultivation and export of coffee strangled any possibility of worthwhile industrial development. In 1932 some 95 per cent of the country's total exports was composed of one product — coffee. The world depression forced the price of coffee to an all-time low putting thousands out of work and reducing the wages of others. The resulting crisis meant that the only possible capitalist mode of government in El Salvador was a military regime which held power by the use of the most unbridled savagery.

Bitter grounds also contains the most detailed information on the industrialisation of El Salvador. It explains that while industrialisation began in the mid-forties it really took off only through the development of the Central American Common Market, Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, and foreign investment in the mid-sixties. Arising out of the discussion on the industrialisation North also devotes a chapter to the 'football war' of 1969 when Honduras declared war on El Salvador ostensibly over El Salvador's success in qualifying for the World Cup. It is here that the central weakness of North's book, the absence of a coherent political framework, becomes most obvious. She downplays the significance of El Salvador's dominance in the Central American Common Market as the most important factor in leading to the conflict.

El Salvador: background to the crisis has been written by a committee. It has all the attendant disadvantages and advantages. The transition in the book from chapter to chapter, author to author, is clumsy, the book lacks continuity and the individual chapters vary in quality. But some chapters are excellent. Those on the Indians, women, the Catholic Church, the right-wing paramilitary groups, the role of Honduras are the best researched and best written analyses on these aspects of El Salvador's reality to date.

Arnsen's book is the least useful. It does not really live up to its title in examining in more detail than the other books the impact of El Salvador on US foreign policy. Indeed the book tends to lack any direction and just chronicles various 'peak' events without any real system or analysis. It tends to stab at events erratically and while this produces some useful insights it is not a very effective approach.

All the books provide appendices which add various extras in the way of information: the platform of the FDR/FMLN; a chart outlining the relationship of the various opposition groups to each other; statistics on US investment, US military and economic aid; various chronicles of the struggle; and maps.

It is necessary to read more than one of these books for a proper understanding of the Salvadorean revolution but when a country the size of El Salvador can frighten the mightiest military power on earth then the more we can learn, the better.



Photo: SALPRESS

mains nonetheless a strategy for the defeat of revolutionary socialism in El Salvador. At the same time he doesn't rate the chances of this social democratic strategy and its supporters within the FDR as being very high. He is worried that the FMLN has accepted the idea of a finite democratic stage in the Salvadorean revolution and has subordinated itself to the liberal bourgeois parties in the FDR but thinks that the expulsion of these parties from the FDR in the present circumstances of the war would in all probability be disastrous.

Dunkerley's contradictory attitude to the FDR arises from a confusion over the question of whether or not it is permissible for revolutionaries to enter into alliances with non-revolutionary forces. Our attitude is that the formation of the FDR represents quite clearly the culmination of a process in which the revolutionary organisations have won hegemony over all the other forces of opposition in this stage of the struggle against the Salvadorean junta. It does not seem very likely that an organisation like the FPL will

Reviews

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Ron Ward

Jenny Beale: *Getting it together* — Women as trade unionists; Richard Minns: *Take over the city* — The case for public ownership of financial institutions; Charlie Clutterbuck and Tim Lang: *More than we can chew* — The crazy world of food and farming; Colin Thunhurst: *It makes you sick* — The politics of the NHS, all published by Pluto Press, 1982, £2.50.

Pride of place in the blurbs and promotional matter for Pluto Press' new *Arguments for Socialism* series edited by John Harrison is given to this testimonial from Tony Benn: 'One of the main reasons why the Tories swept to power in 1979 was that the Labour movement had over the years almost ceased to argue for socialism. This new series ... can play a significant part in re-establishing the necessity for a socialism that is democratic, libertarian and humane.' These are strong words even if one may be excused for wondering whether it is not rather the *capacity to struggle for and achieve* a libertarian, humane and democratic socialism which needs to be (re-)established, rather than its necessity.

Unfortunately, on the evidence of the first

thought. And the publishers and series editor deserve congratulation for designing a format appropriate for activists with little time to read, to be confronted with areas of political importance at some remove, but no less relevant for that, from their normal spheres of activity. *More than we can chew*, although excessively facetious, is packed with interesting information and makes many relevant connections between normally highly disparate facts and ideas. *Take over the city* has much to say about the hidden financial institutions from merchant banks to pension funds that control the proceeds of the fruits of our labour. It is, however, in many ways the weakest book politically, begging such large questions as what nationalisation means, and under whose control it should take place, and treating alternative investment strategies as



In all cases (except Jenny Beale's book which is about how women workers can establish their rightful positions in the labour movement today and therefore constitutes, I suppose, an *Argument within Capitalism*) there is little to suggest what we can do about the iniquities the books catalogue.

Certainly the books all provide food for



four books in the series, we have a very long way to go, however the task is defined. Another reviewer, in the *New Statesman*, has suggested that *Arguments against Capitalism* would have been a more accurate series title. This is certainly true; but what is missing is not just a vindication of the potential of socialism to resolve the particular problems discussed but also any suggestion of how the discussions presented relate to socialist strategy.

largely technical rather than political questions. *It makes you sick* is an excellent book which successfully summarises a wide range of research-based information without ever being dry or boring, and puts this together with highly relevant memories of pre-NHS medicine and glimpses of the potential of socialist health care. *Getting it together* does not set itself the task of developing a socialist strategy for the liberation of women; in its more limited objective of arguing for and suggesting a line of advance for women's organisation and advance within the unions it succeeds well although important issues of current debate are hardly touched upon.

But while all four books — especially at the very reasonable price of £2.50 — are well worth buying and will hopefully be read beyond the traditional left-book-buying-audience, there is a crying need for books which tackle and present popularly questions of socialist politics and socialist strategy and provide some kind of guide to action. When will it be met?

IRON BRITANNIA

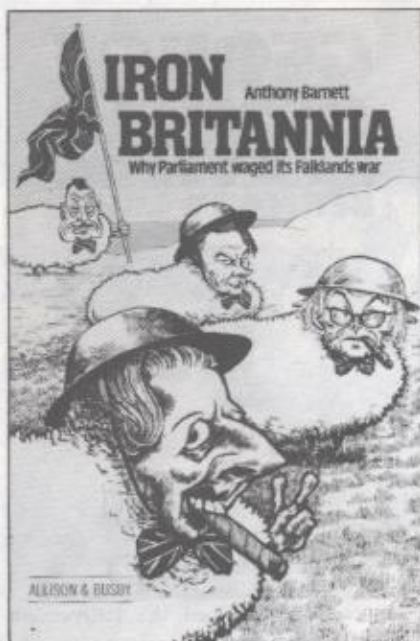
Andrew Jenkins

Anthony Barnett: *Iron Britannia*. Allison & Busby, £2.95.

Anthony has set himself the task of explaining why Britain became enmeshed in an 'unnecessary' war and why there was so little serious political opposition to the adventure. He has not added to the literature about the fighting that breathlessly relates how our boys bashed the Argies, whilst modest asides, as if from Jilly Cooper in khaki, reveal that our media men were dreadfully brave and super too. Anthony Barnett has a more serious and honourable aim: to explore the political culture that generated the war and to encourage us to make any repetition more difficult.

How well has he carried out this task? One of the strengths of the book — its coverage of parliament — is also its weakness. The subtitle of the book is 'Why Parliament waged its Falklands war' and the emphasis on the House itself and, in particular, the hysteria of the 3 April debate does show the political degeneracy of the leaderships of all parties. But it also skews the explanation of the war towards the 'irrationality' of the parliamentary cretins.

Anthony explains the feverishness of the 'crackpot' parliament in terms of Churchillism. 'All of the essential symbols were there: an island people, the cruel sea, a British defeat, Anglo-Saxon democracy challenged by a dictator ...' The essence of Churchillism is explained as an alliance across parties with an anti-fascist rhetoric and a firm belief in entente with the USA to make Britain great again. It is based upon a coalition of Tory imperialists and Labour reformism. There is an element of truth in this analysis. Thatcher, Foot, Callaghan, Owen and Powell all queued up to do their Churchill impersonations in an horrific parody of amateur talent night at the social club. But why just Churchillism? Were not the political components of the coalition not part and parcel of Lloyd Georgeism, or Joe Chamberlainism, or even the social imperialism of the 1880s when a section of Tories packaged together immigration laws, imperial



adventures abroad and social welfare at home to produce straight young soldiers? The link through all these is imperialism, and this need not be a nostalgic atavistic spasm in the late 20th century.

Barnett does make some points. The response of Eric Heffer shows the weakness of what passes for anti-fascism in the Left when his response to Argentina was seen in terms of not letting fascist thugs get away with it. Barnett realises the weakness involved in trying to outbid the 'patriotism' of the Tories. Anthony then gets worried he has gone too far and genuflects gently: 'This is not said to denigrate either the revolutionaries or the imperialists of the World War. Their struggle against fascism was made a mockery of in parliament 3 April.' What the 3 April revealed was the total bankruptcy of popular frontism that EP Thompson and *Marxism Today* wish to portray not just as a beacon from the past but the sole reliable light to the future.

Anthony touches on a number of themes that are valuable. The obscene 'deeds not

words' speech of Foot ensured that the Task Force sailed. An obdurate opposition could have stopped the entire adventure. The strength of the Falklands Factor is examined. It was there. The Mitcham and Morden election registered a miraculous Tory win. Thatcher did gain in public support and did turn the 'spirit of the South Atlantic' against the unions. But Anthony correctly stresses the limitations of this process. The Easter CND demonstration was massive. Ignore for a moment the joy of relatives getting their loved ones back safe or Union Jacks in pubs. Where were the organised political demonstrations in favour of the war? The St Pauls service indicated that the Church was closer to the popular mood than the blood lust of the Tory Right.

The essential weakness of Anthony's book is that he does not adequately explain the war. Was it all irrational nostalgia for Empire? Well, certainly there are limits to a rationality that allowed Foreign Office officials to make further progress in negotiations with Argentina as late as 27 February 1982 and which were then rejected by Thatcher. But what of the international context? Barnett makes great play of establishing a pattern within which to situate the Falklands conflict: Cambodia v Vietnam; Uganda v Tanzania; Iraq v Iran ... etc. It is the most terrible old ragbag of nonsense. The missing component is to consider the overall needs of imperialism, with all the contradictions in that dimension.

The weakness of the Left in Britain was not to deal with the issue of imperialism. From *Socialist Organiser* rightwards, there were confusions on this. The 'ecumenical' teach-in against the war run by the Socialist Society that Anthony refers to was broad enough to involve Peter Jenkins of the SDP, but felt that the anti-imperialism of Tariq Ali might go too far and alarm those of a timid disposition. So certainly the 'patriotism' of the Labour Front Bench, the 'irrationality' of Thatcher, the need for a foreign diversion from domestic strife and the consequent unifying tendency, the Navy lobby and the Falklands lobby all played their squalid part. But so too did the need, in a post-Vietnam world, of British imperialism as a whole to reassert its capacity to wage foreign wars. And the battle fields of the future are not to be Gibraltar or Hong Kong, but the Gulf and Central America.

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Reviews

'TROTSKYITE WITH BIG FEET'

Judith Arkwright

Bernard Crick: *George Orwell — A Life*, Penguin, 1982, £2.95.

'The Trotskyite with big feet' was how HG Wells once described George Orwell. Whilst perhaps agreeing on the size of his feet, writers and critics cannot agree on interpretations of his writings each claiming him for their own. From 'Tory anarchist' to proto-fascist to Social Democrat, Orwell has been described in a variety of ways.

The latest biography of the man and his work by Bernard Crick attempts very successfully to put the record straight. His appreciation of Orwell documents in great detail the extraordinary process whereby an old Etonian and member of the Burmese colonial police force, became a revolutionary socialist.

Born in 1903 in Bengal, Arthur Eric Blair decided to leave the Imperial Indian police force in 1927 after five years service because 'I had got to escape from every form of man's dominion over man'. This spontaneous hatred of imperialism became the starting point for his journey towards socialism.

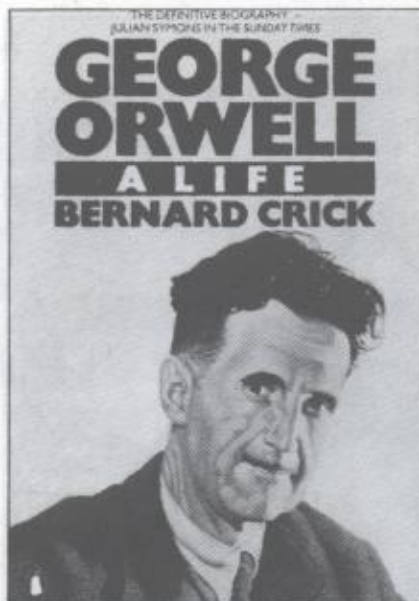
Filled with middle class guilt feelings and the need to purge himself of his background, Orwell spent the next years living amongst the poor and the vagrants of Paris and London. If his journey onto the other side of the class barriers strikes us today as somewhat false, it did open Orwell's blinkered eyes to the conditions in which so many people lived. He tried to communicate what he had found to the rest of the world in his first successful novel 'Down and Out in Paris and London'.

It must be noted here that although Orwell succeeded in shaking off his background and in identifying with the oppressed rather than the oppressor, Crick's biography rather glosses over the treatment of his own wife, who serviced Orwell as a writer and died at an early age under anaesthetic from an operation for cancer, with little support from her husband. Perhaps the women's movement of the 1930s and 1940s was not strong but it is regrettable that a modern-day biographer tries to shrug this off, when Orwell's own contemporaries did in fact remark on it.

Orwell's experiences in Paris and London combined with the huge political upheavals of the 1930s brought Orwell, Crick argues, towards a 'democratic Socialist' perspective. For example, Orwell was in Marseilles after leaving Burma for what was to be the last time when Sacco and Vanzetti, the two Boston anarchists were executed, and he remarked sardonically upon a conversation in a Bank at the appearance of a mass demonstration in their support:

'It was instructive to hear two clerks saying "Oh well you've got to hang these blasted anarchists" and to see their half-shocked surprise when one asked whether Sacco and Vanzetti were guilty of the crime for which they were condemned.'

But it was Orwell's experiences in the Spanish Civil War, according to Crick, which finally made Orwell a socialist and it was on his return after being wounded in 1937 that (for a



brief period) he joined the Independent Labour Party.

Crick argues forcefully that Orwell went to Spain to fight fascism and not just to comment on the sidelines. On arrival he was drafted into the POUM militia (the one which was labelled as under Trotskyist influence). He soon realised that a huge debate was raging between the left factions as to how to fight the fascists and initially he took the Stalinist view and attempted to be transferred to a Communist Party-controlled militia in Madrid.

The Communists were arguing against the POUM that the key task was to fight fascism and that socialism and the revolution could be left till later. The POUM argued that the two tasks were inseparable and had to be achieved by organising the mass of workers as was happening in Barcelona when Orwell was there.

Orwell's experience in Barcelona was decisive and when he witnessed the way the Communist Party crushed the revolution, their fear of the workers in arms, and the mass arrests of his comrades in the middle of battle with the fascists, he was horrified. He wrote angrily of the tragic death of Andrés Nin at the hands of the Communists and from that time on aligned himself with the POUM and the anarchists.

However, the basis of Orwell's views did not change from the experience of the Spanish Civil War and Crick attacks those who argue that Orwell became disillusioned with the socialist cause and use his later works — *Animal Farm* and *1984* — as examples of cold war propaganda. To understand these works it is important to appreciate Orwell's profound hatred of the Communist Party and the background to it.

On his return to England from Spain, Orwell and his friends were hounded by the Party. Crick tells an amusing tale of a Russian Communist journal which wrote to Orwell (not realising who he was) and asked for a review and a copy of 'The Road to Wigan Pier'. Orwell wrote a polite letter back saying that he would write a review but he was still ill from wounds received while serving in the POUM militia. He received this reply:

'... Our magazine has nothing to do with POUM members; this organisation, as the

long experience of the Spanish people's struggle against insurgents and fascists has shown, is part of Franco's "fifth column".'

Crick describes 1984 not as a polemic against revolution, as cold war-mongers in the USA would have it, but rather as a book about 'revolution betrayed', a polemic within the Left about what could happen and about the dangers of totalitarianism. Orwell was undoubtedly pessimistic but not fatalistic in his attitude. He admitted that 'all revolutions have failed' but added that 'they are not all the same failure'. Any hope there is in 1984 lies with 'the proles'.

Orwell's writing, explains Crick, was not intended to be prescriptive or didactic — he was less a propagandist for socialism than a prophet attempting to alert the Left to what he regarded as the crucial dangers of his age. In a preface to 1984 written after Hiroshima, he was indeed prophetic:

'But suppose — and really this is the likeliest development — that the surviving great nations make a tacit agreement never to use the atomic bomb against one another? Suppose they only use it or the threat of it against people who are unable to retaliate? ... If, as seems to be the case, it is a rare and costly object as difficult to produce as a battleship, it is likelier to put an end to large-scale wars at the cost of prolonging indefinitely a "peace that is no peace".'

Crick points out that English critics who knew Orwell and knew that he was literary editor of *Tribune*, active on civil rights etc, did not misinterpret his work in the same way as American critics. If Orwell perhaps did not effectively scotch suggestions that he was a cold war warrior of the Right, it could have been because he was by this time dying of TB. He did, however, write fairly unequivocally from his sick bed that:

'My recent novel is not intended as an attack on socialism or on the Labour Party which I support, but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralised economy is liable ... I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily will arrive but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive...'

This is not perhaps a 'trotskyite' position but it is a view of the Communists from the left, and a materialist view at that, written at the end of his life.

Crick paints a portrait of a very courageous man who did attempt to identify with the oppressed despite his privileged background and who sacrificed his health and wealth to the cause of finding out and publicising the truth about the world around him.

His individualism may have left him open to misinterpretation by all comers but as 1984 approaches, it is to be hoped that this biography will open the way to a general appreciation that his hostility to Communism was not the hypocritical paranoia of a bourgeois politician but was in the name of freedom and a truly socialist society.

Judith Arkwright is a former women's correspondent for *Socialist Challenge* and currently a member of the NUR.