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LIVING MARXISM

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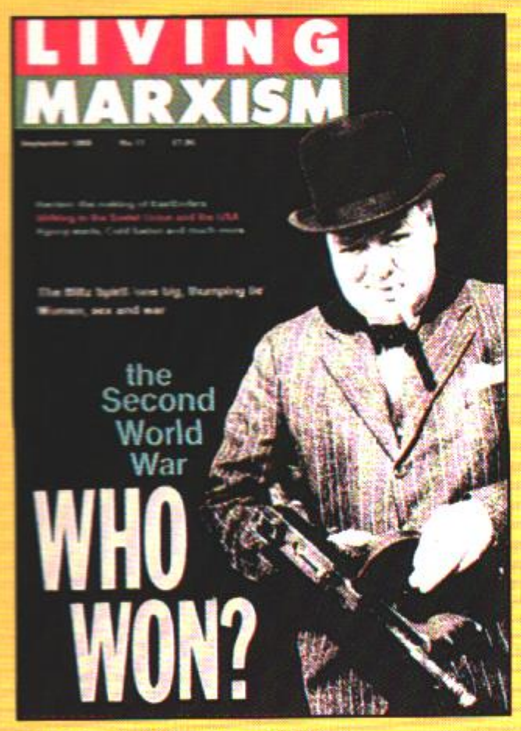

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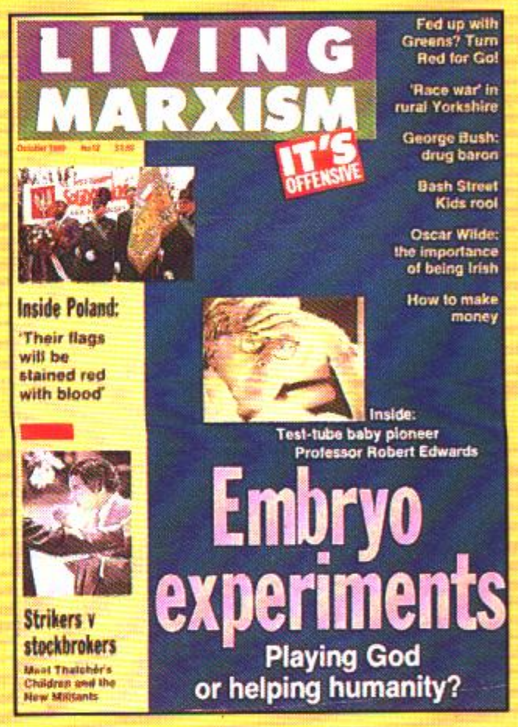

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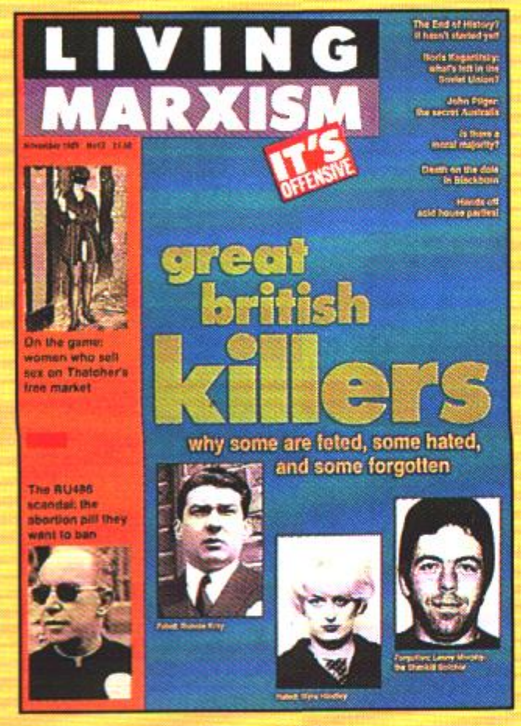

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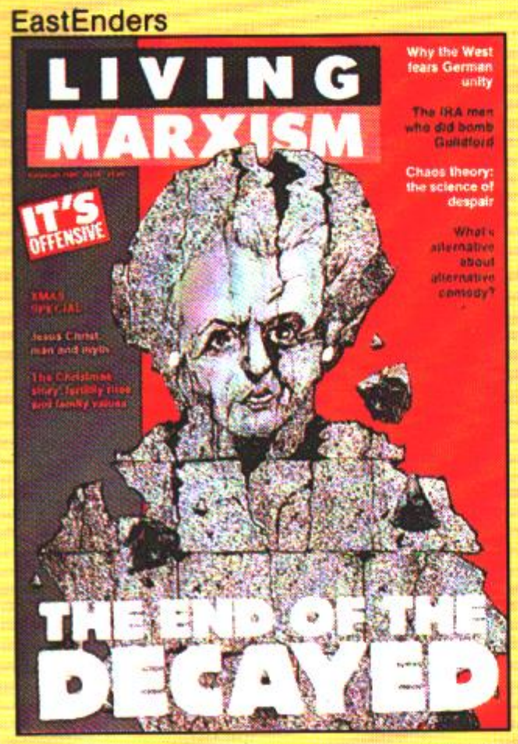

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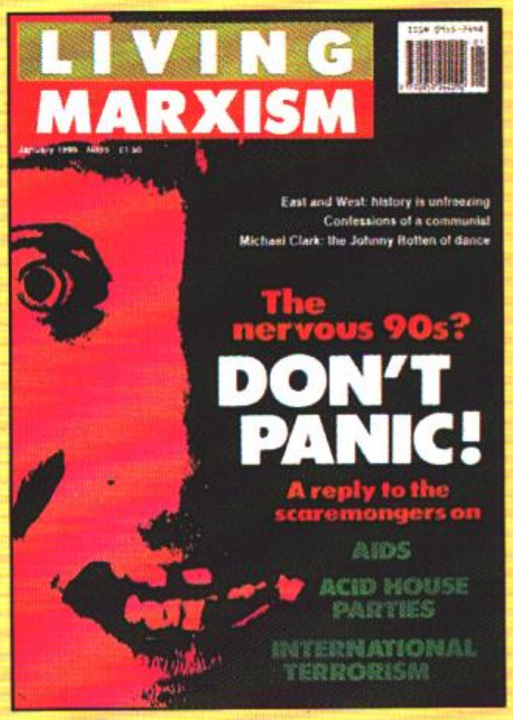

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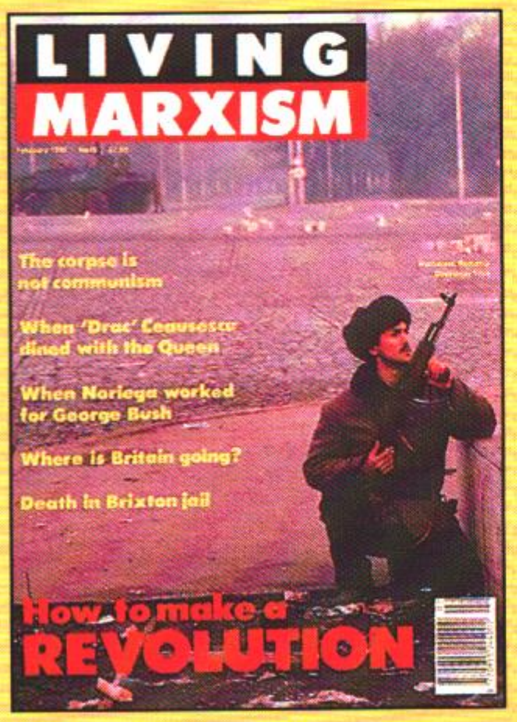

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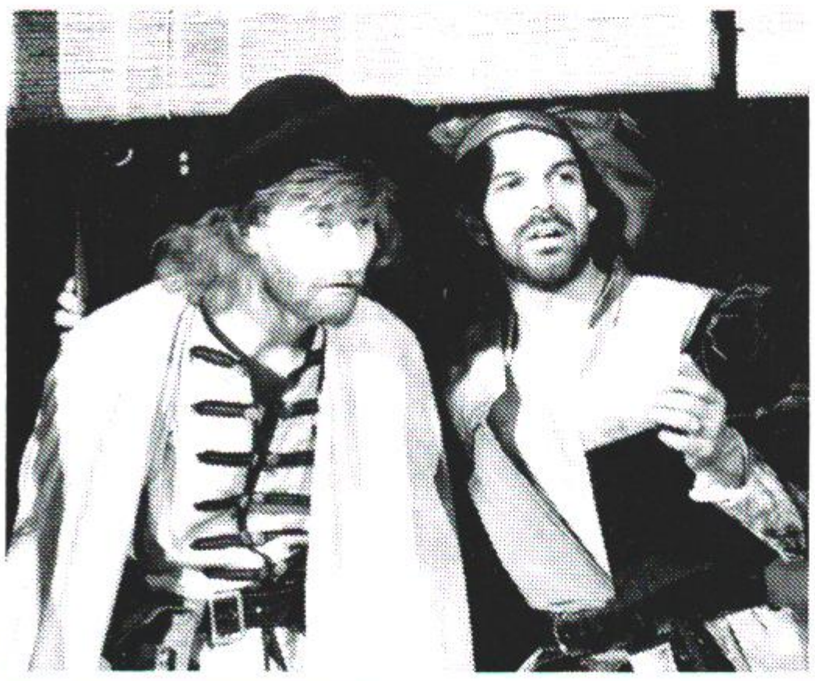
That was Stalinism. This is... LIVING MARXISM

Enough is enough. Having heard Marxism pilloried from right and left alike, and listened to it being blamed for the crimes of Stalinism, we launch a counter-attack this month.

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



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living

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LIVING MARXISM

Monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party
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editorial

History is still on our side

'If the validity of Marxism itself is questioned, it seems to me that it would be better for somebody like me to be in something like the Labour Party...where I can get a photocopier for a community group or something like that.'

This rather dramatic lowering of horizons (from dictatorship of the proletariat to photocopier of the community group) comes from a leading member of the old Communist Party of Great Britain. It was delivered at a crisis meeting of the party executive, called to discuss whether the CPGB has any future. The minutes of this meeting, published in line with the fashion for glasnost-style self-criticism, reveal an even more senior member of the Communist Party giving more succinct expression to the same downbeat mood. 'History', he says, 'is passing us by'.

The view that Marxism belongs to days gone by has now achieved the status of common sense. This is largely due to the way in which many who call themselves communists willingly concede that Marxist ideas are outdated. Their admissions of guilt have greatly strengthened the argument that capitalism has been correct all along and will continue to be so. But these people speak only for themselves. While they scramble for photocopiers on which to reproduce the old arguments of right-wing intellectuals, the quickening flow of real events outside their executive committee meeting is making nonsense of many capitalist claims and confirming some basic truths of Marxism.

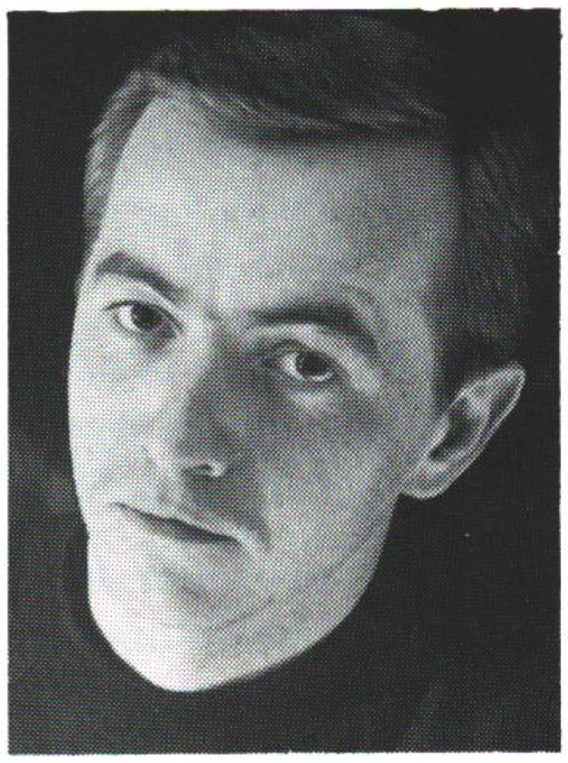
Who has truly been left behind by history? By what right do the ideologues of the enterprise culture claim to be the voice of the future, while dismissing Marxism as an echo of the past? Look, for example, at what some of the leading statesmen and academics of the West have had to say about the prospects for dramatic change in Europe.

'In Eastern Europe', said top US foreign policy expert William Bundy, 'Soviet control remains strong and outright revolt unlikely'. Harold Brown, a former US defence secretary, agreed with him: 'Next to maintenance of the Soviet system in the USSR itself, preserving Marxism-Leninism in Eastern Europe is the icon for whose retention the Soviet Union will risk (indeed go to) war.'

These statements were made not about the Soviet Union under Stalin or Brezhnev, but Gorbachev. They were central contributions at a conference called by the high-powered American Assembly in November 1988. Barely a year later, the biggest 'icon' of all, the Berlin Wall, was gone without any risk or rumour of war. And, in most of Eastern Europe, 'outright revolt' was proving to be not so much unlikely as unnecessary, since the 'strong' Stalinist regimes were collapsing almost of their own accord.

The best brains of the British establishment have fared no better. As late as the summer 1989 edition of *International Affairs* Sir Michael Howard, then Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, dismissed the prospect of German unity:

'However great the desire may be in West Germany for cultural reintegration, or in East Germany for the consumer products of the West, there is little likelihood of even a post-Honecker GDR allowing itself to be



MICK HUME
EDITOR

absorbed by its dynamic Western neighbour. The German Democratic Republic has acquired an identity and perverse pride of its own....Whether or not the Wall comes down, the GDR is likely to maintain a well-guarded frontier as much to keep disruptive elements out as to keep its own citizens in.'

Howard's readers would barely have had time to nod sagely at the wisdom of his remarks before 'disruptive elements' from the West were dancing on the Berlin Wall and taking bits home as souvenirs, while East Germans' pride in their state proved so 'perverse' that two thousand of them a day were abandoning their homes, jobs and even children to flee West through the not-so-well guarded frontier.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the gurus of Western civilisation have failed the test of time. They have shown themselves to be locked into the post-war order, their ideas frozen along with history in the 1945 settlement and the division of Germany and Europe which followed. As that settlement and that division disappear almost overnight, they remain stuck in the past, speaking in a language that sounds as dead as Latin.

●

Defenders of the status quo have always attempted to portray a particular moment of history as the permanent state of human existence. Thus they have projected the capitalist market back to the cavemen, and the Cold War forward into the twenty-first century. But the relentless process of historical change catches them out time and again. The rapid changes in the world order over recent months have thrown everything into confusion once more. Those raised on the stable certainties of the post-war world are now shocked to discover that the old balance of power no longer holds; like the Pax Romana and Pax Britannica before it, the Pax Americana has just about run its course as maps are redrawn on a daily basis and Germany and Japan rise to prominence again.

The finest minds that capitalism can buy are too steeped in the ways of the past to make sense of current events. Yet, lost as they are, they are still able to appear confident and modern in comparison to the Stalinists. This is the final disservice which the corrupt old Communist parties are paying to Marxism.

Perhaps it is understandable that a party like the CPGB should feel out of step with the times. After all, it has to deal not just with its Stalinist tradition, but with the fact that the theories and tactics which its new thinkers presented as *the* radical ideas for the eighties already look exhausted; the notion of 'hegemonic Thatcherism' now appears only slightly less ridiculous than the proposal for a pact with the SDP/Liberal Alliance.

However, there is no reason why Marxists should share such hang-ups. We have nothing invested in the old order, East or West. And we have everything to gain from rapid international change.

●

Eighteen months ago, we could no more have predicted the precise date at which the Berlin Wall would fall than could our enemies. But nor would we ever have made their mistake of asserting that all would remain the same. The idea of a constant process of change and flux in human society is a central tenet of Marxism.

However permanent its creators and defenders might have declared it, no system of social organisation has lasted very long before giving way to another. The great historical leaps have brought with them new and more efficient production methods, which have formed the economic basis of a new and higher human order. This is the path of progress through history, the advance from slavery through feudalism to capitalism. If today's cruder right-wing ideologues were correct in their assertion that nothing fundamental had changed in humanity's economic attitudes since the caves, then they would still be making their propaganda by painting on the walls.

Those who wish to protect their stake in the existing order must deny the truth of historical change, since it raises awkward questions about what will come next. They have had an easy time of it over the past 45 years, an unprecedented period of stability. Now, however, the demise of Stalinism and the re-raising of the German question are helping to return capitalist society to its more normal state of turbulence and chaos, as first described by two old Germans at the dawn of Continental capitalism almost 150 years ago:

'All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face, with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.' (K Marx and F Engels, *The Communist Manifesto,* 1848)

Marxists do more than recognise the process of historical change; we welcome and seek to advance it, since it opens up fresh prospects for the transformation of society in a progressive direction. Today, the upheavals in the East may give an immediate boost to Western capitalists. But the unfreezing of history also shakes up the sleepy, stable international order which has kept the post-war world safe for the exploiters.

Almost every reference point of modern political life, from the idea that Eastern Europe offers a socialist model to the argument that the 'Soviet threat' justifies Western militarism, is now being removed from the board. New questions arise, new answers are demanded. And with social systems in crisis East and West, the possibility arises of putting revolution back on to the agenda.

Dramatic changes and violent flux are inevitable; yet the outcome of the process is not. Social progress has never evolved naturally, like plant-life. It requires the motor force of the class struggle to drive it onwards, otherwise change can always be managed in the interests of reaction. While the Stalinists and capitalists agree that communism and class politics are dead, this issue of *Living Marxism* emphasises our intention to stand against the stream, and to seek to give Marxism a contemporary expression as the theory of revolution in the nineties.

If some are content to photocopy other people's versions of history, so be it. Our intention remains to help make some history of our own.

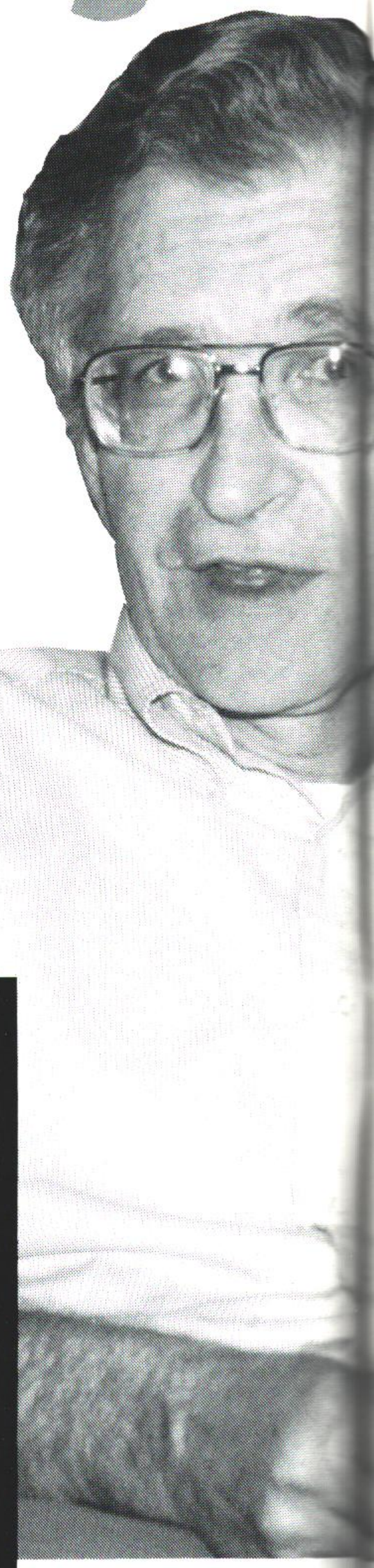
'The demise of Stalinism and the re-raising of the German question are helping to return capitalist society to its more normal state of turbulence and chaos'

east and west

Noam Chomsky

'The real Cold War's not over'

Leading American writer Noam Chomsky talked trans-Atlantic to Daniel Nassim about whether Nato and the American Century are finished—and about what comes next



Daniel Nassim: The division between the Eastern and Western blocs has provided the framework for international relations for more than 40 years. What do you think are the likely implications of the end of the Cold War?

Noam Chomsky: First of all, my conception of the Cold War is different from the conventional one. After the Second World War the United States emerged as indisputably the world's strongest power. Its first goal was to reconstruct Germany and Japan and their periphery. The enemies would be rebuilt, but now subordinated to the United States rather than antagonistic to it, regional powers within a US-run global framework. The industrial societies needed a hinterland to exploit, what we call the third world. That was supposed to, as the state department put it, 'fulfil its functions' as a source of resources and markets and cheap labour for Europe, Japan and ultimately for the USA.

Now the Soviet Union was a problem. Firstly, the Soviet empire closed off from this global system a region which was mostly supposed to be exploitable third world. Secondly, although the Soviet Union wasn't much of an economic power, it had a lot of military force. It also had a good
because of its primary role in overthrowing Nazism. People like president Eisenhower talked of the danger of 'ideological aggression' from the Soviet Union. That's what really bothered the British foreign office, Eisenhower and other rational analysts. They didn't expect Soviet

Noam Chomsky is Professor of Linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Outside the Ivy League, however, he is better known as one of America's leading radical writers, who has been a consistent critic of US imperialism since the Vietnam War. His latest honour was third place in a neo-fascist newspaper poll for 'the pain in the ass of the eighties'. His new book is *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, Pluto Press, £9.95

troops to march into France. They were concerned with ideological aggression, the influence of the Soviet Union in helping maintain strong labour unions and other aspects of the resistance-based popular culture.

Thirdly, in later years the Soviet Union did provide a deterrent to the use of US power. As a global power the US carries out intervention and subversion in areas where it doesn't have a conventional force advantage—and that's dangerous. It meant that there was always the threat that third world intervention might blow up into superpower confrontation. Soviet power provided a deterrent, and the Soviet Union off-and-on would provide support for groups or states which the United States was trying to destroy. So there was a real basis for antagonism.

However, that's not the main function of the Cold War. For the Soviet Union the Cold War was about tanks and Berlin and Budapest and Prague and Afghanistan. And internally it meant the entrenchment of a certain system of military-bureaucratic power. For the United States the Cold War has meant intervention and subversion all over the world. And internally the entrenchment of a certain system of power, a mechanism of state industrial management which compels the public to pay the costs of high-technology industry through the Pentagon system. The Cold War was also a device for maintaining a degree of influence and control over Europe and Japan, which were the real rivals.

Now that system hasn't ended. One side has called its half of the game off. But the other side hasn't. The Cold War from the US side has been largely a war against the third world, and a mechanism for retaining a degree of influence over its industrial rivals and, crucially, a mode of domestic social organisation. And nothing has changed in that respect. So the Cold War hasn't ended. The real Cold War hasn't vanished.

There are differences. The fact that one side has called the game off, at least temporarily, means that US military interventions require a different propaganda framework. So, for example, in the past it's always been possible when you invade Grenada or the Dominican Republic to say you were defending yourselves from the Russian threat. That's beyond the capacity of anybody's imagination at this point. The invasion of Panama was the first act of US subversion or aggression in many decades that wasn't justified by an alleged Soviet threat. It has a totally different propaganda framework.

Also the decline of the Soviet deterrent gives the United States more 'clout', as the state department put it. Because the United States' forward capacity to intervene is reinforced as the power of the Soviet deterrent declines.

So the Cold War will change in those respects. It's also impossible to pretend any more that Europe and Japan are just colonies that do what we tell them to do. The real world system which has been emerging for 20 years is tripartite, trilateral—Germany and its periphery, Japan, and the United States. The three are going to have problems. For instance, as the Soviet system collapses they're all trying to swoop on it in a parody of what they did to Mexico and Brazil. The question is who will pick up the spoils. Right now Germany is in the lead.

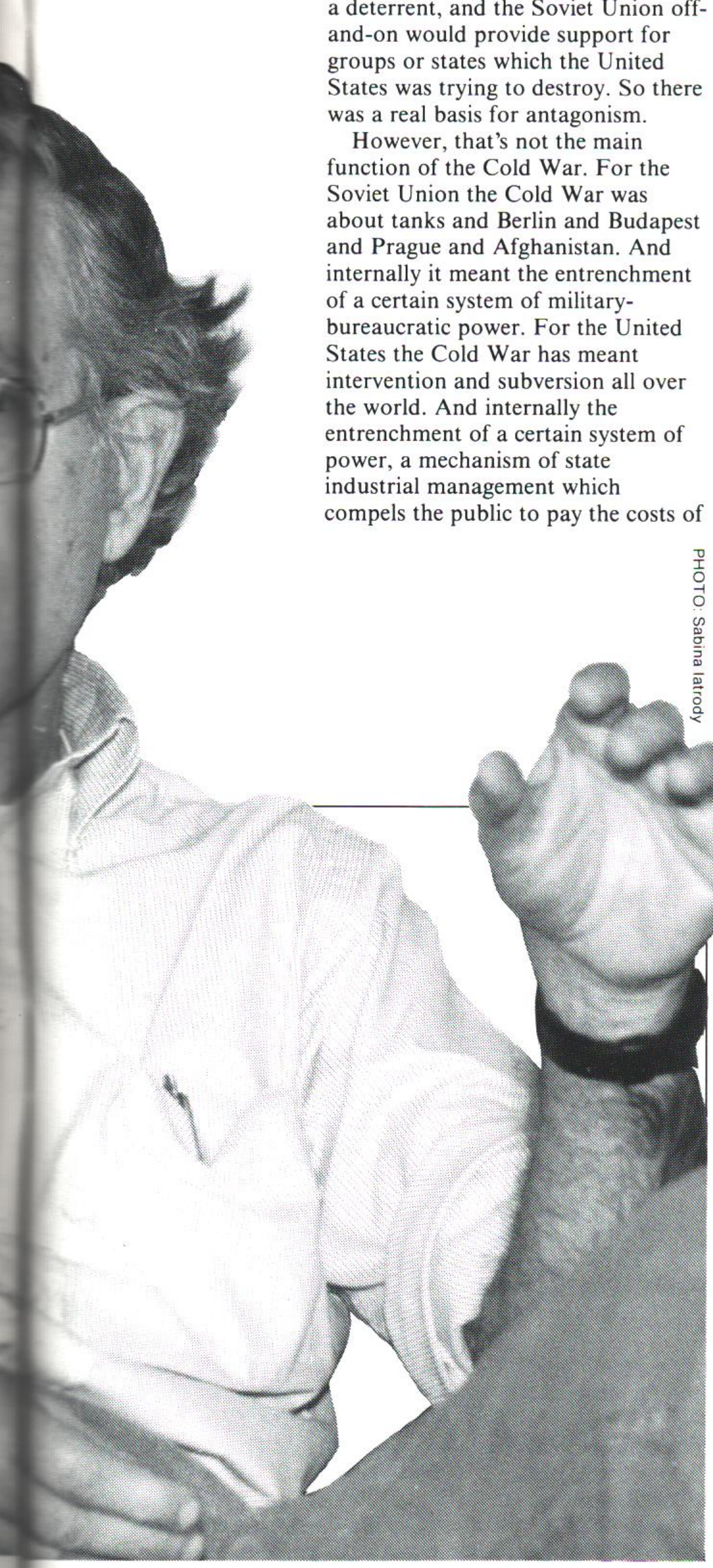


PHOTO: Sabina Iatrody

Daniel Nassim: You outline how there was an East-West conflict but not in the way it was conventionally understood. And you talk about rivalries between the Western powers. In the light of the past few months do you think you could say that East-West conflict was ever the primary source of tension in the world?

Noam Chomsky: It was the source of tension in one respect. It was the conflict that provided the greatest danger of total destruction, because of the threat that a third world conflict might turn into a superpower confrontation, which would mean basically the end of history. And the concern over the Soviet Union was real because they were supporting targets of US attack and they just wouldn't open up their society to exploitation.

But I don't think it's been the major element in world affairs since the sixties. Since the early seventies it's been perfectly clear that the world has slowly moved towards this tripartite power system. And that the United States is going to have its problems and that although the Soviet Union is not a real competitor Europe and Japan are.

Daniel Nassim: I agree that Japan and Germany are becoming a threat to the United States' world power. What implications do you think that will have for international relations?

Noam Chomsky: If this was 40-50 years ago we'd have a global war. That's the kind of thing that world wars were fought over. There won't be this time, for two basic reasons.

One reason is that there's much more interpenetration of capital than there was. What's called Europe, Japan and the United States has a lesser meaning than it had in the past. For example, a large part of the negative trade balance of the United States is caused by US corporations exporting to the United States from abroad. And that interaction of free world international capital has created a very different kind of system. Capital does rely on individual state power, for regulation, for maintaining the workforce and so on. But much less than in the past.

The other thing is that international military conflict is simply inconceivable. Everyone who even has a brain cell alive knows that it would lose everything. So I don't think it's going to go the way it did in the past. But it will lead to serious economic conflict and, crucially, it will lead every one of these regions to attack its own population. Because to maintain the competitive edge, in a system of great power conflict, it is necessary to ensure the profitability of corporations—low wage levels and so on—and that's happening. What's called conservatism, or neo-liberalism, is happening all over the world, and is very advanced in the United States. Huge sectors of the country live in third world standards, real wages have been declining since the early seventies.

Daniel Nassim: I take the point that the world is a very different place from before the Second World War. And also that there is a large interpenetration of capital. But why do you think that this necessarily rules out a military conflict between the Western powers? For example, before the Second World War there

were close economic links between Germany and the USA. But that didn't stop them going to war.

Noam Chomsky: There certainly were interconnections. Indirectly major American corporations—like General Motors—remained involved in German industry during the war, certainly through the early part. However, it's a matter of scale—the connections were much less. Just compare, say, US investment in Europe in 1935 and 1985; there's a qualitative difference. I think that capital is much less nationally based than 40 years ago.

I don't mean to suggest that it transcends the state system—it does not. For example, General Motors makes a huge amount of profit from overseas investment and is quite happy to export factories to cheap labour. Nevertheless it depends on the US government to ensure that the public subsidises its costs. And the US state has to have the power to use in case anybody gets in GM's way. So sure, these international corporations always depend on one or another state to ensure their health and power. But in a manner that is qualitatively different from, say, the 1930s. Plus the fact that they all understand now something that nobody understood then. That a war is simply unthinkable. They can't do it because everything they have would go.

'The United States didn't want Germany unified, it just wanted Nato'

Daniel Nassim: Looking at the changes in Europe, although it has expressed support for German reunification, the Bush administration didn't seem too happy about the fall of the Berlin Wall. How do you analyse the US attitude towards the German question?

Noam Chomsky: Well they've all been dragging their feet on it, particularly the United States. In fact the first reference to a wall that I know of is by George Kennan, who was one of the top architects of the post-war system back around 1946. He stated in internal documents that it would be necessary to 'wall off' Western Germany from Soviet influence. He didn't mean a wall of rocks and stones, but nevertheless the metaphor is suggestive and I think that's one element that led to partition.

Since the early fifties there have been repeated apparent possibilities for reunification. But that was rejected flat-out because the United States didn't want Germany unified, it just wanted Nato. That goes on right until today, when James Baker [US secretary of state] goes to Berlin he makes a speech about how 'you guys could be united, it would be wonderful, but you've got to stay within Nato'. The reason is that so long as we have the pact system we've got the United States' clout.

One respect in which the United States is still overwhelmingly powerful is militarily. Therefore it has been pushing very hard for the maintenance of some form of pact system. They want the Warsaw Pact and Nato to remain, I think primarily to control Germany and Eastern Europe. But I don't think they can stop it. German nationalism is on the march and it's not very pretty. It's very frightening for anybody that knows a little history.

Daniel Nassim: The whole rationale for Nato's existence—maybe not what it was really about but the way it was justified—has been to contain the Soviet threat and to protect Western Europe. And now it's very obvious that there is no Soviet threat, what future is there for Nato?

Noam Chomsky: What Nato was about was imposing a certain form of interaction among the industrial societies through which, as Kissinger put it, the United States would maintain the overall framework within which other powers operate. And it was partly a way of imposing a social system on Europe in which labour would be subordinated. The radical-democratic thrust of resistance would be contained and the conservative order, including fascist collaborators and so on, would be reconstituted.

That was a real function of Nato and those functions are still alive. The only question is how you adjust to dealing with them now. You can't pretend that the Red Army is going to sweep over Europe. That's like the problem of how you invade Panama when you can't pretend that you're defending yourself from the Russians. My feeling is that Western propaganda systems are up to this. Just as they were in the case of Panama.

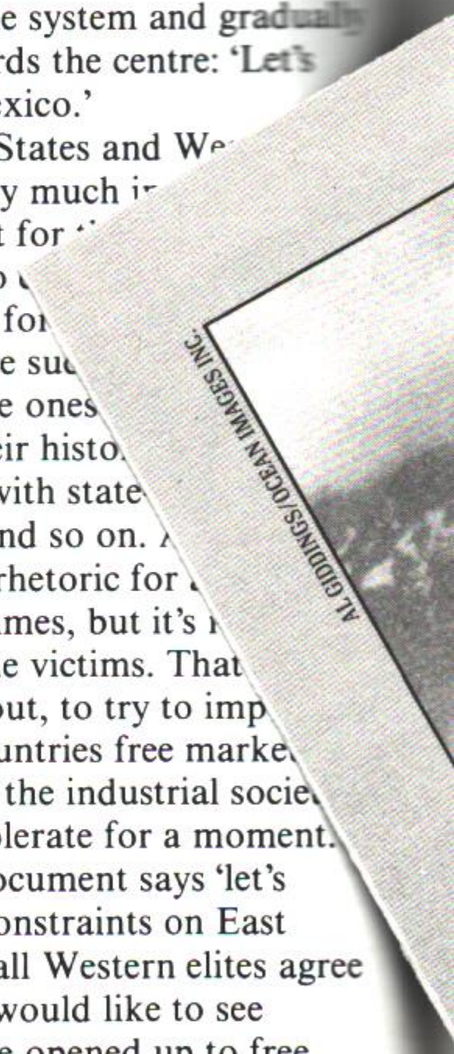
Daniel Nassim: Can you say a bit more about changing perceptions of the 'Soviet threat'? In the past the US authorities made a big propaganda point of attacking the Soviet Union. But in the last few months they've seemed very keen to prevent Gorbachev collapsing. Now, however, we have the widely discussed 'Z' document, arguing for a withdrawal of US support for Gorbachev. Do you think that this is a real option for US foreign policy?

Noam Chomsky: Well, you know, 'Z' is a kind of a current intellectual fad. On the intellectual level it's laughable. It's written by a very angry Soviet historian who sees everything in the West as practically communist. So it's all about how the Anglo-American Sovietologists with their liberal-to-radical bias regarded Stalin as a democratic leader. But you can put all of that stuff aside. That's just hysteria.

There's only one sentence in that document that has any content. He says, being an ultra-right fanatic, that we shouldn't even support Gorbachev. But the one point of sanity in the document is in fact expressing the consensus of Western elites. It says that what we should support in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe are parallel structures. He says we shouldn't help them maintain their social system. Nothing that would maintain any welfare or state-run thing. That should go.

What we should construct is parallel structures, parallel systems, based solely on the market. Which are subject to IMF constraints, he says that explicitly, and which include free-trade zones for investment and so on. He says we should begin with this on the periphery of the system and gradually extend it towards the centre: 'Let's turn it into Mexico.'

The United States and We… Europe are very much i… the free market for … they attempt to … never accept it fo… never have. The su… societies are the ones … throughout their histo… protectionist, with state … development and so on. … market is fine rhetoric for … social programmes, but it's … intended for the victims. That … the IMF is about, to try to imp… third world countries free marke… structures that the industrial socie… would never tolerate for a moment.



So the 'Z' document says 'let's impose IMF constraints on East Europe'. And all Western elites agree on that. They would like to see Eastern Europe opened up to free exploitation. To be a place where you can put assembly plants, you can have tax havens, you can export pollution, all the standard third world facilities.

Daniel Nassim: I am sure that what you say about the 'Z' document itself is right, and that the West is trying to introduce capitalism into Eastern Europe. But what seems striking to me is how very worried they do seem about the Soviet Union collapsing.

Noam Chomsky: They are all in favour of turning the Soviet Union back into a third world exploitable country. The only question is how you do it. Now the 'Z' document says let's abandon Gorbachev and build parallel structures. There are others, who I think are more rational, who realise that kind of fanatical free marketism is going to lead to such

disorder and chaos that the country won't even be exploitable. And they are the ones who prefer to do it through Gorbachev. Let Gorbachev step-by-step dismantle the system while we press to turn it into a standard third world society. The ideal would be to get it like the Philippines. There are real problems. If the Soviet Union breaks up into warring ethnic groups, nobody is going to be able to exploit it. Any more than you can exploit Lebanon.

Daniel Nassim: We mentioned how the United States has used the pretext of the Soviet threat to justify intervention in the third world. Now it cannot credibly do so, what implications do you think that will have for American foreign policy?

Noam Chomsky: Once it became impossible, no matter how crazed they were, for the United States to deny that the Soviet abandonment of international conflict was quite real, the question was what we do about it. And the immediate response was to say 'There are a lot of difficulties for us about what Gorbachev is doing in regard to the arms budget and so on. But there is a silver lining—that we can use military force more freely in the third world because the Soviet deterrent has declined'. And that's basically what Elliott Abrams [US assistant secretary for Latin American affairs] said again in the Panama invasion.

Furthermore, when people like the editorial writers for the *Washington Post* refer to Gorbachev's 'new thinking', what they mean is that Gorbachev will demonstrate that the new thinking is real if he stops supporting the targets of US attack. 'We'll only know if he's serious if he lets us have our way in the world without any impediment.' You can see a heightened self-confidence on the part of American leaders. They now are looking forward to being able to, say, reincorporate Cuba inside the US-dominated system. Because they're hoping that Gorbachev's new thinking is real and that he won't defend Cuba.

'The Reaganites were kind of extreme. Their love of violence, that's not rational imperialism'

So it's not just a matter of military force, that's the least of it. Sane imperialists don't like the sight of blood because it makes them happy; the way they destroy and control third world countries is primarily economic. And I would imagine that the various forms of subversion will be used more freely. Of course there are other constraints. One constraint is the declining power of the United States relative to Europe and Japan. And Europe and Japan may be less inclined to let the United States have its own way.

Daniel Nassim: Do you think that, despite the constraints you mention and despite all the talk of demilitarisation, the Panama invasion in some ways can be seen to represent the real dynamic in US foreign policy?

Noam Chomsky: I don't really think so. In the eighties, in Central America alone, maybe 200 000 people were slaughtered as a result of various kinds of US intervention in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. But if you look at the places where the United States was able to use *direct* force, you're talking about Grenada with a couple of dozen militiamen, or Libya which is totally defenceless against air attack, or Panama which is barely a country. I mean the United States could stage trial runs, operations in which they surrounded the Panama Defence Force, before the invasion.

American leaders understand that the public is not going to tolerate any real military action so they can only fight against people that can't fight back. And if somebody can't fight back, yes, then you can have a two-day attack where you run around striking heroic poses and that kind of thing. But all this kind of mock heroics isn't going to work if anybody can defend themselves. You'd have to do it by other means. By mercenary states, by subversion, by economic power, by international terrorism. So I don't really think that Panama is a model, much as American elites would like it to be, I don't think they have the capacity to do it.

There was a sense in which the Reaganites were kind of extreme. Their commitment to the use of violence and their love of violence and so on, that's not rational imperialism. And with the Bush administration US policy is moving more towards the natural mainstream, you use force when you have to. But there are often other devices which are much more effective and you use them where you can. So, take Nicaragua, economic strangulation, ideological warfare, a low-level terrorist threat would have been sufficient without sending out gangsters to torture children.

Daniel Nassim: What about the new thinking option? You described how the USA wants the Soviet Union to stop backing its third world opponents—which indeed it is doing. But it seems to me that they want to go even further, that there is talk of working together with the Soviets to contain what they call 'regional conflicts'. They'll work together, as they have in southern Africa, to try and stitch up deals in the third world.

Noam Chomsky: I don't think the Soviet Union is much of an actor in these regions. The way in which the Soviet Union has been an actor in the third world has been to support certain groups or elements that the US is opposed to. So in southern Africa basically the whole game is in the hands of the United States and Europe. When they talk about the Soviet Union becoming a key player, or joining us, what they mean is stop giving any support to those regimes we want to get rid of, that's the Soviet role. For example, the United States would like to crush the PLO, and tell Syria to accept a regional settlement, which means Israel in control of the Golan Heights and so on. And the role of the Soviet Union is to withdraw. That's what's called 'cooperation'.

Daniel Nassim: Finally, a lot of the old assumptions have gone—the Soviet threat is no longer credible, Germany is reunifying and so on. Given these changes, what do you think the new dynamics are likely to be in international relations in the nineties? What areas of conflict are likely to emerge?

Noam Chomsky: The major area of conflict is going to be between the three global powers: the United States, a German-run Europe and Japan. And they're going to be in conflict over all sorts of things. Right now the conflict is over who has the advantage in exploiting the 'third world' opening up in Eastern Europe.

There's also going to remain what's called the North-South conflict, the methods to ensure that the traditional third world remains subordinated to the needs of the industrial societies. And that's always going to require intervention of one form or another. It varies as to whether it's military, economic, IMF procedures or whatever.

And there are also going to be increasingly severe class wars in the industrial societies. Maybe a one-sided class war, but that doesn't make it any less. There's got to be a consistent attack on the domestic populations, to ensure that each power of international business is able to compete.

Those are really the traditional conflicts. The only thing that has gone is that the Soviet Union is much less of a deterrent than it was in the past. It was never much, but now it's virtually nothing. And secondly the Soviet Union and its whole region is now itself opening up to exploitation and robbery. And the trilateral powers are emerging more clearly as rivals. So there's a lot of Japan-bashing in the United States. And if the EC gets its act together they'll be Europe-bashing. And the other way round too—Europe is going to have Japan-bashing. That's how it all goes. ●

A gift from Gorbachev

After Nicaragua

Stefanie Boston looks for the wider significance of the fall of the Sandinistas

The defeat of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua means that the USA probably faces less resistance to its domination of Latin America than at any time since the Second World War. This is despite the fact that, both economically and politically, Washington itself is in a weaker position in the world than at any time over those years. How can we explain this paradox? What makes the implications of the fall of Daniel Ortega's Sandinistas so serious that even a senile Uncle Sam can now bestride his 'backyard'?

In Britain, commentators on both the right and the left have claimed that what was special about the events in Nicaragua was the character of the Sandinista movement itself. The *Daily Telegraph's* front-page article announcing the election result—'Marxists ousted by a "new Aquino" '—summed up the prevailing right-wing view that a hardline communist government had been overthrown in a display of people's power—'as in Eastern Europe' (27 February).

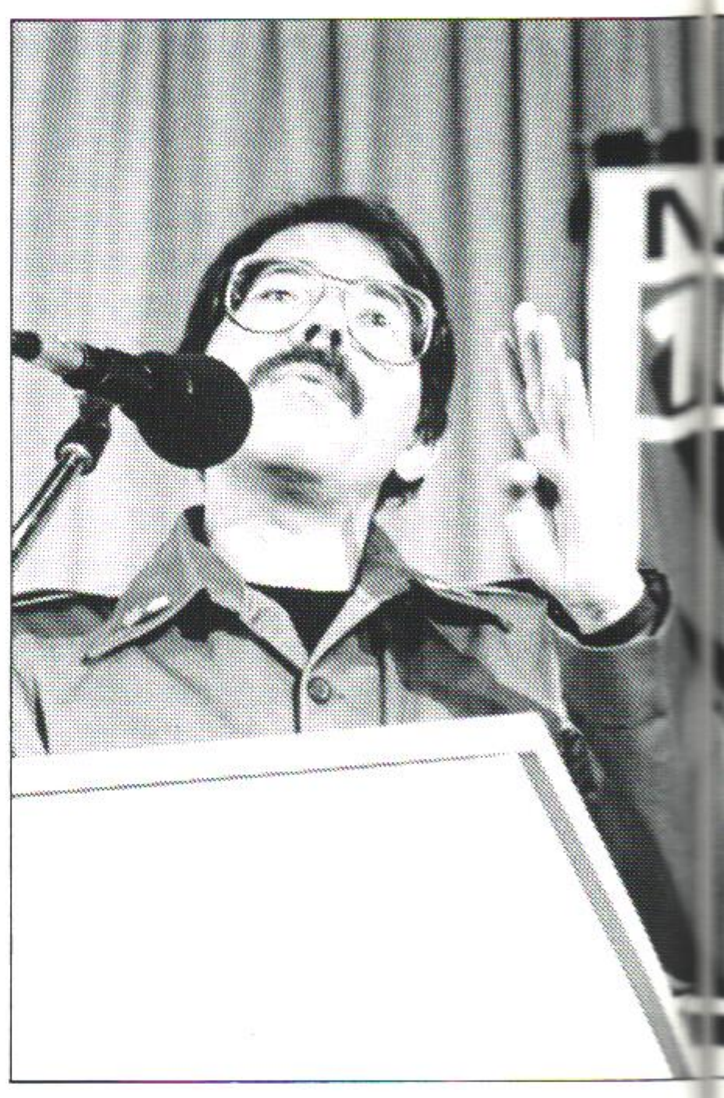
From another perspective, the British left also treated the Sandinistas differently to other third world regimes. As the *New Statesman and Society* editorial on the election results explained, 'the democratic left in Western Europe invested enormous emotional capital in Nicaragua...absolutely convinced that here was a new model of revolution...genuinely open, dynamic, liberatory'. The Sandinistas' defeat thus represented the 'death of a dream' (2 March).

Neither left-wing dreams nor right-wing bragging explains very much about the importance of Nicaragua. There is little unique about the Sandinista movement. Although it was previously endorsed by the Soviet Union, it is not made up of East European-style communists; indeed Nicaragua's two 'historic communist formations' both joined the right-wing Contra supporters in the anti-Sandinista UNO coalition which won the election. Even the *Telegraph* felt obliged to redefine Ortega's regime as only 'semi-Marxist' (whatever that means) the day after it had celebrated the result.

Nor, despite the anti-imperialist heroics of its supporters and the socialist rhetoric of its leaders, did the Sandinista government represent 'a new model for revolution'. Like many another radical nationalist regime down the years, it sought to create a safe environment for the development of an independent national capitalism. Ortega claimed to be using 'market mechanisms' for socialist ends; but it was the industrial and agro-export capitalists who received major concessions as the regime sought to buy their loyalty, while the workers and peasants suffered plunging incomes and soaring inflation in the name of 'revolutionary austerity'.

Typical case

The Sandinistas certainly introduced welfare and education measures designed to improve their people's lot; so, however, has Colonel Gadaffi, but nobody on the British left would point to Libya as a socialist model. In sum, the Sandinistas are typical of the sort of third world movement which anybody who is a democrat, never mind a Marxist, should defend



against the aggression and terrorism of an imperialist power like the USA and its Contra stooges; but which nobody need pretend has any special progressive character.

To discover why the Sandinistas' defeat indicates such a significant regional shift in favour of the USA, we need to look beyond the nature of the movement itself to the broader role which the Soviet Union plays in the third world. The recent success enjoyed by US imperialism in Central America has been due in no small part to the Soviet retreat. In Nicaragua, as elsewhere in the third world, Mikhail Gorbachev has pressurised nationalist movements to make their peace with their oppressors. Gorbachev has thus effectively made a gift of large areas of the globe to US and Western imperialism.

The 'new thinking' in Soviet foreign policy is part of the Kremlin's response to the crisis of the Stalinist system in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev has more or less agreed to give the Western powers a free hand in what are usually called 'regional conflicts'. He hopes that disengaging from third world trouble-spots will relieve some of the pressure on the crumbling Soviet economy. 'New thinking' is designed to allow Moscow to cut its military and economic aid bill, and to earn it better access to Western support, finance and technology.

Over the past couple of years, the Soviet Union has been stepping up the pressure on movements over which it traditionally exercises some influence, telling them to moderate their demands. This has taken effect, to the detriment of the liberation forces, in key conflicts around the world.

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Daniel Ortega in London last year: pressure to moderate his image meant that, by election time, he had swapped the combat fatigues for a cowboy outfit

In Namibia, Swapo has already been pressed into accepting a sham form of independence. As is argued elsewhere in this month's *Living Marxism,* the African National Congress is now being leaned on to reach a compromise agreement with the apartheid state. The Palestine Liberation Organisation's increasing emphasis on negotiating with the Israeli state rather than struggling against it is at least partly due to the influence of Soviet 'new thinking'. And Central America has not been immune either. Gorbachev pressed the Sandinistas to make one concession to the USA after another, while Washington continued sponsoring terror and sabotage in Nicaragua. The resulting economic ruin and political isolation of the regime were vital in swinging the February election.

Gorbachev announced his intentions towards Central America during a trip to Fidel Castro's Cuba in March 1989: 'We are resolutely against any theories or doctrines used to justify the export of revolution or counter-revolution and all forms of foreign intervention in the affairs of states. It is only on that basis that the existing regional conflicts can be solved and their emergence in the future prevented.'

Although Gorbachev presented the withdrawal of support for Central American movements as an even-handed arrangement involving both the Soviet Union and the USA, the reality is very different. While Washington has become if anything more aggressively interventionist in the region—invading Panama, attacking a Cuban cargo vessel, backing the Contras and giving the UNO coalition a massive electoral bankroll in Nicaragua—the Kremlin has refused to give much-needed aid to the beleaguered Sandinista and Castro regimes, or to the liberation movements fighting brutal dollar-backed dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Contra diction

Under pressure from the Soviet Union, the Sandinistas opened talks with the Contra terrorists in 1987 and signed the Sapoa peace treaty the next year—an agreement which the Contras, with US encouragement, have violated ever since, while the Soviets urged restraint upon the Sandinistas. Although the Nicaraguan regime refused to renew the ceasefire last October, it did release almost 2000 prisoners belonging to the hated National Guard of former dictator Anastasio Somoza. Liberal human rights bodies expressed shock that such an army of torturers and murderers should be allowed to walk free.

An incident last November demonstrated how the Sandinistas were now coming under pressure to submit from both Washington and Moscow. In the middle of intense fighting between the El Salvadorean army and the left-wing FMLN guerrillas, a Nicaraguan plane crashed in that war-torn country, carrying Soviet surface-to-air missiles destined for the guerrillas. US secretary of state James Baker seized the opportunity to turn the screws on the Kremlin.

'We have the right to assume Soviet involvement', Baker said. 'Soviet behaviour toward Cuba and Central America remains the biggest obstacle to a full, across-the-board improvement in relations between the USA and the Soviet Union.' But he was careful to leave a get-out for the Soviet new thinkers. 'Either the Nicaraguans are lying to the Soviet Union or the Soviet Union is lying to us [about supplying weapons to the FMLN]. We prefer to believe it is the former.' Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze took the bait, assured the USA that Moscow had not supplied weapons to the region since 1988 (in other words, the Sandinistas must be lying), and announced that Central America was 'supersaturated with weapons that are not contributing to anybody's security'. Shortly after this, in December 1989, the Sandinistas were pressed into signing an agreement recognising the pro-US regime in El Salvador—thus implicitly denying the legitimacy of the FMLN's struggle.

Soviet withdrawal hasn't only left the Sandinistas more isolated and vulnerable. It has also forced others in Central America to adopt a more moderate stance and seek to improve relations with US imperialism—at a time when the militarised US-backed regimes are becoming more brutal than ever. The FMLN now stresses that it does not want to seize power in El Salvador, and that it will give up the armed struggle if president Alfredo Cristiani will negotiate a number of reforms such as a purge of death squaddists in the armed forces. In Guatemala, the main guerrilla umbrella group has asked George Bush to suspend arms shipments to president Cerezo because he uses the guns to kill people. While the opposition is reduced to making polite requests to former CIA chief Bush, the Guatemala death squads now operate in broad daylight, leaving tortured and decapitated bodies of trade unionists and students by the roadside. This is what 'new thinking' means when translated into the harsh language of Central American politics.

Stalinism has never been a reliable ally of anti-imperialists. The Soviets have only ever become involved in third world conflicts for their own strategic benefit, and have always been more than willing to corrupt or derail a struggle if it suited them. However, in the past the political and economic support which the Stalinists provided has allowed regimes like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and especially Castro in Cuba, to survive in the face of intense imperialist hostility and international isolation. Now that Gorbachev has given up any pretence of support for their struggles, those fighting for liberation from oppression are going to have to do some new thinking of their own. In the meantime, the creaking old imperialists in Washington have some breathing space in which to swagger like young bully boys once more.

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liberation

Seven theses on South Africa

No time for euphoria

Should we interpret developments in South Africa as signs of hope or warnings of danger ahead? The Revolutionary Communist Party recently issued a controversial set of theses on the issue. We reprint them here, and invite further contributions to the debate

1. The release of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and of other organisations, and the new climate of negotiations signifies that South Africa may well be undergoing important political changes. Ever since the general strike in Natal in 1973 and the Soweto uprising in 1976, the Pretoria regime has sought to contain the mass movement not simply through repression but also through reform. The strategy of South African president FW De Klerk is at root a response to the revolt of the black masses, which began to threaten the system in the early seventies and which has continued at varying levels of intensity to this day.

However, although mass resistance is the ultimate cause of the Pretoria regime's reform strategy, the specific timing of Mandela's release and moves towards negotiations are due to other factors. It is necessary to recall that since 1987 the mass movement has experienced a downturn. Although it remains robust, it has been significantly weakened in comparison to the early eighties. Indeed it appears that the timing of De Klerk's moves was motivated by the belief that the Pretoria regime has consolidated its position, and that the government can now negotiate from a position of strength with the representatives of the black majority.

It is important not to fall into the trap of wishful thinking and mindless euphoria. The Pretoria regime has *not* been forced to negotiate; compared to the years 1982-1987, the balance of forces favours the government. Moreover it appears from the available accounts that De Klerk's initiative has been carefully planned. Far from being a panic response to pressure from below, it represents a sophisticated attempt to work out a neo-colonial solution for South Africa.

2. De Klerk's initiative must be seen in the wider context of the international consolidation of the forces of imperialism. Although the Soviet Union has never played a progressive role in the third world, its very existence as an alternative ally for third world movements limited Western imperialism's room for manoeuvre. With the effective withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the third world, Western imperialism has succeeded in improving its position. The fall of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the neo-colonial solution imposed in Namibia are just two examples of the present pattern of development. Pretoria has certainly seen the Namibian experience as a dry run for its experiments at home.

It is now clear that Moscow and Pretoria have been discussing the future of South Africa for at least three years. During the past 20 months Gorbachev has become increasingly cooperative with the apartheid regime. Moscow's 'new thinking' has been imposed on the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Soviet diplomats have called into question the role of the armed struggle and have insisted that the ANC/SACP accept some of the realities of the apartheid system. Since Moscow has been the most important backer of the ANC/SACP, its advice to the leadership of this movement has obviously been influential. It is also likely that, behind the scenes, Soviet diplomats have worked on the ANC/SACP leadership to help create a viable framework for negotiations.

De Klerk has self-consciously drawn attention to the new international situation. In particular he has pointed to the collapse of Eastern Europe and of the Soviet model as evidence that the South African government now has little to worry about from anti-capitalist forces.

3. How does the changing pattern of international relations affect the domestic scene in South Africa? Marxists have always

argued that the systems of apartheid and of South African capitalism were closely linked. Apartheid and its framework of oppression and discrimination helped to create an environment conducive to the intense exploitation of black labour. Within the system of apartheid, this exploitation and the domination of society by a white minority regime were mutually reinforced. Apartheid was thus used to perpetuate the socio-economic relations of South African capitalism. The links between apartheid and South African capital are still very close. But international developments afford a new opportunity for rationalising the institutions of South African capitalism.

With the collapse of the Soviet model, South African capital can feel confident that it will not face a challenge to its economic system. Since the South African capitalist class feels that it is no longer threatened by an alternative system, it can be more relaxed about how it supervises its affairs. It now has the option of attempting to preserve capitalism through deregulating race relations and relying more on the market to defend the status quo. In such circumstances, at least in principle, the possibility that apartheid could be reformed cannot be excluded.

De Klerk will use the carrot to reward moderation and the stick to repress and isolate militants

4. The strategy of the South African ruling class is straightforward. It hopes to neutralise the liberation movement by drawing the leadership—or at least sections of the leadership—into a protracted process of negotiations. Its aim is to *moderate* the leadership of the black majority. To this end the regime is prepared to make concessions to cooperative African nationalist leaders. De Klerk expects to draw a section of the African leadership into a relationship with the state, while isolating those who prove immune to compromise. The carrot will be used to reward moderation while the stick will be used to repress and isolate militants.

De Klerk's strategy of reforms is designed to divide the black population both economically and politically. The orientation is towards the formal/informal separation of blacks in the homelands from those elsewhere. Reforms in education, housing and the Bantustans can go some way in changing the political map of South Africa. It will not mean that South Africa becomes non-racial, simply that the differences between white and black are reproduced through the market and more subtle means of domination. Dividing blacks along ethnic lines is another policy already being promoted by the regime.

What are De Klerk's prospects of success? There are many obstacles to realising his objectives. Ultimately it depends on the overall balance of forces. More specifically it depends on whether an accommodating group of black representatives can deliver their constituency. The key obstacle is the mass movement. Will those who have struggled for so long accept the results of negotiations which are not in their interests, or will they take independent action in defence of their cause?

5. The state of the mass movement now and in the period ahead is crucial in determining the future of South Africa. Black resistance remains a decisive factor, and there is still an impressive level of popular participation, if not on the level of the 1982-87 mobilisation. One particular problem is that the black working class and trade union movement has been weakened through the repressive measures imposed under the state of emergency.

The ANC/SACP probably exercises more influence over the mass movement today than at any other time. This influence is primarily political rather than organisational, although the SACP has succeeded in strengthening its hold over the trade union movement.

Ironically, despite its influence the ANC/SACP faces a crisis of identity. The decline of Stalinism in Eastern Europe has obviously shaken up the SACP. It is worthy of note that SACP leaders have gone further than Nelson Mandela in making conciliatory gestures towards South African capital. Some SACP leaders have indicated that the policy of nationalisation is negotiable. In contrast the ANC leadership still pays lip-service to this objective, for fear of losing control over its constituency.

It appears that despite internal differences the ANC/SACP leadership is ready to negotiate and compromise with De Klerk. If the deregulation of race relations can be packaged in some kind of democratic form then the ANC/SACP can be expected to make a deal. Obviously the danger of a grassroots revolt is a problem that can stall the success of negotiations.

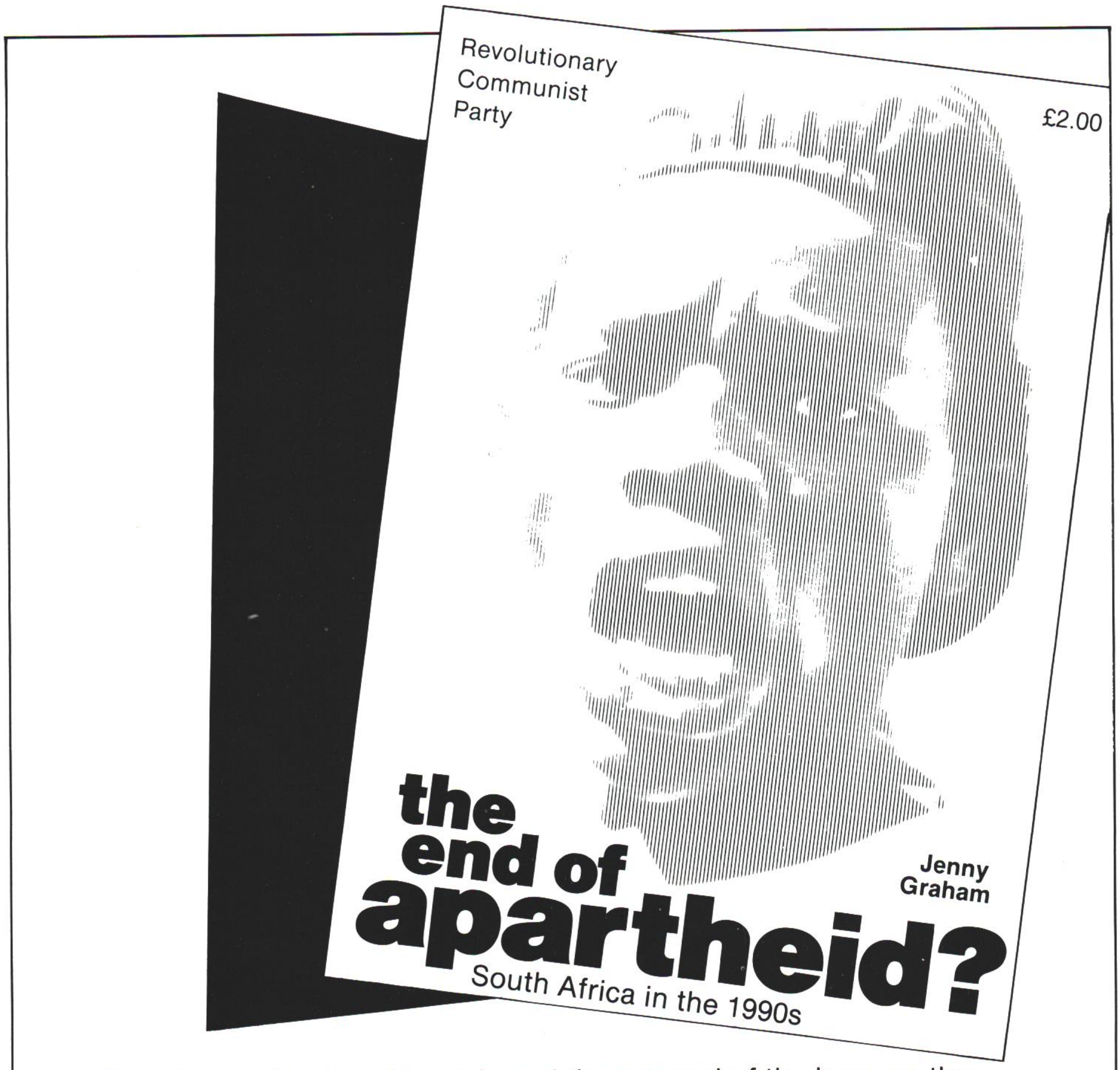
Although the ANC/SACP are not the only genuine representatives of the black masses, they are by far the most influential. Stalinism and its failed strategy of two-stage revolutions remain the dominant influence over anti-apartheid forces. The development of independent working class politics has thus become crucial. Otherwise the bitter experience of Namibia, Zimbabwe and Kenya could be repeated; and given the significance of South Africa, such an outcome would have devastating consequences for the whole continent.

6. The role of negotiations is not only to integrate a representative black leadership. It is also to internationalise the South African question. Protracted negotiations, which have the approval of the major international powers, create an environment for the successful implementation of controlled change.

The campaign for sanctions has done little to hurt South African capital. But it has taken the initiative away from working class action and has endowed capitalist governments with moral authority on the grounds that they fought apartheid. The sanctions campaign has ironically served those who want to maintain the existing socio-economic relations in South Africa. It has provided a pretext for Western leaders to intervene in South Africa and help De Klerk 'reform' apartheid so as to protect capitalist power. The internationalisation of negotiations provides the most obvious framework for imposing a neo-colonial solution on South Africa.

7. The struggle in South Africa faces tremendous dangers. Its fate hangs on whether the masses are prepared to accept De Klerk's neo-colonial strategy. It is evident that in the present climate there can be no genuine negotiations. De Klerk retains the initiative. The state of emergency remains intact. The Pretoria regime still has its military forces and its power to coerce. Negotiations can thus mean little more than De Klerk dictating terms in private, while some democratic-sounding formula is worked out for the public. The mass movement must remain vigilant and be prepared to act to protect its own cause. In Britain and the West, those who oppose apartheid must fight to expose the internationally orchestrated operation designed to betray the oppressed of South Africa.

(Reprinted from *the next step*, 16 March)



The release of Nelson Mandela and the removal of the bans on the African National Congress and other organisations by president FW de Klerk led to worldwide celebrations among all who detest the apartheid regime.

This pamphlet examines the factors, international as well as national, that have produced this dramatic shift in the policy of the South African state. It exposes the plans agreed between Pretoria and its Western backers, with the complicity of the Soviet Union, to pursue negotiations with key black representatives while stepping up measures to fragment popular resistance.

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don milligan

Browne sugar

In recent months the personal finances of the great and the good have been receiving a surprising amount of public attention. The Duke of Westminster, the richest man in Britain, had to ask for time to pay when he was fined £120 for breaking the speed limit. Sophia and Marcus Wilberforce were accused of conspiring with the tsarist 'Baron' de Stempel to steal the fortune of the ancient and senile Lady Margaret Illingworth. And shareholders of Ferranti International are up in arms at the revelation that Alun-Jones, their former chairman, was given severance pay of £490 000. The bizarre, the dishonest, and the greedy. You might think that there is nothing unusual about all this, and you'd be right. However, political jiggery-pokery has now joined the more usual tales of fraud and mismanagement.

This has been highlighted by the case of John Browne, Conservative MP for Winchester. Browne has seen his political career collapse since a commons inquiry reported that he was paid $88 000 by the Saudi Arabian monetary agency, and thousands of pounds by other companies and business interests, to speak up on their behalf in the corridors of power. In itself, however, none of this was irregular or suspect. It is exactly what 170 other MPs who describe themselves as 'consultants' or 'advisers' do every day of the week. Indeed 385 MPs out of the full complement of 650 admit to having outside 'commercial interests', and 37 of these run companies whose sole purpose is to lobby parliament and senior civil servants. So Browne is not alone in pursuing business lunches, trips abroad, presents, emoluments, expenses and fees. On both sides of the house it is considered a perfectly reasonable activity.

Browne's only 'crime' was that he failed to report his multifarious sources of income to the register of members' interests. The register, 98 closely printed pages, lists whom MPs work for and where, it is reasonable to assume, their back-handers come from. They don't have to list the size of their income or the precise nature of their financial arrangements. But, they do have to 'declare an interest' in any companies, industries, promotional agencies or commercial contracts from which they derive benefits or income.

The register was set up in 1976 after it was found that at least three MPs had been mixed up with the architect, John Poulson, who had been convicted for bribery and corruption. One of the MPs was Reginald Maudling, a former home secretary. Since that time the register of members' interests has been used to create the impression that the financial transactions of MPs are beyond reproach, and that they conduct their business in the house in an open and honest fashion. This has now been messed up by John Browne.

The investigation into Browne has been followed by questions concerning the activities of several other MPs. Sir Peter Emery, MP for Honiton, is now facing enquiries concerning undeclared payments from the government of Bophuthatswana, a puppet state run by South Africa. Sir Marcus Fox, MP for Shipley, is also facing some probing questions concerning his interests in Brengreen (Holdings) Ltd, a firm of cleaning contractors. No doubt more undeclared interests will come to light.

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Predictably, Labour MPs are indignant. Dennis Skinner, the Beast of Bolsover, is outraged. Bob Cryer and Dale Campbell-Savours are gravely concerned. The good name of parliament is besmirched by the whiff of corruption. Much worse, democracy herself is violated by MPs who try to use their parliamentary connections to pecuniary advantage. The Labour left thinks that British democracy will be strengthened if the public knows that the Emir of Bahrain gave the MP for Faversham a gold watch, or if we know that the MP for Westbury does the odd job for members of the Iraqi royal family. Democracy apparently works better if I know that the government of Sri Lanka bought the MP for Leicestershire north-west a dinner service, or that the MP for Harwich is an adviser to the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

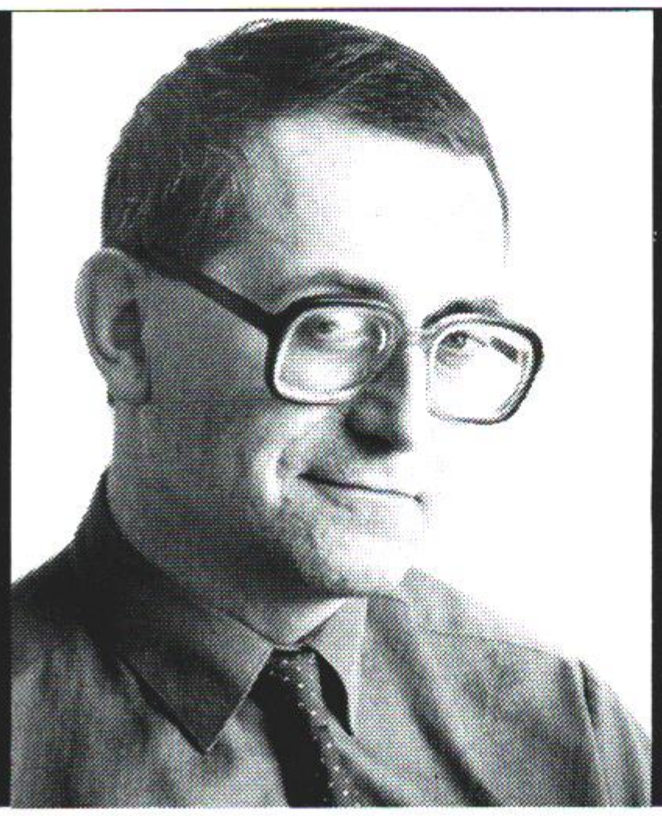
The idea seems to be that, if all the financial doings of members of parliament are known about, Britain will be a fairer, more decent place to live. The Labour politicians monitoring the register of MPs' interests appear to believe that, by protecting the reputation of parliament, they are in some mysterious way doing the public a good turn. The fact that the general public already thinks that most MPs go to parliament in order to 'feather their own nests' seems to have completely passed over Bob Cryer's head.

I doubt very much whether John Browne's constituents are really surprised or shocked by his undeclared interests. His voters are more likely to be concerned that Browne attempted to get his former wife imprisoned because she had trouble finding her substantial share of their divorce settlement. Being represented at Westminster by a rogue is one thing; but by the sort of cad that drags an ex-wife into court over money is quite another.

However, the truly remarkable thing about the fuss kicked up about John Browne is the modesty of his undeclared activities. In the scheme of things Browne is decidedly second division. Beside a character like Sir Jack Lyons he fades into the wallpaper. Sir Jack is a financier, not an MP. But he has been accused of accepting £3.3m from Guinness in return for whispering in the ears of MPs and ministers. Many millions—£1m a month at one stage—were allegedly shelled out to bankers, management consultants and public relations advisers to promote Guinness interests in the City, in parliament and at the department of trade and industry. Whether or not their directors and officials end up in court, this is exactly the sort of thing that every other major company does. They might use smaller budgets and smaller fry, but they're all in the same game.

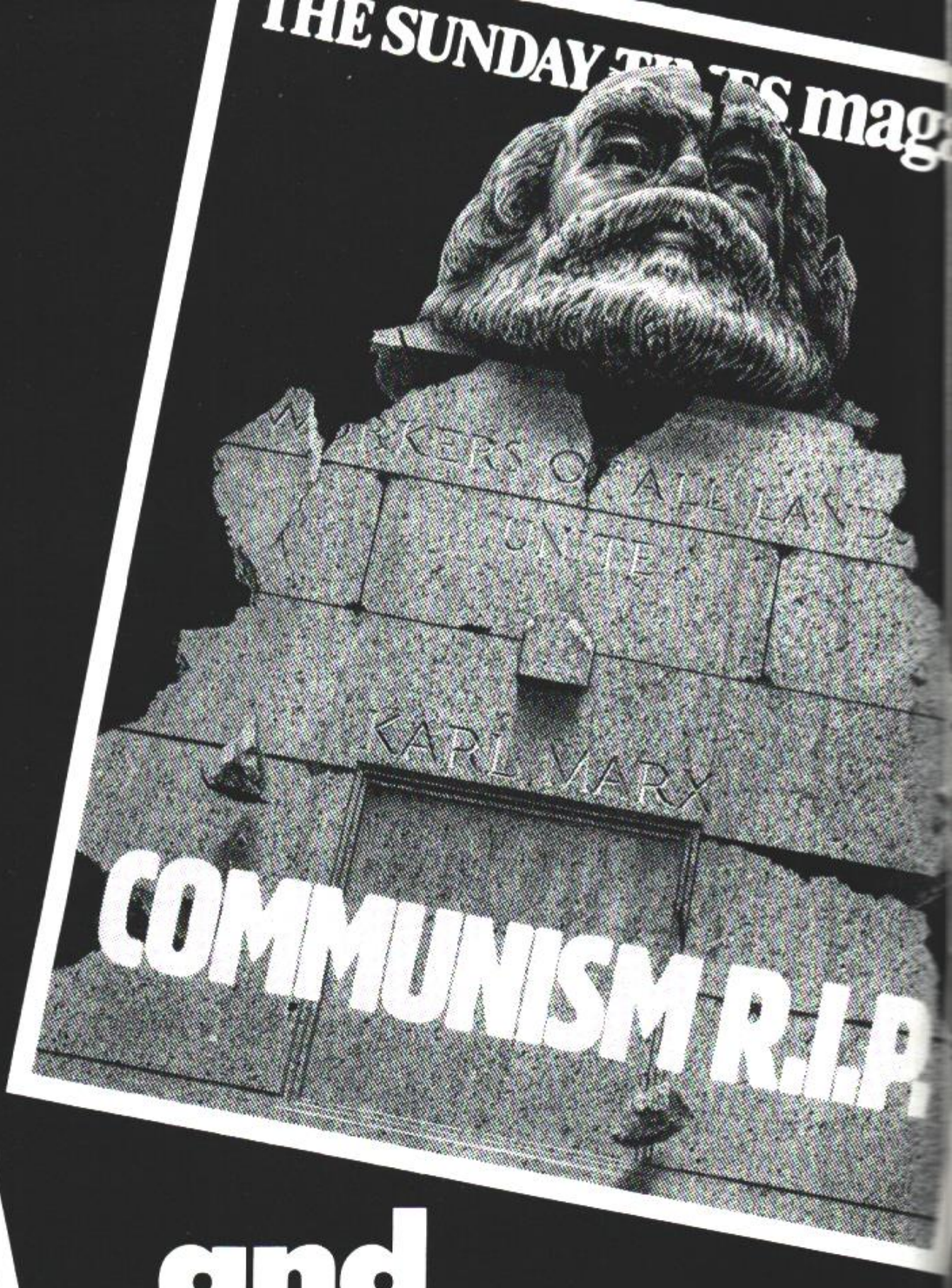
Whatever Browne minor, or Lyons senior, have been up to it is quite wrong to think that this chicanery corrupts the parliamentary principle. Parliament is no bastion of public virtue. It is simply the most public legislative arena of the British capitalist state. The law courts, ministerial instruments and regulations are others. Parliament is where laws drafted by government departments (and lawyers retained by lobbyists) are debated and amended. Consequently, it is quite proper for private commercial interests, investors, banks and insurance companies to bring what influence they can to bear on government policy, contracts or law-making. It is, after all, their state. And parliamentary procedure is designed to perpetuate their interests.

If Skinner, Campbell-Savours and Cryer were trying to expose parliament as a capitalist club I would cheer. But they are not doing this. On the contrary their concern in keeping the register of MPs' interests up to date, and upbraiding the cads who break the rules, is to let everybody know what a tough fight they put up in the struggle against Tory graft and corruption. In the process they seek to strengthen the illusion that parliament exists to represent the genuine interests and aspirations of the people. At least John Browne and Sir Jack can plead not guilty to that act of fraud.



'Democracy apparently works better if I know that the government of Sri Lanka bought the MP for Leicestershire north-west a dinner service'

From the left...



and the right ...

reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated

Marxism lives!

Mike Freeman puts the modern case for the Marxist theories of capitalist crisis and working class revolution

Nowhere has the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had a greater impact than on the radical intelligentsia of the West. For decades right-wing ideologues have insisted that the responsibility for the backward and repressive character of the Soviet Union lay, not merely with Stalin and his successors, but also with Lenin and Trotsky and the revolutionary tradition going all the way back to Marx and Engels. A feature of the Western response to events in the East today is that similar denunciations of Marxism are now made by those who, at least until recently, considered themselves to be Marxists. The leader article in the February edition of *Marxism Today,* 'Marx after Marxism' by Gareth Stedman Jones, is a candid statement of the New Left's repudiation of Marxism.

Now a lecturer at Cambridge University, Stedman Jones established his reputation as a leading left-wing historian with the publication in 1971 of *Outcast London,* a study of class relations in the capital in the late nineteenth century. For the past decade he has been working on an official biography of Frederick Engels. He has been prominent as an editor and contributor to both the *New Left Review* and *History Workshop Journal.* These were periodicals of the 'New Left' which emerged in the radical upsurge of the sixties and enjoyed their peak of influence in the seventies. The New Left was a product of the declining influence of the official communist movement on radical intellectuals after the crisis of 1956 (the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution and Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing the crimes of Stalin), and of the subsequent rise of student and middle class radicalism around issues such as nuclear disarmament and solidarity with third world liberation struggles.

What's left?

The New Left saw itself as a radical think-tank. Its self-appointed task was to produce new ideas (largely in translation from French and Italian) and set agendas for the rest of the left. But it never sought to test out its ideas through intervention in society. Hence its members remained aloof and passive, rarely condescending to comment on day-to-day events except to give grudging support to the Labour Party at election times. Otherwise they never considered the practical consequences of their theories, preferring esoteric discussions of aesthetics and philosophy to engagement with the pressing problems of class politics in Britain.

In the conditions of today, East and West, the New Left's contemplative tradition has led it to the final abandonment of Marxism. But, as our examination of Stedman Jones' article will show, its attempts to write off Marxism reveal much more about the New Left's own intellectual bankruptcy.

'So what is left?' of Marxism, asks Stedman Jones, surveying the wreckage of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe. He concludes that the only aspects of Marxism worth preserving are those insights which 'have long ago been absorbed into the mainstream of social-democratic and liberal thought':

'Among these was a uniquely powerful image of the global energy and unrelenting expansiveness of capitalism, an unforgettable focus upon the authority relations of modern industry, and a dramatisation of the structural antagonism generated by this productive process.'

Lenin long ago upbraided social democrats for trying to turn Marx into a 'common liberal', but Stedman Jones wants to go much further and turn him into a mere journalist, novelist or even a playwright.

Stedman Jones' key phrases—'uniquely powerful image', 'unforgettable focus', 'dramatisation'—are like soundbites from an introduction to the *South Bank Show* or some similar late-night arts programme. The works of Marx, the revolutionary, are presented as worthy of consideration by the panel of judges for the Booker Prize. (In passing, we should warn those Labour MPs who support the censorship of Salman Rushdie's novel that, for all their literary merit, Marx's works contain several passages that could be considered offensive and even blasphemous by devout members of the Churches of England and Rome, not to mention believers in Judaism, so that in deference to the prejudices of their constituents they may wish to prevent publication, at least in paperback.)

Marx himself had a more prosaic assessment of the merits of his writings. Writing to Engels about his major work, *Capital,* he modestly pointed out that 'the best points' in his book were:

'1. The two-fold character of labour, according to whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange-value (all comprehension of the facts depends on this). It is emphasised immediately in the first chapter;

'2. The treatment of surplus-value independently of its particular forms as profits, interest, ground rent, etc.' (Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence,* 1956, p232)

Marx explicitly repudiated the view that his recognition of the class struggle, reduced to 'structural antagonism' in Stedman Jones' pompous formulation, was his distinctive discovery, as he indicated in his famous letter to Weydemeyer:

'And now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of the class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes.' (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works,* 1968, p669)

Marx went on to clarify that 'what I did that was new was to prove:

'1. That the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production,

'2. That the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat,

'3. That this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.'

The distinctive and revolutionary character of Marx's theory was his emphasis on the transience of all forms of human society. In contrast to the conventional prejudice that the existing order is the culmination of human civilisation in the best of all possible worlds, Marxism regards modern society as a society in the process of constant transformation.

Marx challenged the view that capitalism was eternal, identifying both the objective and the subjective conditions pointing towards the transition from the prevailing system to a higher form of society. He revealed the objective factors in the tendency of the capitalist economy to expand in such a way that it comes up against its inherent limitations, resulting in trends towards stagnation and crisis. For Marx the subjective bearer of change in society was the class struggle, and he sought to clarify the role of the working class as the dynamic force for change within the capitalist system. As Stedman Jones explicitly rejects both Marx's view of capitalist crisis and his conception of the historic role of the working class, it is worth clarifying both theories and considering their relevance to today.

'Marx was far more successful', writes Stedman Jones, 'in evoking the power of capitalism than in demonstrating in any conclusive fashion why it had to come to an end'. In fact, for Marx, the very drive for profit that gave the capitalist system its dynamism was also the force that drove the system

inexorably towards collapse.

To appreciate the Marxist theory of crisis it is necessary to go back to the first of what Marx considered 'the best points' in *Capital*—the two-fold character of the labour embodied in a commodity. In capitalist society, any commodity is the product of a particular sort of work, the concrete labour involved in, say, making shoes or building cars. This labour determines the particular shape and form of the commodity, which give it its use-value. At the same time, any commodity, irrespective of the nature of the labour embodied in it or its particular use, can be exchanged for money in the market. This exchange-value of a commodity reflects the abstract labour contained in it, which is simply one small fraction of the total labour of society. Whereas the deployment of concrete labour in the production of use-values is a common feature of all forms of human society, the deployment of abstract labour to produce exchange-value is peculiar to capitalism. The capitalist system is unique in human history in that its concern is not to produce useful things, but to expand value and thus make profit.

'It is not the consciousness of mankind that produces social revolution but the contradiction of material life, the collision between the productive forces of society and its social relations.' —Henryk Grossmann

Secret of success

The secret of capital's success in expanding value and making profit lies in the unique properties of one commodity—human labour-power. Like every other commodity, labour-power has a use-value and an exchange-value. Its exchange-value, paid in the form of wages, is the equivalent of what it costs to enable the worker to feed, clothe, house himself and bring up the next generation of workers. The distinctive character of labour-power lies in its use-value, which can be exploited to produce a greater amount of value than its own exchange-value; this is extracted in the form of surplus-value embodied in commodities, and is subsequently realised after sale as profit.

The process of capital accumulation involves the relentless production of use-values with the object of expanding value and surplus-value which can be invested in further production and surplus-value extraction. But the drive to raise the rate of surplus-value by lengthening the working day and driving down wages soon reaches objective limits, and capital is forced to try to raise productivity by investing more in plant and machinery than in living labour.

The thirst for profit thus results in a growing mass of capital and surplus-value, but the proportion of labour-power employed relative to a given quantum of capital declines—and, since labour-power is the source of surplus-value, the rate of profit declines inexorably too. This fundamental tendency of the capitalist system necessarily manifests itself in the real world in modified forms. It appears in the guise of what Marx characterised as 'counteracting tendencies', expedients adopted by the capitalist system to avert the inherent drive towards collapse—such as the extension of credit. It appears also in the form of periodic crises which interrupt the process of accumulation and provide a mechanism for restoring it, invariably at enormous cost to the mass of society. Marx emphasised that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall was 'the most important law of modern political economy' (*Grundrisse,* 1973, p748), since it identifies economic crisis as an inbuilt feature of capitalist production itself.

For Stedman Jones, however, the 'Marxism' of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall must be firmly separated from his post-Marxist, post-*Newsnight* Marx. For him the theory of crisis falls into the category of 'articles of faith rather than inescapable truth'. Yet if we survey the fate of world capitalism in the 120 years since the publication of Marx's *Capital,* events confirm the tendencies towards stagnation and decay much better than they reveal the 'power of capitalism' that so impresses Stedman Jones.

The capitalist system has survived, a possibility never excluded by Marx, but, as he accurately anticipated, it has managed to keep expanding only at the cost of catastrophic recessions and ever increasing immiseration on a global level. The system survived the Great Depression of the 1870s and 1880s largely through the systematic development of imperialism, a system of global capitalist domination. Yet, while this temporarily postponed recessionary trends, these soon returned on a wider scale, unleashing the rivalries among the imperialist powers that culminated in the First World War. The worldwide slump of the 1920s and 1930s was finally resolved only through two decades of fascism and terror that ended in the inter-continental barbarism of the Second World War.

Today the West celebrates '45 years of peace and prosperity', conditions created by two waves of mass slaughter and devastation in Europe and through the continuing exploitation and subjugation of the third world. The new world recession that has been slowly gathering momentum since the mid-seventies has already created mass unemployment, homelessness and poverty in the heartlands of Western capitalism, while it has plunged much of sub-Saharan Africa into economic collapse and starvation. While Stedman Jones rushes to join the chorus condemning Marxism, reality confirms as 'inescapable truths' the basic elements of Marx's theory of capitalist collapse.

For Stedman Jones, it was 'eloquence rather than science which established the association between the end of capitalism and the destiny of the working class'. But Marx did not share Stedman Jones' almost mystical reverence for the power of language. The role of the working class was an inseparable part of his theory of society. Marx was not merely offering a description of the class struggle as something 'generated by the production process', but presenting that aspect of his theory which revealed the forces for change and progress in society. For Marx, the class struggle was both an expression of the fundamental conflict of interest between the major classes of capitalist society and a way of resolving it. Marx sought to clarify the role of the working class with the aim of guiding its active participation in realising the objective tendencies inherent in the historical process of which it was a central part.

Marx never mechanically separated the role of the working class from developments in the capitalist economy. He insisted that it was not a question of the economic conditioning of class relations, but of the place of class struggle in the totality of capitalist relations of production, as the Polish Marxist Henryk Grossmann pointed out:

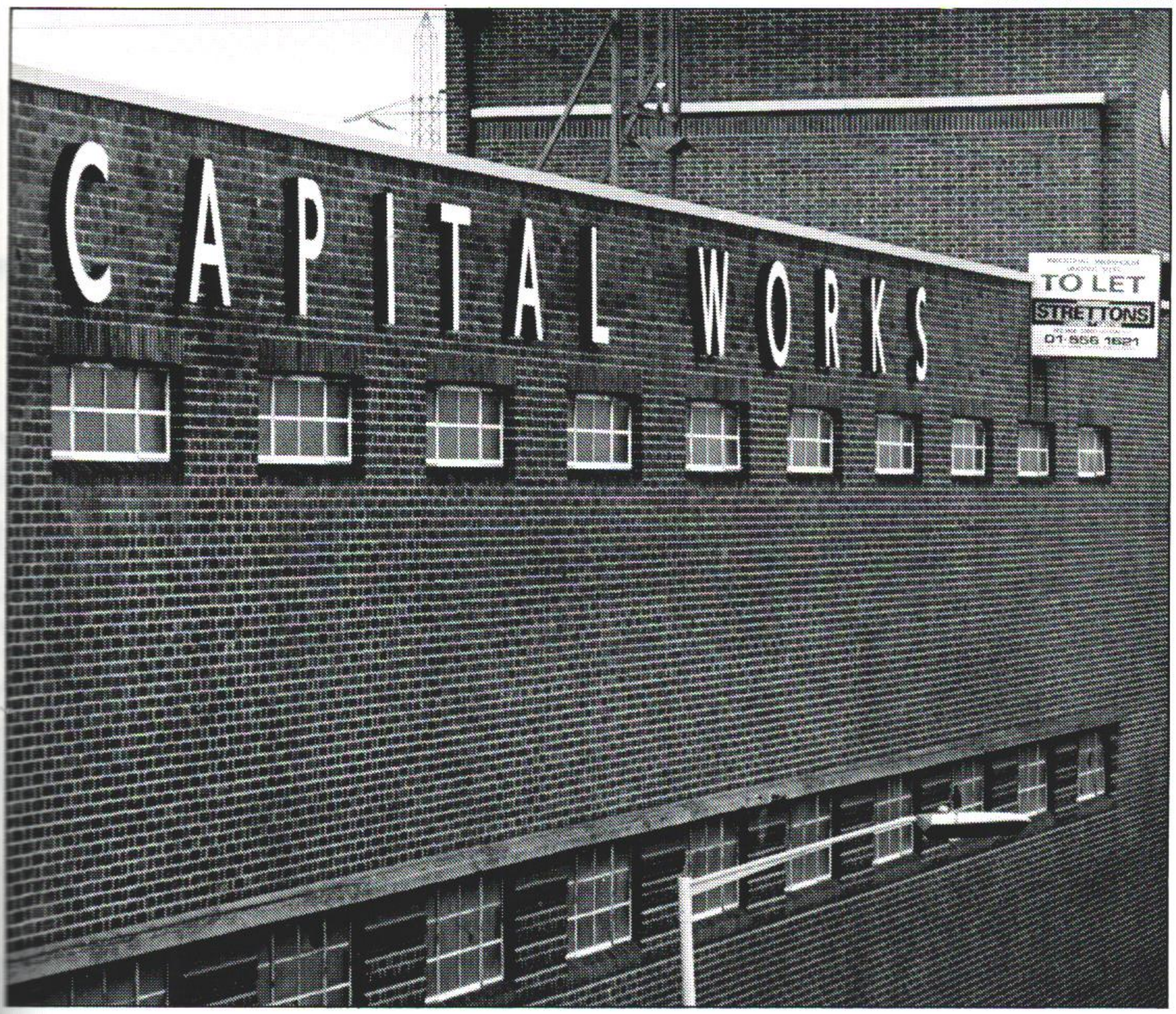
'The social process as a whole is determined by the economic process. It is not the consciousness of mankind that produces social revolution but the contradiction of material life, the collision between the productive forces of society and its social relations.' (*The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System,* forthcoming)

Just as capital itself was both the driving force and the limit to capitalist development, so the working class was in a position to make the greatest contribution to the development of the productive forces of society—by overthrowing the social relations of capitalist society that currently hold back progress. Marx's celebration of the dynamic potential of the working class was not some rhetorical excess but the very heart of his theory of capitalist society and how it could be transcended.

Has the history of the past century refuted Marx's materialist faith in the revolutionary potential of the working class? On the contrary. Wherever revolutionary upheavals have taken place, whenever the capitalist order has been threatened and the world has had a glimpse of the possibility of a higher form of

As another recession approaches, Marx's 'most important law of modern political economy' looks as relevant as ever

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



active role of the working class is relatively submerged. This was the fate of Russia after 1905, of much of Central Europe in the inter-war years, and, in a less repressive but equally reactionary form, of most of the Western world since the onset of the Cold War in the late forties consolidated a new world order under US hegemony.

What evidence is there of the revolutionary potential of the working class today? It is striking that at a time when the capitalist world order is fairly secure and the class struggle is at a low ebb, the threat of working class revolt is a constant preoccupation of rulers everywhere. It is striking too, that whereas Western commentators constantly deny the relevance of class conflict in their own societies, they instantly recognise its importance elsewhere.

When workers in Romania took up arms and took to the streets against the Ceausescu regime, it was immediately apparent that this was a far greater threat to the Stalinist order than the much more restrained and respectable protests in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. When miners went on strike across the Soviet Union last summer, every Western observer could perceive that this was a far greater problem to Gorbachev than the protests led by Boris Yeltsin. Even Kate Adie could appreciate that when workers of Beijing joined the students in Tiananmen Square last June, the challenge to the regime was of a qualitatively different order. Every commentator on recent events in South Africa acknowledges the fact that the rise of a powerful black working class is the most important change in the internal situation since Nelson Mandela was imprisoned 27 years ago.

Even in Britain, where the traditional labour movement has been devastated by a decade of Thatcher rule, the working class remains the greatest menace to the government. It is worth recalling that the conclusion drawn by most pundits after Thatcher's 1983 landslide general election victory was that most workers had been so far incorporated into the enterprise culture that the traditional working class was no longer a force in British politics. Within 12 months the miners embarked on what turned out to be the most forceful and sustained industrial challenge to any Western government in the post-war period. Even though the miners were defeated, the unions have remained a constant menace to the Conservative government; last summer it was the railway workers, then it was the ambulance workers. Away from the workplace, officially sponsored panics about football hooliganism, lager louts and acid house parties all reflect the authorities' concern to keep a firm grip over working class youth.

'Problem of labour'

In his earlier study of Victorian London, Stedman Jones discusses the establishment's preoccupation with 'the problem of labour'. It is striking that, whereas 'new social movements' concerned with peace, the environment or animal rights have come and gone throughout the past century, 'the problem of labour' is apparently eternal. There could be no better vindication of Marx's thesis of the revolutionary destiny of the working class. It is ironic that this potential is much more clearly recognised by the defenders of the existing order than by its erstwhile opponents on the New Left.

Stedman Jones alleges that Marx 'never succeeded in establishing a coherent theory of the connections between property relations and political forms'. But such an arid scholastic endeavour would never have been attempted by Marx, who rejected academic preoccupations with rigid definitions and classifications in favour of an approach which sought to understand social phenomena in their inter-relationships, not in general, but in specific historical contexts. Stedman Jones' formulation already assumes that property relations and political forms are distinct and autonomous spheres, whereas Marxism begins from the interconnectedness of social reality and social relationships. Marxism denies the existence of fixed connections between social phenomena and seeks instead to grasp the dynamic of these relationships through the study of the historical development of society.

Take, for example, Marx's writings on France. In a number of different works Marx presented a detailed study of the evolving relations between economic and class forces and political forms in the complex

struggles of nineteenth-century France. These writings reveal that Marx's concern was not to establish some abstract universal theory to satisfy the rigour of a twentieth-century Cambridge academic. His aim was to assimilate the experience of the working class, raise its awareness of the lessons of these defeats and thus to prepare it more fully for the battles to come. The major achievement of this approach was the development of the Marxist theory of the state.

In their writings of 1847-48, Marx and Engels expressed only a vague and general idea of how the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society would proceed. Though they recognised the necessity for the 'proletariat organised as the ruling class', they had no clear idea of how to deal with the existing state apparatus (see *The Communist Manifesto,* 1848). However, the revolutionary upheavals in Europe between 1848 and 1851 provided new insights into this problem as revolutionary workers found themselves confronted with the repressive machinery of the state, newly commandeered by the democratic bourgeoisie.

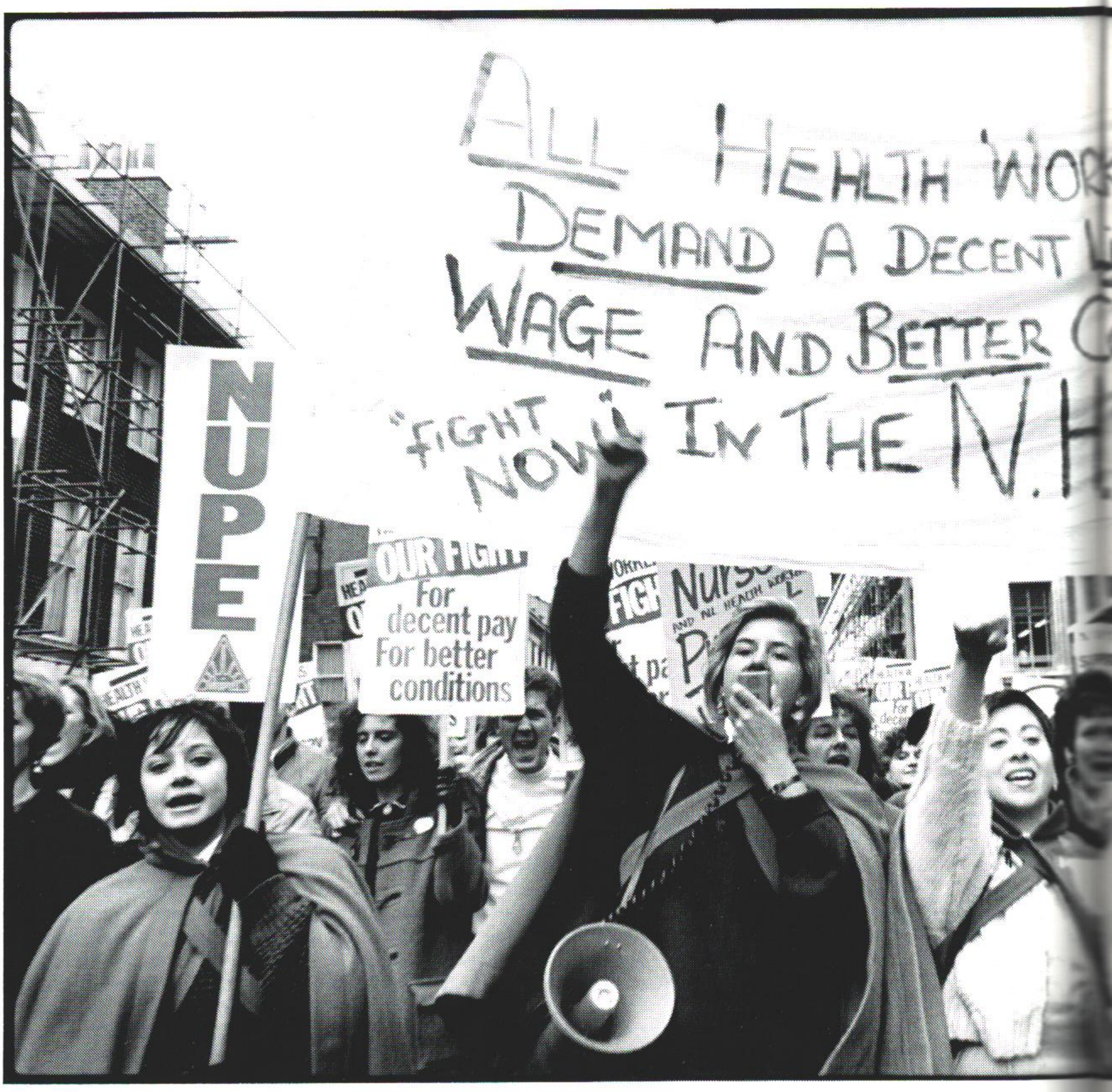
Noting how the parliamentary republic in France had consolidated its state apparatus, Marx observed that 'all revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it' (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte,* 1852). Yet, though it was now clear that the capitalist state could not be taken over by the working class, but had to be destroyed, what should replace it remained unclear. The resolution of this problem required, not theoretical speculation, but the historical experience that was soon provided by the Paris Commune of 1871.

Though the rising in Paris was soon crushed in a frenzied mass slaughter of some 50 000 workers, it was greeted by Marx as an historic experience of enormous significance. In a few weeks the Communards destroyed the existing state machinery and established the basic elements of a distinctively proletarian regime. In their 1872 preface to a new edition of *The Communist Manifesto,* both authors developed their earlier analysis in the light of the Paris events:

'One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes".'

Marx and Engels celebrated the Commune because in Paris the working class had 'at last discovered' the dictatorship of the proletariat, the political form through which it could realise its historic destiny. On the twentieth anniversary of the Commune an exultant Engels mocked 'the social-democratic philistines' who feared the dictatorship of the proletariat: 'Do

PHOTO: Pandora Anderson



you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat.' (*The Civil War in France*)

One who fully appreciated the Marxist approach to history and politics was Lenin, whose 1917 pamphlet *State and Revolution* consists largely of a spirited defence of the Marxist theory of the state against the attacks of social democracy. He concludes his discussion of the lessons of the Commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat with the observation that 'we shall see further on that the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, in different circumstances and under different conditions, continue the work of the Commune and confirm Marx's brilliant historical analysis'.

As is well known, the completion of this pamphlet was interrupted by the October Revolution and the chapter on Russia was never written; Lenin commented in a brief postscript to the first edition that 'it is more pleasant and useful to go through the "experience of the revolution" than to write about it'.

Stedman Jones insists that Marx's 'refusal to accept that capitalism might be controlled by political reform and collective pressure was ultimately a dogmatic assertion'. But, as we have seen, Marx's judgements on the scope for democratic reforms were made on the basis of his study and experience of the class struggle in Europe in his lifetime. The universal experience of the working class then, and indeed since, has been that whenever the capitalist order is seriously threatened by the working class it abandons its democratic façade and resorts to terror and dictatorship. This was the case in France in 1848 and 1871, just as it was in Chile in 1973 and in countless other instances in between.

The collapse of the social democratic government in Sweden in February, following its announcement of a drastic austerity package including a wage freeze, cuts in sick pay and a ban on strikes, confirms that even in the most prosperous capitalist country the living standards and civil liberties of the working class can never be guaranteed. The idea that capitalism can be controlled by democratic structures is truly a dogmatic assertion, one that Stedman Jones has inherited from the very liberals and social democrats against whom Marx, Engels and Lenin directed their polemics.

Pre-Marxists

Generations of liberal reformers have drawn up their ideal programmes for society and tried to persuade the establishment to see the reason and justice of their proposals. The Charter 88 platform of constitutional and democratic reforms is the latest manifestation of this approach; it has been signed by many prominent figures of the New Left, including several past and present editorial board members of *New Left Review*. Marx characterised this approach as a form of utopian, doctrinaire socialism:

'[It] subordinates the total movement to one of its elements, substitutes for common social production the brainwork of individual pedants and, above all, in its fantasy dispenses with the revolutionary struggle of classes and its requirements by means of small conjuring tricks or great sentimentalities; fundamentally it only idealises the existing society, takes a picture of it free of shadows and aspires to assert its ideal picture against the reality of this society.' (*Class Struggles in France*, 1850)

It is ironic that in their desire to go beyond Marxism, today's academic critics of Marx are reverting to prejudices that were familiar in Marx's own lifetime and indeed originate in the pre-Marxist era.

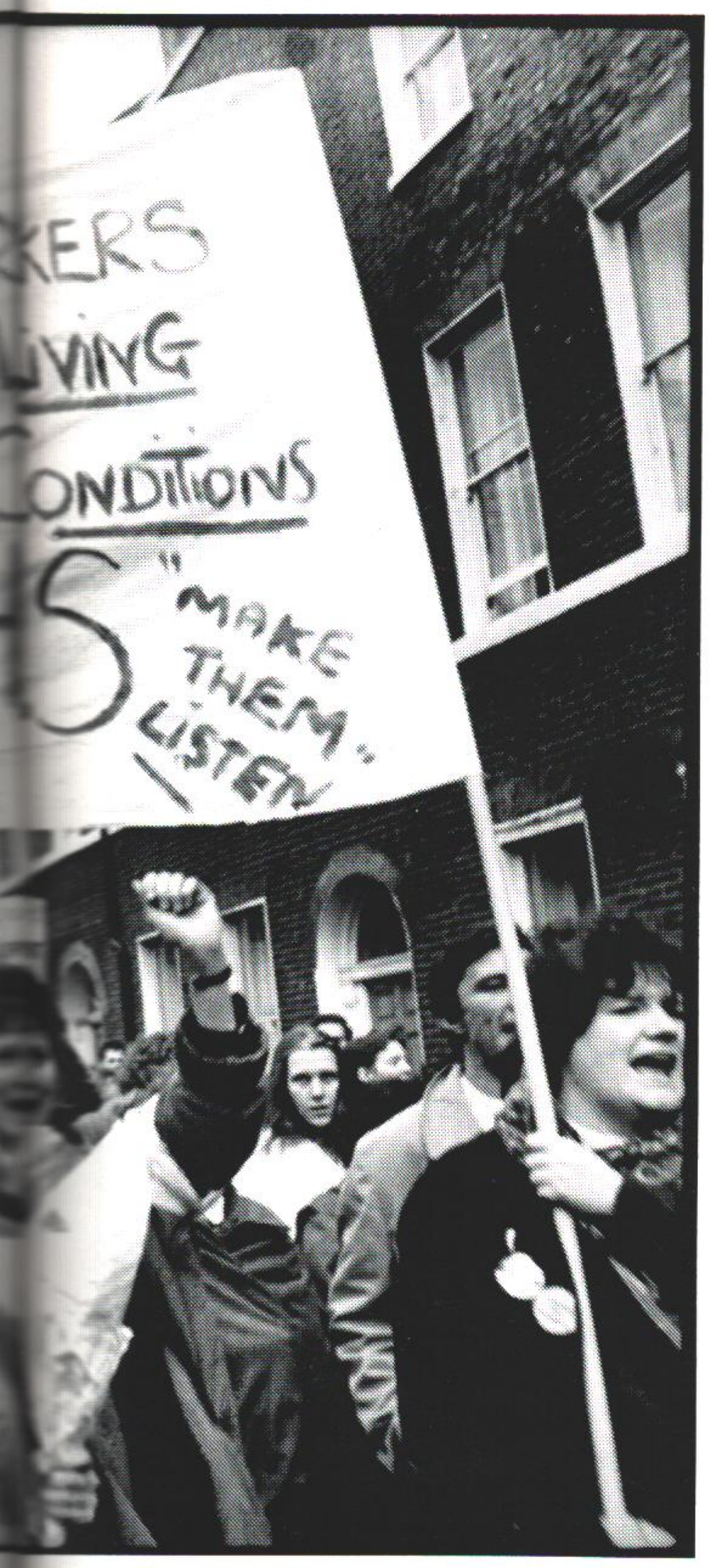
The consequences for Marxism of recent events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have been extensively discussed in recent issues of *Living Marxism*, and much of this issue is devoted to continuing this discussion. For revolutionary Marxists these events confirm the bankruptcy of the Stalinist distortion of Marxism and remove a major obstacle to building a genuine anti-capitalist alternative in the West. The academic Marxists of the New Left draw quite different conclusions. Stedman Jones concludes from these developments that 'it is time that the left abandoned its adherence to Marxism'. His final sentence is the bland declaration that 'it is now up to the left to create a fresh sense of an alternative'. But what is this alternative? The remarkable feature of Stedman Jones' statement abandoning Marxism is that it contains not even the pretence of putting forward an alternative.

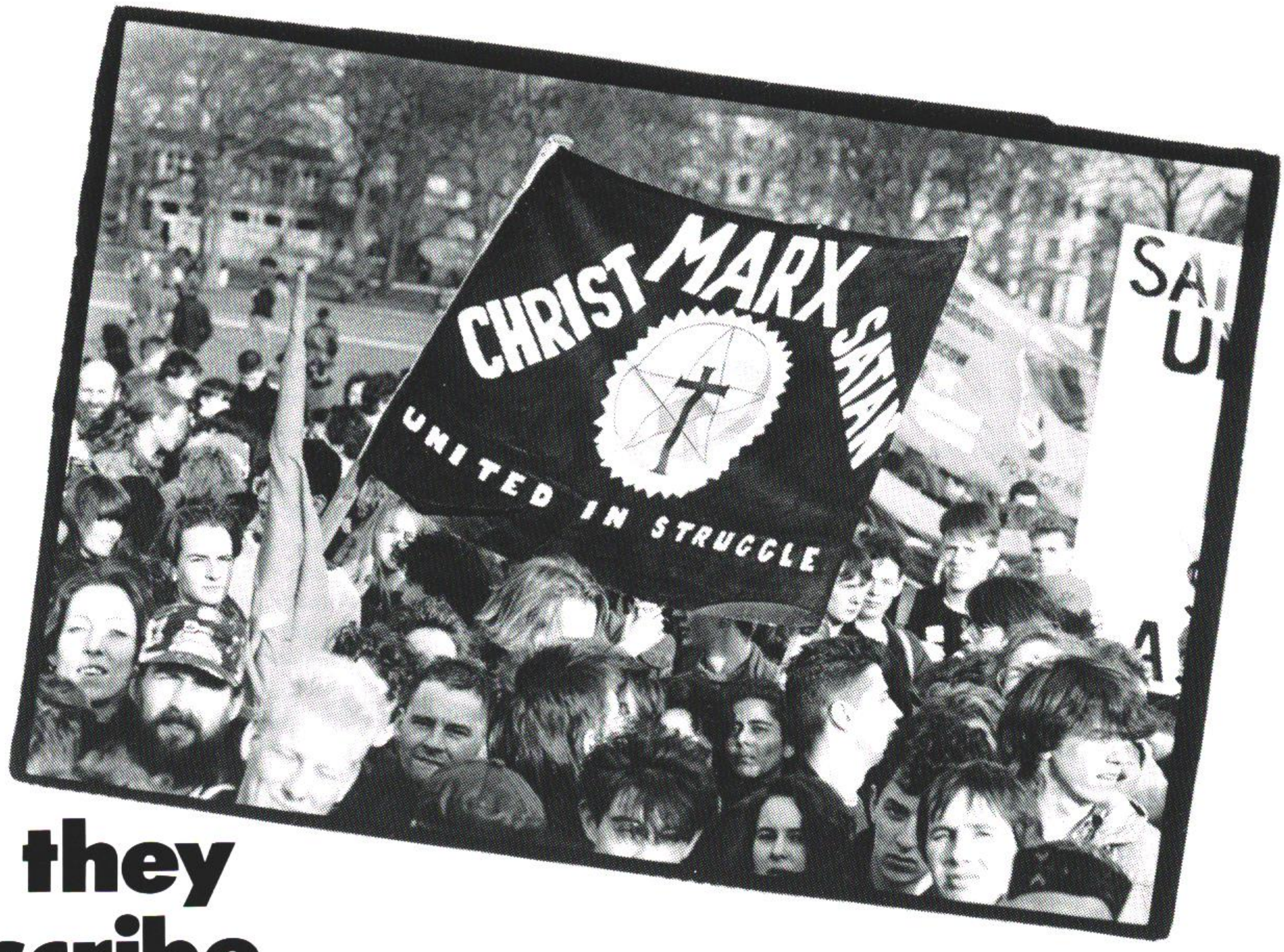
In the past prominent radical intellectuals who repudiated Marxism generally confidently espoused a positive alternative; thus Eduard Bernstein elaborated a coherent reformist position within German social democracy and John Strachey gravitated from the Stalinist camp to the right wing of the British Labour Party. Instead of advancing any alternative to Marxism, Stedman Jones offers merely a shrug of despair. His statement contains an implicit acknowledgement that everything that the left has tried has failed and that in its current state of exhaustion it can do no better than choose the least obnoxious of the options currently on offer.

Stedman Jones' despondent article reveals that the New Left is no longer linked to any critical project. Its critical posture has been suspended and its sole concern now is to settle scores with its own past. It is appropriate that Stedman Jones should have chosen the old Communist Party journal *Marxism Today* to announce his farewell to Marxism. The New Left emerged as a reaction to Stalinism, but it never made a decisive break from its traditions. Always reluctant to push its critical ideas to organisational conclusions, it retained fraternal links with Stalinist labour movements and for a decade fellow travelled with Eurocommunism. How appropriate it is that they should now go down together.

●

From the poll tax to NHS reforms, working class protest remains the greatest menace to Tory policy





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stalinism and bolshevism

by leon trotsky

This month, Living Marxism is proud to republish in full the rare pamphlet 'Stalinism and Bolshevism', written in 1937 by the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. We publish it not just as an historical artefact, but as a contribution to the current debate about communism.

'Is it true', asked Trotsky in 1937, 'that Stalinism represents the legitimate product of Bolshevism, as all reactionaries maintain, as Stalin himself avows...and certain left doctrinaires considering themselves Marxist believe?'. He wrote 'Stalinism and Bolshevism' to rebut this assertion. In 1990, the arguments are being re-run with a vengeance.

Today it is popular on the left to claim that events in Eastern Europe discredit not just Stalinism and bureaucratic dictatorship, but Leninism and working class revolution too. Radicals who argue this point pride themselves on their 'new thinking for new times'. Yet there is little to distinguish the substance of their arguments from those of the 'innovators' against whom Trotsky wrote his pamphlet in the thirties.

Written at the height of Stalin's showtrials, 'Stalinism and Bolshevism' defends revolutionary communism against the accusation that it was to blame for the crimes of the corrupted Soviet regime. Trotsky concludes on the need for a new movement, which he called the Fourth International, to reclaim Marxism from the Stalinists and its detractors as 'a theory of movement, not of stagnation'.

The people against whom Trotsky polemicised are long gone and mostly forgotten. But much of their thought lives on in modern guise among those on the left who would renounce revolutionary Marxism today. And the job of creating a party which can re-establish Marxism as a modern theory of movement is still to be done. That is why we think it worth devoting the next seven pages of Living Marxism to reproducing the pamphlet, the complete version of which has not been published in Britain since the seventies.

David King Collection

Trotsky by Yuri Annenkov

REACTIONARY EPOCHS like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and isolate its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through. In these conditions the task of the vanguard is, above all, not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow: it must swim against the current. If an unfavourable relation of forces prevents it from holding political positions it has won, it must at least retain its ideological positions, because in them is expressed the dearly paid experience of the past. Fools will consider this policy 'sectarian'. Actually it is the only means of preparing for a new tremendous surge forward with the coming historical tide.

The reaction against Marxism and Bolshevism

GREAT POLITICAL DEFEATS provoke a reconsideration of values, generally occurring in two directions. On the one hand the true vanguard, enriched by the experience of defeat, defends with tooth and nail the heritage of revolutionary thought and on this basis strives to educate new cadres for the mass struggle to come. On the other hand the routinists, centrists and dilettantes, frightened by defeat, do their best to destroy the authority of the revolutionary tradition and go backwards in their search for a 'New Word'.

One could indicate a great many examples of ideological reaction, most often taking the form of prostration. All the literature of the Second and Third Internationals, as well as of their satellites of the London Bureau, consists essentially of such examples. Not a suggestion of Marxist analysis. Not a single serious attempt to explain the causes of defeat. About the future, not one fresh word. Nothing but clichés, conformity, lies, and above all solicitude for their own bureaucratic self-preservation. It is enough to smell 10 words from some Hilferding or Otto Bauer to know this rottenness. The theoreticians of the Comintern are not even worth mentioning. The famous Dimitrov is as ignorant and commonplace as a shopkeeper over a mug of beer. The minds of these people are too lazy to renounce Marxism: they prostitute it. But it is not they that interest us now. Let us turn to the 'innovators'.

'the routinists, centrists and dilettantes...do their best to destroy the authority of the revolutionary tradition and go backwards in their search for a "New Word"'

The former Austrian communist, Willi Schlamm, has devoted a small book to the Moscow trials, under the expressive title, *The Dictatorship of the Lie.* Schlamm is a gifted journalist, chiefly interested in current affairs. His criticism of the Moscow frame-up, and his exposure of the psychological mechanism of the 'voluntary confessions', are excellent. However, he does not confine himself to this: he wants to create a new theory of socialism that would insure us against defeats and frame-ups in the future. But since Schlamm is by no means a theoretician and is apparently not well acquainted with the history of the development of socialism, he returns entirely to pre-Marxist socialism, and notably to its German, that is to its most backward, sentimental and mawkish variety. Schlamm denounces dialectics and the class struggle, not to mention the dictatorship of the proletariat. The problem of transforming society is reduced for him to the realisation of certain 'eternal' moral truths with which he would imbue mankind, even under capitalism. Willi Schlamm's attempt to save socialism by the insertion of the moral gland is greeted with both joy and pride in Kerensky's review, *Novaya Rossia* (an old provincial Russian review now published in Paris); as the editors justifiably conclude, Schlamm has arrived at the principles of true Russian socialism, which a long time ago opposed the holy precepts of faith, hope and charity to the austerity and harshness of the class struggle. The 'novel' doctrine of the Russian 'Social Revolutionaries' represents, in its 'theoretical' premises, only a return to the pre-March (1848!) Germany. However, it would be unfair to demand a more intimate knowledge of the history of ideas from Kerensky than from Schlamm. Far more important is the fact that Kerensky, who is in solidarity with Schlamm, was, while head of the government, the instigator of persecutions against the Bolsheviks as agents of the German general staff: organised, that is, the same frame-ups against which Schlamm now mobilises his moth-eaten metaphysical absolutes.

The psychological mechanism of the ideological reaction of Schlamm and his like, is not at all complicated. For a while these people took part in a political movement that swore by the class struggle and appealed, in word if not in thought, to dialectical materialism. In both Austria and Germany the affair ended in a catastrophe. Schlamm draws the wholesale conclusion: this is the result of dialectics and the class struggle! And since the choice of revelations is limited by historical experience and...by personal knowledge, our reformer in his search for the word falls on a bundle of old rags which he valiantly opposes not only to Bolshevism but to Marxism as well.

At first glance Schlamm's brand of ideological reaction seems too primitive (from Marx...to Kerensky!) to pause over. But actually it is very instructive: precisely in its primitiveness it represents the common denominator of all other forms of reaction, particularly of those expressed by wholesale denunciation of Bolshevism.

'Back to Marxism'?

MARXISM FOUND ITS highest historical expression in Bolshevism. Under the banner of Bolshevism the first victory of the proletariat was achieved and the first workers' state established. No force can now erase these facts from history. But since the October Revolution has led to the present stage of the triumph of the bureaucracy, with its system of repression, plunder, and falsification—the 'dictatorship of the lie', to use Schlamm's happy expression—many formalistic and superficial minds jump to a summary conclusion: one cannot struggle against Stalinism without renouncing Bolshevism. Schlamm, as we already know, goes further: Bolshevism, which degenerated into Stalinism, itself grew out of Marxism; consequently one cannot fight Stalinism while remaining on the foundation of Marxism. There are others, less consistent but more numerous, who say on the contrary: 'We must return Bolshevism to Marxism.' How? To *what* Marxism? Before Marxism became 'bankrupt' in the form of Bolshevism it has already broken down in the form of social democracy. Does the slogan 'Back to Marxism' then mean a leap over the periods of the Second and Third Internationals...to the First International? But it too broke down in its time. Thus in the last analysis it is a question of returning to the collected works of Marx and Engels. One can accomplish this historic leap without leaving one's study and even without taking off one's slippers. But how are we going to go from our classics (Marx died in 1883, Engels in 1895) to the tasks of a new epoch, omitting several decades of theoretical and political struggles, among them Bolshevism and the October Revolution? None of those who propose to renounce Bolshevism as an historically bankrupt tendency has indicated any other course. So the question is reduced to the simple advice to study *Capital*. We can hardly object. But the Bolsheviks, too, studied *Capital* and not badly either. This did not however prevent the degeneration of the Soviet state and the staging of the Moscow trials. So what is to be done?

'Under the banner of Bolshevism the first victory of the proletariat was achieved'

Is Bolshevism responsible for Stalinism?

IS IT TRUE that Stalinism represents the legitimate product of Bolshevism, as all reactionaries maintain, as Stalin himself avows, as the Mensheviks, the anarchists, and certain left doctrinaires considering themselves Marxist believe? 'We have always predicted this', they say. 'Having started with the prohibition of other socialist parties, the repression of the anarchists, and the setting up of the Bolshevik dictatorship in the Soviets, the October Revolution could only end in the dictatorship of the Bureaucracy. Stalin is the continuation and also the bankruptcy of Leninism.'

The flaw in this reasoning begins in the tacit identification of Bolshevism, October Revolution and Soviet Union. The historical process of the struggle of hostile forces is replaced by the evolution of Bolshevism in a vacuum. Bolshevism, however, is only a political tendency closely fused with the working class but not identical with it. And aside from the working class there exist in the Soviet Union a hundred million peasants, diverse nationalities, and a heritage of oppression, misery and ignorance. The state built up by the Bolsheviks reflects not only the thought and will of Bolshevism but also the cultural level of the country, the social composition of the population, the pressure of a barbaric past and no less barbaric world imperialism. To represent the process of degeneration of the Soviet state as the evolution of pure Bolshevism is to ignore social reality in the name of only one of its elements, isolated by pure logic. One has only to call this elementary mistake by its true name to do away with every trace of it.

Bolshevism, in any case, never identified itself either with the October Revolution or with the Soviet state that issued from it. Bolshevism considered itself as one of the factors of history, its 'Conscious' factor—a very important but not decisive one. We never sinned in historical subjectivism. We saw the decisive factor—on the existing basis of productive forces—in the class struggle, not only on a national but on an international scale.

When the Bolsheviks made concessions to the peasant tendency, to private ownership, set up strict rules for membership of the party, purged the party of alien elements, prohibited other parties, introduced the NEP, granted enterprises as concessions, or concluded diplomatic agreements with imperialist governments, they were drawing partial conclusions from the basic fact that had been theoretically clear to them from the beginning; that the conquest of power, however important it may be in itself, by no means transforms the party into a sovereign ruler of the historical process. Having taken over the state, the party is able, certainly, to influence the development of society with a power inaccessible to it before; but in return it submits itself to a 10 times greater influence from all other elements in society. It can, by the direct attack by hostile forces, be thrown out of power. Given a more drawn out tempo of development, it can degenerate internally while holding on to power. It is precisely this dialectic of the historical process that is not understood by those sectarian logicians who try to find in the decay of the Stalinist bureaucracy a crushing argument against Bolshevism.

In essence these gentlemen say: the revolutionary party that contains in itself no guarantee against its own degeneration is bad. By such a criterion Bolshevism is naturally condemned: it has no talisman. But the criterion itself is wrong. Scientific thinking demands a concrete analysis: how and why did the party degenerate? No one but the Bolsheviks themselves have, up to the present time, given such an analysis. To do this they had no need to break with Bolshevism. On the contrary, they found in its arsenal all they needed for the explanation of their fate. They drew this conclusion: certainly Stalinism 'grew out' of Bolshevism, not logically, however, but dialectically; not as a revolutionary affirmation but as a Thermidorian negation. It is by no means the same.

Bolshevism's basic prognosis

THE BOLSHEVIKS, however, did not have to wait for the Moscow trials to explain the reasons for the disintegration of the governing party of the USSR. Long ago they foresaw and spoke of the theoretical possibility of this development. Let us remember the prognosis of the Bolsheviks, not only on the eve of the October Revolution but years before. The specific alignment of forces in the national and international field can enable the proletariat to seize power first in a backward country such as Russia. But the same alignment of forces proves beforehand that *without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries* the workers' government in Russia will not survive. Left to itself the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate. More exactly; it will first degenerate and then fall. I myself have written about this more than once, beginning in 1905. In my *History of the Russian Revolution* (*cf,* 'Appendix' to the last volume: 'Socialism in one country') are collected all the statements on the question made by the Bolshevik leaders from 1917 until 1923. They all amount to the following: without a revolution in the West, Bolshevism will be liquidated either by internal counter-revolution or by external intervention, or by a combination of both. Lenin stressed again and again that the bureaucratisation of the Soviet regime was not a technical or organisational question, but the potential beginning of the degeneration of the workers' state.

At the eleventh party congress in March, 1922, Lenin spoke of the support offered to Soviet Russia at the time of the NEP by certain bourgeois politicians, particularly the liberal professor Ustrialov. 'I am for the support of the Soviet power in Russia' said Ustrialov, although he was a Cadet, a bourgeois, a supporter of intervention—'because it has taken the road that will lead it back to an ordinary bourgeois state'. Lenin prefers the cynical voice of the enemy to 'sugary communistic nonsense'. Soberly and harshly he warns the party of danger: 'We must say frankly that the things Ustrialov speaks about are possible. History knows all sorts of metamorphoses. Relying on firmness of convictions, loyalty and other splendid moral qualities is anything but a serious attitude in politics. A few people may be endowed with splendid moral qualities, but historical issues are decided by vast masses, which, if the few don't suit them, may at times, treat them none too politely.' In a word, the party is not the only factor of development and on a larger historical scale is not the decisive one.

'One nation conquers another' continued Lenin at the same congress, the last in which he participated...'this is simple and intelligible to all. But what happens to the culture of these nations? Here things are not so simple. If the conquering nation is more cultured than the vanquished nation, the former imposes its culture upon the latter, but if the opposite is the case, the vanquished nation imposes its culture on the conqueror. Has not something like this happened in the capital of the RSFSR? Have the 4700 Communists (nearly a whole army division, and all of them the very best) come under the influence of an alien culture?'. This was said in the beginning of 1922, and not for the first time. History is not made by a few people, even 'the best'; and not only that: these 'best' can degenerate in the spirit of an alien, that is, a bourgeois culture. Not only can the Soviet state abandon the way of socialism, but the Bolshevik party can, under unfavourable historic conditions, lose its Bolshevism.

From the clear understanding of this danger issued the Left Opposition, definitely formed in 1923. Recording day by day the symptoms of degeneration, it tried to oppose to the growing Thermidor the conscious will of the proletarian vanguard. However, this subjective factor proved to be insufficient. The 'gigantic masses' which, according to Lenin, decide the outcome of the struggle, become tired of internal privations and of waiting too long for the world revolution. The mood of the masses declined. The bureaucracy won the upper hand. It cowed the revolutionary vanguard, trampled upon Marxism, prostituted the Bolshevik party. Stalinism conquered. In the form of the Left Opposition, Bolshevism broke with the Soviet bureaucracy and its Comintern. This was the real course of development.

To be sure, in a formal sense Stalinism did issue from Bolshevism. Even today the Moscow bureaucracy continues to call itself the Bolshevik party. It is simply using the old label of Bolshevism the better to fool the masses. So much the more pitiful are those theoreticians who take the shell for the kernel and appearance for reality. In the identification of Bolshevism and Stalinism they render the best possible service to the Thermidorians and precisely thereby play a clearly reactionary role.

In view of the elimination of all other parties

'The bureaucracy...cowed the revolutionary vanguard, trampled upon Marxism, prostituted the Bolshevik party'

from the political field the antagonistic interests and tendencies of the various strata of the population, to a greater or less degree, had to find their expression in the governing party. To the extent that the political centre of gravity has shifted from the proletarian vanguard to the bureaucracy, the party has changed its social structure as well as its ideology. Owing to the tempestuous course of development, it has suffered in the last 15 years a far more radical degeneration than did the social democracy in half a century. The present purge draws between Bolshevism and Stalinism not simply a bloody line but a whole river of blood. The annihilation of all the older generation of Bolsheviks, an important part of the middle generation which participated in the civil war, and that part of the youth that took up most seriously the Bolshevik traditions, shows not only a political but a thoroughly physical incompatibility between Bolshevism and Stalinism. How can this not be seen?

'To deduce Stalinism from Bolshevism or from Marxism is the same as to deduce...counter-revolution from revolution'

Stalinism and 'state socialism'

THE ANARCHISTS, for their part, try to see in Stalinism the organic product, not only of Bolshevism and Marxism but of 'state socialism' in general. They are willing to replace Bakunin's patriarchal 'federation of free communes' by the modern federation of free Soviets. But, as formerly, they are against centralised state power. Indeed, one branch of 'state' Marxism, social democracy, after coming to power became an open agent of capitalism. The other gave birth to a new privileged caste. It is obvious that the source of evil lies in the state. From a wide historical viewpoint, there is a grain of truth in this reasoning. The state as an apparatus of coercion is an undoubted source of political and moral infection. This also applies, as experience has shown, to the workers' state. Consequently it can be said that Stalinism is a product of a condition of society in which society was still unable to tear itself out of the strait-jacket of the state. But this position, contributing nothing to the elevation of Bolshevism and Marxism, characterises only the general level of mankind, and above all—the relation of forces between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Having agreed with the anarchists that the state, even the workers' state, is the offspring of class barbarism and that real human history will begin with the abolition of the state, we have still before us in full force the question: what ways and methods will lead, *ultimately,* to the abolition of the state? Recent experience bears witness that they are anyway not the methods of anarchism.

The leaders of the Spanish Federation of Labour (CNT), the only important anarchist organisation in the world, became, in the critical hour, bourgeois ministers. They explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of 'exceptional circumstances'. But did not the leaders of German social democracy produce, in their time, the same excuse? Naturally, civil war is not peaceful and ordinary but an 'exceptional circumstance'. Every serious revolutionary organisation, however, prepares precisely for 'exceptional circumstances'. The experience of Spain has shown once again that the state can be 'denied' in booklets published in 'normal circumstances' by permission of the bourgeois state, but the conditions of revolution leave no room for the denial of the state: they demand, on the contrary, the conquest of the state. We have not the slightest intention of blaming the anarchists for not having liquidated the state with a mere stroke of a pen. A revolutionary party, even after having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society. But all the more severely do we blame the anarchist theory, which seemed to be wholly suitable for times of peace, but which had to be dropped rapidly as soon as the 'exceptional circumstances' of the...revolution had begun. In the old days there were certain generals—and probably are now—who considered that the most harmful thing for an army was war. Little better are those revolutionaries who complain that revolution destroys their doctrine.

Marxists are wholly in agreement with the anarchists in regard to the final goal: the liquidation of the state. Marxists are 'state-ist' only to the extent that one cannot achieve the liquidation of the state simply by ignoring it. The experience of Stalinism does not refute the teaching of Marxism but confirms it by inversion. The revolutionary doctrine which teaches the proletariat to orient itself correctly in situations and to profit actively by them, contains of course no automatic guarantee of victory. But victory is possible only through the application of this doctrine. Moreover, the victory must not be thought of as a single event. It must be considered in the perspective of an historical epoch. The workers' state—on a lower economic basis and surrounded by imperialism—was transformed into the gendarmerie of Stalinism. But genuine Bolshevism launched a life and death struggle against the gendarmerie. To maintain itself Stalinism is now forced to conduct a direct *civil war* against Bolshevism, under the name of 'Trotskyism', not only in the USSR but also in Spain. The old Bolshevik party is dead but Bolshevism is raising its head everywhere.

To deduce Stalinism from Bolshevism or from Marxism is the same as to deduce, in a larger sense, counter-revolution from revolution. Liberal-conservative and later reformist thinking has always been characterised by this cliché. Due to the class structure of society, revolutions have always produced counter-revolutions. Does this not indicate, asks the logician, that there is some inner flaw in the revolutionary

method? However, neither the liberals nor reformists have succeeded, as yet, in inventing a more 'economical' method. But if it is not easy to rationalise the living historic process, it is not at all difficult to give a rational interpretation of the alternation of its waves, and thus by pure logic to deduce Stalinism from 'state socialism', fascism from Marxism, reaction from revolution, in a word, the antithesis from the thesis. In this domain as in many others anarchist thought is the prisoner of liberal rationalism. Real revolutionary thinking is not possible without dialectics.

The political 'sins' of Bolshevism as the source of Stalinism

THE ARGUMENTS of the rationalists assume at times, at least in their outer form, a more concrete character. They do not deduce Stalinism from Bolshevism as a whole but from its political sins. The Bolsheviks—according to Gorter, Pannekoek, certain German 'Spartakists' and others—replaced the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of the party; Stalin replaced the dictatorship of the party with the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. The Bolsheviks destroyed all parties except their own; Stalin strangled the Bolshevik party in the interest of a Bonapartist clique. The Bolsheviks compromised with the bourgeoisie; Stalin became its ally and support. The Bolsheviks recognised the necessity of participation in the old trade unions and in the bourgeois parliament; Stalin made friends with the trade union bureaucracy and bourgeois democracy. One can make such comparisons at will. For all their apparent effectiveness they are entirely empty.

'No one has shown in practice or...on paper how the proletariat can seize power without the political leadership of a party that knows what it wants'

The proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from the insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspiration of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power. In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard. The Soviets are the only organised form of the tie between the vanguard and the class. A revolutionary content can be given this form only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally Spain). No one has either shown in practice or tried to explain articulately on paper how the proletariat can seize power without the political leadership of a party that knows what it wants. The fact that this party subordinates the Soviets politically to its leaders has, in itself, abolished the Soviet system no more than the domination of the conservative majority has abolished the British parliamentary system.

As far as the *prohibition* of other Soviet parties is concerned, it did not flow from any 'theory' of Bolshevism but was a measure of defence of the dictatorship in a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies on all sides. For the Bolsheviks it was clear from the beginning that this measure, later completed by the prohibition of factions inside the governing party itself, signalised a tremendous danger. However, the root of the danger lay not in the doctrine or the tactics but in the material weakness of the dictatorship, in the difficulties of its internal and international situation. If the revolution had triumphed, even if only in Germany, the need of prohibiting the other Soviet parties would have immediately fallen away. It is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the juridical point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian regime. The reason for this development lies neither in Bolshevism nor in the prohibition of other parties as a temporary war measure, but in the number of defeats of the proletariat in Europe and Asia.

The same applies to the struggle with anarchism. In the heroic epoch of the revolution the Bolsheviks went hand in hand with genuinely revolutionary anarchists. Many of them were drawn into the ranks of the party. The author of these lines discussed with Lenin more than once the possibility of allotting the anarchists certain territories where, with the consent of the local population, they would carry out their stateless experiment. But civil war, blockade, and hunger left no room for such plans. The Kronstadt insurrection? But the revolutionary government could naturally not 'present' to the insurrectionary sailors the fortress which protected the capital only because the reactionary peasant-soldier rebellion was joined by a few doubtful anarchists. The concrete historical analysis of the events leaves not the slightest room for legends, built up on ignorance and sentimentality, concerning Kronstadt, Makhno and other episodes of the revolution.

There remains only the fact that the Bolsheviks from the beginning applied not only conviction but also compulsion, often to a most severe degree. It is also indisputable that later the bureaucracy which grew out of the revolution monopolised the system of compulsions in its own hands. Every stage of development, even such catastrophic stages as revolution and counter-revolution, flows from the preceding stage, is rooted in it and carries over some of its features. Liberals, including the Webbs, have always maintained that the Bolshevik dictatorship represented only a new edition of Tsarism. They close their eyes to such 'details' as the abolition of the monarchy and the nobility, the handing over of the land to the peasants, the expropriation of capital, the introduction of the planned economy, atheist

education, and so on. In exactly the same way liberal-anarchist thought closes its eyes to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution, with all its repressions, meant an upheaval of social relations in the interests of the masses, whereas Stalin's Thermidorian upheaval accompanies the reconstruction of Soviet society in the interest of a privileged minority. It is clear that in the identification of Stalinism with Bolshevism there is not a trace of socialist criteria.

Questions of theory

ONE OF THE MOST outstanding features of Bolshevism has been its severe, exacting, even quarrelsome attitude towards the question of doctrine. The 26 volumes of Lenin's works will remain forever a model of the highest theoretical conscientiousness. Without this fundamental quality Bolshevism would never have fulfilled its historic role. In this regard Stalinism, coarse, ignorant and thoroughly empirical, is its complete opposite.

The Opposition declared more than 10 years ago in its programme: 'Since Lenin's death a whole set of new theories has been created, whose only purpose is to justify the Stalin group's sliding off the path of the international proletarian revolution.' Only a few days ago an American writer, Liston M Oak, who has participated in the Spanish revolution, wrote: 'The Stalinists in fact are today the foremost revisionists of Marx and Lenin—Bernstein did not dare go half as far as Stalin in revising Marx.' This is absolutely true. One must add only that Bernstein actually felt certain theoretical needs: he tried conscientiously to establish a correspondence between the reformist practices of social democracy and its programme. The Stalinist bureaucracy, however, not only had nothing in common with Marxism but is in general foreign to any doctrine or system whatsoever. Its 'ideology' is thoroughly permeated with police subjectivism, its practice is the empiricism of crude violence. In keeping with its essential interests the caste of usurpers is hostile to any theory: it can give an account of its social role neither to itself nor to anyone else. Stalin revises Marx and Lenin not with the theoretician's pen but with the heel of the GPU.

'Stalin revises Marx and Lenin not with the theoretician's pen but with the heel of the GPU'

Questions of morals

COMPLAINTS OF THE 'immorality' of Bolshevism come particularly from those boastful nonentities whose cheap masks were torn away by Bolshevism. In petit-bourgeois, intellectual, democratic, 'socialist', literary, parliamentary and other circles, conventional values prevail, or a conventional language to cover their lack of values. This large and motley society for mutual protection—'live and let live'—cannot bear the touch of the Marxist lancet on its sensitive skin. The theoreticians, writers and moralists, hesitating between different camps, thought and continue to think that the Bolsheviks maliciously exaggerate differences, are incapable of 'loyal' collaboration and by their 'intrigues' disrupt the unity of the workers' movement. Moreover, the sensitive and touchy centrist has always thought that the Bolsheviks were 'calumniating' him—simply because they carried through to the end for him his half-developed thoughts: he himself was never able to. But the fact remains that only that precious quality, an uncompromising attitude towards all quibbling and evasion, can educate a revolutionary party which will not be taken unawares by 'exceptional circumstances'.

The moral qualities of every party flow, in the last analysis, from the historical interests that it represents. The moral qualities of Bolshevism, self-renunciation, disinterestedness, audacity and contempt for every kind of tinsel and falsehood—the highest qualities of human nature!—flow from revolutionary intransigence in the service of the oppressed. The Stalinist bureaucracy imitates also in this domain the words and gestures of Bolshevism. But when 'intransigence' and 'inflexibility' are applied by a police apparatus in the service of a privileged minority they become a force of demoralisation and gangsterism. One can feel only contempt for these gentlemen who identify the revolutionary heroism of the Bolsheviks with the bureaucratic cynicism of the Thermidorians.

Even now, in spite of the dramatic events in the recent period, the average philistine prefers to believe that the struggle between Bolshevism ('Trotskyism') and Stalinism concerns a clash of personal ambitions, or, at best, a conflict between two 'shades' of Bolshevism. The crudest expression of this opinion is given by Norman Thomas, leader of the American Socialist Party: 'There is little reason to believe', he writes (*Socialist Review,* September 1937, p6), 'that if Trotsky had won (!) instead of Stalin, there would be an end of intrigue, plots, and a reign of fear in Russia'. And this man considers himself...a Marxist. One would have the same right to say: 'There is little reason to believe that if instead of Pius XI, the Holy See were occupied by Norman I, the Catholic Church would have been transformed into a bulwark of socialism.' Thomas fails to understand that it is not a question of a match between Stalin and Trotsky, but of an antagonism between the bureaucracy and the proletariat. To be sure, the governing stratum of the USSR is forced even now to adapt itself to the still not wholly liquidated heritage of revolution, while preparing at the same time through direct civil war (bloody 'purge'—mass annihilation of the discontented) a change of the social regime. But in Spain the Stalinist clique is already acting openly as a bulwark of the

bourgeois order against socialism. The struggle against the Bonapartist bureaucracy is turning before our eyes into class struggle: two worlds, two programmes, two moralities. If Thomas thinks that the victory of the socialist proletariat over the infamous caste of oppressors would not politically and morally regenerate the Soviet regime, he proves only that for all his reservations, shufflings and pious sighs he is far nearer to the Stalinist bureaucracy than to the workers. Like other exposers of Bolshevik 'immorality', Thomas has simply not grown to the level of revolutionary morality.

The traditions of Bolshevism and the Fourth International

THE 'LEFTS' who tried to skip Bolshevism in their return to Marxism generally confined themselves to isolated panaceas: boycott of the old trade unions, boycott of parliament, creation of 'genuine' Soviets. All this could still seem extremely profound in the heat of the first days after the war. But now, in the light of most recent experience, such 'infantile diseases' have no longer even the interest of a curiosity. The Dutchmen Gorter and Pannekoek, the German 'Spartakists', the Italian Bordigists, showed their independence from Bolshevism only by artificially inflating one of its features and opposing it to the rest. But nothing has remained either in practice or in theory of these 'left' tendencies: an indirect but important proof that Bolshevism is the *only* possible form of Marxism for this epoch.

The Bolshevik party has shown in action a combination of the highest revolutionary audacity and political realism. It established for the first time the correspondence between the vanguard and the class which alone is capable of securing victory. It has proved by experience that the alliance between the proletariat and the oppressed masses of the rural and urban petit bourgeoisie is possible only through the political overthrow of the traditional petit-bourgeois parties. The Bolshevik party has shown the entire world how to carry out armed insurrection and the seizure of power. Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat. The Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics. Even if the Stalinist bureaucracy should succeed in destroying the economic foundations of the new society, the experience of planned economy under the leadership of the Bolshevik party will have entered history for all time as one of the greatest teachings of mankind. This can be ignored only by sectarians who, offended by the bruises they have received, turn their backs on the process of history.

'Bolshevism is the *only* possible form of Marxism for this epoch'

But this is not all. The Bolshevik party was able to carry on its magnificent 'practical' work only because it illuminated all its steps with theory. Bolshevism did not create this theory: it was furnished by Marxism. But Marxism is a theory of movement, not of stagnation. Only events on a tremendous historical scale could enrich the theory itself. Bolshevism brought an invaluable contribution to Marxism in its analysis of the imperialist epoch as an epoch of wars and revolutions; of bourgeois democracy in the era of decaying capitalism; of the correlation between the general strike and the insurrection; of the role of the party, Soviets and trade unions in the period of proletarian revolution; in its theory of the Soviet state, of the economy of transition, of fascism and Bonapartism in the epoch of capitalist decline; finally in its analysis of the degeneration of the Bolshevik party itself and of the Soviet state. Let any other tendency be named that has added anything essential to the conclusions and generalisations of Bolshevism. Theoretically and politically Vandervelde, De Brouckere, Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Leon Blum, Zyromski, not to mention Major Attlee and Norman Thomas, live on the tattered leftovers of the past. The degeneration of the Comintern is most crudely expressed by the fact that it has dropped to the theoretical level of the Second International. All the varieties of intermediary groups (Independent Labour Party of Great Britain, POUM and their like) adapt every week new haphazard fragments of Marx and Lenin to their current needs. Workers can learn nothing from these people.

Only the founders of the Fourth International, who have made their own the whole tradition of Marx and Lenin, take a serious attitude towards theory. Philistines may jeer that 20 years after the October victory the revolutionaries are again thrown back to modest propagandist preparation. The big capitalists are, in this question as in many others, far more penetrating than the petit bourgeois who imagine themselves 'socialists' or 'communists'. It is no accident that the subject of the Fourth International does not leave the columns of the world press. The burning historical need for revolutionary leadership promises to the Fourth International an exceptionally rapid tempo of growth. The greatest guarantee of its further success lies in the fact that it has not arisen away from the great historical road, but has organically grown out of Bolshevism.

28 August 1937

Left-baiting

Gizza job!

Alan Harding is unimpressed by right-wing intellectuals

The fall of the Sandinista regime stimulated a gleeful outbreak of left-baiting in Britain. Every right-wing pundit in the land rejoiced at the discomfiture which the 'Hampstead intelligentsia' dinner party set would be enduring over their afters. Hampstead is traditionally home for all the pointy-heads and weirdos who are supposed to constitute the British left, according to the hard-nosed regular guys of the right who probably went to school with them anyway. Unlike you and I, these stereotypical lefties spend a lot of time talking over their food rather than eating it. The populist anti-Hampstead element is not an essential feature of left-bashing, and may be frowned upon in some quarters since many right-wing ideologues also know which way to pass the port and talk at dinner, if not with their mouths full.

This sort of left-baiting is very useful for the modern right ideologue. Beating the tired old left wing with the stick of their romantic sloppiness and intellectual dishonesty serves to hide the crassness and intellectual vulgarity of the right.

Take for example Kenneth Minogue, Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics. In his column in the London *Evening Standard* of 28 February Minogue runs through a list of 'lost', 'pathetic' and 'evil' causes, such as Nicaragua, which have become the left's lost causes or ones that they would prefer to forget.

In Minogue's catalogue we find the Albanian regime, which must have slightly fewer supporters than Wimbledon football club, jumbled up with the North Vietnamese and the defeat of US imperialism in South-east Asia. After the ritual name-calling Minogue turns to theory. Have you noticed, he asks with a flourish, how popular markets are with the Brit abroad?:

'They love markets because markets are an image of abundance. Watch any British tourist on holiday, and the most exciting place to visit will be the local market, with crabs crawling over the fish stalls and colourful fruit piled high. It is a world away from the abstract "material needs" of Marxist theory.'

Buying fresh fish on holiday is proof positive that people are not interested in 'the abstract "material needs" of Marxist theory'. Minogue never gets round to telling us what is abstract about the material need to eat whether on the Costa Brava, in Ethiopia or anywhere else. But he does tell us that capitalism is really all about this market untrammelled—the 'black economy'. The acme of capitalist development—or, in sterile Marxist-speak, the productive forces of humanity—is selling teatowels from the back of a lorry down the Roman Road market.

'Capitalism', Minogue proceeds, 'arose spontaneously in Britain in early modern times because government in England was much less oppressive than elsewhere'. When I read this I became convinced that I should apply for Minogue's job at the LSE, since he didn't seem to know anything about his subject, and market forces demanded I offer my services—even if a bit cheaper.

To point out Minogue's little mistake on how capitalism arose 'spontaneously' in Britain, I could start with the fourteenth-century Statute of Labourers regulating wages. Or maybe with the Tudor and Stuart legislation offering branding, tongue removal and execution for moving around the country. No, it should be the Enclosure Acts which offered our forebears a free place in the satanic mills in exchange for having the common land wrested from them. For more sophisticated students we could then look at the Factory Acts which controlled exploitation to ensure that skilled workers were not wasted in the more technically advanced factories of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Somewhere in the midst of his intellectual buffoonery Minogue must have realised that he lacked conviction, for he ended his article with the standard prejudice that human beings are incapable of self-emancipation: 'The point of political institutions is not to perfect people (which is impossible) but to limit in some degree their folly and (at times) their nastiness.' Mine was the folly for forgetting that, to do the difficult job of apologist for a decrepit system, having the historical knowledge of a professor is far less important than the 'nastiness' of an *Evening Standard* hack. As such, Minogue's tenure seems secure enough.

PHOTO: Living Marxism

liberation

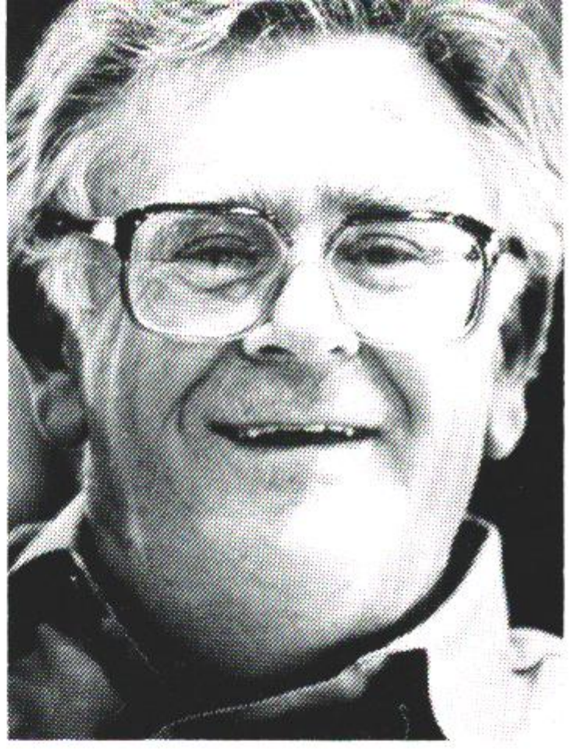

PHOTO: IDAF

A reply to Joe Slovo

Has socialism failed?

Joe Slovo (above), general secretary of the South African Communist Party, may seem to be doing well compared to his East European counterparts; while they are reviled by the world, he is saluted by Nelson Mandela. But, as his new pamphlet reveals, Slovo and the SACP are having problems of their own coming to terms with the crisis of Stalinism. Linda Ryan read 'Has socialism failed?', and found few new answers along the Slovo road to socialism.

Not so long ago it was quite fashionable in certain circles to call yourself a Marxist. Many two-bit dictators declared themselves to be Marxists, to help establish a degree of legitimacy among militant workers at home and with radical regimes abroad. Bogdan Szajkowski, who edits a series on 'Marxist regimes' for Pinter Publishers, succeeded in finding more than 30 countries to fit this label. Yet, almost overnight, they have disappeared. These days it is difficult to find more than one or two governments which will admit to an identification with Marxism.

Yesterday's 'Marxist' leaders are busy styling themselves a new image. Except for in a few places like Cuba or China, former so-called Marxist governments have discreetly changed their rhetoric and often even their policies.

Cuba's reluctance to follow Mikhail Gorbachev's new thinking is entirely understandable. For Fidel Castro's Cuba, isolated off the coast of the mighty USA, dropping the old stance of hostility to Western imperialism would mean accepting US domination. It is for similar reasons that many supporters of the South African Communist Party (SACP) have been reluctant to follow their East European counterparts.

Gorbachev-type diplomacy in South Africa means the perpetuation of apartheid. In these circumstances, where the evils of apartheid are so manifest, it is unlikely that there will be much popular demand among black workers for the SACP to renounce its more radical policies. As a consequence, a party like the SACP faces a real dilemma.

liberation

Traditionally the SACP has looked to Moscow for inspiration and leadership. Indeed its appeal in South Africa has been to some extent due to its links with the Soviet Union. Thus it is very hard for the SACP explicitly to oppose Gorbachev's political initiatives. At the same time, however, if the SACP is to retain its influence within South Africa it needs to project a radical image; the young militants who carry hammer and sickle flags through the black townships are much more interested in armed struggle than in East-West arms negotiations. Reconciling these conflicting pressures is itself a problem. But in addition the SACP must also explain why, unlike the Communist parties of Eastern Europe, it is still relevant to the contemporary situation.

Reason to live

Joe Slovo, the general secretary of the SACP who was personally saluted in Nelson Mandela's first speech after his release, has written a pamphlet which aims to deal with these difficulties. In 'Has socialism failed?', Slovo attempts to establish that, despite all that has happened in Eastern Europe, socialism still has a role. It is a publication which should be of interest to all Marxists, since it illustrates how the supporters of Moscow-type societies attempt to justify their continued existence in today's much-changed conditions.

It is difficult for an organisation like the SACP, with its long Stalinist past, to decide what to retain from its tradition. After all, the contemporary representatives of this tradition in the East seem to be suggesting that almost nothing is worth preserving from the Soviet experience. Every major pronouncement by Gorbachev and his allies indicates that Stalinist rule in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has all been a big mistake. It would be easy to conclude from this that it would be far better if the Russian Revolution had never happened and capitalism had remained intact across Eastern Europe.

In his pamphlet, Slovo correctly points out that this discussion is about much more than the past record of Stalinism; the relevance of Marxism and communism to the present day is at stake. Slovo argues that the negative experience of Stalinism has provided the pretext for abandoning Marxism altogether, and even for giving up the socialist critique of imperialism: 'There is less visible than at any other time a critique of imperialism's continuing human rights violations and its gross interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.' (pp6-7) He notes that the Soviet voices too are now talking up the benefits of the market economy:

'For the moment the socialist critique of capitalism and the drive to win the hearts and minds of humanity for socialism have been virtually abandoned. *The unprecedented offensive* by capitalist ideologues against socialism has indeed been met by a unilateral ideological disarmament.' (p7)

It is hard to disagree with Slovo's assessment of the way that events in the East have eroded the public credibility of Marxism. Unfortunately, he remains too much in the Stalinist mould to understand how this situation has come about.

Even when Slovo does attempt to distance himself from past forms of Stalinism, he remains a prisoner of its present forms. Thus at times Slovo becomes a caricature of Gorbachev, writing in the fashionable Moscow style of self-criticism: 'Vigilance is clearly needed against the pre-perestroika styles of work and thinking which infected virtually every party (including ours) and moulded its members for many decades.' (p4) How brave of him, you might say at first sight, to make such criticisms of his own movement. But on closer inspection it becomes evident that the call for vigilance is nothing more than a platitude. What are 'pre-perestroika styles of work'? How far do they go back: 1960, 1950, 1927, 1917?

Old habits

Surely, if 'pre-perestroika styles of work' are the problem, then the communist movement built around these political practices must be the source of the problem. It is difficult to see how the negative experience of decades of 'pre-perestroika styles of work' can suddenly give rise to a healthy and positive alternative. Certainly Marxists ought to be clear that an essentially oppressive social arrangement, such as a Stalinist society, cannot suddenly develop a capacity for reforming itself into a progressive one. And (as the people of Eastern Europe are now asking) why should anybody trust a party which put up with Stalinism for decades just because it now mouths phrases about perestroika?

So how far will Slovo go in breaking with his past political tradition? Superficially he is prepared to go a long way. He dismisses the pre-perestroika era. He advocates facing up to history and observes that to look for excuses for Stalinism would be 'very much like special pleading' (p3). Noble intentions perhaps, but Slovo cannot quite bring himself to go through with them. He gets no further than the third paragraph of his pamphlet before reminding the reader that the Soviet system cannot be dismissed 'as an unmitigated failure'. As proof, Slovo resorts to old-fashioned Stalinist arguments, informing readers, for example, that there are more doctors per head in the Soviet Union than in Western Europe. Like every other forgetful Stalinist, Slovo does not add the fact that in any Soviet hospital there are likely to be more doctors than clean hypodermic needles.

Good losers

Slovo instinctively realises that he had better not say too much about the alleged social and economic achievements of 'socialism' in the Soviet Union. Consequently, he draws upon more ethereal and intangible factors in the Soviet Union's defence. 'No one can doubt', writes Slovo, 'that if humanity is today poised to enter an unprecedented era of peace and civilised international relations, it is in the first place due to the efforts of the socialist world' (p2). What he means is that the unilateral collapse of the Warsaw Pact has made the traditional Cold War rhetoric redundant. If, by abandoning the contest with Western imperialism, 'socialism' has shown its moral superiority, fair enough. But it hardly provides an inspiring vision to attract a new generation to the cause.

Slovo has also fallen victim to his own Gorbachev-speak. The 'unprecedented era of peace and civilised international relations' that he writes about seems conspicuous by its absence. From Kosovo to Panama it appears that, on the contrary, we are about to enter an unprecedented era of international tensions and instability.

As he continues the attempt to salvage something from the Stalinist past, and to find some redeeming qualities in East European societies, Slovo's arguments sometimes sound more like a *Private Eye* mickey-take of Marxism:

'The transformations which have occurred in Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria are revolutionary in scope. With the exception of Romania, is there another example in human history in which those in power have responded to the inevitable with such a civilised and pacific resignation?' (p6)

The fact that the Stalinist parties of Eastern Europe have recently proved themselves to be good losers seems a curious advertisement for their system. Indeed it could be argued by those of a cynical turn of mind that the relatively swift demise of these regimes only demonstrates their total bankruptcy and the near-total absence of any popular support.

Slovo clearly finds it hard to settle accounts with the past. In one breath

he warns of the need for vigilance against the return of pre-perestroika days; in the next he insists that the pre-perestroika days were not entirely bad old ones. When it comes to accounting for the actions of his own party, the SACP, the same ambiguity is evident.

SACP excepted

Slovo suggests that the problems of the past were due to the uncritical stance taken by communists. But after pointing the finger at his own tradition, he quickly exempts the SACP from the general criticism. It appears that, from the early seventies, the SACP had already broken from the pre-perestroika style of work. 'We can legitimately claim', boasts Slovo, 'that in certain fundamental respects our indigenous revolutionary practice long ago ceased to be guided by Stalinist concepts' (p24). Thus he can present the SACP as an essentially healthy organisation which stood firmly in the tradition of Gorbachev before the world had ever heard of the man. The past, against which we were supposed to be vigilant, has suddenly been vindicated.

Slovo explicitly refuses to explain why the official communist movement tolerated Stalinist methods for so long:

> 'We make no attempt here to answer the complex question of why so many millions of genuine socialists and revolutionaries became such blind worshippers in the temple of the cult of personality.' (p12)

It is entirely understandable that Slovo should refrain from examining too closely why the 'official' Communist parties were so firmly attached to the Stalinist tradition. Were he to undertake such an investigation it would soon become clear that Stalinism is not a problem of the past but the dominant influence on the SACP and its counterparts today.

Slovo, like his counterparts elsewhere, tends to reduce Stalinism to either the problem of 'the cult of the individual' or to its anti-democratic aspects. In this vein he defines the 'essential content of Stalinism' as 'socialism without democracy' (p3). In reality the cult of the individual and anti-democratic practices are only symptoms of the problem.

A pamphlet which begins by praising socialism ends by upholding the virtues of Western-style pluralist democracy

Missing links

Stalinism is not an anti-democratic perversion grafted on to the gains of the Russian Revolution. It is a system created through the destruction of the working class. Everyone from the right to the 'official' communist movement is determined to prove that there is a link which connects the 1917 revolution with Stalin and with Gorbachev today. In the case of the right this procedure is essential to discredit the idea of a revolution itself by pointing to the crimes of Stalinism. In the case of the 'official' communist movement this analysis is important to prove that Stalinism was but an episode in the history of a socialist society established in 1917.

In this vein, Slovo argues that 'socialism certainly produced a Stalin and a Ceausescu, but it also produced a Lenin and a Gorbachev' (p1). The aim is to associate the revolutionary past and Lenin with the perestroika present and Gorbachev, linked by the less praiseworthy Stalinist years in between.

In reality, the turning point was not a recent one between pre-perestroika and perestroika. The key break occurred with the consolidation of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy in the late twenties. By this time there was already nothing left of the gains of the Russian Revolution. Stalinism is the political outlook of a ruling bureaucracy created through an unusual sequence of events: the overthrow of capitalism followed by the defeat of the working class. It is this unique combination of events that gives Stalinist politics their special characteristics, from their anti-capitalist rhetoric to their highly unstable opportunism.

No Marx

Stalinist politics, the ideology of the 'official' communist movement from the twenties to today, are traditionally a synthesis of national reformism and anti-capitalist rhetoric. The Soviet bureaucracy was forced to adopt an anti-capitalist stance to counter the hostility of Western imperialism. At the same time internally it promoted the national reformist strategy of building socialism in one country, top-down through the actions of the state bureaucracy. Marxism became an empty dogma in its Stalinist form, designed to endow the politics of the bureaucracy with a semblance of coherence.

The old Communist parties accepted the ludicrous pronouncements of Moscow as good coin because they shared the same political premise as the Stalinist bureaucracy. Parties like the SACP have never been, or long since ceased to be, Marxist organisations. Their programme is a mixture of radical rhetoric and state socialism. This top-down approach to building socialism means that the state, not the working class, becomes the progressive agent of change.

The SACP is an excellent example of national reformism in action. Slovo praises the abandonment of Marx's concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat by the 'official' communist movement, on the grounds that it sounds anti-democratic and out of step with the times. What he renounces is not just a form of words, but the idea that the working class should seize power and organise its own state to use any means necessary against the capitalists. Instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Slovo opts for some form of vague pluralism. He writes of freedom and democracy and a 'multi-party post-apartheid democracy'. All this sounds fine. But it begs the question of which class interests are to prevail in a post-apartheid South Africa?

Who needs them?

Like the other old Stalinist parties, the SACP faces a crisis of identity. Its new call for political pluralism is shared by everybody in South Africa to the left of the ruling National Party. If communism has been transformed into everyday democracy, then what is so special about it and why does it need its own parties and programmes?

Slovo's defence of socialism inadvertently turns into a rejection of the concept. 'Has socialism failed?' serves only to confirm that, in the very process of justifying their existence, today's Stalinists are forced to give up more ground. A pamphlet which begins by praising socialism ends by upholding the virtues of Western-style pluralist democracy. Slovo thus effectively writes the SACP off the modern political map, revealing it as a remnant of the past. It represents a tradition—Stalinism—which once destroyed a youthful revolution, and which is now entering senility.

Someone like Slovo cannot be expected to defend socialism, since the very existence of his Stalinist movement has provided a powerful argument against it. New thinking and perestroika are not the beginning of some socialist renewal but the beginning of the end for a tradition that has done so much to discredit Marxism. It is the final act of a tradition that in every respect bears the stamp of Stalin.

The task of creating a Marxist tradition that is relevant to today cannot be entrusted to those trapped in the politics of the past. It falls to those who have refused to make the slightest concession to the 'official' communist movement, and who will know and despise Stalinism for what it is, whether it is fronted by a Ceausescu or a Gorbachev.

• J Slovo, 'Has socialism failed?', Inkululeko Publications, 1990, £1.50

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Tony Benn

Still taking it from the top?

Gemma Forest asked Labour MP Tony Benn about the crisis of state socialism, East and West

Tony Benn talked to Nicolae Ceausescu for two and a half hours in 1968. 'I think their prime minister of the time said "You come back to Romania in 10 years and you'll find a multi-party system".' More than 20 years later, as the Ceausescu figures finally fall and pluralism starts to arrive across Eastern Europe, how does Benn react to the changes there?

Sitting in his basement study in Holland Park, he launched into a long and—as he later admitted rather disarmingly—boring history of the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary. So I reminded him that he, and many other people in the Labour Party, had long referred to the Stalinist states of the Eastern bloc as 'the socialist countries'. Now that their tradition of bureaucratic, top-down planning had been so discredited, didn't it reflect badly on his own idea of what socialism means?

'The word socialist is very general', Benn responded. 'It covers everything from a mild social democracy in Sweden to what is loosely known as the socialist camp. It may be that socialism, like capitalism or imperialism or religious domination, goes through various phases. Later, it's renewing itself. From a historical perspective, one may very well see a renewal of socialism based on consent.'

Although Benn insisted that he has 'never defended these regimes', his identification of them as socialist seemed to me more significant than he suggested. It hinted at the baleful influence which Stalinist command economics have exercised over the Labour left's own tradition of state socialism. According to Benn, however, repeating the foreword to the latest volume of his diaries, only the Morrisonian right wing of the Labour Party had been bureaucratic in its economic policy.

'The only command economy I've experienced first-hand was the incomes policy. In the winter of discontent, in 1978-79, there was a committee chaired by Hattersley that fixed everybody's wages. I do think—and this is an ingredient very, very rarely allowed to come out—that the Webbs, with their Fabian ideas, were very much in line with the Stalinist ideas.' The Labour left to which he belonged, said Benn, had always believed in 'the bottom-up type of planning', while 'the state corporation is a product of right-wing Fabian planning'.

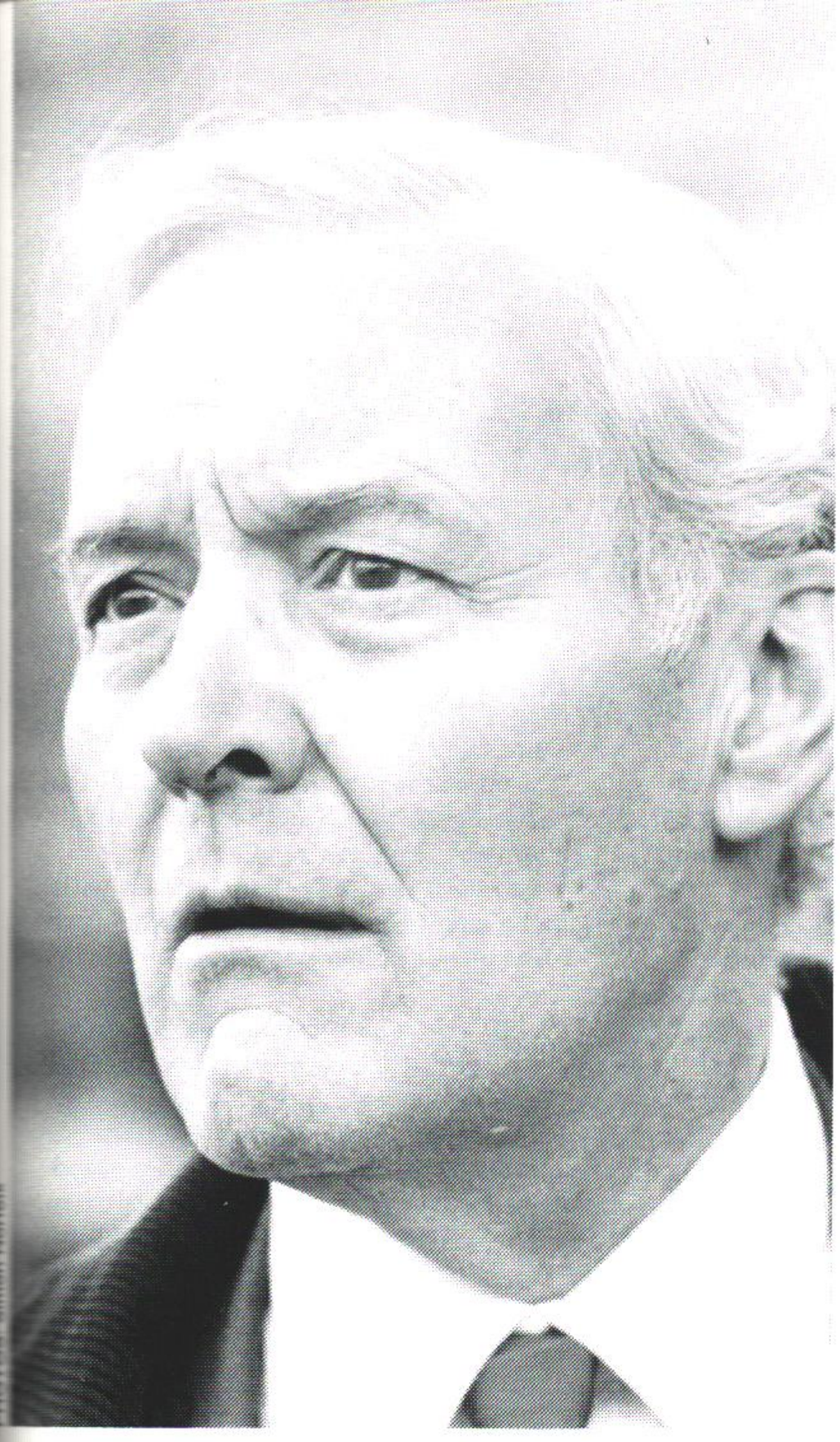
Left in

It was hard to be satisfied by this. Benn might truthfully say that he has only experienced command economics at the hands of the right wing; after all, only the right has run a Labour government (although he himself sat in the cabinet alongside Hattersley). However, the left's Alternative Economic Strategy for increased state planning was a key part of the manifesto with which the last Labour government sold workers the idea of 'planned' wage controls. And while the Fabians were certainly admirers of the Stalinist system from the thirties, the nationalisation policies which they subsequently promoted became totems of the state socialist left far more than of the Labour right.

The theme of creating or renewing socialism from the top down seemed to crop up time and again in our conversation. As we discussed the events in Eastern Europe, Benn suggested that the popular protests there were directed against 'the nature of a top-down dictatorship of the proletariat'. Yet his remarks often revealed his own sustained belief that, nonetheless, the real impetus for transforming society can come from above.

For example, he described 'the three main sparks for reform in the Soviet Union today' thus: 'The intellectuals wanted the right to publish work of a kind that was available in the West. The media wanted the same sort of freedom that's available to CBS, the BBC, *Panorama* and so on. The managers wanted the right to manage without control.' Among the references to highly placed intellectuals, editors and enterprise managers, he made no suggestion that the Kremlin reformers might be motivated by any fear of working class revolt from below against their stagnating system.

And what of Mikhail Gorbachev, the most prominent exponent of



'revolution from above' in the world today? 'He's doing what's absolutely necessary', said Benn. 'Of course there is a top-down element in the Gorbachev reforms, which is quite interesting. It is triggered by these three elite groups. The extent to which this is really echoed and picked up and becomes a bottom-up thing is something we will still have to see.

'But of course I'm a supporter of Gorbachev, because I think that what he's doing reflects the necessities, at this stage, of socialist development.' Which is an interesting way to describe such Gorbachev policies as market-oriented economic reforms, military repression in Baku, and the abandonment of liberation movements in the third world.

'Power corrupts'

Benn's sympathy for Gorbachev's attempts to reform Soviet society from above contrasted sharply with his hostile remarks about the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917—this century's outstanding example of social transformation from below. Although Benn frankly admitted that he had gained his understanding of Marxism from reading somebody called Emile Burns rather than Marx, he seemed certain enough about its flaws.

'If you take the Bolsheviks, where did all that lead? The crisis of Stalinism was not because of Stalin, but an inherent weakness in that view of society—that somehow you have a few people who do understand and they take over. The dictatorship of the proletariat very quickly becomes the corruption of power. I don't want to see that happen in Britain....That is one of the justifications for thinking that it will not be done by a few people who understand, but in a rather different way—for mobilising people whose thrust is toward socialism whether they realise it or not.'

Such talk of 'the corruption of power' under the dictatorship of the proletariat seemed a little rich coming from a confirmed believer in the British parliamentary system—under which, as even Benn conceded later, 'Labour MPs are really part of the civil service, with their allowances, and now state aid for the opposition parties'. Instead of dwelling on this institutionalised corruption, however, Benn preferred to speculate about the possibility of a tightly knit group of politically motivated men (to use Labour premier Harold Wilson's notorious anti-communist salvo against the seamen's strike of 1966) being corrupted in the post-revolutionary future.

So how would Benn justify his belief in the power of a Labour-controlled parliament to implement

progressive change from above? It sounded like simply another form of outdated state socialism. 'Actually', he said when I pressed him on this, 'all social progress comes from underneath—by pressure. So if the left groups were pressure groups, in the way that capital is a pressure group, I think we'd be more likely to make progress'.

Scratch the surface of these remarks, and Benn's ideas become far more modest than they might at first appear. All that he was really talking about was putting pressure on parliament to enact progressive legislation. The 'from below' part of the process would thus be limited to grassroots pressure for reform, backed by 'left groups', which, by exerting more pressure than capital, could ensure that the Labour MPs inside were able to support social progress. The problem with this scenario is that capital is something slightly more substantial than 'a pressure group'; it is a social relation between the exploiter and the exploited, and exercises power over society regardless of what Benn or anybody else might say or pass in parliament.

East or West, Benn was reluctant to face up to the crisis of old-fashioned state socialism, or to concede that his ideas are out of step with the fast-changing times. At his most evasive he verged on the bizarre. 'My objective', he told me, 'is that every party in Britain should be socialist—Tory socialist, Liberal socialist. I think that's what the socialist movement's all about'.

'My objective is that every party in Britain should be socialist—Tory socialist, Liberal socialist'

This may seem somewhat unrealistic, given that the Labour Party is not arguing for these ideas, never mind the Tories or Liberals. Benn, however, believes that nothing fundamental has changed among the rank and file of Neil Kinnock's new-look Labour Party. The left may keep their heads down between now and the election, 'but when we win, the Labour Party will reassert itself, because it represents a clear economic interest in society. At the moment it's so worried about the impact of Thatcherism, it's going along with things it doesn't really believe in'.

Of the past

This is the same argument we heard from Benn and his allies before the 1987 election and presumably, if Thatcher were to win in 1991-92, it would be the same argument that we would hear in the run-up to the election of 1995-97. Meanwhile, the international crisis of state socialism can only accelerate the real movement of the Labour Party away from any notion of representing a 'clear economic interest' and towards the middle ground. Far from the 'socialist renewal' which Benn is convinced will come to Labour in time, his party looks set to transform itself into an explicitly anti-socialist organisation.

Tony Benn is a likeable man, whose deep suspicions of the establishment and support for the underdog set him apart from the fools and sycophants whom he sits alongside in the commons. Yet the overwhelming impression left by a morning's discussion was of a man out of his time, happier with the certainties of the past than the uncertain future. 'If you don't understand where you've come from', he says in his defence, 'you don't understand where you're going. I want to feel free to range over human history, to make the past serve the present. You can reach a larger audience that way than you can with the language of socialism, which is so recent not many people have heard of it.

'If you take for example religion and politics, they're the same thing! If you're brothers and sisters, solidarity comes out. An injury to one is an injury to all, united we stand divided we fall, you do not cross picket lines....That comes from the Book of Genesis. People say "I never thought of that". All of a sudden people start to feel confident with ideas that were alien to them'.

April 1975: Pol Pot captures Phnom Penh

America's guilty secret

Fifteen years after Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia, Lynn Rawley looks at how that infamous regime was made in the USA

On 17 April 1975 the Khmer Rouge took the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, ending the civil war against the US-backed regime. Within four days they had emptied the city—just the start of a programme to expel urban dwellers to enforced work in the countryside. When Pol Pot fell in 1979, the massacres and famines which marked his years in power had killed more than a third of Cambodia's seven million people.

In the West, the crimes which Pol Pot's regime committed against its own people have been used as potent symbols of anti-communism. The bloody events in Cambodia are held up as a bitter lesson in the perils of Marxism gone mad.

Once the Khmer Rouge had expelled the population from the cities they set up re-education camps to identify 'impure' Cambodians—those without a peasant background. Doctors, teachers, lawyers and skilled workers were hunted down and killed. The penalty for wearing glasses was death.

The Khmer Rouge placed the power of life and death in the hands of teenagers, the uncorrupted youth. Cambodians were ordered to forget their past: history was abolished by the introduction of Year Zero. And the regime cut all communications with its 'corrupt' neighbours.

When Vietnam overthrew Pol Pot in 1979, the Cambodians began to count their dead. They found that the Khmer Rouge had executed at least a million people; two million died from starvation and disease. The survivors built walls of skulls as monuments.

The West portrayed Pol Pot as an oriental Hitler who committed genocide for a socialist Cambodia. But notions of mad Marxists trying to create 'pure' communism do not explain why the Khmer Rouge enjoyed support among the peasantry or how they managed to seize power. The truth is that the barbarism of the Khmer Rouge was only a consequence of the barbarism employed by the USA in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Modern Cambodia is the product of years of Western domination and the struggle against it. Until 1954 the country was a French colony, with the USA picking up 80 per cent of the bills for the crumbling French empire. After Cambodia gained formal independence, it came under the increasingly direct influence of US imperialism—along with the rest of South-east Asia.

During the sixties, when the USA was engaged in the early stages of the Vietnam War, it took action to secure control over Cambodia. In 1966 the US-backed Lon Nol clique gained control of the Cambodian government and purged it of anti-American factions. They forcibly conscripted Cambodians for Washington's war next door; 600 000, 10 per cent of the population, died fighting a foreign war against the Vietnamese people.

In 1969 president Nixon ordered the 'secret bombing' of Cambodia to flush out Vietnamese guerrillas from their jungle bases near the border. Pilots were sworn to secrecy; while they laid waste to Cambodia through 1969-70, the American public knew nothing about it. In April 1970, US troops launched a land invasion of 'neutral' Cambodia.

From 1969 to 1973, American B-52s and F1-11s dropped 275 465 bombs on Cambodia (the equivalent of 25 Hiroshimas). In the period from February to August 1973 alone, the US airforce carpet-bombed the country, making it impossible for Cambodians to live overground. American bombs killed 16 000 and turned over half of the population into refugees. They destroyed 75 per cent of domestic livestock. Cambodia's small industrial sector was obliterated: of 1400 rice mills only 300 remained. The bombs dropped in 1973 destroyed 40 per cent of the roads and a third of the bridges in the country. In 1969 Cambodia had only one paper mill and one phosphate plant: America blew both of them up.

It was not Pol Pot, but Nixon and Kissinger, who began the destruction of Cambodia. The USA reduced the country to economic chaos, killed thousands and turned half the population into refugees. The famine that swept one of the world's richest rice-growing regions was caused by the American bombing campaign.

The Khmer Rouge came to prominence in the countryside in response to this devastation, as a peasant guerrilla movement demanding Cambodian freedom and an end to the forced confiscation of food from the countryside to the towns. It was never Marxist, nor was it a mass movement; the most committed of the Khmer Rouge rank and file were teenagers orphaned in America's war, while their most loyal supporters were the poorest peasants who had suffered most. Their rise to power was more a symptom of the exhaustion and bitterness of a people brutalised by a foreign power than any positive endorsement of Khmer Rouge policies.

After April 1975, many of the Khmer Rouge's bloody policies were a response to the chaos left by America. The war and the bombing campaign had killed many peasants and prompted many more to escape to the cities, leaving behind a depleted peasantry unable to produce enough rice to feed the population. The Khmer Rouge, in an act of brutal pragmatism, forced urban dwellers out into the villages to perform forced labour and plug the gaps. Similarly, the Khmer Rouge's persecution of the urban middle classes was an attempt to gain control over a society devastated by US imperialism. Pol Pot sought to consolidate his base of support by directing the anger of the poor peasants against the wealthier city dwellers, some of whom had helped to administer the old regime since the days of French rule.

The USA has gone to great lengths to disguise its responsibility for what happened in Cambodia. As soon as Pol Pot took power, the American censorship and black propaganda machine moved into action. One newsman remembered how reports of what happened when Phnom Penh fell were distorted and ignored back in the USA:

'The Khmer Rouge troops told Phnom Penh government soldiers that they were "brothers" and that they did not want to kill them. There were eye-witness accounts by AP (Associated Press) staffers of the Khmer Rouge and Phnom Penh troops embracing on the battlefield, yet when I filed this it was censored by AP....AP reported that the liberators burnt down refugee huts two days before the fall of Phnom Penh, yet the Cambodian AP staffers who visited the front all day could not confirm the report.' (Quoted in N Chomsky and E Herman, *After the Cataclysm,* 1979, p238)

To this day Kissinger claims that the bombing of Cambodia was justified because of the threat of communism. What happened in Cambodia, he says, was 'heartbreaking'. But apparently not so upsetting as to make him call off the B-52s.

After the fall of Pol Pot, Cambodia continued to be the victim of international anti-communism. In 1979, Vietnam invaded the country and ousted the Khmer Rouge government to prevent the turmoil there spilling over its borders. The West portrayed the Vietnamese incursion as an example of communist expansionism, and *upheld the legitimacy of the Khmer Rouge government* against the invader.

In 1980, the United Nations, led by America, denied Cambodia loans and international aid. The US government under Jimmy Carter swore to keep Cambodia isolated so long as 'communist' Vietnam was in occupation. Lord Carrington, the British delegate, told the UN general assembly that Britain would endorse Pol Pot as the legal representative of the Khmer people. Only the Soviet Union, for its own pragmatic reasons, voted against backing Pol Pot.

The civil war that has ravaged Cambodia is the product of decades of foreign interference. When Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia last year it left the puppet Hun Sen government in power, fighting the Western-backed coalition headed by Prince Sihanouk and dominated by the Khmer Rouge. Although diplomatic moves to end the war have recently begun, Cambodia seems as far as ever from peace and prosperity. While Cambodians continue to pay the price for the barbarism which the Western powers introduced, the guilty governments of the West continue to lecture them about the benefits of civilised behaviour.

5, 10, 15, 20...

7 April 1985	Wham! tour China
25 April 1980	US bid to rescue hostages in Iran flops as helicopters crash into each other
31 April 1975	Saigon falls to North Vietnamese
9 April 1970	Beatles split
1 April 1940	Germany annexes Austria
7 April 1920	French troops occupy the Ruhr
4 April 1910	Teenage anarchist shoots at Prince of Wales in Brussels—and misses

Opera Factory

Dirty Don Giovanni

Actor-singer Omar Ebrahim explained why a night at the opera should be a totally sensual experience. Andrew Calcutt listened to his dulcet tones

'Putting the sex back into Mozart' was the *Independent on Sunday* verdict on the recent Opera Factory production of *Don Giovanni,* soon to be televised. The *Guardian* described Omar Ebrahim as 'the dirty Don'. 'A Giovanni of seemingly tireless virility' echoed the *Daily Telegraph* more demurely. On one thing they were agreed: Opera Factory's *Don Giovanni* was about sex, and nothing but.

'I beg to differ', says Ebrahim, '*Don Giovanni* is a working of overlapping myths. One side of it is damnation—you follow a figure who in a Catholic world is sent to hell. The other journey is that of a great lover who is dessicating himself, using himself up. In Mozart's hands the myth is about humaneness, and there is real sensitivity to the problems of how people interact with each other'.

Fair enough, but I didn't get the impression that he was too unhappy with the reputation which has put bums on seats for Opera Factory. 'That view of Opera Factory started with the first show which was a production of an old opera, *Asis and Galatea,* in which Galatea is rescued from the sea in a wet see-through dress. The following year we were involved in a production of *The Beggar's Opera* which contained a fair amount of nudity. In live theatre the effect of people with no clothes on can be to create a kind of austere atmosphere. But media coverage has let people know that the opera will be in English, that there's a commitment to storytelling and that it will be extreme.' Fans of 'extreme' opera recently packed out the performances of *Don Giovanni* at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, a long way from the fringe venues where director David Freeman staged Opera Factory's first performances nine years ago.

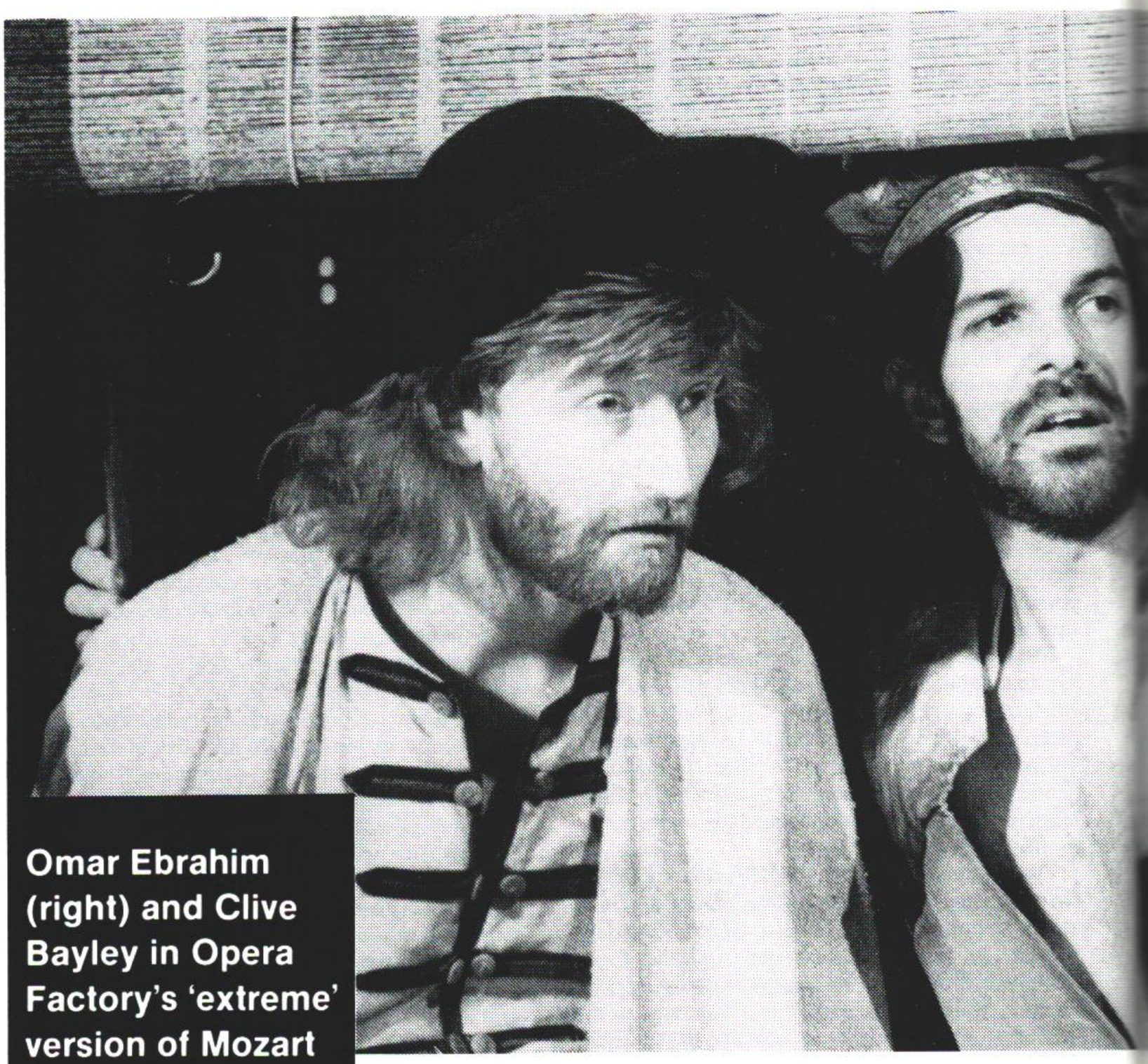
Ebrahim is from Coventry, of Asian and English extraction, and started out at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He's 33 now, and given the physical demands of work with the Opera Factory, sees himself as an athlete with 10 good years left, if he's careful. 'If I could perform eight times a week it would make what I do more viable. More people could see it for a start. But if you try to perform every night you can't keep the right tension on the vocal cords and you can't produce the right amount of mucus. The resonances you need can only be produced by allowing the throat to become moist again. The first concern for me as an actor is that *Don Giovanni* is three hours long. That means a major physical effect on me: hormones, changes in blood sugar and all the rest of it.'

In opera, where freelance singers are usually brought together on a one-off basis by executive producers, it is unique for the same group of players to work with each other for as long as they have in Opera Factory. They have performed new operas such as Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy,* and classical work—the company is in the middle of staging all Mozart's operas to mark the bicentenary of his death. Ebrahim differentiates between the 'musical worlds' which he is called on to enter by different composers. But in every case, his response is primarily instinctive and physical. 'An intellectual response is almost irrelevant when you're acting', he declared, 'because you're doing a real thing with your body'.

He has no time either for 'Fabergé-box' opera in which 'we the talented show off what we can do to you the people who wish you were as talented as us'. He wants 'real communication between actor and audience' which is 'hot, sexy, because there's a feeling that anything can happen'. He believes that the sensuality of a singer's 'commitment of breath and the resonance of sound' is something which reaches everyone, even 'the offensive people, dripping with whatever, who keep me away from opera houses 90 per cent of the time'. Total sensuality, he argues, has a universal effect. 'There comes a point when everybody feels it.'

Opera Factory calls on its audiences to respond in like manner: 'When a story is going well, you get that overall forgetfulness. And I don't mean the kind of forgetfulness that comes with drink, but that genuine attention you see on a child's face. That is real time.' Ebrahim's 'real time' implies a suspension of intellect. In a direct reversal of the Brechtian approach he wants to put the audience into that state where 'experience is direct, without a frame of reference'. When an audience is reflecting and comparing, that for him is 'doublethink, the ultimate false standpoint'.

Undoubtedly music, the chief component of opera, is more instinctive and less intellectually based than many other art forms. Even so Ebrahim goes on to concede that perhaps he draws too strict a distinction between the visceral and the cerebral, and that abandonment to the instincts is sometimes more apparent than real. 'Of course you have to say to yourself, I'm going to sing these notes....What I am really thinking about during a performance is things like, is all my weight on my right foot? A crick in the neck or tension in the hand will alter the



Omar Ebrahim (right) and Clive Bayley in Opera Factory's 'extreme' version of Mozart

sound. So a lot of what is going on in my mind is a kind of dull monitoring. But that is one of the conundrums. After all, where were you when you were acting another person?'

The status of opera as a kind of officially sanctioned high culture worries him. 'When you're attacking your population and locking everyone up, one of the things that a government will say is "Well of course we are a cultured nation, look at our opera house". Opera, even more than ballet, has been used to advertise cultured, humane sensibilities. That's why it gets so much funding.' Apart from legitimising the establishment which sponsors it, Ebrahim recognises that the opera house is the place where people who think they've made it show off to other people who think they have too. One of the motives for Opera Factory's *Don Giovanni* was to recapture this jewel in the crown of social opera for what Ebrahim calls 'the subversive threat of live theatre'.

Of course Ebrahim wants it both ways. He isn't about to cut himself off from opera's sugar daddies. A hugely expensive art form needs all the funding it can get: 'I am happy for the rich to use opera as a playground if that means the commissioning of new work. It only becomes a problem when that cynicism affects the performers. You meet so many victims, really, who've been told "if you do this, you can do this" and, surprise, surprise, they lose the edge.' Still, solid cash is needed for what he calls the 'constantly changing collaboration of words, music and staging.' So a bargain must be struck between patron and performer. *New World,* the latest opera by Michael Tippett which Ebrahim will be appearing in later this year, could not be performed—or even have been written—without such a bargain.

It is difficult to find a bargain among the tickets. The fact that opera is a rich man's playground is usually reflected in high prices, which exclude many young people who might otherwise give it a go. To them, Ebrahim addressed his concluding remark: 'Try and get to dress rehearsals—don't pay. That's what ruins the opera for me—paying.'

PHOTO: Catherine Ashmore

Film: *Roger & Me*

The Scrooge of Flint

Joe Boatman previews Michael Moore's *Roger & Me*, and puts in a call to Roger at General Motors' HQ

Flint, Michigan, was the birthplace of both General Motors (the richest company in the world) and Michael Moore, whose entire family were employed on one part or another of the Buick production line. His father worked for the company for 33 years, and his uncle was in the Great Sit-Down Strike of 1937, which led to the formation of the United Auto Workers. When Moore was growing up in the fifties and sixties his world was dominated as far as the eye could see by General Motors.

Moore broke with tradition and became a radical journalist. In 1986 he was sacked as editor of *Mother Jones,* one of the biggest circulation political publications in the USA, for refusing to attack the Sandinistas. Returning to his home town he discovered that GM was moving much of its plant to Mexico, leaving behind 35 000 redundant workers and a ghost town. Initially, Moore seems bemused, 'I thought plants closed down when they were making a loss—but GM were making record profits'. Big brother was cheating at Monopoly, despite owning everything on the board, and Moore wanted to do something about it. He became a film-maker.

'I didn't want to make another "dying steeltown" documentary' he says, 'with all the clichés about how horrible it is to be unemployed. I think everybody knows it's rough to be without money, so I decided that this film would not have a single shot of an unemployment line'. He came up with *Roger & Me;* Roger is Roger Smith, the chairman of General Motors.

The central ingenious device of the film is Moore's earnest, persistent and hilarious attempt to get Roger to comment on the devastation caused by the closures. When all conventional methods have failed, Moore starts turning up at Roger's clubs claiming a lunch date on the off-chance Smith is expected—'Is he here yet? Maybe I got the date wrong'. Even now Moore is still trying to make contact with his quarry, and has extended the ploy into the marketing of the film by insisting that every time the film is shown one seat must be left empty for the use of Mr Smith.

Moore is not, however, blaming one misguided individual for GM's investment strategy. His wry investigation makes some quite profound observations about the entire profit system at work. Without fear or favour he treats all his interviewees (from GM workers through a bailiff evicting ex-GM workers to Michigan's reigning beauty queen) as if their only shared assumption is that everybody wants to have a nice day. The cruel necessities of a market economy, usually taken as given, are disregarded as Moore observes with detachment the anarchic destruction of a community. This attitude, expressed in an ironic deadpan commentary, throws the absurdities of capitalist production, ideology and culture into such sharp relief that you have to laugh or else you'd cry.

I rang GM in Detroit, but Roger Smith was 'travelling on business'. But what does he think of the film? 'He thinks it is sick humour.' So he's seen it? 'No, but it has been described to him and he thinks it is sad because it ridicules people in unfortunate circumstances.' *Roger & Me* will make you laugh, but not because Moore thinks life in 'the unemployment capital of America' is a joke. He says 'I want people to leave the theatre with some spirit in them, some life, some sense of humanity, and hopefully some anger. I think that getting people depressed only paralyses them. I don't think it gets them to go out and act and I want people to *do* something'.

In place of worthy clichés, Moore has interwoven a sharp choice of archive and TV footage and an imaginative collection of interviews. He accompanies a bailiff from the Flint County sheriff's office on a relentless series of evictions. In one sequence Roger Smith's paternal GM Christmas broadcast—in which Smith quotes Dickens on Christmas, 'Though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket it has done me good so I say "God bless it" '—is intercut with a Christmas Eve eviction of a Flint family, their possessions and tinsel-covered tree. Once you've been evicted, where do you go? Moore visits the U-Haul depot, a self-drive removal firm threatened with closure because plenty of people are leaving Flint but the usual reciprocal arrangements with other depots can't be made.

He also looks at various pathetic attempts to revive Flint's economy. The mayor hired an evangelist: 'Save Your Soul, Save Your Job' said the flashing advert. A newly formed tourist board built a reconstruction of the once-prosperous Flint town centre, but nobody wanted to visit Auto World. Moore remarks flatly, 'I suppose it's a bit like asking people to go to New Jersey to visit Chemical World, or to Alaska to visit Exxon World. People just don't want to look at human tragedy when on vacation'.

Most tragic are the desperate attempts to survive among the ruins: the man who sells his blood; the woman (founder of a feminist radio station) who seems to have sold her soul. She demonstrates an almost surreal sincerity about marketing drapes, Avon lady-style, by matching curtain colours to your 'seasons': 'I had myself colour-analysed, I'm a spring person.'

Moore treats all of his interviewees with respect, and the humour is not at the expense of GM's victims. He does give them enough rope however, and some just stick their necks in the noose and jump. The union rep echoes the GM rep, almost word for word. 'I don't think another sit-down strike would accomplish anything now', they both state with finality (at the nostalgic Great Sit-Down Strike commemoration parade). A special mention must be made of God-loving, gay-hating singer Anita Bryant (who once sang in praise of sparkplugs for a GM pay cheque) who tells Flint's unemployed to 'Hang in there, cheer up because you live in a free society and, if nothing else, thank God for the sunshine'.

The real rules of the game are finally given away by GM lobbyist Tom Kay, who has already patiently pointed out that GM exists to make profits, not to honour its home town. Exasperated, he reminds Moore that 'cradle-to-grave security cannot be accomplished under a free enterprise system'.

My Detroit Voice of GM took up this theme, and thought it was most unfair of Mr Moore to pick on Roger: 'It could have been about any other chief executive officer, of any other company in any other industrial city in America. The world has changed since the fifties and the sixties, we're now into a global market. It would be delightful if we didn't have to worry about the onslaught of foreign competition, but we have had to re-evaluate and get more competitive. The fall-out has included some lay-offs.'

Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Brookside against infantile disorders

'How about the talking milkshake, is that funny?' It's Saturday night and the voice at the other end of the line had the quiet insistence that comes from genuine desperation. 'Give me till Monday', I replied, 'I'll think of something'. I'm still thinking. I've got the phone off the hook. Liverpool is a city full of writers. In the parks, on the buses, at the checkouts, you can see them all—their faces creased with worry. I hear snatches of conversation; how about if Harry drank the milkshake, is that funny? *Brookside* (Channel 4) has suffered its most calamitous ratings collapse since those first few, frightening weeks when there were more people watching the closed circuit security system in Woolworth's.

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The received wisdom is that the programme is too miserable, so I and every other associated writer have been called upon to perform that most dreary and lonesome of all creative acts—think of something funny. After all, the programme that has displaced *Brookside* from its position at the top of the Channel 4 charts is a comedy—*The Golden Girls*. But Brookie didn't slip from first to second; it went right down to fourth. Second and third at the moment are *Land of the Giants* and *The Waltons*. Maybe the odd one-liner won't be enough; maybe we should shrink Sheila and have her terrorised by enormous forest rangers; or have all the Brooksiders gather round the Collins' kitchen table and hold hands before meals.

Going into the ring against three American shows has really brought home the fundamental differences between British and American popular drama. British TV claims to be trying to describe life as it is; American TV drama sets out to show life as it could be. *The Cosby Show* (ITV) is *The Waltons* of its generation. It gets ratings normally reserved for royal weddings because it has the same effect as a royal wedding. It emanates a cosy glow, a feeling that life is all right after all. The fact that the American royal family is black simply adds to this effect. America as a whole must really be healthy and nice if a black family can be so elevated, and accepted. By contrast the classic British description of family life is *Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC1)—the title says it all, the vow of love that became a gladiatorial challenge.

The basic premise of *The Waltons* is this: never let the sun go down on a row, ie, never leave a story unresolved; never send the viewers away without that final blessing—'Night, Mama', 'Night, John Boy'. The programme that has done most to update this trick is of course *thirtysomething* (Channel 4). Here every week some disaster befalls one of the cast and the rest rally round to sweep it all away before the final credits. When Sheila got post-natal depression on Brookie, the feeling among the writers was that the longer it could be kept going, the better. On *thirtysomething,* Hope can have a miscarriage, lose her libido, recover it and start a new pregnancy quicker than I can say, 'Harry Cross'. Despite the technical flashiness of the programme, and its desperately trendy details, it is the underlying comforting fiction that carries it.

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The Waltons is great and *thirtysomething* is pretty but *Land of the Giants*? Please. It's glum, uninventive and cheap. But it hypnotises my children and I know why. It's because the Earthlings have become children. The 'giant' world into which they find themselves is not like the back garden of *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids;* there are no giant insects, no bomb-sized raindrops. Instead there are huge pieces of rubbish and every week the Earthlings cart them off as raw materials to be used in the rebuilding of the spaceship. Every week these painful, painstaking efforts are frustrated by some lumbering, unthinking giant. Or grown-up.

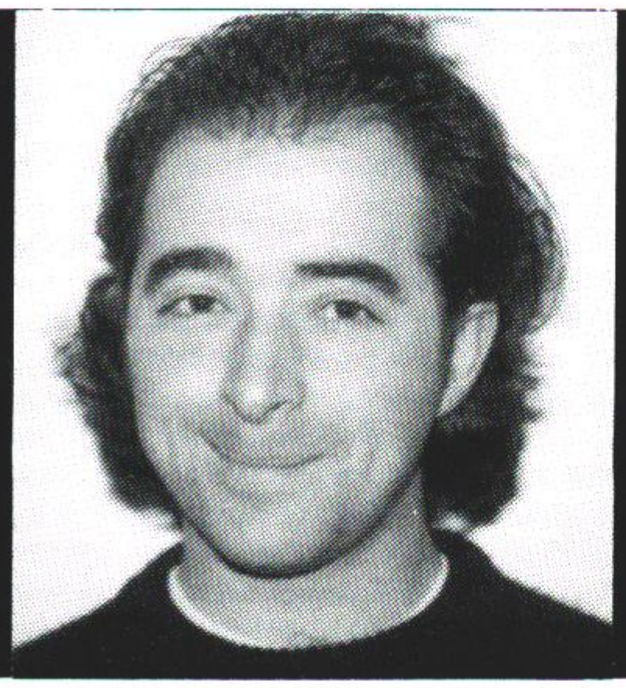
If you've ever spent a day with a toddler, you'll know that it's much the same story. Slowly, in some discreet corner of the house, the child will assemble and arrange a pile of toilet roll holders, tissues and tampax of uncertain but profound ritual significance and amazing technological ability. Then some giant git like you comes and sweeps the whole lot into the bin. *Land of the Giants* dramatises these struggles and allows you to relive the frustration and the feeling of near invisibility that you had in those days. It is radically regressive where *The Waltons* is simply nostalgic. Of course both programmes encourage the return to childhood in one much more obvious way—they are repeats. They literally take you back a bit.

Paradoxically, *thirtysomething,* even though it is about grown-up advertising executives, has a similar appeal. In *The Waltons* it is the family that provides the emotional life support; in *thirtysomething* it is friends, college friends. It concentrates closely on adults, and has a very sophisticated, snappy surface. Scratch that surface though, and you find another, very potent, fiction. The fact that your friends will not desert you is a handy thought in itself, handy for babysitting and PMT. It also means that you have got an escape route back to your heady youth. The gang has stayed together; you're still a bunch of kids really, just hanging out and playing house. In fact the first episode of the new series ran a story in which Nancy and Elliot were forced to relive their adolescence by the reappearance of Nancy's mother. In the second Hope lost her libido because she didn't feel like a teenager any more. Once around the block in the convertible with the hood down though, and she was hot and willing all over again. Apparently there is no such thing as an adult sexuality.

In the third episode Melissa's search for a man was only fruitful within a coy reworking of the Cinderella fairytale. If you want to see just how infantile *thirtysomething* is, watch *The Wonder Years,* made by the same people but using characters who are just into their teens. The plots of both programmes are more or less interchangeable. *thirtysomething* deals articulately with certain issues but it always does so within this snuggly context. Whether it's the collapse of a business or when to start weaning, the underlying message is always, 'there there now, it's just a nightmare, it'll be better in the morning'.

The form and style of *thirtysomething* are so powerful that they will absorb and dissolve any difficulty you throw at them. On Brookie the opposite is supposed to happen. We too have a cheerily familiar formula—soap—with its own comforting fictions; but when Brookie is at its best, the form buckles and breaks and out comes something new and challenging. That's why it's such an unreliable show—sometimes atrocious, sometimes wonderful. It is based on the assumption that people want to be woken up rather than shushed to sleep. I *hope* that assumption is right.

As the great debate about quality TV shapes up it looks more and more like a class war—with Clive James on one side and *Bob's Full House* on the other. *Brookside* was born in the days when people still believed in a popular TV that was not an insult and that could sometimes catch fire and shine like art, while you were doing the ironing. Are those days gone? Maybe not. Maybe it *is* funny when Harry drinks that milkshake.



'On *thirtysomething,* Hope can have a miscarriage, lose her libido, recover it and start a new pregnancy quicker than I can say "Harry Cross" '

These are hard times in the high street.

Andrew Calcutt met a prosperous pawnbroker and some suffering shop assistants

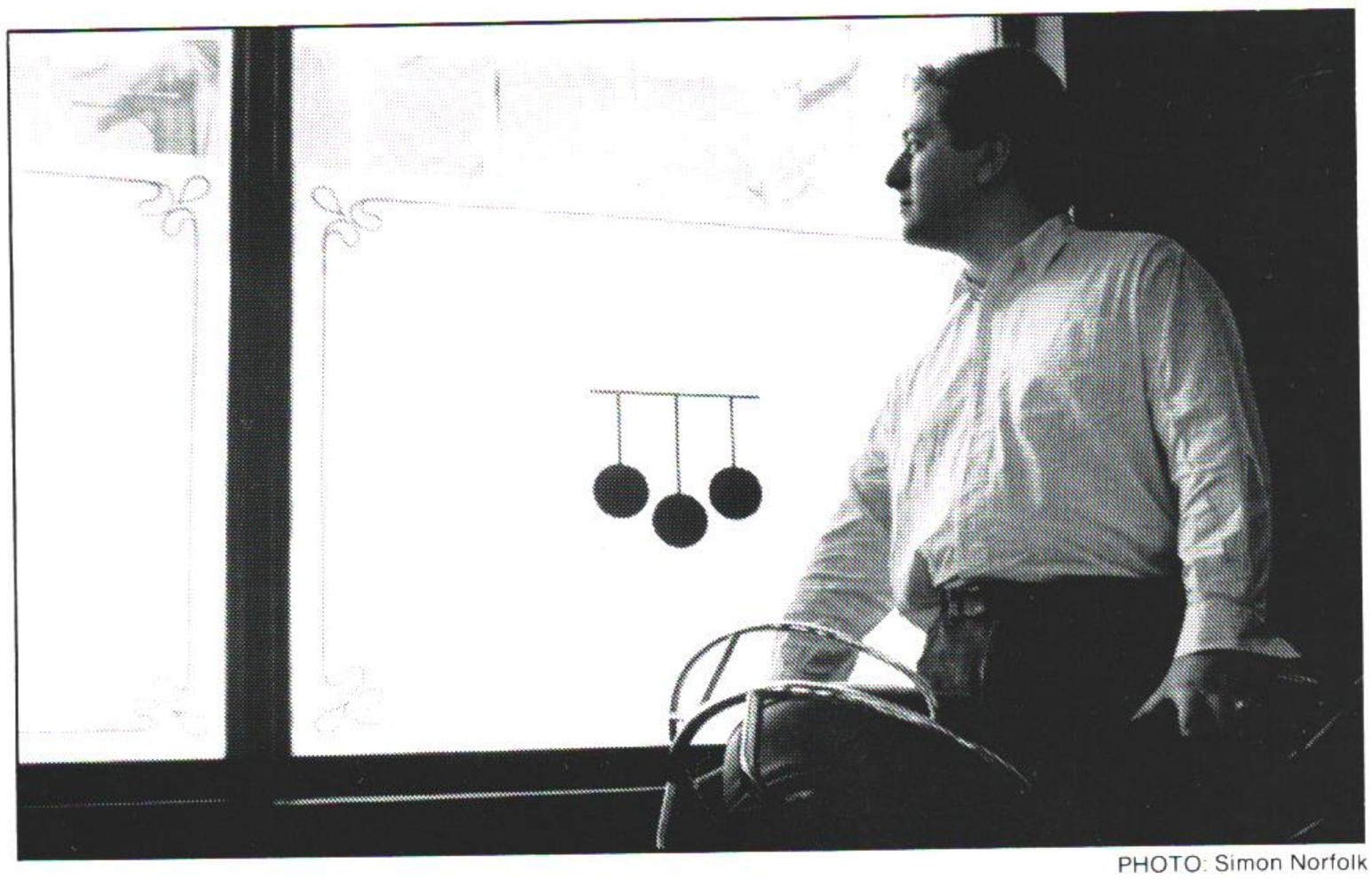


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

Dreaming of a recession

Pawn baron

According to tradition 'uncles', East End argot for pawnbrokers, are emaciated Fagin-types who live in a twilight world of Dickensian squalor. Not Stephen Squire, 25. He's as well-built and upfront as the London Pledge Co, the pawnbroking enterprise he founded four years ago with a little help from his family, who were in the scrap metal business.

'Other pawnbrokers have little shops in little streets. Now if a man pulls up in a Ferrari outside a little shop he's going to think "My car's worth more than this shop. How do I know they're going to be there next week?". We thought "the banks have been going for a long time, they must know what they're doing". So we found premises on a high street which used to be a bank.'

Having secured his premises on a prime site opposite the Angel tube station, Squire finished off the £240 000 refurbishment by restoring the original Victorian wood panelling, to get a respectable atmosphere. He wants business from the City. 'We don't deal with a lot of destitute people. We deal with people who have got money and they need to get their hands on it, so they hock their valuables—and they have got val-u-ables. We had a man yesterday with a £21 000 watch. The desk behind you [antique walnut] is in pawn, and the grandfather clock, the bust of Winston Churchill, the silver up there—we decorate our office with it. We've had a Ford GT40. That's worth £700 000.'

Squire's list of pledged goods included a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, an Aston Martin, BMWs, Maseratis, Porsches, planes, motorbikes: 'The Harley out there, the chap pawned it for £2500 and the contract runs out just ready for the summer. He gets £2500 and we get about £600, and his bike is in a centrally heated garage.' The cars and planes are what keeps Squire interested. 'It's pretty boring without a Porsche or something. I do like it when the latest pledge is parked outside, like the 1962 Stingray we had last year. A lovely set of wheels.'

Much of his £1m annual turnover is far more routine. 'We get the housewives coming in to pawn the video because of an electricity bill or the husband hasn't got paid or because she's lost the money over at the betting office.' Unlike old-style 'uncles' who are mainly interested in jewellery, Squire's policy is to take anything he can put a value on, even 'a couple of ex-London Transport doubledecker buses. Someone throws the gauntlet down and we pick it up, and see what it's worth. Just put your assets on the table and we'll lend you money'.

How does it work? 'People come along, put the article on the counter, and we offer them a loan. It may be £50. We give them a form which shows the interest rates, expiry dates. They sign it, date it. We take their camera, jewellery, whatever. They take their money. By not lending the customer the total value, that encourages them to come back and get it. They've got six months before we notify them that in 14 days we will most likely sell the goods. So they come down and either collect the goods by paying the loan plus the interest; or if they haven't got the money for the loan just the interest, which on £50 would be £12.50 over six months, and then we renew their contract for another six months.' The last thing Squire wants to do is sell off the goods. 'It's the worst thing we can do, because we lose the custom. If we sell their camera, they've got no camera to pawn, and they're annoyed with us for selling it.'

'Everybody lives on credit these days. If you die it's a way of taking something with you.' In an age where there's no stigma attached to credit Squire wants to make pawnbroking as respectable as banking. He knows, with his rates, that he is a last resort, and he doesn't ask any unnecessary questions. 'We don't sit behind a desk saying "Has your cat had kittens?" We lend money. You can put it on the next race if you like. But if you can't pay us, we'll have to sell your goods. Obviously.'

Squire sees good times ahead. 'Recession's knocking on the door. For pawnbrokers that's good news. We're always dreaming of a recession: we pray for one. When interest rates are high our interest rates don't look so bad. Businesses are paying 20 per cent just to borrow money from banks. So they're starting to bring in the company cars. We should increase our turnover by 30 per cent. We should really go strong this year and next.'

Assistants told: 'sell or be sacked'

Are you being bombarded, sir?

The eighties was the shopping decade. The credit-fuelled 'retail culture' seemed to many to have become the dominant culture. 'I shop, therefore I am' went the postmodernist bluffoonery. 'When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping', went the bullish yuppies. And, as unconvincing as any sex and shopping novel, the sociologists boasted of the new consumer society in which individuals defined and expressed themselves through the myriad choices they made in the marketplace.

The shopping spree is over. Growth in sales last year was the lowest since 1982. Only the necessities are still selling well this year. Burton's chairman, Sir Ralph Halpern, warned that '1990 is going to be a tough year'. He was right. Shares in Sophie Mirman's Sock Shop were suspended in February when they hit 34p. Sir Terence Conran's Storehouse Group (including Habitat, Mothercare and BHS) is 63 per cent down on half-yearly profits. Habitat is closing another 12 stores, threatening up to 400 jobs. Profits for Next are down by 50 per cent. Furnishers MFI recorded an £8m loss in six months. Carpets and furnishing group Lowndes Queensway forecast retail profits down £27m to £3m. And from April the uniform business rate means total rate rises of about £30m for Burton's, £12m for Next and £6m for Dixon's.

'They're asking us to grovel', Steve from one Rumbelow's store complained as he told how his manager wants him to extract more money from fewer customers. 'The first week of the January sale was good', reported Charlie from Next: 'Since then it's been dreadful.' Tim, at a north London branch of Burton's, agreed: 'It doesn't get busy until 3-4pm. I have to find things to do until then.'

The sales gimmicks at a big shopping centre like Brent Cross are now spectacular. The jewellers, Zales, were offering free carphones worth £299 if you spent £200, and a free portable phone worth £750 if you spent £500. Ratner's offered 10 per cent off your wedding ring if you bought a diamond engagement ring. Dolcis was selling £129 handbags for £29. Top Shop ran the attractive slogan BOG OFF (buy one, get one free). K Shoes cut their prices three times. Russell & Bromley sold children's shoes for £5.

'It speaks for itself when a January sale should end', said Tim from Burton's, 'but ours didn't take off and we had to extend it'. Many retailers had brought the January sales forward to December before extending them into February. 'As long as one store is having a sale, we all have to have one', said a weary assistant in Oxford Street. One Oxford Street store has got around the problem by calling itself The Sale Shop. Some market leaders are 'going Green' to woo the concerned customers, or 'going grey' to attract the older ones. Next has moved into 'home shopping' via the Next Directory. Fusion at London's Trocadero complex is 'creating new shopping experiences'.

It's all about consumer credit, which fell £39m last December, the first fall on record. It rose again in January, with the total topping £27 billion. But the squeeze is definitely on. According to a report published in March by the Policy Studies Institute, 2.5m households were seriously affected by debt last year, even before the latest hike in interest rates. As belts tighten across the country, panic signals are flashing in the shopping centres which are only held up by credit.

Managers are pressing staff to sign customers up to in-house credit schemes. Billy, a sales assistant in Oxford Street, described how he had to push credit: 'I work on a leather concession in Top Man. Now the manager has asked me to open five store cards a day as well as selling the leather that I am here to do. There are two cards, a Budget account and an Option account. He's always asking me to open Option accounts, the more expensive one. This is more or less exploiting the customers into commitments they may not be able to afford.'

Dixon's expects retail financial services to yield £37m profit in the current financial year, compared to only £3m retail sales. Kingfisher, the Woolworth's group which has been trying to buy out Dixon's, claims that Dixon's profits last year were entirely derived from sales of guarantees and loans. If it is right then Dixon's shops are little more than a front for selling credit.

Assistants are trained now in 'bombarding' selling. Don't 'assist' customers, 'rush' them, 'sell' to them. The competition between assistants is being raised to cut-throat intensity. 'We don't get bonuses as such', says one Brent Cross worker, 'but the top seller might get two hours' overtime pay. If you don't meet your target, they're always willing to let you know that there's somebody else who will'. Low selling assistants are expected to work late, without pay, tidying up to get back into the manager's good books.

Tim knows that if he doesn't 'look sharp' he may be out of a job. 'Over the last quarter, our shop made £120 000 less profit than head office says we should have. Sackings are on the way.' At some Burton's branches the sackings are already under way. 'They have closed Harrow on the Hill and one of the shops on the Edgware Road', said Nicola. 'There are lay-offs elsewhere. Basically it's last in, first out.' A sales assistant in north London reported that B&Q 'are cutting staff every week'. Lowndes Queensway is sacking 1000 staff. Two Mothercare stores are to follow. Even Harrods has started laying people off.

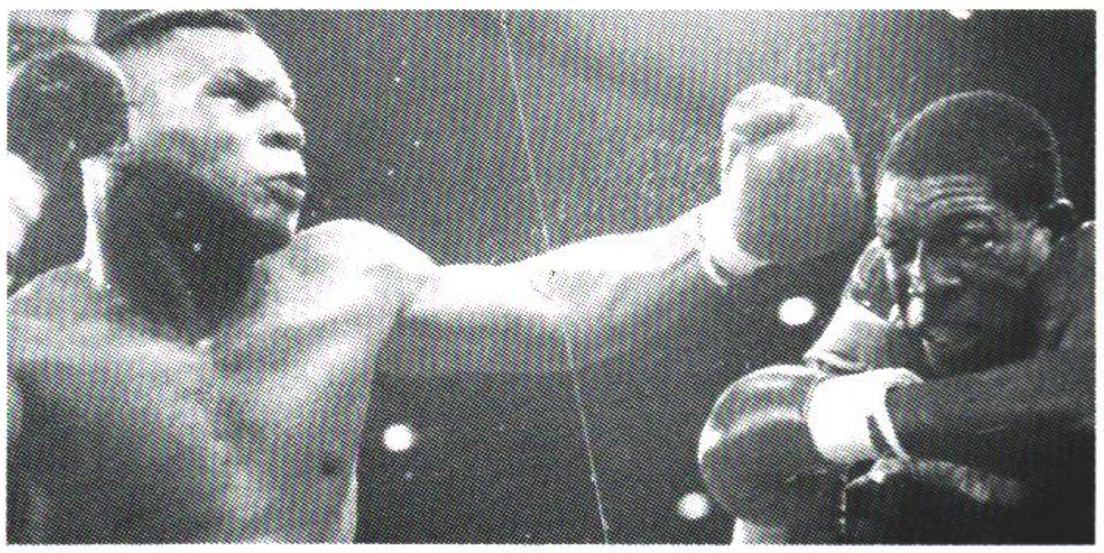
From a peak in December 1988 of 2.5m people working in shops, the shakeout has been fairly steady. It has been drastic in the retail shoe section of the Sears group, which includes Dolcis, Curtess, Freeman Hardy Willis and Manfield. Staff at Brent Cross Dolcis have already been cut from 75 to 25. The idea, according to one salesman, is to 'pay the good sellers more and get rid of the bad ones'. Assistants have three months to prove themselves. In June Sears is going to axe 200 of its least profitable shoe shops, and employees will be thrown out with the fittings.

The shopworkers are among the first victims of the harsher economic climate. But those who thought that they, by virtue of their spending powers, had become masters of their destinies, are in for some nasty surprises too. The market is striking back.

Who KO'd Mike Tyson?

King of the ring

Nick Johnson talked to Mike Tyson's manager about the ex-champion's road to the canvas



You might think that it was James 'Buster' Douglas who beat 'Iron' Mike Tyson in February. But Tyson's longstanding manager Bill Cayton sees boxing promoter Don 'electric hair' King as the man who did most of the damage. 'Don King has destroyed Mike Tyson', Cayton told me a week after the biggest upset in boxing history. 'King has surrounded Tyson with his own henchmen rather than the most capable professionals. He has been negligent in taking care of Mike to an extent that almost defied description. His cornermen didn't even have an Endswell!'

An Endswell is a small, clothes iron-shaped device frozen in ice and used to reduce swelling around the eyes. When Tyson's eye started swelling up fast in the fourth round of the Douglas fight, his corner just dabbed it with a bag of melting ice. By round eight he couldn't see out of his left eye. In round 10 he was knocked out.

The media did not exactly share Cayton's anger about what happened to his boxer. Sports critics on both sides of the Atlantic were overjoyed with the result. 'Sport's biggest bully finally gets his come-uppance' beamed the headline in Britain's *Boxing News* (23 February). It resurrected the argument that Tyson's career (previous record: 37 straight wins, 33 inside the distance) was all hype 'plotted by co-managers Jim Jacobs and Bill Cayton'. In America, *Newsweek* became so excited that it forgot itself and started talking like a tabloid: 'Tyson carried savagery to a sick extreme... savoured every act of terrorism, delighting in the melodious screams of all the little old ladies he knocked over in Brooklyn.'(26 February) Even the *Independent*'s normally sober Michael Farthers summoned up the courage to dismiss Tyson as a 'successful thug' (12 February). All the experts agreed that Iron Mike was a street bum who, said *Boxing News,* 'had finally been forced to swallow a dose of his own medicine'.

The boxing authorities and their friends in the press were always anti-Tyson. To see why, you only have to compare him with the British sporting establishment's favourite fighter, Frank Bruno.

Bruno and Tyson were both working class black kids. But while Bruno was becoming head boy at the Oak Hall boarding school, Tyson had been arrested 40 times before he was 12 and spent a lot of time in detention centres. Bruno is always besuited, polite and willing to do his 'Know what I mean 'Arry' act for the camera. Tyson snarls, walks around with no shoes on and refuses to perform for the media, preferring to listen to his Walkman during pre-fight press conferences.

Bruno sells Mother's Pride, stars in children's pantos and opens supermarkets for £5000. Tyson gets into brawls and crashes cars. Bruno has his loyal and home-loving girlfriend (now wife) Lorna. Tyson had his sex scandal press stories and his brutish and short marriage to TV actress Robin Givens. Bruno comes out of the establishment 'stable' of Terry Lawless. Tyson was discovered and groomed by outsiders in the boxing world. His unorthodox trainer and father-figure Cus D'Amato, backed by the financial team of Cayton and Jim Jacobs, was always in trouble with the boxing powers that be, and with the racketeers who exploit the sport and the fighters.

In sum, while Bruno has willingly been turned into the quintessential English good sport, Tyson refuses to fit the wholesome image of the all-American hero. Never mind the fact that Tyson was the most exciting heavyweight champion since Ali, while Bruno has never beaten one class boxer; or that Tyson destroyed Bruno when they fought in February last year. So far as the sporting establishment is concerned, Iron Mike is a terrorist thug and Big Frank is a Member of the British Empire.

The story of Tyson's relationship with promoter Don King, whom Cayton now blames for his decline and defeat, is the tale of how the financial circus that is world boxing tries to tame and use a man like Mike Tyson.

King is a former numbers racketeer from Cleveland who spent four years in jail for beating a man to death in a financial dispute. Two grand jury investigations and a 23-count indictment on tax charges later, he still rules the roost. His influence over the boxing world is legendary. More than one fighter has gone into dispute with King, and then seen himself slip mysteriously down the rankings.

Tyson was a problem for King, a great heavyweight champion operating outside of his financial control. After D'Amato died in 1985, Jacobs and

Cayton had assumed control of Tyson's career. Their close relationship with the boxer shut King out—and Tyson increased his share of the takings at the promoter's expense.

When Jacobs died in March 1988, King moved in. He turned up uninvited at the funeral and offered a distraught Tyson $25m for 'five easy matches'. When Tyson refused, King began a public power-struggle with Cayton. It was a time when the champion seemed unstable and susceptible, veering from a bust-up with his wife to a fist-fight with a former opponent in front of a Harlem clothing store and an alleged 'suicide attempt' car crash. By July 1988 King had won, and Tyson had broken all contact with Cayton, although the latter contractually remains his manager until 1992. One by one King replaced all the old faces around Tyson with his own relatives and cronies.

I asked Cayton why Tyson had gone along with King. 'It wasn't his decision. He was manipulated, given all sorts of inducements. Even though I'm the manager, King has the body and brain of the fighter. King came to my office after he had gotten Mike to sign a four-year contract, probably the most erroneous contract between an owner and fighter in history, and I refused to sign it. King said to me "Sure I poisoned Mike's mind against you. Give me that four-year exclusive contract and I'll unpoison him". King not only poisons minds, he brags about it.'

When James Douglas got up off the canvas in the eighth round in Tokyo, and then knocked out a strangely lethargic and motionless Tyson with a four-punch combination in the tenth, King's financial plans for the year seemed ruined. He had already signed a contract for Tyson to defend against Evander Holyfield in July, and the Home Box Office TV network had already paid $26.5m for a seven-fight contract with King's champion. Nobody had believed that Douglas would be a problem; the bookies even suspended betting on what was considered a one-man fight.

When his plans buckled along with Tyson's legs, King quickly bounced back. Picking up the 'Maradona's hand' syndrome, he pointed out that Douglas had been down for at least 12 seconds in the eighth round and that the referee had got the count wrong. 'Truth should prevail', preached King, 'fair play is what we're looking for. The first knock-out obliterates the second knock-out'. Under pressure from King two of the international boxing bodies which award world titles, the WBA and WBC, refused to recognise Douglas as champion. Only the IBF declared him the winner. Few seemed to notice or care that by the time the referee counted Tyson 'out', he had been down for at least 14 seconds.

Two days later, when the shamefaced WBA and WBC sobered up and declared Douglas champion, King changed his tune too. 'I've always recognised Buster Douglas as heavyweight champion. There has never been a question about that. I never asked anybody to change his decision.' King imagines everybody to have memories as long as his loyalties. Back in his New York office, he was seeing the light and struggling to seize the reins of the Buster bandwagon. 'I've been promoting Buster Douglas longer than I've been with Mike Tyson...I am Douglas' promoter, and if Johnson [Douglas' manager] thinks otherwise then he is not only in breach of contract but also in breach of his moral and spiritual obligations.' (*Independent on Sunday*, 18 February)

When Tyson was a raw teenager, Cus D'Amato used to warn him about men like King: 'Let them in and they will destroy you.' Cayton believes that has happened, and he is glad that Tyson failed to get a quick rematch. 'He would have been knocked out again. That is my belief. I am really relieved he didn't get the rematch. King has been a disaster for Tyson and a disaster for boxing, and will undoubtedly continue to be just that.'

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Big Brother on the billboard

'Get a ticket'

John Fitzpatrick on London Transport's strongarm advertising and (below) the criminalising culture behind it

'Get a ticket, not a criminal record' says the poster on the tube, the voice on the radio and the man in the television advert. For a while there you couldn't even escape it in the cinemas. For over six years London Transport in conjunction with Network South East has run one of the most threatening advertising campaigns of recent times. Most advertising tries to seduce or amuse, some tries to shock, or to warn for our own good; this sort tries to bully.

The standard bully ad is for TV licences. 'We're not taking any prisoners' intones the most recent snooper menacingly, reminding us of those harrowing scenes of the three-piece suite being repossessed as financial ruin follows the fine. London Transport however has taken things to a new level. Not content to threaten the humiliation and bother of getting caught, being prosecuted, paying a hefty fine and so on, its campaign threatens a lifetime of remorse. It focuses on the 'criminal record', hyping it up into some form of original sin, a fall from which the errant commuter will never recover.

There is no doubt that disadvantage and prejudice are visited on people simply on account of their having a 'criminal record'. A fair amount of this is generated by the rather mystified nature of the concept itself, as if a record were a chronic disease. Crucially the term does not distinguish between the murderer, the rapist, the fare dodger or the highway obstructor, not to mention those who are convicted but innocent—a category which, as recent news of police activities confirms, is very sizeable.

It is not enough apparently that the convicted person pays their fine or serves their time, society must make sure that they pay over and over again for ever breaking any law. Society is to be divided into criminals and non-criminals, which even *Crimewatch* man Nick Ross had to concede was 'ridiculous', after the *News of the World* stigmatised him for a bit of shoplifting in his youth. This is the culture which the advertising campaign is using—and reinforcing—to scare fare dodgers.

London Transport probably wants to scare people because it doesn't seem to be very good at catching them. For the year to November 1989 it reported 3065 people, of whom 1426 were convicted, 339 cautioned and 134 got 'no further action'. The rest presumably got away, one way or another. These results are not going to make a big dent in the estimated £26m lost in fare evasion in one year (£26m may be a lot of money, but there are 815m passenger journeys each year). LT hopes the new ticket barriers will cut down on the fraud, and looks forward to a new law allowing it to exact on-the-spot fines.

In the meantime, it is happy to pursue the

On the record

The keeping and use of criminal records has become a highly developed aspect of social control. Records of convictions are held centrally (in addition to local records) on the Police National Computer. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 may protect people from the more absurd prejudices about convictions, but more importantly it legitimises and promotes the social disapproval which, in addition to the sentence, the state wants to stick to law breakers in the first place.

Under the act an adult conviction is 'spent' after five years if a fine was imposed, after seven years for a custodial sentence of six months or less, and after 10 years for sentences of between six months and 30 months (above that it can't be spent). You don't have to disclose a spent conviction when applying for jobs or insurance, or when involved in legal proceedings. Many jobs however are exempt from the act, and applicants have to reveal any convictions, spent or not: these include solicitors, doctors, nurses, casino operators, firearms dealers, teachers, social workers, any job which gives 'substantial access to people under 18', which is quite a few, and any job involving 'national security', which these days includes more and more.

Records will be deleted from the PNC only when the person has not come to the notice of the police for 20 years, but not at all if they involve custodial sentences of more than six months or evidence of mental illness or indecency. Cautions and bind overs are not criminal convictions, but are still likely to be held on the PNC.

The most striking thing about the whole business is the number of people affected. It is estimated that nearly 44 per cent of males in England and Wales will at some time in their lives be convicted of an indictable offence (ie, not including minor motoring offences, soliciting, drunkenness, etc). 'If present trends continue, the prevalence of convictions for non-motoring offences in England and Wales will exceed 50 per cent for males in the foreseeable future. In other words, unconvicted males will be deviant in a statistical sense.' (David P Farrington, 'The prevalence of convictions', *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol 21, No 2, 1981) A third of all males born in 1953 have already been convicted of a serious offence. The rate for women is much lower (seven per cent) but they are catching up ('Home office statistical bulletin', issue 32/89).

Criminal records are a useful way of justifying police surveillance of the population, and of spreading fear and suspicion. One distasteful example of this is the home office's introduction of criminal record checks on those working for voluntary organisations where 'substantial access' to children is involved. Despite much reasoned opposition from the voluntary sector that such a scheme would do nothing to protect

psychological warfare being waged on its behalf by advertisers Harris Kemp. One of the adverts features a young woman mortified at being caught in front of her workmates and reeling at the revelation that the authorities had been watching her for weeks. A very unlikely story this, given the actual pick-up rate, but it spreads a bit of paranoia that we are all being observed.

Frank Harris from Harris Kemp did a lot of research in 1982 and 1983 and discovered that people were more worried about the other consequences of a conviction than the fine. 'The whole campaign is about what people will think might happen to them. People are just not worried about fines. To deter them you have to have something on top of a fine.' So the creative people came up with something on top, the criminal record.

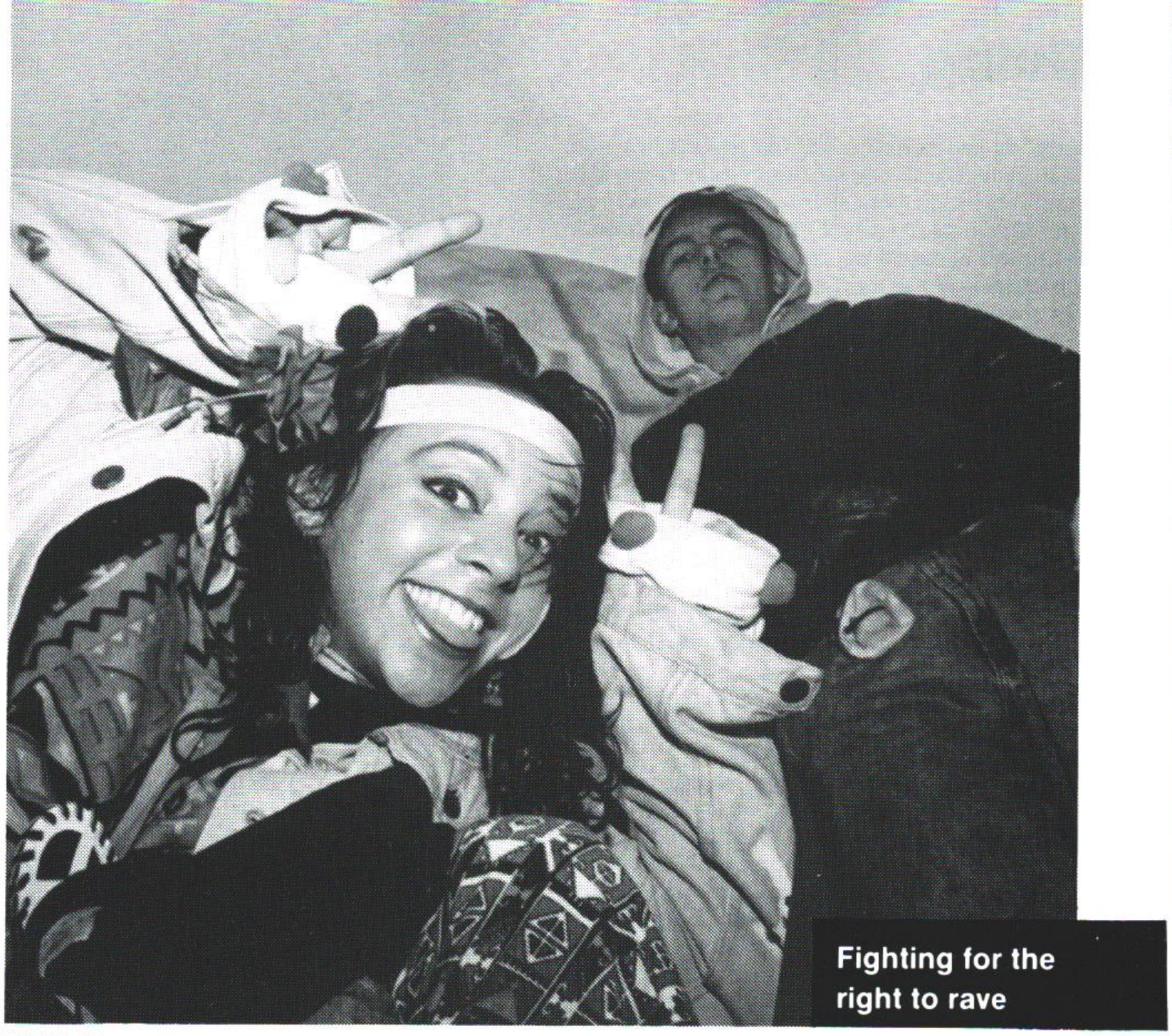
The adverts are generally very effective in communicating the guilt and fear which are supposed to cluster around this sinister condition. A man from the bank is terrified that his conviction might put the mockers on his new job in Hongkong. A smart young lad comes out of the magistrates court quite distraught and not to be consoled by his girlfriend, 'not exactly a good reference is it!'. A woman leaves a supermarket worrying about her son's conviction—what will the neighbours think? An older gent is shamed by the thought that he will never be trusted again, by colleagues at work or even by friends in the bar.

The convicts' first person accounts are heartfelt and aching with regret. It was a clever move to personalise the issue; cleverer still to have a range of persons for the target audience to relate to. Unsurprisingly, the range is weighted heavily in the direction of the middle class. Most of the characters are very respectable, the type who can be expected to be vulnerable to these concerns. As Harris says, 'It's not directed at the hardened criminal, but at the opportunistic offender. We're trying to change attitudes on a long-term basis'.

children but a lot to damage civil liberties and the quality of services, three pilot schemes have been set up. A local voluntary group will set up a 'disclosure unit' to check out with the police any potential workers for voluntary agencies in the area.

Unfortunately it all seems to be having an effect. When Southwark council in London recently stated in job adverts that convictions were not necessarily a bar to employment there was an outcry in the local press. 'We don't want ex-cons working for the council' was the general line, with a strong racist undercurrent to it, because of course the police make sure that young black men suffer more than most from the criminal record syndrome. In another example, following press publicity last year of a case in Kent, Norman Warner, director of social services, issued an hysterical memorandum to his staff: 'It is better to err on the side of extreme caution by not employing anyone with any record with access to children.'

Think about it; anyone with *any* record rules out an awful lot of people; and access to children (no 'substantial' here) rules out an awful lot of jobs. The increasingly repressive character of the law, as it worms its way further into our lives, and the increasingly blatant character of police malpractice combine to make it more and more difficult for a person to go through life without a conviction, whether they've done anything anti-social or not. We should get this thing in context. If there is any 'extreme caution' to be exercised it is in relation to people like Mr Warner and campaigns like that being run by London Transport.



Fighting for the right to rave

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

House music scene under pressure

Live and kickin'?

As the official crackdown on warehouse parties continues, and the mainstream pop industry tries to tame house music, Joe Curran asked some rave-goers to assess the damage so far

House music may have made the charts but much of the genuine scene remains illegal, with Graham Bright MP trying to introduce a bill to ban it and police chiefs promising to drive the raves away. But whatever happens, the spell has certainly been cast over a lot of people and the music and its aura will not be dispelled so easily.

The dreamy terms used by most party-goers when they talk about the scene is in stark contrast to the music. Angel, one of the young DJs from the pirate radio station Kick FM, is sharper than most: 'House and acid deals with things of the mind, how you feel. Hip hop is a black thing.' The beat and the lyrics of hip hop are hard, aggressive. The acid beat is more heavy and monotonous, created by hi-tech synths and drum machines, mixed with a myriad of sounds lifted from other tracks by sampling machines. Vocals are optional, but the overall effect is always the same: you just can't stand still. Add a little soul and you've got house, a little hip hop and you've got hip house.

Acid here doesn't mean LSD, not that trips are unknown. Angel: 'The term acid means to burn the music, to totally transform it. When we're on the steel, we don't really look, we just bung it on, yeah that sounds good, let's have some of that, turn it up. If you've got the talent to mix, you mix it. That's what acid is all about.'

House has become steadily more popular since 1987. The originality of the music, the heavy bass and nuff drums are only part of it. As Finbar O'Brian, a party promoter since October 1987, puts it, 'You've got to capture the atmosphere, actually go to one of the raves. When it all started it really was like the summer of love. It was like beyond compare. There's no better way to express yourself than through music and dance. It's still good but there's a lot of greed in it now. They're changing a lot of money'.

O'Brian has no sympathy for the clubs which have lost out to the raves in warehouses and fields. 'The reason these things started in the first place was because the clubs couldn't hold the people. They weren't playing the music, they were intransigent. So we took it away from the clubs and put it in places where people could really have true freedom. Some of the clubs are brilliant, but it's not the same as the warehouse.'

'Part of the reason why acid is so popular is that the first time people go to a massive rave they are struck by how beautiful the people are', says Angel: 'The guys are good-looking, the girls are seriously beautiful! We used to have a great time. Any house, didn't give a shit. Give it that (indicates kicking door down). Set up. No electricity, no problem; where's the nearest lamp-post, plug into that, and away we go. Lights? Get a candle, get a torch, it was alright. And then smiley face came about. A month later everyone started going on about Es and trips and before you knew it, it wasn't safe to wear a smiley t-shirt.'

This much is agreed by everyone involved: there was no trouble to speak of before the police got involved. According to Ozzy G, a rapper, 'When the parties first started it was really underground, and the police didn't have much clue what was going on. That was probably the best time that we

had. We had no trouble. I was at the Reigate do until about eight o'clock in the morning. There was no trouble and all of a sudden the old bill turn up and all hell breaks loose'. O'Brian claims to have organised about 25 parties, 'out of those I don't think I've ever had any trouble that I couldn't sort out myself'.

Angel has no doubts as to why the police have been moving in. 'It's a very political thing. When you get a black guy, a white guy, an Indian and a Chinese all jumping up and down to the same thing, and they're all good friends, all brought together by one type of music, then the government have got problems. Young people, full stop, are rebellious by nature. When they're separate you can control that.'

O'Brian echoes what seems to be a common sentiment on the scene: 'Everyone's under one banner here. They all want the right to dance. When the walls are coming down in Eastern Europe and they are all being granted more freedom, it's ironic that in Britain we are getting more repressed.'

The justification for that repression has been, mostly, drugs. Mystery Man of the pirate station Fantasy FM is not impressed. 'In Stringfellows they take drugs, they don't get raided. They want to get it back in the clubs and keep it under control. This rave business, there's been so much togetherness and that, I think the government fear the outcome of the thing. They can see a new era. Look at the fashion around. Everyone's wearing the same thing.'

Graham Bright might be trying to impose £20 000 fines and six-month prison sentences for those who organise unlicensed entertainment, as well as confiscating their profits. But don't get him wrong. 'Above all', he says, 'let the young have their entertainment in a safe and sane environment'. Sounds like fun. Yet many on the scene have already taken his bait. They are arguing for greater cooperation with the police and a reformed licensing system under state regulation.

There are various outfits and umbrella groups campaigning on the issue, all seeming to tend in the same direction while sounding militant. Cleveland Anderson is a spokesman for the Freedom to Party Campaign: 'What we've actually done is join up all the organisations, the radio, the underground scene and some of the record companies and we've released a record called "All we wanna do is dance" which supports the campaign. It's all about freedom to dance. An expression of how the younger generation feels, how we've been treated by the press, the government and the senior generation. If you want anything in this country you've got to fight for it.'

The steady incorporation of the raves has been reflected in the music as it is heard on the radio stations. The pirates of course have their own problems, including raids by the police, department of trade and industry officials and, as if that wasn't enough, rival outfits. The 'winter of discontent', however, has also seen some of the pirates losing their originality. Fantasy FM for example has been moving into the mainstream of chatty DJs and advertising (even if it advertises the merchandise of Biology, one of the biggest rave promoters).

Angel will hear none of it. 'They wanna run their ship like Capital Radio. I feel that defeats the purpose of the music because the music is saying "Yeah, let yourself go, let the music use you". You can't be doing that with the three o'clock news coming through. You can't be doing that if you've got some regimental timetable.' He suddenly demonstrates how to run a radio show, jumping off his chair and miming a routine over an imaginary deck 'Yes London, Angel on the steel, giving it that—zip, zip, zip' he leans forward, baring his teeth and hisses the station's name into the microphone: 'Kick!'

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books

Soviet popular culture

'A new art has arisen'

Richard Stead on art, revolution and perestroika

The tumultuous changes in the Soviet Union over recent years have sharpened interest here in all things Soviet. Two new books give us an opportunity to compare some of the popular art which has accompanied two very different periods of political upheaval.

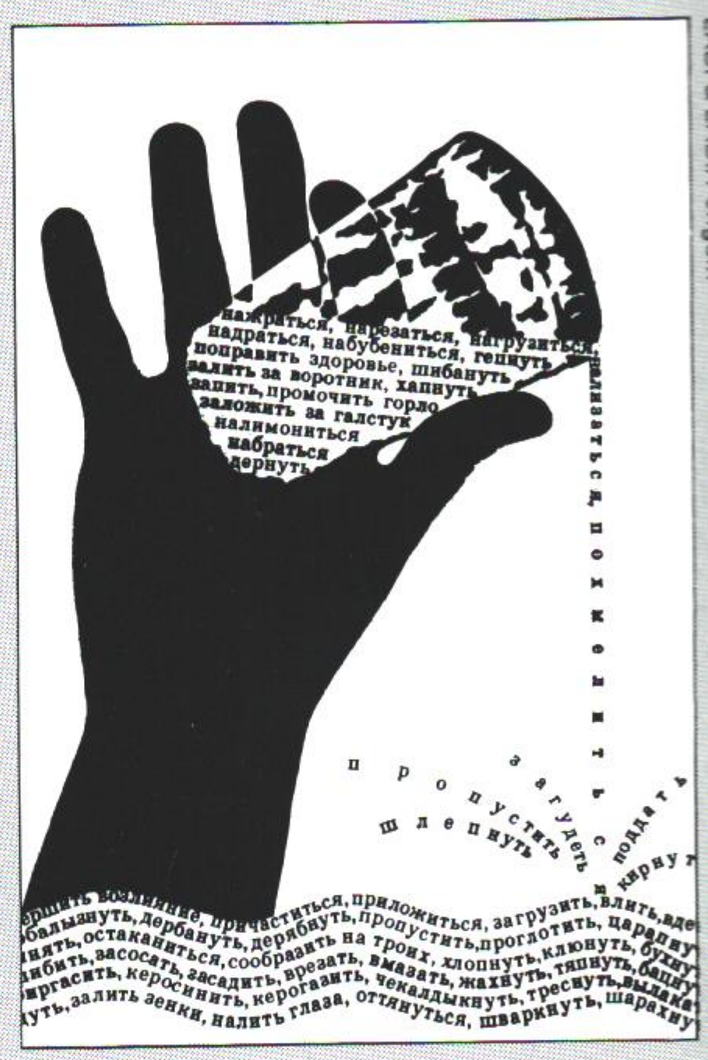
In October 1918, Anatoly Lunacharsky, head of the people's commissariat for public education, declared 'a new art has arisen ...to express the new life in works of art, to get rid of that mass of sentiment which is obnoxious to the people, to create new forms of public buildings and monuments'. *Street Art of the Revolution* is an account of that new art. Originally published in the Soviet Union in 1984, it charts the activities sponsored by the festivals commissions which were set up by Lenin for the celebration of May Day and the October Revolution, red letter days in the Soviet calendar.

Featuring 220 illustrations, including photographs of the period and reproductions of surviving art works, the book also reproduces many extracts from articles and decrees written at the time. It brings home how the extraordinary artistic innovation which accompanied the revolution was not confined to specialist, individual artists and well-known names such as Malevich, Lissitsky and Rodchenko. These and others such as Mayakovsky, Tatlin, Vesnin and Stepanova were enlisted in a conscious effort to create a rich culture for and with a mass public. Nor were things left to the experts: the Petrograd soviet decreed in April 1919, 'Under no circumstances may the arrangements for the May Day festivities be given into the hands of the futurists from the "Fine Arts" department. A special commission has been entrusted with the job of attracting trade unions and other workers' organisations to the task'.

It was not just a question of agitational murals, although they are here too. Cities were turned into huge open-air exhibitions with hundreds of decorations and monuments. There were street shows and plays involving thousands of participants, often combining avant-garde developments with the most traditional art forms. Catherine Cooke's introductions to each section are very useful.

Inevitably there is sometimes the unmistakable air of the institutional and the official about these events, especially as the years of revolutionary change give way to the era of Stalinism. Even so this is a fascinating glimpse of a new culture struggling to be born.

The excitement of the art of the revolution easily overshadows the subjects of another new book, *The Posters of Glasnost and Perestroika*. These posters, from 1986 to 1988, are hailed as the fruit of the heady new atmosphere abroad in the Soviet Union. Yet they seem to lack any real energy or inspiration.



Yulia Labi and Evgeny Labi, 'To load up, take communion, pour behind the collar...', 1987

It is telling that many of these modern posters seem to be art works for exhibition only, appearing in a 'single original version', as opposed to being mass-produced or distributed; a reaction no doubt to the discredited use of posters by the Stalinist state. Some are striking or amusing, and compared to most Western art they are closely engaged with political and social issues (drunkenness, prostitution, the environment, perestroika). These are glimpses of the preoccupations and prejudices of contemporary Soviet society, and further explanation would have been useful. But the images alone are sufficient to suggest that Gorbachev's 'revolution from above' has generated none of the genuine artistic excitement and innovation which followed the workers' revolution of 1917.

- Vladimir Tolstoy, Irina Bibikova and Catherine Cooke (eds), *Street Art of the Revolution: Festivals and Celebrations in Russia 1918-33*, Thames & Hudson, £30
- Victor Litvinov (ed), Alexander Yegorov (introduction), *The Posters of Glasnost and Perestroika*, Penguin, £12.99

Why America needs Nato

Keeping an eye on Germany

With the German question at the centre of world affairs once more, Pat Roberts reviews Wolfram Hanrieder's *Germany, America, Europe*, Yale University Press, £19.95

Recent events have cast a curious shadow over books published in the past year on the subject of European politics in general and Germany in particular. The fundamental premise of both left and right analysis has been so quickly whisked away that even as they are published these books carry the quaint air of belonging to another age. But not this one by Wolfram Hanrieder.

To be sure, like many others, he takes as given the permanent division of Europe and of Germany. His book came out last August and states that 'the two Germanies still appear solidly divided, and Europe still suffers from what George F Kennan called its "great cramp": its foreign position outside the rim of the two empires' (p385). But Hanrieder cannot be singled out for this judgement. Virtually every expert would have agreed with him.

In fact Hanrieder came close to drawing the right conclusions about the inevitable dynamic towards German reunification. Unlike most works on the subject he argues that the division of Germany had very little to do with the Cold War as such. He suggests that the partition of Germany stabilised the relationship between the Soviet Union and the USA. Moreover he rightly points out that one of the main aims of Nato was to contain Germany.

Hanrieder emphasises the historic role of the German question as a destabilising factor in international affairs. After 1945, the way that Germany could be most safely reabsorbed into the capitalist world system was first by dividing it and second by integrating its Western part into Nato. As part of a US-dominated military alliance, the threat of German power to France and other West European nations could be neutralised. The author argues that for Western Europe 'the integrative structures of Nato remain the most effective way of dealing with the "German problem" '. This analysis explains why today Western diplomats, and even some East European ones, place such stress on the need for guarantees that a united Germany stays within Nato. It shows that the true purpose of Nato is not to provide a military alliance against a non-existent Soviet threat but to regulate the activities of German imperialism.

With hindsight it is also evident that the relationship between Nato and the Warsaw Pact was not merely conflictual; it was also symbiotic. Both sides needed the other to justify the perpetuation of the division of Germany. As the author notes, as far back as 1968, 'the gradual loosening of the Warsaw Pact' for Washington 'was a cause less for exultation than for concern' (p17). Today of course it is all too clear that Washington is not too pleased with the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact. The traditional pretext for the division of Europe has now gone.

The irrelevance of the traditional Cold War strategy is illustrated by the pronouncements of Margaret Thatcher. In February, she was calmly saying that she quite understands how the Soviet Union should want to station troops in East Germany. Such understanding from an old foe of the Soviet Union should not be at all surprising. In fact Thatcher is far more worried about an emerging German power than a declining Soviet Union.

Today it is clear that the Cold War helped concentrate our minds on the wrong problem. All the time the real problem facing the Western powers was not the Soviet Union, but Germany. The very existence of Germany, a major capitalist power without a place in the world, calls into question the international balance of power. Hanrieder's book provides an excellent background to the problem that was always close to the surface, and is now breaking through. It only remains to be seen how long Nato can keep up the charade of pretending to look after Germany.

Merchant bankers

Robber barons

Against the background of the Guinness trial Mark Butler reviews Dominic Hobson's *The Pride of Lucifer: Morgan Grenfell 1838-1988*, Hamish Hamilton, £16.99

Dominic Hobson explains the fall from grace of Morgan Grenfell as a consequence of the 'greed, caution, panic, incompetence, pride, arrogance, cowardice and foolishness' which were exhibited by the bank's management—traits which were 'all too common in the City of London in the 1980s'. The fact that the foundations of the City's oldest institutions are built on greed seems to have evaded Hobson. He believes that the nasty thing just broke out in the eighties, like a bad case of the acne rosacea that disfigured bank founder JP Morgan's nose. 'To the founders of Morgan Grenfell', he says, 'the paramountcy of the reputation of the House over personal enrichment was beyond question. Their successors in the 1980s were less scrupulous in their dealings and so made errors of principle as well as judgement'.

For Hobson, in the old days business was conducted with honour. Today, they just want to make a fast buck. Take George Peabody, a founding father of what became Morgan Grenfell; a philanthropist who turned down both a baronetcy and the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath from Queen Victoria, preferring instead a miniature portrait of the monarch as a 'public mark of her sense of his munificence' as she put it. He simply prayed 'that I might be enabled before I died to show my gratitude by doing some great good to my fellow men'. Anybody who takes this creep at face value deserves a miniature themselves.

By way of contrast Hobson gives us the terrible depths to which Morgan Grenfell had fallen by the 1970s. The rights issues of 1974 and 1978 had diluted the family shareholdings and the new institutional investors were more interested in share-price performance than how many peers or merchant banking families were on the board. Disinterested advice to the client went out of the window, poaching other banks' customers came in. Such an ungentlemanly approach led a City analyst to describe them as 'public school bully boys'. This was probably a more stinging reproach than anything a City regulatory body is ever likely to hand out, but at Morgan Grenfell they took their beating like, well, public school boys.

Things went from bad to worse, or rather from the discreet to the blatant, ending up with Guinness. Morgan Grenfell was now being run by Christopher Reeves, who had learnt to kill at Hill Samuel. Guinness chief Ernest Saunders was the type of chap with whom he could do business, and he did. Saunders had just presided over 'the most savage disposal programme in modern British management history', closing 149 companies in three years. He wasn't from a merchant banking family either.

In 1985 Guinness acquired Arthur Bell & Sons, a one-time customer of Morgan Grenfell. The City was outraged that Morgan's should take the side of one client against another, but there was much admiration for the macho tactics of Morgan and Saunders. It later transpired that they could afford to be macho; a director of Bell's was passing them information. Finally the scandal over the alleged manipulation of Guinness shares during the Distillers takeover bid prompted Tory fears about the City giving capitalism a bad name, led to the fraud squad being called in, and sent Saunders and others to stand trial at Southwark crown court.

Hobson tells a good tale, but he has missed the point. The root cause of the increasingly imaginative ways of making money which he describes lies in the speculative nature of business in the past few decades, and not in the thinning moral fibre of the business community, or the school they went to.

Industries the world over have faced increasing problems of profitability since the sixties. All but a few have ceased to be attractive homes for capital seeking a profit. For those who want to make money, it is more lucrative to gamble on what a share, commodity or bond might be priced at tomorrow, than to invest in a company's expansion plans of today. And corners have to be cut.

Critics like Hobson can complain about the lack of 'honest practice'. But when has the honest practice of a capitalist ever been anything other than making money? When did a capitalist choose to invest in something that gave him a lower rate of return, even if the alternative meant risky speculation? When did any capitalist refrain from breaking the law if he thought he had to and could get away with it? It was ever thus.

It was certainly thus for Hobson's idea of an old gentleman banker, JP Morgan, who merged the Pennsylvania and New York Central railways in 1885, knowing that the alliance was against state laws. When the supreme court struck down his merger of the Great Northern Railroad with the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1895, he simply arranged for the stock to be held by individuals like himself. He was labelled as one of the original 'robber barons'. The old firm could have taught the new boys a trick or two about ruthless business. JP Morgan's father, for example, made $1.5m by lending money to the French government to help its bloody suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871.

But never mind the bad apples. In 1864, the Peabody Donation Fund (founded two years earlier by Morgan Grenfell man George) started the Spitalfields estate, providing 62 flats at a cost of £22 000 'for the working class'. In October 1988, Morgan Grenfell gave £500 000 to the Tower Hamlets Centre for Small Businesses in Brick Lane, not far from Spitalfields. This brings Hobson out in goosepimples: 'After all the tumult and venality of the previous years, the bank has rediscovered George Peabody's "higher pleasure and greater happiness than making money—that of giving it away for good purposes".' Hallelujah.

letters

We welcome readers' views and criticisms. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX

The Mandela factor

Russell Osborne ('The Mandela myth', March) is right: Nelson Mandela is not a Marxist, nor has he ever been one. But then again, he never claimed to be. He is a radical democrat who unashamedly admires all the trappings of British parliamentary democracy. But as Osborne rightly points out, he holds those views in exceptional circumstances. Even the desire for bourgeois democracy is subversive in a society where black South Africans are denied any rights, and it was for this reason that the white supremacist regime saw fit to lock him away for 27 years.

Now that Mandela has been released he has a very important role to play in the movement. He may not be a communist, but the courage he displayed throughout his imprisonment has commanded the respect of millions of black South Africans. For this reason he has already become the strongest unifying force of the liberation struggle. The ANC is swelling in numbers, in confidence and in political strength. And the stronger the organisation, the better able it will be to call the shots against the apartheid regime in the future.

Today, the movement is being organised around basic demands for democratic rights. The Freedom Charter is not an anti-capitalist programme and ANC leaders are social democrats. But we cannot expect the movement to run before it can walk. The struggle for democracy today sows the seeds of the socialist revolution of tomorrow.

At present, the priority is to unify and strengthen the movement. To this end, Mandela can play an invaluable role as a figurehead and focus for the liberation struggle. When this has been achieved the black working class will be strong enough to fight the most important struggle of all—against the capitalist class, including its black element. Osborne mentioned how Mandela's black millionaire friend Richard Maponya got a lot of attention when he reported that Mandela opposed nationalisation. Maponya is a free-marketeer who controls the BMW concession in South Africa. He has nothing in common with black workers. But they cannot be expected to deal with such individuals while they still carry apartheid on their backs.

Paul Merriman *Hull*

The implication in your article is that Nelson Mandela is a man to compromise. That is a view I know is shared by many worried comrades inside South Africa. Significantly, many young blacks did not applaud Mandela's marathon speech in Durban, and the comrades in Natal are not about to embrace Inkatha thugs as prodigal sons on his advice. But the more principled sections of the movement could well be sacrificed by the conciliatory policies adopted by the ANC in the near future.

If Mandela was the only individual putting forward a strategy of compromise, the situation would not be so perilous. But his views are echoed by other leading sections. Walter Sisulu has said that De Klerk's reforms go too fast, he needs time to teach young hotheads the skills of the talking-shop. Murphy Morobe from the UDF speaks scornfully of the 'young lions' who want 'to shoot your way to Pretoria'.

Unfortunately these moderate views hold sway. ANC statements sound more conservative by the day. But as yet, there is no one to step into the current leadership's shoes.

Joseph Sibisi *London*

Ad outrage

In 14 years of reading the left press your subscription advertisement in the March issue is the most disgusting thing we have yet seen. Pictured is a moronic-looking specimen wearing a t-shirt featuring a nuclear attack on Moscow. Whilst anyone with an iota of elementary class consciousness would have 'acquainted his face with the pavement', *you* run the caption 'I bet he subscribes to *Living Marxism*'. Why would you want to associate yourself so prominently with such reactionary filth? What is revealed is total racist contempt for the Soviet people.

Joan Lewis and Ted Talbot *Nottingham*

German questions

I have been following your supportive coverage of German reunification with interest but feel that you underestimate one very important element in the debate: the problem of the emergence of a strong German nationalist identity.

When the state of West Germany was set up by the United States after the war, it had no credibility among the people. West German leaders Adenauer, Brandt, Schmidt and later Kohl could not win support by speaking of German history or traditions or pride because the Nazis had used and despoiled all such nationalist symbols. Because it could not wave its flag at the world with confidence and without shame, Germany had to content itself with being what they called an 'economic giant but a political dwarf' in international affairs.

Today all this has changed. With reunification, Germany looks like it will be a political giant also. Unity will strengthen all West German institutions because they have won a great 'victory' over the communist East. The German people's distrust of rulers will be less powerful, because Kohl and whoever comes next will have much more status as head men in a united and powerful Germany.

The return of a nationalist identity in Germany can only benefit the right-wing politicians and the fascists who are becoming more popular. Left-wing people will find it much harder to stop the tide of sentiment that will accompany the growing strength of the German state. For this reason I cannot be so certain that unification will be a very good thing. I am worried that the left may be drowned and destroyed in the back-wash that unity will create.

Ute Fischau *London*

Sharon Clarke's article ('The German question: an answer', March) asks the wrong question and comes out with the wrong answer. Politicians and media pundits may be obsessed with the question: for or against unity? But for Marxists, German unity is not so straightforward.

Clarke wholeheartedly supports German reunification—not because there is anything inherently progressive in German unity as such (ie, a blow against imperialism) or because the working class will directly benefit from it (so far so good)—but because 'the partition of Germany has tended artificially to freeze history'. Following the same logic, would *Living Marxism* also support Japan's remilitarisation and break with America because this would unfreeze post-1945 history as well? Hopefully the answer would be no. Marxists use shifts in imperialist relations (such as German reunification) to demonstrate the need for independent working class solutions, and do not side with imperialist 'underdogs' who challenge the system.

Living Marxism needs a more balanced approach to the question of German unity. Marxists are neither for nor against unification. Emphasis on the benefits or dangers to the working class internationally depends on the context in which the discussion is raised. In Britain we have to challenge anti-German chauvinism, and in Germany, German nationalism.

Dave Chandler *Newcastle*

Berlin Wall, January 1990

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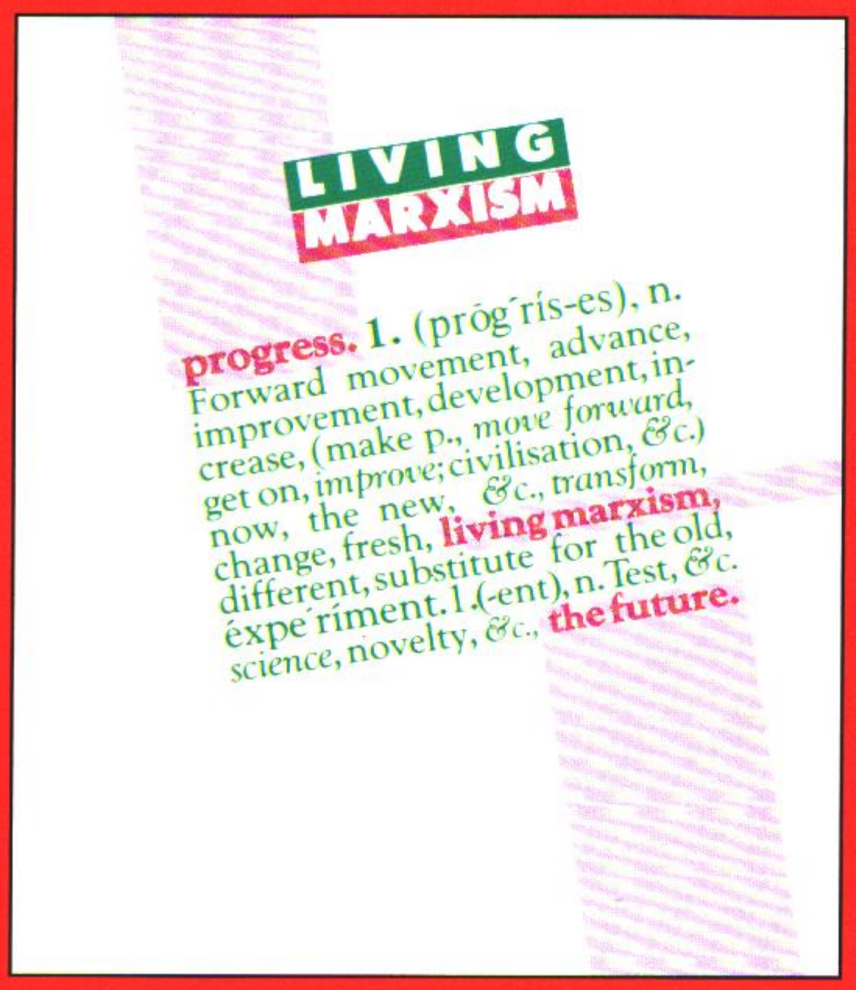

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