

socialist  
**REVIEW**

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# The state of the world economy

COME ON THEN SEE  
A RECOVERY?



**INSIDE: History of the family, politics of Militant, Marx centenary**

# What does inflation mean?

For the last few months, each announcement of the rate of inflation has been greeted in the press as a major cause for celebration. **Sue Cockerill** looks at the reality.

Unemployment is at record levels, but inflation is at its lowest for ten years, so recovery is on the way – so goes the message. The Tories have no other signs of economic success to point to, so they are making the most of this one.

For the last decade 'the fight against inflation' has been the justification for attacks on wages and public spending by both Labour and Tory governments. Inflation must be beaten in order to make Britain competitive in the world – the argument has been the same, through the Social Contract and monetarism.

Although now Labour leaders argue that the price in terms of unemployment is too high, they are careful to stress that their plans for economic expansion won't cause inflation.

Both Labour and Tory accept that wage rises cause inflation; both argue that government policy is decisive in controlling it.

So – first of all, what is happening to inflation? Does it mean the Tories' policies are working? Who does falling inflation benefit?

## Inflation falling

Inflation is falling. There are various different measures of price levels, but the one which is most often referred to is the Retail Price Index. This is calculated by collecting price information on a range of goods and services, and adjusting, or weighting them, by the patterns of expenditure of consumers. The objection to this measure is that it can understate changes in the cost of living for people on low incomes, who spend a higher proportion of

their money on essentials – food, fuel, rent.

The Tories themselves objected to it for different reasons. Since they themselves contributed to the rise in the RPI by putting up VAT and nationalised industry prices, and because they wanted to undermine the practice of linking wage demands to the RPI, they came up with something called the Tax and Prices Index.

They claimed that by cutting direct taxation, they would be increasing the money people had in their pockets, and the new index would reflect a truer picture. The trouble was the TPI soon started to rise even faster than the RPI, so it was quickly forgotten about.

Recent figures on the effect of the Tories on people's tax burden show that the position has stayed the same for middle level earners and got worse for the low paid. The only people who have benefitted are very high earners.

But although the Tories have messed about with statistics generally (especially on unemployment), including recently abolishing the special indices on the cost of living in London – to discourage London weighting claims – the current downward trend in inflation is undeniable.

All the signs are that it won't last. The average forecast for inflation next year is 6.5%, but most forecasters are agreed that it is likely to fall to about five per cent in the first half of the year, and then start to rise again, perhaps reaching ten per cent in 1984. That is why some stockbrokers are advising the Tories to go for a spring election.

Falling inflation may be claimed as a success by Thatcher but the reality is different. When they won the election, the Tories said that the money supply was crucial to their anti-inflation policy, and there would be a time-lag before it took effect. They then utterly failed to control the money supply in the first eighteen months.

That ought to mean rocketing inflation. We hear a lot less about sterling M3 these days, but a lot more about wages. Even here, most workers who have remained in

work have maintained their real wages through most of this government. At the same time, mass unemployment has meant that overall the government hasn't been able to cut its own spending in line with its monetarist theories.

Inflation has been dropping not just in Britain but throughout the advanced western countries, certainly over the last six months. Partly that is because companies have not been able to put prices up in an attempt to maintain their profit levels as they did in the past – the recession is too deep. Partly it is due to the dramatic fall in world commodity prices – food, metals and other raw materials, and even fuels.

For the countries in the third world which produce these commodities, the situation is disastrous. The relation between what they receive for these exports and what they pay for imports is worse than it has been since 1950.

And that leads to the question of who benefits from falling inflation? Because the capitalist system is international, falling commodity prices present problems for western capitalists too, especially for the banks. If the income to commodity producing countries is falling, they have more and more difficulty paying the interest on their enormous debts to the western banks.

## Real interest

The problem of debt in a period of disinflation is a general one which has been a major concern of bourgeois economists lately. When inflation is rising, the real burden of debt is reduced year by year. Though interest rates have been higher in the last decade than before, they have in real terms been negative for long periods of time. Now that inflation is falling, companies (and countries) have found themselves paying quite high real interest at a time when recession is hitting them in other ways.

Some far-sighted people can also think of other ways in which lower inflation can cause problems for the capitalist class. A columnist in the *Financial Times* recently pointed out that it could make wages difficult to cut!

'While there have been examples in the UK and US of workers taking pay cuts in nominal terms, these have been rare and confined to companies able to threaten closure or wholesale sackings convincingly. The lesson seems to be that employees can be persuaded to accept a pay cut in real terms, but there is a great deal more stickiness over nominal reductions in basic pay.'

If inflation is ten per cent, workers can be persuaded to take a five per cent rise. If inflation is one per cent, few will accept four per cent less cash in their wage packets.

As far as the working class is concerned, falling inflation is hardly a cause for rejoicing. Those who have suffered most from rising prices – pensioners and the unemployed – will only stand to gain as a result of struggle by the employed. And while those workers with some power have been able to maintain their living standards so far, the recession has opened up more divisions in the class which have to be overcome. □

What's frightened them?  
Find out on the cover of...

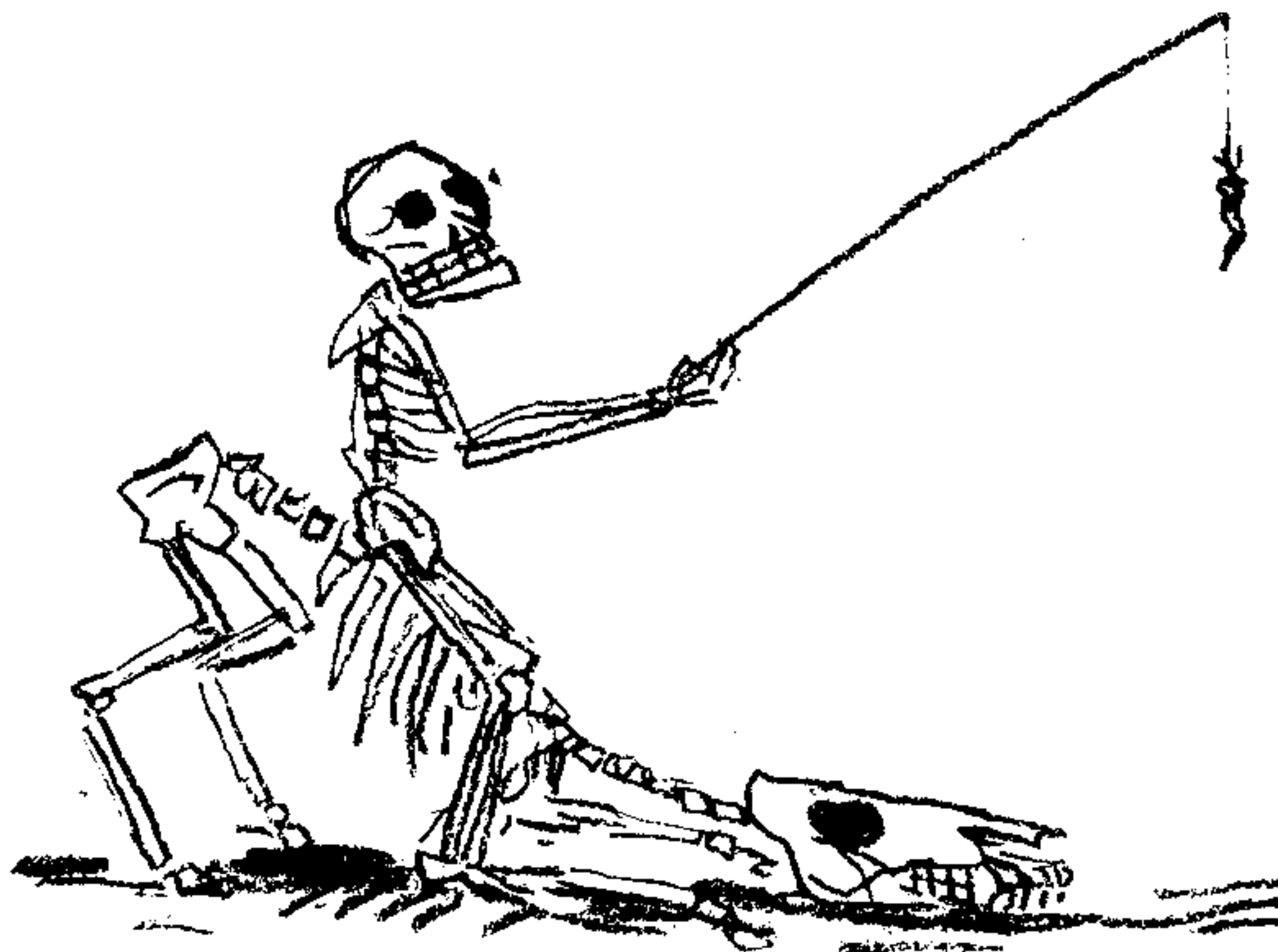
## INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM ★ 18

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# No end in sight



While Tory ministers pray daily for an end to the world recession, they not only have no idea of what causes it, nor of when it will end: Nigel Harris, author of a new book, *Bread and guns*, shortly to be published by Penguin, analyses the state of the world economy and indicates likely medium-term future developments.

1982 was the grimmest year so far in what will soon be a full decade of world economic stagnation. It seemed last winter that the low point must have been reached—'upturn' just round the corner was the favourite comfort of Ministers. Even as late as July, the OECD (the club of advanced industrial powers) predicted a 2.25 percent rate of growth for the full year. But the prospect of upturn retreated like a mirage. The strategies—including monetarism—could no longer be justified without revival, and faded. All the sacrifices made because growth was just round the corner, became just sacrifices, a self-flagellation to ensure the survival, if not prosperity, of capital.

The revised estimates for the growth of gross products in the OECD group for 1982 now range from  $-\frac{1}{4}$  to  $+\frac{1}{2}$  percent. For 1983, a rate of growth is proposed of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2

percent, and for 1984,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3. However, there is no more assurance than before that these figures will remain firm—they will possibly shrink, the closer we get.

In any case, whatever the figure, everyone freely admits it will not affect unemployment. Unemployment in Europe will increase by one million every six months up to 1984. The *OECD Outlook* notes:

'It is not clear on present trends and policies, that the prospects for Europe would improve thereafter. Unemployment in Europe has risen every year since the first oil shock in 1973-74'.

And for the OECD group as a whole, unemployment should reach 35 million by 1985, or  $9\frac{1}{2}$  percent of the labour force (as against  $5\frac{1}{2}$  percent in 1979).

Customarily, it is assumed that a failure to

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**Private property**

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revive in the OECD group is the stalling of the 'engine of world growth', which, in other words, implies that the world profit rate is primarily determined in this group. The rate will not rise despite the years of ransacking the 'factors of production', as represented in the level of unemployment, of bankruptcies and the reduction in the capacity of industry. The destruction is still not enough; the great overhang of decaying capital still holds down the profit rate. The longer this persists, the more stagnation spreads outwards from the oldest heavy industry to the newest, from there to the newest growth industries, from the geographical heartlands of the system in Europe and North America to those areas that continue to expand. Even as late as 1981, Mexico had a growth rate of over 8 percent, down in 1982 to possibly 3 percent.

The mechanism for the spread of contraction is seen through trade. The OECD markets are the largest in the world, taking some two thirds of world exports. As those markets contract, the demand for the exports of other areas falls, inflicting contraction upon them. The export revenue earned by the Third World fell by \$40 billion between 1980 and 1982, both because markets contracted and because commodity prices collapsed. Payments made by the Third World to service medium and long term debt increased in the same two years by \$37 billion. That turnaround of \$77 billion is sufficient to end much of the growth that has persisted.

### Activity continues

However, the picture is much more complicated than this. Slow or negative growth should not conceal that rapid reshuffling of activity continues—between different sectors (say, industry and services), industries, types of operation (black and white economies; large scale direct production and subcontracted or cottage production) and geographical area. Even within countries the picture is mixed—between the devastation of the north of the United States and the southern States, between Glasgow and Slough. Slump does not depress all activities equally; it discriminates, forcing some activities to grow disproportionately. In the deepest slump, some activities boom—even if it is only scrap dealing, pawnbroking, second hand clothes.

Since a country is an area providing the basis for the production of a unique combination of output and services, the effect of slump will vary according to the commodity composition of national output. The OECD markets as a whole may stagnate, but some sectors will grow rapidly. For example, since 1973 the demand for cars in the United States has stagnated, but the demand for small cars soared—favouring those countries specialised in manufacturing small cars (Japan and Europe).

Indeed, some of the processes of change are accelerated by slump, as capital is obliged to redouble efforts to search out lower cost opportunities as the condition of survival. A more elaborate division of labour results. Quite often the statistics do not permit us to detect the processes, for they are

### As markets contract, the demands for the exports of other areas falls, inflicting contraction on them.



organised to exhibit national shares of some crude output. For example, US statistics record only 'domestic production' and 'imports' of tyres, as if all tyres were interchangeable; in fact, the US manufactures heavy, special duty and aircraft tyres, makes and imports from Europe vehicle tyres; imports entirely bicycle and motor cycle tyres from the Third World. If the effect of slump is to contract the capital goods industries (using heavy and special duty tyres) but expand the use of bicycles and motor cycles, then it is clear how contraction in the US can produce a boom—or at least, growth—in those parts of a Third World country producing light tyres. Thus, the idea of the industrialised countries as an 'engine of growth' to the world is not at all a simple one—the effects of the relationship can be perverse (slump producing boom, not slump).

It is this reshuffling of a more elaborate division of labour that underlies the different growth performance of the world since the first slump (1973-74). There are at the moment four rough types, identified geographically although in practice each type is represented somewhere in the other three:

i) the 'Atlantic economy' (Western Europe and North America), the original 'engine of growth' of the world system. It is here that we can speak most accurately of the two slumps and intervening stagnation. In relative terms, the devastation of this area as the result of the last nine years has been most extreme, particularly in its core industrial regions, although the scale of sheer impoverishment still does not match that in parts of the Third World (but the seasonal features on the scale of homelessness, absolute destitution, suggest the First World is catching up with the Third).

ii) The effects of the second slump from 1981 have been to drag down a major part of the high growth sectors of the seventies (that is, countries that maintained or accelerated growth when Europe and North America went into slump, followed by stagnation)—Latin America (particularly Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela), the Mediterranean (Yugoslavia, Spain, Greece), Eastern Europe (particularly Hungary and Poland) and South Africa. We could also include here the special case of the oil-producing countries.

iii) However, the second slump has not reduced all the growth sectors equally. East

and South-east Asia continue to grow, even if at reduced rates. The estimates for growth in gross domestic products in 1982 (excluding Japan) are as follows:

Hong Kong (3.5 percent);  
South Korea (4.9);  
Malaysia (3.7);  
Singapore (5.0);  
Taiwan (4.0);  
Indonesia (4.0);  
Philippines (2.5);  
Thailand (4.8);  
China (4.0).

Despite some problems of cumulative debt—particularly South Korea and the Philippines—the growth figures do not indicate slump. They are in part related to the relative strength of the heart of the industrial region, Japan.

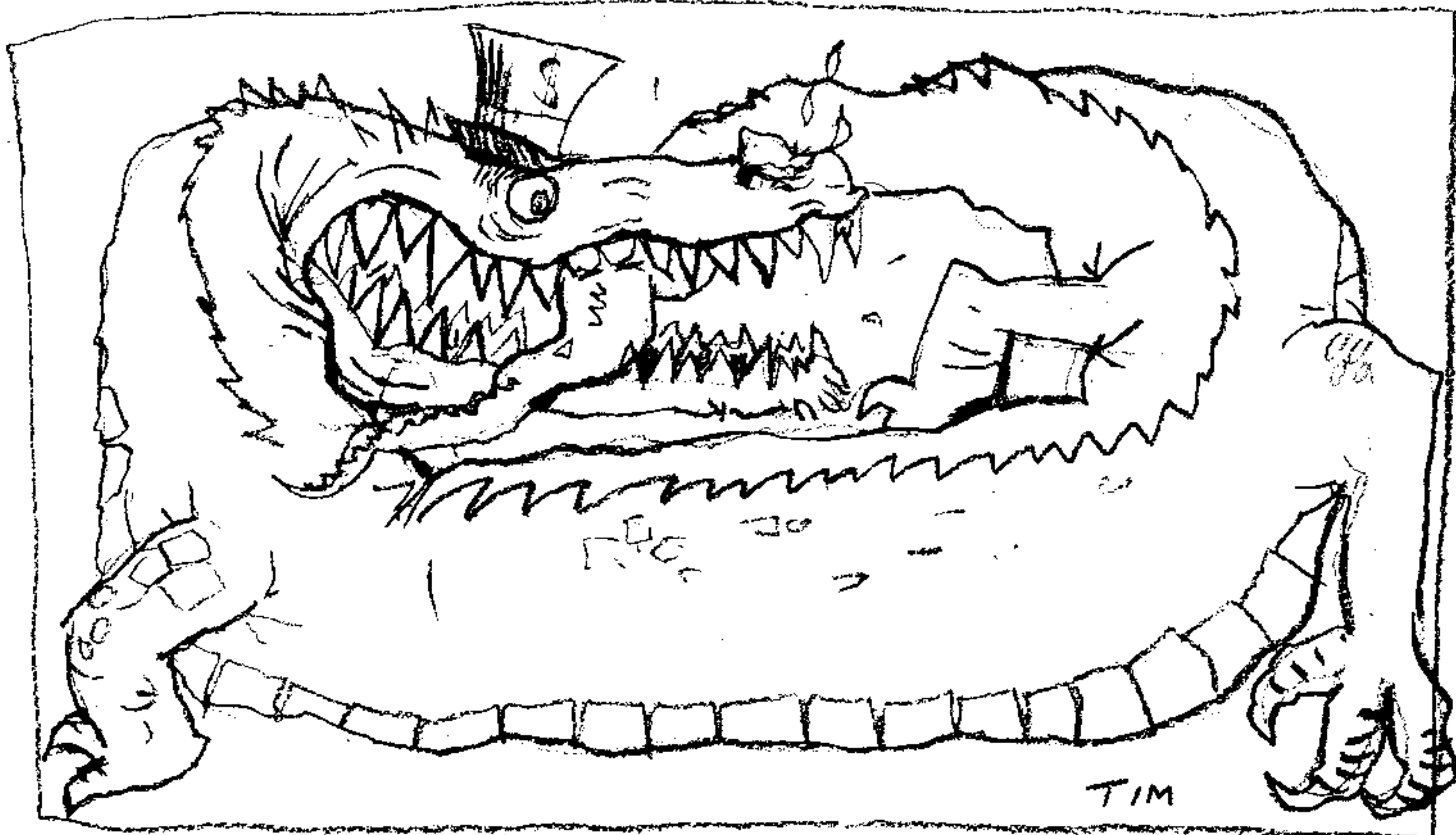
iv) Finally, the rest, including the mass of countries of south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these countries are the poorest in the world, participated imperfectly in the long boom (1947 to 1974) and have experienced continuous decline in the seventies, punctuated by the threat of famine. But it is a mixed bag, because, as we will see below, some of the countries have also begun to accelerate the pace of capital accumulation.

### National product

It should be noted in passing that the concern here is with 'economic growth', the expansion of national product, an indirect measure of the rapidity of capital accumulation, not with the increase in employment, incomes or consumption. In the context of the system, those elements are merely 'accidental byproducts' of the process of capital accumulation, not its essence. Thus, one can imagine the rapid growth of a sparsely populated oil-producing power that generated a complex of automated industry with very few direct byproducts in terms of employment or incomes for the mass of the population.

This is important since it is too frequently assumed that high growth produces high levels of employment and consumption. Take the interesting case of Sri Lanka which, after many years of relative stagnation through the long boom, has been swept into the wake of growth in south-east Asia. Per capita investment has increased 60 percent, and net capital inflows from abroad have soared—foreign capital inflow as a percent of Gross Domestic Product registered 4.2 percent in 1960, 3.1 percent in 1970 and 22.0 percent in 1980. But over the same period, per capita consumption has stagnated or declined.

Of more substance for the world system than Sri Lanka is the relative opening up of two giant Asian economies—China and India. China's rate of growth seems to be reaching a fairly regular four to six percent per year, slump or not (and the only economic factor likely to drag this down, is a run of disasters in agriculture). Between 1974 and 1979, India averaged a 4.3 percent annual growth rate. Over the past twenty years, Indian investment as a proportion of Gross National Product has increased from 17 to 24 percent, and China's from 23 to 31



percent, indicating for countries that are both very poor but, by world standards, possess very large industrial sectors (both would be among the top dozen industrial powers in the world), a remarkable increase in the pace of accumulation. The figures make no difference for the mass of the poor of both countries whose existence shows no tangible improvements whatever the rate of growth (and indeed, whose consumption is squeezed to sustain such high rates of accumulation). However, for the future of world capitalism the figures are instructive, again indicating a shifting balance in a world division of labour.

### Impact is offset

Between the first (1973-74) and second (1981- ) slumps, the Third World and Eastern Europe offset the impact of depression in the heartlands of the system, the OECD group. Rates of growth in the Third World fell—from 5.8 percent (1968-72) to 4.6 percent (1972-80)—but they were still roughly twice as high as in the industrialised countries (where growth fell from 5.1 to 2.4 percent). From this increased differentiation in performance, we can infer that the relative profit rate in what we are calling the Third World (in fact, it is only a small part of it) became very high. This high profit rate was the basis for a rapid increase in local capital accumulation—many Third World countries increased investment as a percent of Gross National Product up to 25 percent (usually at the cost of consumption)—and a rapid inflow of foreign capital.

How could this happen when the most important market for the output of the Third World, the First, was stagnating? Of course, as we have noted, lower growth of output can go with rapid increases for some sectors

(that is, the commodity composition of output changes), and lower growth of OECD imports does not rule out rapid expansion for some imports. Thus, stagnating markets in Europe and North America can mean also accelerated import penetration by those Third World countries with the capacity to exploit the opportunities.

In part, this happened—while total Third World exports to the OECD group increased relatively slightly in volume terms (although much more in money terms), in particular sectors the growth was much more rapid. But there were other factors that compensated for stagnating markets:

- i) increased borrowing from banks in the OECD group, themselves with excess funds available to lend both because of the contraction in the demand for funds within the OECD group as the result of stagnation, and through the 'recycling' of OECD surpluses. The World Bank estimates that between 1975 and 1978, some 14 percent of total investment in the oil-importing Developing Countries came from borrowing abroad.
- ii) migrant remittances—that is, funds returned home by nationals working overseas. The total of officially recorded migrant remittances (a considerable underestimate of the total flow) rose from \$2.6 billion in 1968-69 to \$23.8 billion in 1978-79 (in the same period, the Middle East, a growth area in the seventies, increased its share of world remittance flows from four to 20 percent). By now, the value of remittances received is a large element in the overseas earnings of a number of countries—as a ratio, for example, of the value of merchandise exports, in Turkey remittances were 77 percent; Portugal 70; Egypt 89; Jordan 175; Pakistan 77 percent.

These factors allowed a group of Third

World countries to expand their imports from the industrialised countries, so offsetting the impact of slump (that is, far from Third World exports to Europe destroying jobs, Third World imports from Europe created jobs). Industrialised countries' exports to the Third World increased in value from \$53 billion in 1973 to \$117 billion in 1979; exports of engineering goods increased from \$23 billion to \$73 billion (the export surplus of the OECD group on the engineering trade rose from \$20 billion to \$56 billion).

### Shift of trade

Finally, there was a slight shift of trade away from the industrialised countries to faster growing markets—the oil producing powers, other Newly Industrialising Countries etc ... 64 percent of Third World exports went to the industrialised countries in 1972, 62 percent in 1980.

Contraction or stagnation in the industrialised countries, with continued relatively high growth in parts of the Third World, accelerated a process of the redistribution of world manufacturing processes between different types of countries (the highly industrialised, industrialised, semi-industrialised, low industrialised etc). The redistribution was made possible by the cumulative effects of changes over the preceding two decades that, in effect, eliminated or reduced the differences in labour productivity in selected processes in the First and Third World—for example, the quality of labour (education, skills etc); the quality and maintenance of equipment; the quantity and quality of associated services (power, transport, air freight, water supplies etc).

Although still quite small, the process of

### Shares of World Manufacturing Output

	1955	1960	1980
1 Western Europe		30	25
2 North America	40	30	under 25
3 a) Japan		3.5	10.5
b) Eastern Europe		11.0	11.0
c) Newly Industrialising Countries (20 countries)		5.0	10.0

redistribution of a growing output between the old and new centres of capital accumulation has been sufficient to register on a world scale. In terms of shares of world manufacturing output, the table shows how the picture changed.

On the World Bank's 'best scenario' (that is, assuming the highest realistic rate of growth in the OECD group), the redistribution is projected to 1990: by then, the share of the first two areas (Western Europe and North America) will have fallen in thirty years (1960-90) from around two thirds of world output to under half; the share of the third (a and c) will have risen from about one twelfth to over a quarter. The change constitutes an unprecedented structural re-organisation of capital, of which geographical location is only one element, without the re-organisation giving any assurance that the world profit rate will be restored to a level sufficient to recreate sustained world growth.

### 'Globalisation'

It would be misleading to see the shift a-taking place between states, so that the process is tied to the viability of particular states. The 'Newly Industrialising Countries' are only a convenient label for the front runners, and whether Mexico or Brazil or South Korea survive financially does not determine the process of redistribution. Once the 'globalisation' of certain processes in manufacturing becomes possible, those processes are no longer tied to particular locations, old or new. Indeed, there are already signs of certain sections of manufacturing leaving the Newly Industrialising Countries where labour costs are already becoming 'uncompetitive' for these types of production—Korean electronics are tending to move on to Malaysia; a number of low cost activities are leaving Mexico for the Caribbean and, particularly, Haiti; already an estimated 50 percent of the manufacturing capacity of Hong Kong textile companies is operating outside Hong Kong (in Sri Lanka, Mauritius and elsewhere).

The world market in slump forces an ever more specialised division of labour, leaving the Newly Industrialising Countries as, for the moment, 'middle skill' manufacturing powers, while low skill operations are located in a widening ring of Third World countries. Thus, a world production system has become intrinsic to the structure, not tied to the fate of either one or all of the Newly Industrialising Countries.

In sum, a series of factors operated after the first slump of 1973-74 to offset the impact of depression in Europe and North America, and thus to keep up the demand for the exports of the industrialised countries. However, many of these factors ceased to operate or, indeed, operated in a perverse manner during the second slump (1981- ). High interest rates and an unusually strong US dollar drove upwards the value of cumulative debts to the point where the largest borrowing countries were threatened by a possible default (Poland, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil). But many lesser borrowers came within striking distance of default and were obliged to seek the renegotiation of their debts (in 1981, Central African Republic, Liberia, Madagascar, Pakistan, Senegal, Togo, Uganda, Zaire; others reached special agreements with the banks—Bolivia, Jamaica, Sudan, Turkey). At the peak of interest rates in mid-1982, debts escalated with fearful speed—a one percent increase in interest rates cost Mexico or Brazil an extra £750 million.

### The slight pretext of the Falkland dispute set alarm bells ringing, leading to a sharp fall in new loans.



The problem was compounded by the collapse in commodity prices (ironically, a key factor in declining inflation rates in the OECD group), so that the export earning capacity of big borrowers was affected, and so their ability to service debts. The most striking example was the collapse of the oil market, producing the beginning of the disintegration of OPEC, and increasing difficulties for major oil powers—Mexico, Venezuela, Nigeria, Indonesia. So dangerous became the increase on cumulative debt, that the slight pretext of the Falkland dispute set alarm bells ringing and led to a sharp cutback in the volume of new loans. The Eurocurrency credits advanced in the first nine months of 1982 were £62 billion, compared to £98 billion in the same period of 1981. The cutback increased through the year, and was increasingly harsh on the Third World—whereas the Third

World took 50 percent of net lending in 1980 and 1981, in 1982 their share was 20 percent. The cuts were of maximum severity for Eastern Europe and Latin America, but relatively mild for East and South-east Asia (the rest of the Third World had never had much access to the commercial banks anyway).

Thus the compensating mechanisms of the 1970s are now lacking, and the full force of slump is being felt both in the industrialised countries and a major part of the Third World. However, there are some changes that damp down the effect of sudden shocks, even if they cannot produce an upturn. The financial system has learned to live with large cumulative debts, discounted by larger reserves for default. Whereas the Polish crisis required more than a year's negotiations to absorb, Mexico was saved from sudden collapse over little more than a weekend.

Reagan who had considered pushing Poland over the edge into default in the first major debt crisis, completely reversed his position for Mexico and Brazil—swift action by the US Government, the Federal Reserve Bank (sweetened by long-term contracts for Mexico's oil at prices below the world market), and the Bank of International Settlements gave sufficient guarantees of Mexico's credit to get the country through to October and an IMF deal; furthermore, the IMF has now made itself responsible for bullying the commercial banks into lending more to Mexico to prevent a default. On Reagan's visit to Brazil in early December, he tossed a £1.2 billion credit to his hosts to reassure the commercial banks.

### The oil market

Finally, Reagan who had originally opposed efforts to increase the reserves of the IMF (to increase its capacity to salvage debtors) swung into the opposite position as the result of the financial crises of Latin America. Of course, the turnaround cannot be unrelated to the discovery that US banks were most exposed in Latin America—loans to Mexico by the nine largest US banks alone are said to equal fifty percent of their capital and reserves. Any default in the south by a major debtor would certainly devastate Wall Street, and through the interbank lending system, Europe as well.

However, the system is so unstable—and its systematic interrelationships so ill understood—that there is ultimately no way to offset all conceivable shocks. The turnaround in the oil market was completely unexpected, and the time required to absorb the change sufficient to make possible a major default. Even the mild winter in North America can produce panic among the bankers—since the seasonal increase in oil prices as a result of cold weather is less than normal, cutting the capacity of the oil powers to service their debts. Indeed, the bankers now lose whether oil prices go up or down.

The attrition in the heartlands of the system generates waves of hysteria both against foreigners—immigrants—and now,

most shrilly, against imports, against a world which is the source of domestic ills. In practice, governments recognise through their public adherence to free trade that their own fate depends upon the survival of a global economy, but they constantly need to reassure their own inhabitants and voters that their fate is more important than some abstract world beyond the borders. This contradiction underlies the persistent wobbling between Scylla and Charybdis. Crumbs of protection must be thrown from time to time to marginal constituencies or to that minority of companies, the bulk of whose profit comes from the domestic market. With the crumbs go an elaborate structure of hypocrisy, lying and open cheating—whether it is Mitterrand's instructions to video tape imports only to enter France through the tiny control point at Poitiers, or the US House of Representatives Domestic Content Bill that instructs all sellers of 900,000 or more vehicles in the US market to use 90 percent US-manufactured parts by 1986 (the Bill is expected to be killed in the Senate). The US Bill was actively supported by the car workers' union, UAW, and actively opposed by the big car manufacturing companies who desperately need to import cheaper components to compete with imports and, overseas, with their rivals.

### Protectionism

The contradictions in each campaign are painfully evident to governments. A ban on coal imports increases the cost of coal to BSC, and thus the price of steel; a ban on steel imports to protect BSC increases the cost of steel for the components for British Leyland and thus reduced its capacity to compete. In this case, on the government's ledger the red figures are merely transferred from one corporation to the next. Only complete control of all imports would avoid such problems, but that would be a declaration of war on all those who have hitherto purchased British exports. Furthermore, insofar as import controls are effective they accelerate the 'globalisation' of production—to escape the closure of British export markets, British capital must invest abroad. The world market is not to be defeated by such manoeuvres.

Nonetheless, the political survival of governments now requires an increasingly dangerous flirtation with protectionism. The November meeting of trade ministers at GATT ended in confusion. The US and Europe are engaged in almost continuous economic warfare, currently at its most bitter over the trade in agricultural goods. US farmers are deep in debt and still 'overproducing', but US exports to third markets are constantly undercut by subsidised European exports. So desperate is Washington that, in the middle of a supposed trade embargo with the Soviet Union, it sold 100,000 tonnes of butter to a major butter exporter, New Zealand, presumably for onward transhipment to Russia. The Americans want to break into the European market; the Europeans want a cosy cartel with the Americans to divide up the world market without touching their home base.

At the Common Market Copenhagen summit in early December, the premiers were for the first time overtly protectionist, presumably as the only way of restraining the nationalism of Mitterrand's France. All could unite in the attack on Japan for its wonderfully cheap machine tools, videos, stereos and colour television sets, as the prelude to blocking South Korea, Hong Kong and Brazil. The united abuse of Japan drowned the shouting over Spanish cars, Danish fish, French apples and the rest. The hypocrisy of the participants is best illustrated in steel—on the same day that the *Financial Times* published a major report on the new efforts by Brussels to eliminate illegal price discounts on the sales of steel within the Common Market, it reported elsewhere that BSC was about to offer special secret discounts on steel purchases by loyal customers.

The measures to control imports have effects in increasing the costs of goods, in reducing the level of activity, but at the end of the day, they do not control imports. Indeed, short of the introduction of a full seige economy, it is not clear that states can any longer control the trade flows that cross

their territories. They may control the official movement, but only with the effect of expanding the unofficial—West Germany complains that, despite the supposed tight control of garment imports, 47 million illegal garments entered the country last year; the British, supposedly controlling South Korea with a firm hand, find half a million extra pairs of South Korean gloves in the British market. Or, if one element is controlled, it reappears in another form—the US controlled leather shoe imports from East Asia, only to be inundated by sneakers (rubber shoes), and when they were controlled, by soles and uppers, and if it is not these, it will be something else. The effect of controls is to reshape the output of the exporters to beat the controls, or to relocate the exporters so they dodge the control on their original country.

Thus the growth of protectionism neither hits the target nor assists world capital accumulation. It is part of the growing 'irrationality' of the system—that is, the pursuit of strategies that make the resumption of growth more unlikely but make the position of states more politically secure. The Falklands war is a vivid example



of the willingness of a state to risk financial catastrophe (given the involvement of British banks in Argentina's cumulative debt) for the sake of political advantage. A more impressive example would be Reagan's dash for military superiority without increasing taxation. The resulting budget deficit—to be covered by borrowing—was great, it drove interest rates up just as slump hit the US economy. High interest rates drove into, or close to, bankruptcy a number of major US companies—International Harvester, Braniff Airlines, Chrysler, and in Europe, AEG-Telefunken. Furthermore, high interest rates made the US dollar unusually strong, as the result of which US manufacturing became unusually uncompetitive, and imports unusually cheap—the trade war with Europe was one by-product. American manufacturing has been devastated, part of it fleeing abroad to escape the high costs. Finally, a strong dollar and high interest rates pushed up the debts of Mexico and Brazil, raising the possibility of the collapse of a major US bank and of Wall Street. Those whom the gods propose to destroy they first make mad.

### Regional economies

It is utopian today to think any of the industrialised countries could recreate independent national economies. There is a growing realisation of this which has affected the case for import control as it has undercut the case for the control of the local money supply (in a financially integrated world). But if national economies have gone, there is still some political mileage to be made out of the idea of regional economies—North and South America, Europe, the Eastern Bloc, the Pacific seaboard. Economically, such units could not survive on their domestic markets alone, but the creation of political authorities to govern such regions could act as cartels to negotiate entry for selected imports from outside and for the division of undemarcated markets outside the regions. Politically, this seems to be one of the few things on offer at the moment; it escapes some of the objections to national protectionism, and offers fertile opportunities for geopolitical speculation.

However, it is least plausible for Europe, the largest single trading entity in the world system. It is perhaps slightly more plausible for the Pacific seaboard where, it seems, the impact of slump has produced a growth in internal trade between the countries of east and south east Asia and a relative decline in trade with Europe and North America.

### The state controls neither the world market nor that part of it which lies within its national boundaries.



However, again the case lacks realism. In order to dispense with the rest of the world, the region would have to inflict on itself a major slump. Japan, without the US and European markets, could not survive in its present form. And all this is to restrict the case to the simply economic. Politically, it is impossible to see how all the countries of the region—including China—would accept the hegemony of Japan, a revival of the prewar Co-Prosperity Sphere. The evidence is that the manufacturing powers of East Asia have bent much effort to escaping from dependence upon Japan—the proportion of South Korea's exports going to the US and Japan has fallen from 74.3 percent in 1971 to 42.9 percent in 1981; and of imports, from 68.1 to 47.6 percent. In fact the shift by East Asia and South-east Asia away from markets in the old heartlands of the system is less a growth in regional self-reliance and rather more yet another aspect of the 'globalisation' of production that is also affecting the old heartlands.

Thus, in each region, the political contest jeopardizes the possibility of establishing effective regional organisations, and the more severe the slump, the greater the jeopardy. Direct conquest and military control still remains the only means to create and hold larger effective entities than existing states. Furthermore, the point of

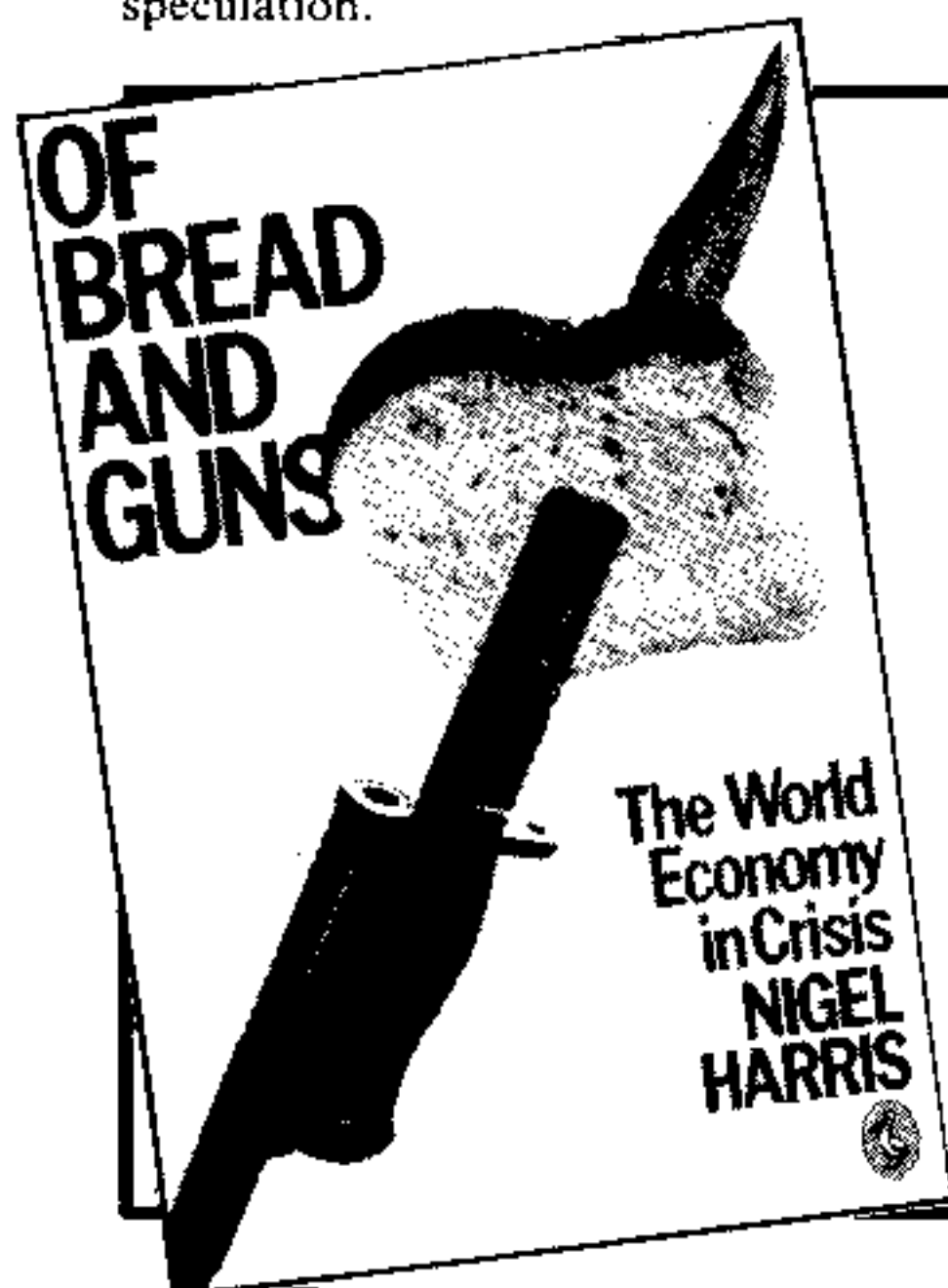
national protection was to secure the loyalty of the local population, regardless of its economic sense. But—as has been seen with Britain in the Common Market—regionalism is a poor substitute for old-fashioned nationalism. Indeed, in the common ruin of all, nationalism is a better bet in securing the survival of the power of the national ruling class, even if it simultaneously pulls down on their heads the temple of the economy.

### Impotent state

The second slump has, more than the first, exhibited the impotence of the state. The state controls neither the world market nor that part of it which lies within its national boundaries—or rather, the state has the power to destroy it, but not to expand it. The answer—supranational regions—has little political reality in it, and even if it did, reducing the scale of capital to one region will only make the slump worse. Thus regions offer no hope of a restoration of employment. The only other proposal is to reduce the wages of the heartlands to the level of the Third World so that world profits are then restored. *The Economist* (27 November 1982) has recently revived this ancient proposal, arguing that to increase the profit rate to 30 percent requires a cut in British wages of 19 percent and of Japanese wages by seven percent. The figures are, as one might suppose, suspect, and it may be that British wages need to be cut by 87.953 percent. However, whatever games are played with the figures, it is difficult to see how any such reductions could be achieved, short of a British version of General Pinochet or Jaruzelski. But to do that would be to risk the political survival of the ruling class.

In sum, the prospects remain grimmer than at any time during the period of stagnation since 1974. There will be some upturn—possibly in North America in 1983—but it is likely to be so slight, it will not be noticed by the growing army of unemployed. If interest rates continue to decline, the financial pressure on companies will be eased. If the dollar continues to weaken, it will relieve the possibility of an open trade war across the Atlantic. And both factors will ease the possibility of a major default by a sovereign borrower. Such small changes may reduce some of the immediate dangers, but they give no assurance for a medium term future.

The system however has no self-destruct mechanism, despite the alarms and hysterical talk. If slump continues on present lines, there must be a sovereign default, but that will not produce the destruction of the system, only increased immiserization. Without a class capable of and committed to the seizure of power, the ruling order will survive in whatever attenuated form. Thus, the discussion of the effects of an upturn are not of interest for their likely economic consequences, but rather for their implications in terms of worker confidence. The accumulation of silent bitterness through these years could make such a return of confidence a rapid and dramatic reversal of the trend.



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# Executive strike-breakers

At the last National Union of Students' Conference **Martin Kellett**, the SWP member on the NUS Executive, resigned his position. The issue that provoked his resignation was scabbing by Labour Party Executive members during a strike by NUS Headquarters' staff. Here he argues that this was no isolated mistake but the result of a long development.

Thatcher's recent announcement that the Tories will implement a student loan system (as opposed to grants) if they are returned to office, is just the latest in a long line of attacks on the education system.

Already the cuts in public expenditure have drastically reduced the standard and availability of education. Many colleges have been forced to cut courses and even departments to make the financial savings demanded of them. Indeed in some cases whole colleges have closed or merged with larger institutions—resulting in a dramatic reduction in student numbers.

In the face of this onslaught on its membership, the National Union of Students has made little attempt to organise a fightback. The Labour-dominated Executive seems content to meet Tory ministers in the corridors of Whitehall rather than galvanise their members into action. The National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) at the Executive elections last Easter put themselves forward as a radical alternative, and yet they seem to be incapable of breaking with the strategy of previous executives. To understand why this

is, it is necessary to look first at the development of NUS.

The late sixties and early seventies were a major turning point for the student movement. 1968 saw a massive wave of struggle inside the colleges in an attempt to achieve academic democracy. For the very first time, occupations were used as a weapon with which to challenge bourgeois ideas. These occupations started at the LSE but were quickly spread to many other colleges. Thousands of students were involved and during the struggle many looked towards the ideas of the left as an answer.

Of course this did not happen in isolation. The war in Vietnam, events in Paris in 1968 and the Northern Ireland civil rights movement had a tremendous effect on the students involved in the occupations. The whole period was one of mass radicalisation—the post war boom had ended and with it the class truce.

It was from this period that two traditions emerged on the left within the student movement. On one hand was the smaller revolutionary tradition of which the SWP was the major part, committed to self-activity and understanding the centrality of the working class in the struggle for socialism.

The other, more predominant, tradition was that of the left reformists—particularly the Communist Party. The capture of the leadership was of paramount importance to the CP and this they achieved through a Broad Left electoral alliance. They recognised the general shift in ideology inside NUS brought about by the 'student revolt' and were able to use it to win a majority on the executive.

## Moving right

Throughout the seventies the CP continued to control the NUS leadership. In order to do this, it was necessary for them to move increasingly to the right to accommodate the general shift in student politics. The industrial downturn was reflected inside the colleges and after the overseas student occupations of 1977, direct action was limited to a few isolated campaigns. The right made significant gains in individual student unions as a result of this. Only by incorporating the Liberals into a re-named Left Alliance were the CP able to maintain their dominance.

Just as the industrial downturn had serious repercussions inside the student movement, it was the political upturn which gave rise to Bennism that was to place one of the final nails in the coffin of the Left Alliance. By the end of 1980, with Benn's popularity rising and the labour left on the advance, NOLS decided that now was the time to split with the Left Alliance. It was, no doubt, embarrassing for them to be in an alliance with the Liberals, but it was really their growth in the colleges that prompted them to do this.

As was the case with a large number of workers, many students had become demoralised by their inability to fight back against attacks from the Tory government.



October 1968, the last great Vietnam demonstration... Students on the move but where to?

They completely rejected the redundant Left Alliance, who for the previous ten years had been unable to defend their interests. Instead they looked for an alternative—and they found it in the shape of the Labour Party.

The alternative of the Labour Party of Dennis Healey offered nothing but a continuation of the attacks they had come to expect from the Tories. But a Labour Party with Tony Benn at its head appeared new and exciting. It offered the promise of an easier way to socialism, under a leadership that could be trusted to carry out the instructions of the rank and file.

As a result NOLS grew massively in the colleges. They soon had groups in more colleges than any other political organisation, some of which were very big. However, their membership was mainly passive—indeed the reformist ideas that led to their sudden popularity ensured this passivity. They were not in the business of encouraging students to fight for themselves—only to fight to change the Labour Party and elect it to office at the next General Election. In the meantime NOLS would settle for the NUS Executive.

At the Easter conference of NUS in 1982, NOLS won a majority in the elections. Not only did they defeat the Left Alliance, they effectively finished it as a major political force in NUS. After ten years of dominating the executive the Left Alliance was able to win only 4 of the 17 positions, not one of which went to a CP member. The 'radical alternative' of NOLS had certainly convinced the delegates to conference. The test was whether they could convert the rhetoric into practice once they were in office.

But unfortunately for NOLS, they won control of the NUS Executive just at the moment when the tide of Bennism was starting to ebb inside the Labour Party. 1982 was the year in which they won in NUS, it was also the year in which the Bennites lost everywhere else.

### **Collapse of Benn**

The collapse of Bennism had a disastrous effect on NOLS. With the collapse, their base in the colleges was seriously eroded and it would seem that the Labour clubs are shrinking in size, although it has been possible for some to maintain their membership on paper. But in just the same way as Benn was forced to make concessions to the right inside the Labour Party, NOLS has been forced to make the same concessions inside NUS.

Since they won the machinery of NUS, it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate NOLS from the old CP-led Left Alliance. They seem entrenched in the same strategy. In almost every area of policy they are putting forward similar ideas. They have continued with the 'development' of NUS into a representational body—one which turns its back on the campaigning aspect of a national union and instead substitutes slick negotiators who can argue the case with government ministers. This is guaranteed to take the Union full circle to the days prior to 1968 when NUS was completely irrelevant to any struggle in the colleges.

This drive for 'professionalism' at NUS

headquarters has been mirrored in recent reforms to conference. NOLS finally managed to introduce compulsory cross-campus secret ballots (the student equivalent of postal votes) for the election of conference delegates, something which the CP had tried to do for several years. Given the mood in the colleges, this removes student activists from the floor of conference and instead hands it over to local student union bureaucrats.

The failure of the recent attempts to set up an Education Alliance involving many trade unions as well as student organisations has also set NOLS back. It has increased the pressure on them to alter their course and there is no doubt that if they do this they will move further to the right rather than look to the left.

### **The shift to the right in the student movement has been so great that the Conference endorsed the Executive's action during the strike.**

One of the most disturbing events to occur since NOLS won control was the sacking of two NUS staff members. They refused to change their job descriptions without proper negotiations through their trade union, and so were promptly issued with redundancy notices. The two staff members were eventually reinstated, but only after a two week strike had forced the Executive to back down.

The dispute showed the managerial attitude of NOLS towards the staff trade union. Immediately prior to the dispute NUS President Neil Stewart was saying: 'This is not British Leyland and I am not Michael Edwardes'. After it, the talk was of 'union intransigence' and union 'bullying tactics.'

Verbal abuse, however, was the least of it. In the course of the strike Labour Party members on the Executive crossed the strikers' official picket line and scabbed on the strike. All thought of elementary socialist principles was dropped in favour of an 'efficient' union.

Behind the dispute is the urgent need for NUS to make financial savings at its headquarters. Both the recession and the Tory restrictions on student union financing are pushing NUS towards a financial crisis. But rather than argue that the need is for student unions to campaign for greater funding, the ideas of reformism lead NOLS to 'tighten NUS's belt'. The results are a loss of democracy (due to structural changes in the conferences) and the introduction of new technology causing further job losses.

As important as the outcome of the strike itself, was the reaction of NUS conference to it. Rather than condemn the Executive for provoking a needless strike by ignoring negotiating procedures, conference gave them a pat on the back. The shift to the right in the student movement has been so great that they endorsed the Executive action

during the dispute.

These developments put me, as an SWP member, into an intolerable position. As I wrote in my resignation letter:

'The one incident that convinced me I was right to resign was the NUS staff strike. Leaving aside the details of the dispute, I find it amazing that the elected representatives of NUS cannot understand the need for solidarity and support on all levels for workers who are defending their union rights. At a time when both trade unions and student unions are coming under increasing attacks, every defeat is a defeat for the movement as a whole. In this case, it is important for all those who call themselves socialists to stand by their principles and to support those workers—but in the NUS strike the complete opposite occurred resulting in the strike-breaking and scabbing that we witnessed.

'The result of the emergency debate at conference showed that my ideas had little backing and proved the unrepresentative position I was in. I do not feel I should be part of an Executive unless I have sufficient political backing to justify my presence.'

It was clear from the vote at the Conference that the Executive were not simply following their own whims. Their views reflected the attitudes of a majority of delegates. Those students who are prepared to fight for even the most elementary socialist principles are in a minority.

### **NOLS in crisis**

The crisis that NOLS find themselves in is the crisis of reformism. It is produced by the idea which believes that change is possible from above. Once the machine had been captured and the base eroded, it was impossible for NOLS to do anything but move to the right to accommodate the prevailing ideas in the student movement. That is a trend which is seen not only inside NUS but also in the internal wrangles of the Labour Party, and in Labour government when they are in office. Without rejecting the ideas of reformism, the only path open to NOLS is that which was trodden before them by the CP.

However, even in the midst of a downturn, it is the task of socialists to argue for action. In many cases it will not be possible to win those arguments. But there are still isolated examples of activity in the colleges, such as the recent Manchester Polytechnic battle, where SWSO members successfully called for an occupation against the cuts. During the occupation they were able to build links with campus trade unionists and NUPE members even held a token stoppage in support of the campaign.

The recent NUS conference called for a one day token occupation against the cuts (much to the disgust of the Executive), and this opens up the possibility of more prolonged action where the work is put in. The opportunity still exists in the colleges for arguing socialist politics with individuals and pulling together that small minority who are willing to fight. They will not be able to look at NOLS for leadership but it is possible to initiate activity—despite rather than because of NUS.



A military funeral in El Salvador: Despite massive US aid the guerillas remain undefeated

## A few steps closer to war

Reagan's recent visit to Central America has emphasised the importance of the region to the USA. But, Carla Lopez argues, that importance will be bought at the cost of continual war.

Each day, Central America moves a few steps closer towards a regional civil war. Behind the build up of tensions stands the United States. Although there are evident disagreements within the Reagan administration on tactics and strategy, there is unity on one objective: the need to defeat the Salvadorean guerillas and to engineer the downfall of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Reagan's visit to Central America in December was essentially a mission of war.

The Reagan administration likes to present its role in Central America as a test case in its determination to halt Soviet subversion in the Third World. Such rhetoric disguises the real aims of US foreign policy in the region: to restore its own hegemony in the Third World as it comes under increasing threat from national liberation movements. Victory of the FMLN in El Salvador would give an impetus to similar movements elsewhere in areas of more strategic importance to US capital, severely threatening US control over important minerals and raw materials and the investments of US multinationals. Such a victory would be a major defeat for imperialism.

But the United States' ability to shape the world to the needs of US capital is not the same in the 1980s as it was in the 1960s. The costs of the Vietnam war could only be borne in the period of post-world war II boom when the dollar reigned supreme. The recession of the '80s makes such imperialist adventures more difficult to contemplate. But the Vietnam war also left its imprint on American popular consciousness expressed most clearly in an unwillingness to see US troops fighting overseas in some similar foreign policy adventure. It is undoubtedly the fear of a popular backlash which has prevented the Reagan administration from sending troops to Central America till now. But the dilemma facing the administration is that without such action it may prove impossible to defeat or even contain the guerilla movements in the region.

### Army offensives

Despite repeated army offensives, increased amounts of US military aid and the return of two army battalions from counter-insurgency training in the US, the Salvadorean guerillas have suffered no major military defeats. In most of the army offensives, around 12,000 soldiers have been mobilised to deal with an estimated 7,000 guerillas. In August, Defence Minister General Garcia, admitted that during the previous year's fighting, over 1,000 soldiers had been killed and nearly 2,000 wounded, an extremely high casualty rate for the army. The army on the other hand, when it fails to have any serious effect on the guerilla

armies, takes its vengeance on the civilian population. Over 38,000 Salvadoreans have been butchered by the army and paramilitary death squads in the last two years.

On 10 October last year the guerillas launched their own offensive, demonstrating once again their military capacity in the rural areas. They pushed their way further into the north-eastern region of La Union taking over a number of villages. According to the FMLN, 1,800 square kilometers of El Salvador are now 'liberated zones'. Their systematic attacks on the country's economic infrastructure have further devastated an economy already kept afloat only by US economic aid and that raised through multilateral agencies under US pressure. According to the University of El Salvador, the country's current external debt—a huge US \$650 million—represents at least 60 percent of GNP.

In this situation the US is pursuing various options in the region taking into account the fact that the commitment of US troops could only be a very last resort.

In the first place, there is the much-publicised destabilisation of Nicaragua. The US views the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government as the prerequisite for pacifying Central America as a whole. Not only is the Sandinista form of politics a dangerous example to other Third World countries, the US remains convinced that the Sandinistas provide arms and logistical support to guerilla movements in Central America.

By mid-1982 the original CIA plan for the destabilisation of Nicaragua approved by Reagan in November 1981 had gradually escalated under the guidance of Haig, assistant Secretary of State Enders and the US Ambassador to Honduras. This was originally a plan to arm a paramilitary squad to undertake acts of sabotage within Nicaragua from camps along the Honduran

border. It soon turned into support for the 5,000 *Somocista* counter-revolutionaries amassed in camps in the same region and intent on the actual overthrow of the *Sandinistas*.

According to *Newsweek* on 8 November: 'US involvement with the *contras* (counter-revolutionaries) has escalated. When equipment—helicopters and radios, for example—breaks down, Americans repair it. Americans established the guerillas' training and arming the *contras* was easy: the massive American build up of the Honduran military freed older Honduran equipment, which was shipped off to counter-revolutionary bases. The Americans were soon treading the thin line between instructing insurgents and plotting the missions they were being trained for.'

In addition to support for the *Somocistas*, the US was deliberately fermenting tensions between Honduras and Nicaragua which increasingly looked like a deliberate attempt to provoke war between the two countries. Honduras has come to play a key role in United States military strategies in the region. In 1969, the Honduran army consisted of 5,000 troops and had an annual budget of US \$7.5 million but by 1981 the number of troops had risen to 35,000 and US military aid from US \$3.6 million in 1980 to US \$75 million in 1982. The direct beneficiaries of this aid are the most hard-line, anti-communist sectors of the armed forces led by General Alvarez. Alvarez would welcome a war with Nicaragua. Joint manoeuvres between the Honduran and US armies were planned for December in the sensitive border region between Honduras and Nicaragua, and the Sandinista government clearly saw these as a prelude to an invasion of their country.

What seems to have put an end to these manoeuvres and, for the time being at least, to the threat of war, is the publication of the *Newsweek* revelations on the US covert operation against Nicaragua. It is quite possible that the exposé was published at the instigation of those in the State Department who feared the way events in the region were escalating into a war which neither Honduras nor Nicaragua could win and which would drag US troops into the conflict. It seems that Schultz himself believes such a war would be a reckless move at present and that the downfall of the Nicaraguan government can be achieved without war through continuing efforts at destabilisation, forcing the Sandinistas into channelling their limited resources into defence and thus undermining their economy and alienating the population. This is accompanied by an intensification of the attempts to isolate Nicaragua politically. This includes propaganda to prove that Nicaragua is increasingly 'totalitarian' and therefore does not deserve the support of the European social democrats amongst others.

### Military options

At the same time, the US is pursuing various military options in the region. It is taking maximum advantage of the imminent bankruptcy of numerous Latin American states to increase its leverage over their foreign policies. This is a technique which it has already used to considerable success to bring Costa Rica into its orbit as one of its main allies in the hemisphere. During his December trip to Latin America the Reagan administration attempted to get Brazil to agree to send military assistance to Central America in return for Reagan's help in securing urgent short-term loans from American banks to enable it to avoid default on its enormous debt.

Just how much Brazil promised is not known, but it represented an attempt by Reagan to revive the 'inter-American hemispheric defence pact' which he had hoped to invoke in Central America prior to the Falklands/Malvinas war. Prior to that war, the Argentine army was scheduled to play a major military role in the region, even to head an inter-American army of peace against the Salvadorean guerillas.

Within Central America itself, the US is also trying to revive a regional military alliance to include Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, aimed at a co-ordinated response to counter-insurgency in the region.

The decision to meet with President Rios Montt of Guatemala as part of his December tour, was Reagan's most important step in this direction and one of the most significant events of the trip. Guatemala has been unable to play a role in regional strategies because of the ban on US arms sales imposed by Carter in 1977 as a result of the country's human rights record. Since Rios Montt took over the Guatemalan presidency in March 1982 there have been according to Amnesty International's conservative estimates, at least 2,600 deaths in 60 massacres by the Guatemalan army. But the Reagan administration has made a concerted effort to prove that these massacres are being carried out by the guerillas. Hence when Reagan met with Rios Montt he made a point of describing him as a 'genuine democrat' who had received a 'bum rap' from the world's press. All this is to enable the administration to persuade congress to resume arms sales to the country.

### Prolonged war

But Reagan still faces problems in persuading US public and congressional opinion that they should continue to support CIA dirty deeds and killer governments in Central America. It is with this in mind that the visit of Israeli defence minister, General Sharon, to Honduras shortly after Reagan's is significant. Israel, which supplied Somoza with arms during the Nicaraguan civil war, is already the main arms supplier to the Guatemalan government. It has offered to sell arms and give training to security forces in Costa Rica and following Sharon's visit, the Israelis are reported to have agreed to sell 10 kfir fighting jets to Honduras. These jets would give the already fairly sophisticated Honduran air force vast superiority in the region. In this way, Israel will ensure the region's armies receive aid if congressional restrictions prevent the Reagan administration doing the same.

The dominant guerilla strategy in Central America today is that of prolonged war. According to some Washington sources, the Reagan administration is also now following a strategy of 'prolonged counter-insurgency'. US imperialism cannot afford to lose in this region. But just as a defeat in Central America would be a major blow for imperialism so a victory of the national liberation movements in the area would be a tremendous boost for socialists everywhere. What is clear is that the Central American war is sure to escalate during 1983.



Revolutionary Nicaragua 1979: Reagan hopes that economic destabilisation will make direct military intervention unnecessary.

# Marx the democrat

1983 is the 100th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. Each month *Socialist Review* will set some of his most important ideas in their context. **Colin Sparks** begins by looking at the young Marx and revolutionary democracy.

Marx was born in the Rhineland town of Trier on 5 May 1818. Although the Rhineland was a province of Prussia, it had been occupied by France until 1814. Consequently its intellectual life was deeply affected by the ideas of the French Revolution. Marx's own family and their circle included close students of the ideas of those eighteenth century thinkers whose writings had been the prelude to the revolution.

The echoes of 1789 haunted 19th Century Europe in much the same way as the echoes of 1917 haunt the 20th. The crowned heads of Europe trembled at the slogan of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'. On the other side of the barricades, every seditious element studied the details of that great convulsion for lessons for the future. Napoleon had much the same status as Stalin has for us.

Germany was much more backward than France, and what had been acted out in practice in France found its strongest reflection in Germany in the realm of ideas. In Germany the King was still strong, the bourgeoisie weak, and the peasants and the very few workers not yet awakened. It was the philosophers who fought out a revolution – in the mind.

## Jewish question

When Marx arrived as a student in Berlin in 1836 these radical philosophers were busy trying to revolutionise the great system of philosophy perfected by Hegel. His work had been deeply influenced both by the French Revolution and by the subsequent counter-revolution. Although his work was based on the idea of change, and above all of historical change, he completed it as a justification for the existence of the absolutist Prussian state and its Lutheran official religion.

His successors, the 'Young Hegelians', were not satisfied with this. Although they retained his belief that ideas were what moved the world – they were what is called 'idealists' – they did not believe that it was possible to reconcile a rational philosophy with an irrational religion.

They began with the attempt to prove that religion did not form man, and thus history. Rather they argued, it was the human mind that formed religion. Some, like Ludwig Feuerbach, went beyond that. They argued that the human mind was the product



of human material life – they were materialists. As Feuerbach jokingly expressed it: 'Man is what he eats'. Thus religious ideas were a consequence rather than a cause; they represented a fantastic form of real human life.

Marx began his career very much under the influence of these currents of thought. Much of his early writing is in this mold, but circumstances were driving him beyond the mere criticism of ideas. The German economy was developing and the realities of politics were changing too.

Marx's first experience of practical politics was as a journalist for the bourgeois liberal publication the *Rheinische Zeitung*, whose staff he joined in 1848. This work brought him to study concrete questions like the reasons for the theft of wood by peasants and the impoverished conditions of wine-growers. These investigations forced him to consider the importance of material factors in determining how the world worked. The criticism of religion became less and less important.

Thus, when Marx came to work out his own ideas, in the early 1840s, it was with reference to this history. One of his first major works was a *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*. Hegel had analysed the monarchical Prussian state as the highest point of history. It represented the universal interest against the particular interests of different groups – what he called civil society.

Marx had great fun pointing to the contradictions in this theory of the state, but what is important is the grounds on which he worked. His starting point was democracy:

'To democracy, all other forms of the state stand as its Old Testament. Man does not exist for the law but the law for man – it is a *human manifestation*; whereas in other forms of the state man is a *legal manifestation*. That is the fundamental distinction of democracy... In all other

states than democratic ones the *state*, the law, the *constitution* is what rules... In democracy, the constitution, the law, the state itself insofar as it is a political constitution, is only the self-determination of the people.'

In saying this, Marx was not going further than the radical bourgeois thinkers who preceded him, but he was to take the idea much further. Hegel's state was separated from civil society and stood over it, and had a concrete material embodiment in the bureaucracy. Marx spent several pages looking at the reality of the closed, routinised, hierarchical world of the state bureaucrat for which Hegel claimed such wonders. Marx wrote: 'For the bureaucrat the world is a mere object to be manipulated by him.'

Such a bureaucracy was necessarily a denial of democracy. The growth of the bureaucracy had only been possible because of the split between the politics of the state and the everyday life of civil society. Consequently it was one of the aims of democracy to abolish this distinction:

'The abolition of the bureaucracy is only possible by the general interest *actually* – and not, as with Hegel, merely in thought, in *abstraction* – becoming the particular interest, which in turn is only possible as a result of the *particular* actually becoming the *general* interest.'

## Berlin students

But Marx had not yet solved the problem of how this 'particular' was to become 'general'. In order to do that Marx had to go beyond the ideas of the French Revolution. His next step was in the course of a pamphlet criticising the 'Young Hegelian' Bruno Bauer, who had once been a friend of Marx's but was now opposing moves for the legal emancipation of the Jews.

In his *On the Jewish Question*, Marx argued that the French Revolution had certainly freed men, but in two ways:

'But the completion of the idealism of the state was at the same time the completion of the materialism of civil society. Throwing off the political yoke meant at the same time throwing off the bonds which restrained the egoistic spirit of civil society. Political emancipation was at the same time the emancipation of civil society from politics, from having even the *semblance* of a universal content.'

The 'free citizen' was both free to vote and free to exploit:

'Hence man was not freed from religion, he received religious freedom. He was not freed from property, he received freedom to own property. He was not freed from the egoism of business, he received freedom to engage in business.'

Mere political emancipation had thus opened the way for the massive development of 'business'. The daily practical activity of human beings was subordinated to the ruthless pursuit of private purposes. It was in this context that Marx analysed the development of German society as its increasing 'Jewishness' and made his well-known remark that: 'The social emancipation of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Judaism*' (*Judentum* in German

also means 'commerce'.)

In his next work, a published *Introduction* to his critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, Marx carried this analysis further. If previous revolutions had failed because they simply separated politics and economics, then the next revolution would have to be more thorough-going. It would have to overturn not just the state but also property relations.

Marx argued that the backwardness of German society meant that it could not repeat the experience of France fifty years before. Consequently, any revolution in Germany would have to go beyond the limit of political emancipation:

'It is not the *radical* revolution, not the *general human* emancipation which is a utopian dream for Germany, but rather the partial, the *merely* political revolution, the revolution which leaves the pillars of the house standing.'

But the French Revolution had been carried out by the bourgeoisie, which put itself at the head of the whole nation in the fight for political liberty. The development of society had made that position difficult:

'No sooner does the middle class dare to think of emancipation from its own standpoint that the development of the social conditions and the progress of political theory pronounce that standpoint antiquated or at least problematic.'

A purely political revolution was impossible in Germany because the development of industry meant that the bourgeoisie could no longer even pretend to itself that it represented 'universal' interests. It knew only too well that its interests stood in sharp opposition to those of another class. Marx then asked the obvious question: who could represent the universal interest, and went on:

'Answer: In the formation of a class with *radical chains*, a class in civil society which

is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong* but *wrong generally* is perpetrated against... a sphere which, finally cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man and hence can win itself only through the *complete re-winning of man*. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*.'

Marx was now well on the way to forming his distinct theory against the various influences under which he had developed. We can see this aspect of Marx's development as the working out of the conditions for democracy.

Hegel's state, with its massive authoritarian bureaucracy, was an obvious denial of democracy. The interests of the bureaucrats in more jobs and better pay masqueraded as the general interest of all people. Because they had a monopoly of political knowledge, it seemed as though they stood for a higher principle than ordinary people merely pursuing private ends. But the reality of the bureaucracy was mindless routine, deference to authority, and bottomless conservatism. The interests of democracy demanded that this excrescence be destroyed.

### Private property

The French Revolution had succeeded to the extent that it made political decision making the right of the citizen. But because it was concerned only to free the citizen from the arbitrary power of the state it had not gone to the root of the matter. It retained the distinction between the political citizen and the civil citizen. The private citizen had rights guaranteed by the state: amongst these rights was the right to property.

Consequently it had set up conditions in which, while everybody was formally free, only those with wealth and education could exercise this freedom. The remainder of the population was obliged, in order even to live, to give up its freedom in everyday political activity. The French Revolution had been a *bourgeois* revolution in that it had set up a state of affairs in which the state existed to guarantee the rights of property.

This was every bit as much a denial of democracy as the bureaucratic state. Indeed, as Marx was later to discover, the bourgeois revolution actually maintained and strengthened that very bureaucracy against which it had claimed to fight.

The idea of democracy could only be realised in practice when the whole of social life was brought under the control of the whole of the population. The distinction between 'state' and 'civil society', in both its absolutist and bourgeois forms, had to be ended. Only then could the idea of people exercising collective control over their own lives become a reality.

Any existing state, and the interests on which it rested, was a powerful social reality: it had, for example, soldiers. It could only be overthrown by the mass of the population. In the French Revolution the bourgeoisie had put itself at the head of the mass of the population and had acted in the general

interest in winning political freedom. But it too had its own particular interest: private property. So the state it set up was once again unrepresentative of the mass of the people.

The development of the bourgeoisie, however, had produced a new class, the proletariat. This class had no property other than its ability to labour. Its particular interest was therefore in abolishing private property in the means of production. But this was also in the universal interest, because to socialise property was to abolish the distinction between state and civil society. Only when the mass of the population had the right to determine the whole of their lives could real freedom be established. Thus the victory of the proletariat was the condition for the realisation of democracy.

This aspect of the development of Marx's thought deserves special emphasis because it has important consequences. The most important of these is something which Marx never considered in detail because he never lived to see its full flowering: the soviet, the workers' council, is the only truly democratic form of political life and thus the only road to human liberation.

The election of delegates from the workplace, and the ability to mandate and recall them at will, is the concrete realisation of the ending of the distinction between state and civil society. The state is formed out of the concrete daily units in which people live as members of civil society.

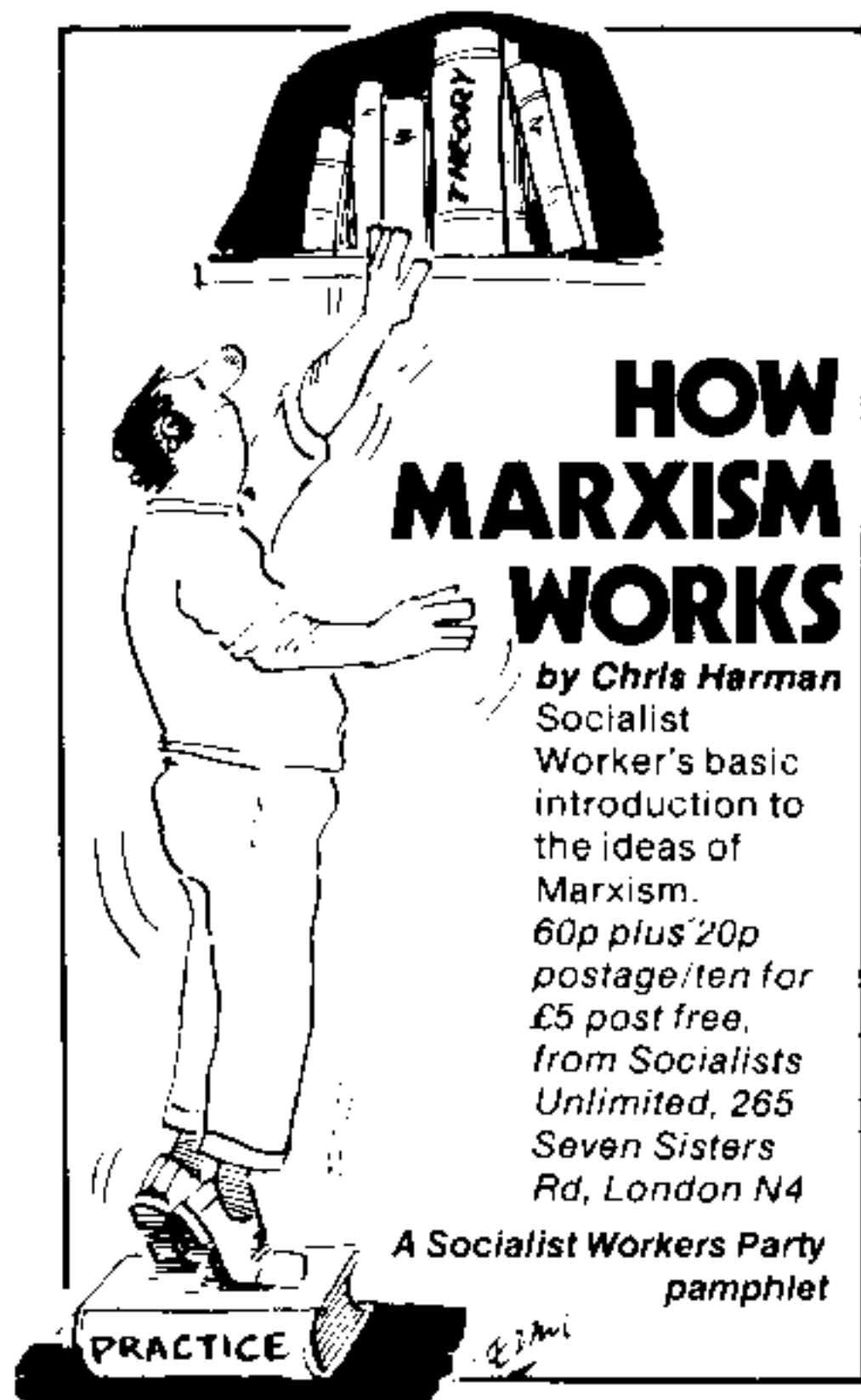
Political life is not separated off from daily life by special elections held once every five years or so, and the people who run the state are not a special breed of people, professional politicians, who beg for votes. The people who run the state and the people who run civil society are the same.

### State socialism

Two other consequences are important because they destroy myths which are common about Marxism. Those who argue that the road to socialism lies through increasing the power of the state, whether they are reformists, stalinists or military dictators, and whether they *think* they are Marxists or not, represent a quite different tradition from that of Marx himself. From its very beginnings, his theory was concerned with the destruction of the state as a separate power.

The myth spread by bourgeois experts that Marxism is a theory of dictatorship by the state and thus that Stalinism is its logical consequence, is equally false. We have seen how, once again from its beginnings, his theory was concerned to find the conditions in which democracy could become a living reality.

From its beginnings to its mature development was still a long road. It was to take much practical experience and much theoretical work before Marx could claim to have worked out the consequences of these early ideas. But the ideas we find in crude form in these early writings we will encounter again in later works like *The Civil War in France*, written in the light of the experience of the Paris Commune nearly 40 years later. □



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## Drinking down the ages

After a fortnight's solid drinking for the New Year, a look at the history of that most famous institution—the public house—is in order. **Paul Furness**, frequenter, looks at some famous historic pints.

Looking through the 'What's On' page of *Socialist Worker* the other week I noticed that two branches met in pubs that have a socialist tradition. One, *The Globe* in Dumfries was once the hangout of the poet Robert Burns. The other, *The Blackmoor's Head* in Pontefract, was one of the early meeting places of the Yorkshire NUM in the 19th century. I also noticed that out of 13 meetings listed for Scotland only two of them are held in pubs, unlike the English and Welsh branches where meeting in the local Community Centre is the exception. This pattern follows closely the history of the socialist movement going back centuries.

### Temperance

Up until the 1890's 90 percent of all trade union and socialist meetings were held in pubs in England and Wales. In Scotland the Scottish temperance movement was closely allied to the Labour movement, so much so that the prohibitionists united with the

Labour Party and Communists in 1922 to defeat Churchill in a Dundee election. When Jimmy Reid proposed holding meetings in pubs as late as the '60s, Willie Gallagher (both then of the Communist Party) was horrified at the idea. Despite the fact that the Communist Party was founded in a pub in 1921 (the now demolished *Victory Hotel* in Leeds) by the end of the '20s most meetings had moved to their own halls. When revolutionary socialists re-emerged in the '60s the pub as the meeting place had a revival.

The history of political activity in pubs goes back over 600 years. The earliest recorded meeting is perhaps the one that took place in a Cambridge tavern following the arrest of John Ball after the defeat of the Peasants' revolt in 1381. The *Wat Tyler* in Dartford (formerly the *Rose and Crown*) was the headquarters of that wonderful if ill-fated revolt.

When the civil war broke out in the 17th century a network of pubs stretching across the country served as centres of radical opposition for the Levellers.

In the 18th century Tom Paine rather egotistically called the pub the cradle of American Independence because he wrote his *'Rights of Man'* at *The Red Lion* in St John's Street, Clerkenwell. He lived for a long time at the *Bull* in Lewes and formed his debating society (The *Headstrong Club*) at the nearby *White Hart*. Also of the period was the radical William Cobbett, his

birthplace is now the *William Cobbett Inn* at Farnham. It was Cobbett who brought Paine's remains back from America and lost them somewhere in Liverpool! He was also involved with the London Corresponding Society which was founded and met at *The Bell* in Covent Garden's Exeter Street (it is still there, tarted up as *The Gilbert and Sullivan*).

The Corresponding Society was never, as its name suggests, centred on London. Norwich had its affiliated Revolutionary Club at its own *Bell* with over 200 members. At one time Norwich had over 20 such radical clubs all meeting in pubs. In Nottingham the Society met at *The Sun* on Pelham Street. Nottingham was then one of the most radical towns in England. The Chartists met at *The Wellington* in Canal Street, *The Seven Stars*, Barkergate and *The King George on Horseback* in King Street. Some pubs became named after the radical cause—the *Standard of Freedom* at Skircoat Green near Halifax, *The Cap of Liberty* at Brighton and the *Land of Liberty, Peace, Hope and Freedom* near Rickmansworth.

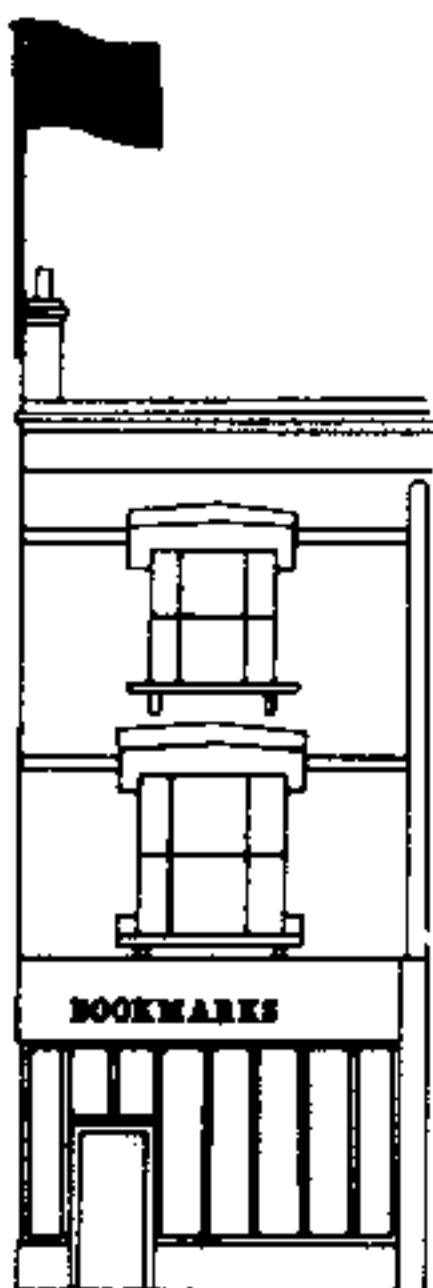
### Chartist pubs

The inside of the Chartist pub also reflected the cause. At the *Andrew Marvell* in Carlisle (now *The Albion* on Botchergate) the female Chartists met in a room decorated with full length portraits of Washington, Andrew Marvell, Arthur O'Connor and Byron all decorated with flowers and laurels. Around the room were portraits of Chartist leaders and the flag of the Female Radical Association with its picture of a Bastille keeper trying to part a mother from her child. *The Cap of Liberty* in Brighton had tricolours, swords and red caps of liberty.

Most of the pubs mentioned are still in use, as is *The Crown and Woolpack* near the Angel in London where the Bolsheviks split from the Mensheviks in 1903, and which used to be a meeting place for the SWP in more recent times. In fact the whole socialist movement has been interwoven with pubs. Some like *The Joseph Arch* at Burford in Warwickshire are named after radicals (in this case the founder of the Agricultural Labourers' Union) others after events, such as *The Peterloo* in the Shambles in Manchester, which was the starting point for that famous demonstration. *The Ship* on Marine Parade, Southend was the headquarters of the Nore mutiny in 1797; the Spithead mutiny in Portsmouth which occurred a few days later was organised from *The Three Tuns*.

Other pubs were the locals of socialists, *The Cricketers* on South Parade, Hastings was the hangout of Robert Tressell (author of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*). In Edinburgh James Connolly used to frequent *The Meadow Bar* and the *Buccleuch Arms*, both on Buccleuch Street, before he gave up the drink. George Orwell was a regular at the *Fitzroy Tavern*, Charlotte Street in London, the *Lord Southampton* on Grafton Terrace was Marx's local for 25 years and Lenin gave Trotsky his first taste of English beer at *The Pindar of Wakefield* on Grays Inn Road. The list could go on and on, much of which is waiting to be rediscovered and tasted. □

# BOOKMARKS

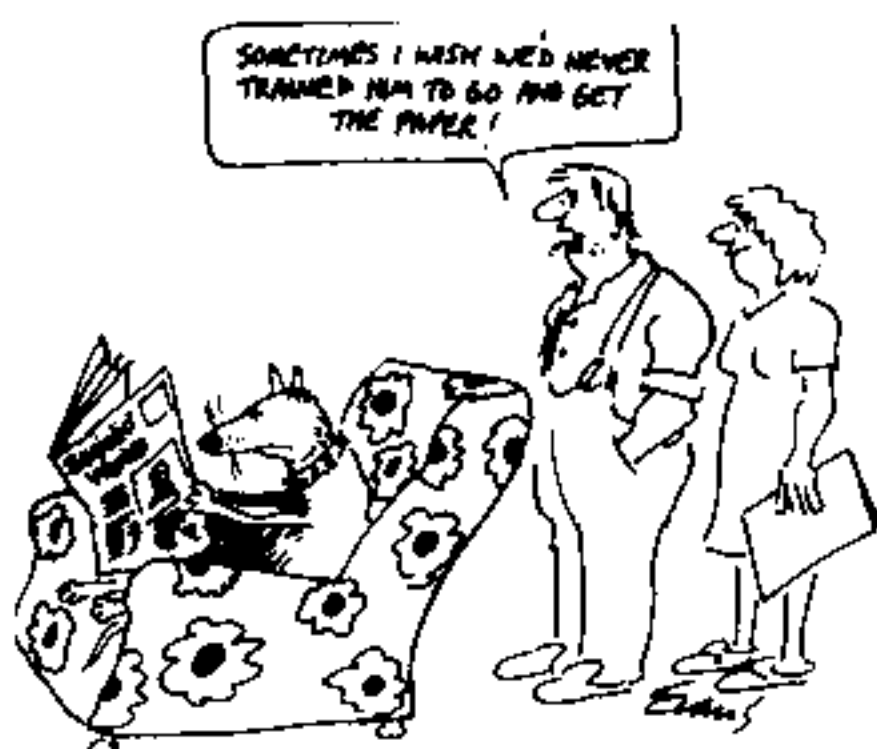


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# Pink but not red

The desire for a 'gay community' has stopped many gay people from becoming involved in socialist politics. **John Lindsay** shows how recent developments in the gay movement place class clearly at the forefront.

'Gay managing director sacks gay workers with help of gay lawyers' ought for once and for all lay to rest the idea that there is one big happy homosexual (albeit oppressed) family. But we are not so lucky.

Events at *Gay News* recently are a sorry reminder of how the heady days of gay liberation in the early seventies have degenerated. *Gay News* started as the paper of the gay liberation movement, produced by a group of volunteers. Then it had an editor (Denis Lemon) and a collective, then an editor and staff, then in a financial take-over, a board of directors (two including the editor).

Now Denis Lemon has sold the paper for £50,000 down and £100,000 over five years. Unsurprisingly the paper can't survive with that sort of drain on its finances so there has to be a dramatic restructuring. This includes redundancies. But even this won't be enough. The deal might collapse. Lemon might have to take on running the paper again. Or he might decide not to strangle the goose and reschedule the debt repayment. This still leaves three more on the dole and a sense of embarrassed puzzlement among liberal community leaders, plaintively calling on Lemon to give up his claim. Give up £100,000.

## Beating strikes

The ease with which the three redundancies were lost, despite the apparent unity of the joint chapels, shows a more fundamental trend. During a strike at Watney's over redundancies and changes in work patterns, a strike with a very high level of success in blocking deliveries of beer to pubs in London, gay people managed to 'break the strike and still get beer in their "gay" pub', according to *Capital Gay*. During the London transport strike over increases in fare prices, job losses and changes in work practices last June, 'thousands of gay people managed to beat the strike to get on the Gay Pride demonstration', again according to *Capital Gay*. On 22 September, the huge demonstration in support of the hospital workers' pay claim, 'hundreds of gay people "hid" behind their union banners' according to *Gay News*, and their NGA members broke the union instruction of support for the hospital workers, 'because gay people have to get their paper'.

What gays working at Watney's, on London Transport, or hospital workers thought of this remains unrecorded. But

what is shown is that not only does the class divide crack the gay community periodically, but when it does, the 'leaders' and spokespeople for the 'movement' will unreservedly desert their proletarian sisters and brothers in order to side with the bosses, indiscriminately (regardless!) of sexual orientation.

The recession and high unemployment are accentuating tendencies already present in the early gay movement. Capitalism has easily been able to incorporate clubs, discos, clothing, real estate and the media, creating a new market and a frisson of excitement. *Heaven*, a gay disco in London is now a popular nitespot attended by thousands. But outside this market, controlled by the breweries and the record industry, the vast bulk of young and unemployed have no chance to enjoy the fruits of gay liberation.

This scene has left women untouched. There has been little proliferation of gay social outlets for lesbians, and less expansion of available literature.

The incorporation of homosexual pleasure into capitalist commodity production is paralleled by political incorporation.

The Tories have had no difficulty in extending the 1967 Act to Scotland and now Northern Ireland. This leaves the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man with idiosyncratic legislation.

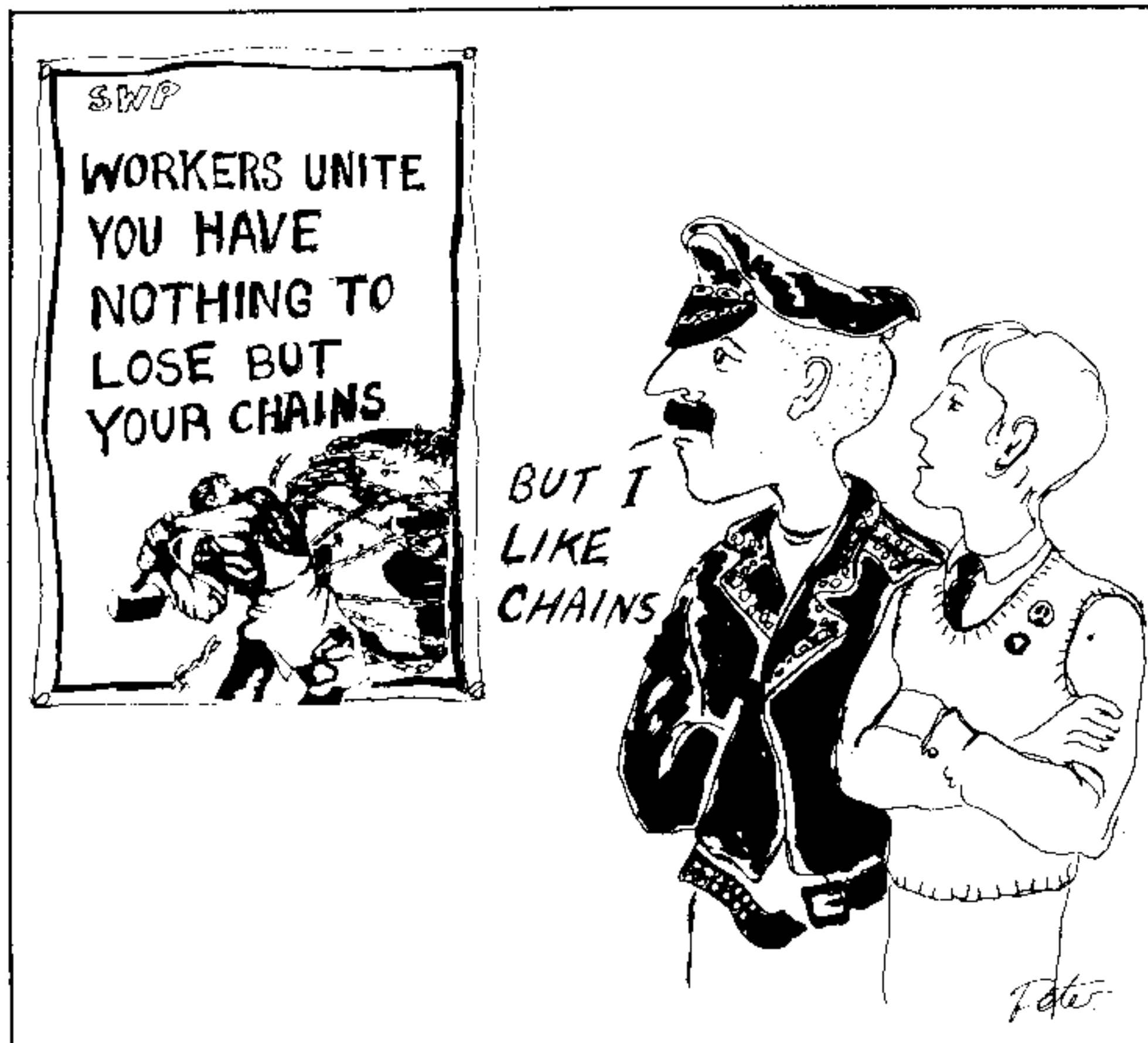
The GLC has now not only funded gay youth workers through the Inner London Education Authority, but set up a gay committee, with councillors and self-appointed gay activists. This committee is serviced by committee clerks like any other committee, and amusing reading the minutes make. Imagine the discussion which once took place in a smoky environment of semi-illegality in the basement of an anarchist bookshop now being discussed in County Hall, minuted by a committee clerk.

Out of this promises to come a large amount of money for a London gay centre, with development workers already appointed, on £9,000 a year. And up to £100,000 for a gay arts festival next June, along with gay pride week, called, suitably enough, Pink June.

The argument we presented in the middle seventies is in one sense clearly wrong. We said that with an economic recession would come a sharp drift to the right in which the gains of liberalism would be lost. We saw the rise of the Nazis, police raids on gay clubs, bookshops and parties as part of this. And with the election of Thatcher in 1979 it looked as if the swing to the right would push the gay movement back before 1967.

This is clearly not what has happened. Police raids appear to be episodic and idiosyncratic activities of individual officers with no concerted support from on high. The Nazis have not only been reduced to the margins of politics, but the open homosexuality of one of their leaders has never become an





issue even in their tiny circles. Thatcher, while making no formal statements herself on questions of homosexuality, has clearly given the go-ahead for the legislative changes in Scotland and Ireland. The press has tried to agitate around Peter Tatchell's homosexuality, Ken Livingstone's statements and Tony Benn's support, but to no effect. Hattersley, shadow Home Secretary, has promised support for a bill to make homosexuality equal in law with heterosexuality should Labour come to power.

### Mechanical

In other words the rather mechanical relationship between economic recession and sexual repression was clearly wrong. Parallels between the thirties and now have not been borne out. Sexuality no longer performs the function of repression which it carried out then.

In part this is certainly a result of changes in family patterns at large. The increase in divorce, single parent families, worker migrations, have all broken down yet further established ideas of a 'natural sexuality' and a 'natural family life'.

In part it is a result of the challenges presented during the high point of gay and women's liberation. Arguments about sexuality, child-rearing, medicine, anthropology, cannot be returned to a pre-1968 stage without major defeats on questions of abortion, social security allowance, education, and a significant change in the lifestyle of large proportions of the bourgeoisie and their families.

In part it is the result of the success of developing a market capable of expansion with the recognition that no major fears for truth, beauty or civilisation are unleashed.

And partly it is the recognition that a

market philosophy based on people 'being allowed to do what they wish with their private property' must at least be 'allowed to do what they wish with their private parts'. This has the saving grace of preventing periodic hysteria as the diversions of the ruling class are paraded for the titillation of the *Sun*.

But if it is true that dramatic moves to the right from outside the gay movement have not occurred, the moves to the right among gay people are greater than we imagined. The number prepared to fight for contentious issues now is much smaller than ten years ago. It is true that 'shock troopers' of the gay movement were always a minority, but it was they who captured the public imagination and gave the space for acceptability to develop.

That minority has now shrunk to vanishing point. And with it a whole series of arguments in sexual politics which have

never formed the broad base of advance but which have always involved the most committed because they are the most contentious questions. It might appear that arguments over children's sexuality, the construction of desire, cross-gender, sado-masochism and pornography are marginal to the major questions facing the labour movement today, but it was the excitement of these debates which gave the determination to take on the authorities, medical, legal and clerical, which formed the bastions of reaction stormed ten years ago.

### Sterile debates


The retreat within the gay movement is a recognition that these debates are now sterile until there is a major upsurge of struggle once more involving the mass of people—with a tiny number of actors these stages become barren—as much as it is a matter of the real fear of the world outside.

There were genuinely a number of people radicalised during the high point of gay liberation who will never be able to crawl back into the closet. Their activity has also created the opportunity for many more to venture out. Gay Switchboard has had more than one million telephone calls. Some of these will not be satisfied by nights in Heaven and prospects of mortgaged monogamy.

There have been real advances made within the labour movement on understanding the relationship between sexual oppression and class oppression. There have been real gains made in the way shop floor militants will defend gay people who are victimised or who come out. The Gay Rights at Work Campaign has given many trade union branches the chance to discuss the topic, many trade union notice boards have seen posters, many canteen arguments have been had. This does not stop NALGO and TGWU holding conferences on the Isle of Man nor the NUT on Jersey, both places where homosexuality is *still* illegal. But it does mean that we will be able to build support for demonstrations breaking the law in both places from dozens of trade union branches, and pull delegates on those demonstrations.

That would have been unimaginable a few years ago. □

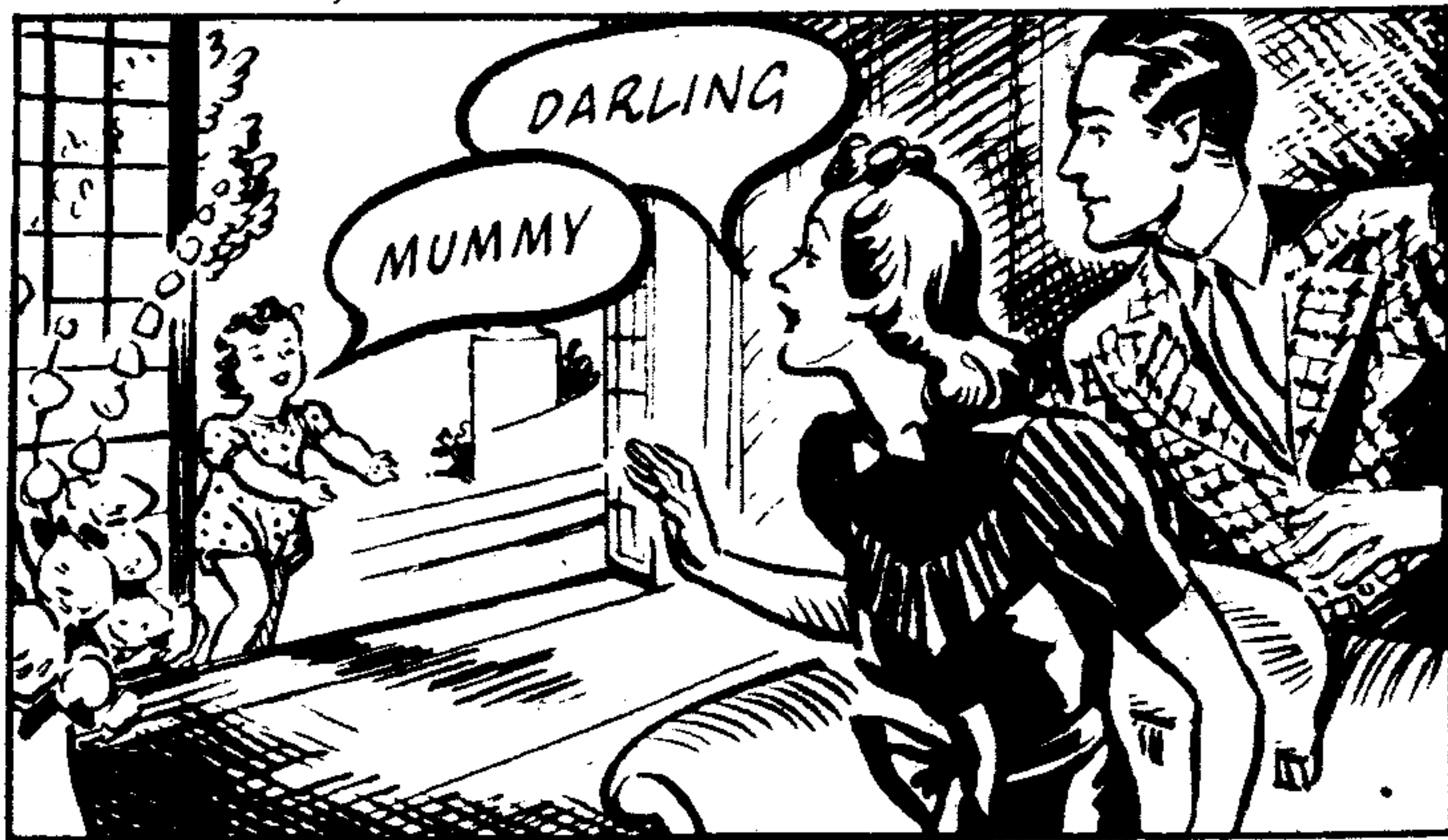
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# An unnatural practice

Marx said that the ruling ideas in any society are the ideas of the ruling class, and there is one such idea in particular that is drilled into us almost literally from the day we are born. This is the idea that the family as we know it—the nuclear family of one couple and their children, with the breadwinner father and the domesticated mother who cares for children, cooks and cleans—is natural and eternal.

The Holy Family, the Flintstones, the Three Bears, historical dramas, the Freudian family—all show the nuclear family as we know it as the basic unit of society. In other words, the family officially does not have a history, it has just always been there. If it is pointed out that people lived very differently in the past, historians, sociologists and psychologists will argue that these different ways of living were unnatural, and that the nuclear family was there all the time, struggling to be free.

Unfortunately, many feminists reinforce this denial of a real, meaningful history of the family by concentrating on just one aspect of it, male power or patriarchy. It is true that in all class societies men have enjoyed power over women and children within the family as well as holding most of the power in society as a whole. But to concentrate on this alone obscures the really interesting and significant facts in the history of the family—the facts of *change*.

Marxism is about change. If capitalism is ever to be destroyed and socialism to take its place, it is necessary both to understand why and how societies change, and to go out and change things. This is the difference between

Far from being natural, the family has a history as tortured and tortuous as the societies which have given it form. **Norah Carlin** describes the major changes that have taken place in Europe.

Marxism and utopian socialism, which may produce interesting and exciting ideas about what is wrong with capitalism and how society could be different and better, but is unable to change it because it provides no understanding of change. The feminist theory and history of patriarchy reinforce this utopianism.

## Class society

The history of the family begins at the same time as the history of class society. Before private property and the exploitation of one class by another existed, the family did not exist. Many Marxists and feminists have discussed the *origins* of the family, but very often the discussion and the understanding stop there, just as the *history* of the family begins. It is as if, once the family was established, there is little more to be said about it, except that it has always been a patriarchal institution. But if we are to understand change in the family, and change in society, there is a great deal more that can and must be said about it.

All aspects of the family—marriage, the

household, child-bearing and child-rearing, personal relationships and moral attitudes—have undergone enormous and sweeping changes quite regularly in history. Even looking at the history of the family in Europe over the last three thousand years can show just how important change has been, and throw a lot of light on the causes of change.

Two things in particular stand out from this history. One is that the family has changed with changes in the *mode of production*—that is, the different systems under which one class produces and another lives off the proceeds: slavery, feudalism and capitalism. The other is that until quite recently different *classes* in the same society have always had different forms of family.

To anyone who is concerned about the disappearance of the family under socialism—either concerned that it won't disappear or concerned that it will!—the history of the family can provide a new perspective. The family has changed so much in the past that there can be no question that it must change in the future. Just how it will change is a question of who is to *make* the future and what it is to be—a degenerate, crisis-ridden version of capitalism, or a planned and humane socialism.

The slave societies of Greece and Rome were the first forms of class society in Europe. There are many learned books on the 'history of the family in ancient society', but they usually ignore one centrally important fact: *only the slave owners had families*. Slaves belonged, as property, to their owners' families, and they were not

allowed to marry. If a slave woman had children, whether their father was a fellow-slave or not, they belonged to her master, who could choose to bring them up to work in his own household or to sell them if he wished.

The slave-owners' families were strictly regulated. In ancient Athens, the most prosperous of the Greek slave societies, the citizens' wives and daughters were confined to the home. They shared women's quarters with the slave women, who did the shopping, washing, water-carrying and any other work that involved leaving the house. The women of a citizen's family had little contact with anyone other than relatives (for example at weddings and funerals), and except on special days of 'women's festivals' had no access to the famous public buildings and civil life of the city. They were not included in the celebrated Athenian democracy, which involved all male citizens.

### Slave owners

Most citizen families owned slaves, even if only one or two. If a family was too poor to live in this way—if, for example, wives and daughters appeared in public, traded in the market, wet-nursed other women's babies or did other families' washing—then their status as a citizen family was seriously in doubt, which meant that their sons could not inherit a citizen's privileges, own land or participate in political life.

There were many women in Athens who were considered to be outside the family: both common prostitutes (often employed in state-owned brothels) and the educated, cultured courtesans who gave intellectual dinner parties for the leaders of Athenian society. These women were a recognised and often highly valued part of society, but they were not part of the family, even if they grew rich, brought up their own children, and had otherwise respectable households. Belonging to a family was a privilege, tied to property, slave-owning and citizenship.

All citizens' marriages were arranged by their families, and what is most interesting is the official attitude to sexuality within marriage. Love, passion and sexual attraction, which are nowadays regarded as the obvious and most secure foundations for marriage, were frowned upon between husbands and wives. Such emotions threatened the stability of the slave and property-owning household. Male citizens were advised to have intercourse with their wives three times a month, to beget citizen children. More often showed signs of dangerous passion, less often might tempt the wife to secret adulterous affairs. If a man wanted sexual satisfaction, he should get himself a slave girl; if he sought lively conversation and entertainment, he should visit a courtesan; if he hankered after beauty and higher feelings, he should devote himself to a young citizen boy.

Although all this was at the level of moral advice offered by philosophers to the citizens, and we do not know how often it was taken, it shows that what is regarded as normal and morally correct in personal relationships in any society depends on what the family is seen as being for in that society.

The same philosophers often said, as official opinion does nowadays, that the family was the basic unit of society. They did not mean the family as a set of *personal* relationships, but a set of property—and slave-owning relationships. (They called it the *oikos*, or household, and it is from this that our word economics comes.)

In ancient Rome, slave-owning was on a much larger scale, and the slave owners lived in large extended families, that is households which included married sons and daughters-in-law as well as their parents. The senior male of the family, the patriarch or *paterfamilias*, had immense power over both the property and the people within the family, including the power of life and death.

### It was cheaper to buy adult slaves than to rear their children.



Although women were much more on display in ancient Rome—the Roman citizens grew very rich on the proceeds of their empire, and lavished expensive luxuries on their womenfolk—they had a very low legal status, reflected in the fact that they did not legally have personal names. (A woman was Julia or Octavia because her father's family name was Julius or Octavius, and to distinguish her from other Julias or Octavias she had only a nickname chosen by her father or husband.) Although Roman women could apparently divorce their husbands quite easily, this was because a woman was still considered to be a member of her father's family even when she was married and living with her husband—in fact, it was her father or brothers who did the divorcing.

The main differences between the slave owners' families in Greece and Rome reflected the differences in the scale of slave-owning and the amount of wealth they were able to accumulate. In Rome as in Greece, the slaves themselves did not have families. Except towards the end of the Roman Empire, when the supply of slaves from newly conquered areas began to dry up, the owners did not wish slaves to breed at all, as it was cheaper to buy adult slaves than to rear their children.

In the feudal society which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire, the ruling class were the nobility, who owned both the

land and the peasants who farmed it. These peasants were not slaves, they were serfs, which means that though they belonged to the lord they had families of their own and plots of land which they farmed to feed themselves, as well as working on the lord's land or providing him with food as rent.

The noble family in the Middle Ages, the period of feudalism, was an extended kin group. This was not a household, but a 'noble house', a wide group of blood relations not permanently living together. It was a unit of power and property in which all its members had an interest, including the women, for they often inherited property and political power. Lesser lords were the 'vassals' of greater lords, which meant that their families were linked together by ties of military service and protection. Landed property, military power and political influence were accumulated by having the right connections in this hierarchy of overlords and vassals. Warfare was one way of pursuing property and power; the family was another.

### Alliances

Marriages were alliances made by the couple's parents, or by their overlords if their parents were dead. Overlords often made a profitable trade out of selling the marriages of heirs and heiresses. A young noblewoman was usually married at or soon after puberty (somewhere between twelve and eighteen), and started to bear children as soon as she was able. A nobleman's marriage was usually postponed until he had done some military service as a knight, but in the meantime he often took a temporary wife of lower social standing than himself for companionship and sexual satisfaction, recognising her children as his bastards and having them brought up in his own or father's household. When the time came for connections, the temporary wife was discarded but financially provided for.

Even legal noble marriages were frequently broken by divorce, because a partnership offering better connections might prove attractive, or an old political alliance break up. This was despite the long struggle of the Catholic clergy to outlaw divorce among the nobility. Couples who had been married for many years might suddenly 'discover' that they had broken the Church's rules by marrying in the first place, either because they were distantly related or because they had been previously engaged to someone else. They would then part and re-marry, and though the Church regarded the original marriage as sinful and the children as bastards, their families and fellow members of the feudal hierarchy clearly did not.

Actual noble households were large and fluid. One couple might own several castles and they were frequently separated as they moved around their lands, visited other lords' households and (for the men) took part in military campaigns. A noble household was full of noble companions and attendants, blood relations and hangers-on of all sorts, upper servants to look after the children and lower ones to serve the household, other nobles' children receiving

training in manners or knighthood, and so on. They all shared a life of much variety but little privacy or opportunity for close emotional bonds.

Peasant households in feudal Western Europe were, on the other hand, nuclear family units. They rarely included more than one married couple and their children, with the occasional widowed grandfather or grandmother. This seems to have been because the lords preferred it that way. With the land divided into small units, each supporting no more than a nuclear family, they hoped to get the greatest returns in labour services and rent. They would also want to prevent the formation of peasant extended families and 'houses' of peasant kinsfolk which might put up some resistance to feudal exploitation, or simply cause a lot of trouble by pursuing violent rivalries and blood-feuds like the nobility themselves.

Where peasant extended families did exist, in parts of Southern and Eastern Europe, they grew up when the lords were weak and divided, or (in Eastern Europe) anxious to attract peasants to new land. Since peasant clannishness and weak lordship also went hand-in-hand in China and India during the Middle Ages, the relationship between classes in feudal society would seem to be crucial to the peasant family pattern.

The purpose of the peasant family household was to produce enough food to stay alive and provide the lord with labour or rent according to his demands. Marriages were made when land was inherited by one partner or the other, and the couple were usually about the same age. They formed a working partnership, to which both partners contributed, though they might have their separate tasks (such as ploughing for men and poultry or dairy work for women), but all worked in the fields at some time of the year.

### Village community

Peasant solidarity, in the absence of extended families, was provided by the village community. The individual family, though a nuclear unit, was not a private and closed set of relationships. The men and the women of the village had their own collective activities, often separate ones such as ploughing on the one hand and washing at the well on the other. The village community could and did intervene when marital relationships got out of hand, in cases of wife beating, scolding or adultery. The village women's solidarity with one another was expressed in a way of life which later came to be condemned as superstition and 'gossip'. (This word once meant simply friend or confidant; nowadays a 'gossiping woman' is disapproved of precisely because she does not respect the privacy of family affairs.)

What changed feudal society and brought about new relationships between classes was the increasing production of commodities—that is, goods made for sale on the open market, and not just to provide for a family's needs or a particular customer's requirements. At this stage, which saw the beginning of capitalism, the nuclear family came into its own as a unit of production.

Merchants, who had for centuries been buying and selling luxury goods and exotic foreign products, began to take an interest in the mass production of saleable commodities such as cloth, metalwares and items of clothing like belts and hats, in their own countries. They did not at first invest in large factories and machines to improve the technique of production. Instead, they simply encouraged more families to produce the goods in their own homes. As the merchants came to control the supply of raw materials like wool, metals and leather, and to monopolise the sale of the finished goods, they were effectively paying these families piece rates for their labour. They were the first capitalists.

### Merchants began to take an interest in the mass production of saleable commodities.



Under this system of production and exploitation, the whole family took part in production. Artisans' marriages were working partnerships, in which the wife had her recognised tasks—often working on the goods, dealing with the merchant, keeping a shop for casual sales, or supervising the work of servants and apprentices. Late marriage—rarely before the mid-twenties for either men or women—ensured that the couple had savings and experience on which to base the partnership.

Though the artisan's commodity-

producing family revolved around the married couple, membership of the family was not limited to them and their children. Servants and apprentices—young girls and boys sent into the household by their own parents, usually remaining there until they reached marriageable age—were part of the family household, under the care and discipline of the master and mistress.

Children too young to be put to work were not a central part of the working household. In the towns where commodity production became widespread, most working wives sent their new-born children out to be wet-nursed by peasant women. This was not for their health's sake—a large proportion of the wet-nursed infants died before they were weaned—but because nursing and caring for a young baby would interfere with the mother's contribution to the productive work of the household. If the children survived to be returned to their parents at the age of about two, a young girl was usually hired to look after them until they were old enough to be set to work at home or sent out as a servant or apprentice to another household.

### Hired labour

As commodity production in the towns grew, more food had to be supplied for the market, and peasant life in the countryside changed accordingly. Serfdom declined, and peasant families were legally free to compete with one another to produce for the market. The gap between rich and poor peasants widened, as successful families acquired more land, hired labour to work it, and showed increasing disregard for the old village ties of solidarity and mutual responsibility. (One indication of this is that all over Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries poor women were often accused of witchcraft after quarrelling with their better-off neighbours.)

Though peasant families rarely sent their children out to wet-nurses, they did hire young girls to look after them, and regularly sent their sons and daughters out to long-term service in other families. There were many grades of wealth among the peasantry, and children were sent to better-off families than their own so as to improve their chances of saving money, marrying a suitable partner, and setting up a successful family of their own when they reached their mid-twenties.

With late marriages, peasant courtship was long drawn out, and very often ended with the woman getting pregnant when marriage—with the prospect of inheriting or purchasing some land—was in the offing, but before it took place. Despite the teaching of all the churches, Catholic and Protestant, peasants did not regard sex *before* marriage as shameful, and a high proportion of peasant brides—as much as 20 percent or 40 percent in some places—went pregnant to the altar. What was regarded as shameful was to have a child without marriage—when the father was a married man, or too poor to marry, or absconded when the pregnancy became known—because such a child was a burden on the community.

During this period of the rise of



The 'loving' discipline of the bourgeoisie

capitalism, the poor could not afford regular family life, and there were increasing numbers of the poor. Married couples frequently broke up because wages were low and opportunities for wage-earning insufficient. Poor husbands often left their families to seek work elsewhere, or simply to avoid the crushing responsibility, leaving their wives and children 'on the parish', dependent on the poor rates or private charity. As soon as such children reached the age of seven, they were taken from their mothers and apprenticed to a master or mistress chosen by the parish authorities. The permanent existence of a family, therefore, depended on its success in the sphere of production, not that of personal relationships.


Personal relationships, especially those between parents and children, began to receive more attention in the families of the bourgeoisie—the successful merchants and larger employers. The family no longer lived above the warehouse or workshop, and wives had less to do with production and more to do with the care of children. Bourgeois families developed a more private and intimate style of life, with separate rooms for different activities, fewer servants and more stress on emotional bonds.

Many historians have claimed that the early capitalist bourgeoisie led the way in 'modern' personal relationships and in-

dividual freedom because of this increased intimacy of family life. But from the seventeenth century until the end of the nineteenth, these relationships were very much a matter of discipline, of authority on the part of the husband and submission on the part of wives and children. The bourgeoisie's 'loving' discipline was reinforced by the threat of Hell and by various methods of physical and mental torture, despite the fact that wife-beating and extreme child-battering were coming to be regarded as barbarous. This was the era of 'spare the rod and

spoil the child', and of the loving but 'dutiful' wife. Bourgeois women were freed from productive labour, and then criticised because they did nothing but consume. Fathers exercised discipline; mothers were regarded as naturally too soft on their children.

The next stage of the rise of capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, brought sweeping changes to both production and the family. The spread of factories, mines and other large industrial enterprises meant that almost all commodity production moved



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The majority of producers became wage earners

outside the home and the majority of producers became wage-earners. This brought major changes in family life for the new working class, though the most lasting changes were not the most immediate.

### New machinery

First of all, it was women and children who were drawn outside the home into the new factories, starting with cotton spinning, which in its household form had always been an activity of women assisted by children. Then, as more new machines were adopted for many different kinds of production and household workers could not compete, men also were driven into the factories.

In some areas, such as Lancashire in the 1840s, the men were put out of work before

there were factory jobs available for them, and they did not turn to household tasks but became demoralised. The fact that they were dependent on women's wages, which were lower than men had previously earned as home workers, did not encourage them to see the situation as permanent or acceptable.

To many observers, like Frederick Engels in Manchester in 1844, it seemed as though working class family life was collapsing. But the re-establishment of the family among the working class was probably necessary for survival. Amid the dirt and disease of mid-nineteenth century factory towns, housework and hygiene were matters of physical survival, and the death rates among women who worked, and their babies, was high. Capitalism provided no alternative facilities for basic human needs.

In some areas, such as Lancashire and the East End of London, the working class set up extended families to cope with these problems. Married women continued to work in large numbers, while home life was provided for by the presence in the household of grandmothers, aunts, and other relatives. Which family members worked and which provided child care and housework was a matter of convenience and job opportunities.

But in most areas the working class family became a nuclear family household in which the wife left paid employment when she married or had her first child, and spent the rest of her life in caring for the children and household.

Skilled male workers began to expect, and through trade union organisation to get, a 'family wage' sufficient to support their wives and children. But it would be a mistake to suppose that this was general among the working class, even though few married women worked outside the home. Skilled workers were the elite of the working class, and defended their privileged position through craft union organisations which excluded unskilled workers and kept their own numbers down through control of apprenticeship. Before the 1890s, few unskilled workers were organised, and neither

their wages nor their bargaining power ever matched those of skilled workers.

Most unskilled workers' families lived on the margins of poverty or below, especially when their children were young—all nineteenth century social surveys mentioned this. Mothers of young children had to scrape and scrounge, and take in washing or lodgers to make ends meet. What did provide the unskilled workers' family with some financial relief was that they had *large numbers of children*, who could be put to work at an early age (still before their teens even after schooling became compulsory) and bring in wages to help support younger brothers and sisters. This was the first time in history that the producing class had had large numbers of children—before the Industrial Revolution poverty and malnutrition meant that only the rich had more than one or two surviving early childhood. But the *average* number of children born to couples married in the 1860s was over six, and more of them survived.

Ideological pressure played a part in removing married women from the workforce. Social reformers were concerned about the 'immorality' of married women working alongside men, as well as about the effects on their health. They were particularly agitated about hot or steamy mines and factories making thin clothing necessary. Women were banned from underground work in mines in 1842, and from night work in textile factories in 1844. In the 1880s attempts were made to exclude them from forge work in the Midland metal trades. The reformers did not suggest alternative work for these women, nor did they point out that conditions in the mines, for example, were equally barbarous and dangerous for men. The exploitation of male workers was for them as much part of the order of nature as feminine women and motherly housewives.

### The respectable family

Middle-class women whose own household duties were lightened by servants were encouraged to visit workers' homes with moral and practical advice as well as small amounts of money, food and blankets. It was made clear that unless the family conformed to the 'respectable' model of hard-working husband and attentive housewife, the money, food and blankets would not be available.

Working class men also reinforced the exclusion of married women from the workforce. For the skilled worker in the craft union it became a point of honour and status to be able to support a wife and children on his wage, and the secretary of the TUC (which was then based heavily on craft unions) said in 1874 that the aim of unions should be to see that women returned to their proper place at home. For many male workers, skilled and unskilled, the employment of women was seen as undercutting their own wages, since women could be paid half as much as men, or less, for the same job. Only a commitment to equal pay, which became TUC policy from 1888, could begin to end this rivalry between men and women workers.

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But for most working class families there was little choice. There was no practical alternative to the nuclear family with many children during the nineteenth century, except in those areas where extended families developed. Official policy succeeded in breaking up the working class extended family by the twentieth century; council housing, old age pensions and family allowances all reinforced the nuclear family model by making it materially more attractive.

The end result of these developments was that the families of the producers, the working class, came to resemble the families of the property-owners, the bourgeoisie, more than at any previous time in history. For both, the model was a nuclear family with full-time housewife and breadwinner father. Different standards of living (servants, sanitation, housing space and household equipment, for example) meant very different conditions and attitudes however, and while working class families continued to have large numbers of children into the twentieth century, the middle classes adopted birth control widely from the 1870s.

It now became possible to see the nuclear family and the separation of home from work as natural and universal, and it is no accident that it was about the end of the nineteenth century that psychological theories of human personality based on childhood in a private, enclosed nuclear family, with all its tensions and emotional conflicts, developed.

### The classic pattern

It should now be clear that the classic capitalist family pattern of the nineteenth century was unique. The separation of work from home, the exclusion of married women from productive work, and the drawing together of different classes into a similar lifestyle, were very different from earlier societies.

What is not so often made clear is that this classic capitalist family pattern has been extremely short-lived. For the working class, it lasted for little more than one century.

For the family is still changing, and in the last thirty years change has been more rapid than at any previous time since the early nineteenth century. Conservatives who wish to preserve the family see this as a crisis for the family as an institution. Marxists and feminists should perhaps study these changes more closely as indications of the strain placed on all capitalist institutions by the economic crisis and long term decline of the system.

The biggest change is that half of all married women are now employed full-time or part-time outside their homes. The figure in 1931 was only 9.6 percent. Since 'all married women' includes everyone from Princess Diana downwards, the figure for working class wives must be well over 50 percent. Most working class families depend on two wages to maintain their standard of living; very few men earn an adequate 'family wage' and women's wages, though still shamefully unequal, have risen from less than half of men's in 1900 to about 62 percent today.

It is ironic that wages for housework and

criticism of the family wage became major concerns in the feminist movement at the very time when the experience of working class women was changing so radically away from the pattern of total dependence. A longer expectation of life, fewer children (birth control was already widely practised among the working class by 1939) and earlier marriage mean that most working class women are workers *both before and after* marriage and childbearing. Their working lives are still usually interrupted by having young children, and they often return to poorer jobs and lower wages, but many years of working life after marriage is now their normal experience.

**'The family has always changed with the economic and social structure of society...socialism provides the opportunity to change things in a planned and positive way.'**



What lies behind the other changes which are hailed by the conservative prophets of doom as the breakup of the family and possibly of civilisation itself? The increasing number of divorces and single-parent families in part reflects the simple fact that both men and women live a lot longer than they did in the past. Before the Industrial Revolution, a couple who married could expect to survive together for an average of twenty years; in 1900, for an average of 35 years; today, the figure is at least 45 years. In the past, most lone parents were widowed parents, and most children in care were orphans.

But divorce and single motherhood do more than redress the balance formerly produced by death. They show the strains

placed on marriage and the family by a dis-integrating and crisis-ridden capitalism, as well as the far from universal appeal of a 45-year partnership. The family today is riddled with contradictions: families break up by divorce but most divorced partners remarry in the hope of a better partnership; young people rebel against their parents but marry earlier, apparently feeling that family life is better from the top than from the bottom.

The decline of the welfare state, with increasingly inadequate health services, child care facilities and schooling, makes the family seem more of a necessity for most working class people. At the same time, it submits the family, especially women, to intolerable burdens as work outside the home becomes a regular and necessary part of their lives. Political parties compete to lead the defence of the family, but *all* governments in the last twenty years have operated taxation policies which favour married couples without children and increase the relative burdens of those with young, dependent children.

### The end is in sight

The main attack on the family comes from the decline of the capitalist system itself, not from socialism or feminism as abstract ideas. The abolition of the family is, to borrow a phrase, an idea whose time has come, as it temporarily seemed to have come in the 1840s. What socialism and feminism can do is point the way ahead to *alternatives* to the family which capitalism never has provided and never will. These alternatives will not be established by compulsion or by preaching (neither of these have ever worked), but by offering alternative ways of living—new forms of child care, housing, provision of food and comforts—in a society based on need instead of profit.

The family has always changed with the economic and social structure of society, and it is bound to go on changing. But in the past, change has been 'blind', unplanned and unconscious. People's ideas of what is natural and what unnatural have been extremely shortsighted, based on indoctrination rather than knowledge. Socialism provides the opportunity to change things in a planned and positive way. The patriarchal family is not a monolithic institution, unchanged for thousands of years, but a series of adaptations to changing material conditions and class relationships. As socialists, we should be able to say that the end of all that is at least in sight.



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# He says farewell

Ian Birchall reviews Andre Gorz's new book *Farewell to the Working Class*, (Pluto, £3.95).

Andre Gorz has not so much written a book as failed to write two different books, each of which might have been useful in its own way.

The first book Gorz has failed to write is a study of the effects of new technological developments on modern capitalism and the class struggle. Such a study would be of enormous importance for socialists. But Gorz gives us no more than the random impressions of a literary intellectual bemused by technological advance. Startling facts ('In the post office, automation has reduced to three the number of employees required to sort and cancel 27,600 letters an hour') are quoted out of context in a style more appropriate to an advertising copywriter than to a serious political commentator.

The second book Gorz has not written is a critique of Marxism. Again, Marxists should always welcome the opportunity to sharpen their wits on an intelligent criticism, which challenges the internal logic or the contemporary relevance of Marxism. But Gorz has done no more than pick up one of the tiredest of Cold War clichés—Marxism is a 'religion', with 'priests, prophets, martyrs, churches, popes and wars of religion'. Working class militants are denounced for their 'rigidity, dogmatism, wooden language and authoritarianism'.

## Aborted books

Gorz has rammed the two aborted books into one. The confusion is compounded by a wilfully pompous style and a style of argument that consists in attributing to one's opponents views they have never held, and then spectacularly demolishing them.

However, the working class is not exactly trendy among certain sections of the Left at present, and Gorz's book may enjoy a vogue in certain circles. So it may be worthwhile to try to disentangle some of the arguments and examine their validity.

Gorz begins from the changes wrought in the social system by technological innovation:

'Automation and computerisation have

eliminated most skills and possibilities for initiative and are in the process of replacing what remains of the skilled labour force (whether blue or white collar) by a new type of unskilled worker. The age of the skilled workers, with their power in the factory and their anarcho-syndicalist projects, has now to be seen as but an interlude which Taylorism, "scientific work organisation", and, finally, computers and robots will have brought to a close.'

This is all right as far as it goes; but it doesn't go very far. Gorz is remarkably vague about *when* this change occurred; anarcho-syndicalism was largely dead by the 1920s and certainly none of the skilled workers I know has an 'anarcho-syndicalist project'.

## All that Marx did, 'apparently', was to translate Hegel's history of Spirit into an equally idealistic history of the working class.

From this Gorz goes on to claim, rather sweepingly, that modern society has reached the end of a process 'making work virtually superfluous'. When he actually quotes sources the predictions are more modest—for example that by 1990 major production centres in the USA will have achieved a 32-hour week.

But facts are the least of Gorz's worries; he continues with broad assertions: '... the abolition of work is a process already underway and likely to accelerate ... it is absolutely impossible to restore full employment by quantitative economic growth.'

Now of course there is some truth (and pretty obvious truth) in all this. Automation is *one* of the causes of unemployment. But there are others. One is a world recession, where workers go idle while workers' needs are unfulfilled. Another is the deliberate will of the ruling class to use unemployment to break trade union organisation. Any serious attempt to analyse the current crisis has to begin by relating these three factors, not by

abstracting one of them.

Instead, Gorz prefers to use his one-sided analysis as the launching pad for a moralising attack on a 'socialist morality' which, he alleges, 'equates morality with love of work'. And from this he goes on to identify the 'traditional working class' ('unionised, stably employed workers, protected by labour legislation and collective agreements') as being no more than a 'privileged minority'. Once again a very old half-truth (the conservatism of the most skilled layers of workers has been a recognised problem in the labour movement since the late nineteenth century) is dolled up as a new insight.

In place of work, which is disappearing, Gorz puts a rather ill-defined notion of 'autonomous production', with a number of gestures in the direction of cooperatives, the women's movement, etc. And on this basis Gorz is able to consign Marxism to the dustbin. All that Marx did, apparently, was to translate Hegel's history of Spirit into an equally idealistic history of the working class. The historical role attributed by Marx to the working class has no 'empirical verification'.

## Historical role

Now it is obvious that Marxism cannot be 'proved' empirically; otherwise there would be no need for any argument. Marxism will only be 'proved' when we make the successful socialist revolution. But when Marxists attribute a certain historical role to the working class, they base themselves on a century and a half of experience, from the Paris rising of 1848 to the Polish struggles of 1980. All this is simply ignored by Gorz; a couple of quotations from the *Grundrisse* suffice to erect a straw person who can be easily demolished.

At this point some of my more perceptive readers may be beginning to get a glimmer of a suspicion that Gorz is an intellectual 'charlatan. Despite his arrogance in dismissing most other socialists, Gorz is far from original. Almost every point of value made in his book was already made a full hundred years ago by one of the very first French Marxists, Paul Lafargue, in a pamphlet called *The Right to Idleness*. Lafargue condemns the love of work as 'madness', looks forward to a three-hour working day, and hails machinery as the Redeemer of Humanity.

Another striking indication of Gorz's intellectual confusion is his use of sources. He picks snippets from all points of the political compass, with no apparent regard

# Days of Hope

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to the contradictions between them. Thus he quotes with approval Antonio Nergi (falsely accused by the Italian state of inspiring Red Brigade terrorism) and a few pages later hails the 'path-breaking' achievements of Roy Grantham of APEX. Indeed a strange pair of bedfellows.

It must also be pointed out that Gorz's past record is not impressive. In 1966 Gorz delivered a lecture which began with the prophecy: 'It is unlikely that in the foreseeable future there will be a crisis in capitalism so acute that, in order to protect their vital interests, workers will resort to a revolutionary general strike or armed insurrection.' When, two years later, ten million French workers proved him wrong, Gorz leapt on to the bandwagon, becoming an ardent advocate of the views of the Italian ultra-lefts in *Lotta Continua*. Now that the promises of 1968 are beginning to fade, Gorz is making sure that his descent from the bandwagon will be noticed on all sides.

### In moderate measure

But beyond all this, the real key to Gorz's position is that he is a Utopian. He has, in moderate measure, the virtues of Utopianism; that is, he shows us the possibilities of an alternative to the present social order. He outlines the feasibility of a two-hour working day, or a ten-year working life. He shows how an economy

geared to highly advanced technology could be combined with a society in which there was a very considerable degree of decentralisation and self-organisation.

But on the key question of how we get to this desirable state of affairs, Gorz has nothing to say. Having abandoned the agency of the working class, Gorz has nothing to replace it with but a 'non-class of non-producers', whatever that might be. And the extravagant flourishes of Utopianism give way to the most abject reformism in Gorz's conclusion, when he declares that:

'In the social and postal services, in local government, the hospitals and health care centres, all that is needed is a simple ministerial directive to ensure that work in one's own freely chosen time becomes a reality. It is a fundamental reform that will cost practically nothing.'

In bidding farewell to the working class, Gorz also seems to have bidden farewell to the world economy, the ruling class and the state. Economic trends in France and the USA are abstracted from the growth of the working class in the Third World (which rates scarcely a mention). There is no recognition of the fact that the class struggle is the product, not of a few dogmatic Marxists, but of the determination of the existing ruling class to preserve their privileges.

Gorz blithely quotes an opinion poll in

which, offered the choice between higher wages and more free time, a majority opted for more free time. That, unfortunately, is not the choice before us. Those who rule at present want both more sackings and wage cuts (the *Economist* recently argued that wages in the advanced countries are between 8 percent and 24 percent higher than they 'ought to be'). And, despite Gorz's hairsplitting about what constitutes the 'state', it is clear they will use the whole repressive machine to get their way.

When it comes to more practical issues Gorz shows incredible naivety. He hails job-sharing and flexible working hours as inroads into the new society, although as he himself notes, they lead to greater productivity, which is presumably why the employers permit and encourage them.

Yet amid all the talk of the 'abolition' of work, Gorz does not seem to have noticed the devastating effects that workers can still have when they refuse to work. The ruling class, their governments, and their associated lackeys still spend a good deal of their time breaking or avoiding strikes—but the word 'strike' does not appear one single time in Gorz's book.

Likewise, Gorz is quick to dismiss the possible role of workers' councils:

'Workers' councils—which were the organs of working class power when production was carried out by technically autonomous teams of workers—have become anachronistic in the giant factory of assembly lines and self-contained departments.'

Such a formulation simply ignores the historical experience that in the major upsurges of workers' councils (Russia 1905 and 1917, Germany 1918, Hungary 1956) these bodies were not primarily concerned with the organisation of production, but with the general crisis of society.

### Political flexibility

Yet for Gorz the overriding advantage of bidding farewell to the working class is the political flexibility it permits. On the one hand one can appear infinitely radical, breaking with old dogmas. Yet at the same time one can latch on to anything that moves—ecology, feminism or any other flavour of the month. Socialism may come at the behest of the Virgin Mary ... or of Francois Mitterrand.

It is noteworthy that among Gorz's sources, cited with a reverence seldom shown to the Marxist classics by their devotees, are Jacques Attali and Jacques Delors. Now these men are not just any old academic hobbledoys. Attali coached Mitterrand in economics before the elections and is now one of a select trio who breakfast with the President every Tuesday. Delors, an ex-Gaullist, is generally recognised as one of the most right-wing ministers in Mitterrand's cabinet. These men, Gorz would have us believe, understand the realities of modern society. Yet the Mitterrand regime has run away from even the modest goal of the thirty-five hour week, and has contributed to the workless society by cutting dole payments. There is a lesson to be learnt here; but we can be sure that Gorz won't learn it.



In 1966 Gorz prophesied that the working class would not resort to a general strike in the foreseeable future. In 1968 10 million French workers proved him wrong



# A tendency to reform

The *Militant* tendency within the Labour Party has attracted a lot of attention from the media recently. Pete Goodwin outlines its traditions and examines its development.

*Militant* presents itself as the Marxist tendency within the Labour Party. It combines enthusiastic and wholehearted membership of the Labour Party with a constant appeal to the words of Marx, Lenin and, above all, Trotsky. Most observers, whether supporters or critics from both right and left, see in this combination *Militant* applying Trotsky's tactic of 'entryism.'

What was that tactic? And how much similarity does it have with the *Militant*?

From at least the time he joined the Bolshevik Party in the summer of 1917 until his death in 1940 there were three vital constants in Trotsky's politics. The first of course was internationalism. The second was the belief that there was no parliamentary road to socialism; that the socialist revolution required the smashing of the capitalist state (and with it parliamentarism) and its replacement by a workers' state based on soviets or workers' councils. The third was

that a successful revolution required an independent revolutionary party of the Bolshevik type.

But how should such parties be built? From 1919 to the end of 1923 Trotsky was, along with Lenin, one of the two key architects of the Communist International which formed mass revolutionary parties by a sharp split not merely from open reformists but from centrists who were well to the left of virtually anything to be found in the Labour Party today. From Lenin's death in 1924 until 1933 Trotsky fought against the Stalinist degeneration of these parties, first from within the Communist International and then as an expelled faction outside, but still with the goal of turning it back to its pre-Stalinist heritage.

## Degeneration

In 1933 he recognised that the degeneration of the Communist Parties had gone so far that it was impossible to push them back on a revolutionary road. A new revolutionary international, new revolutionary parties, would have to be created. But how? The forces Trotsky had at his disposal were tiny: in no single country did they number more than a couple of hundred.

The first tactic he employed to try and

increase them was to orient on a number of small centrist organisations, like the British ILP, which had recently split to the left from Stalinism and Social Democracy. The idea was to win a majority in these organisations to the logical conclusion of their leftward move, namely a complete break from their remaining reformist and centrist elements and their turning into fully Bolshevik organisations. Events however soon exhausted the perspective. Most of the centrists soon started shifting back rightwards. Individuals were won, but not organisations of any size. Trotsky's supporters still remained small in number and on the fringes of the labour movement.

It was at this point, the summer of 1934, that Trotsky proposed a new tactic for his supporters, the tactic of entryism into social democratic parties. Over the next two years, Trotsky was to propose entry into the French Socialist Party, the Belgian Labour Party, the American Socialist Party, the British Labour Party and a number of other organisations. But in each case the move was argued on the basis of the concrete circumstances in the particular country.

The tactic was first formulated for France (hence the name sometimes given to it of 'the French turn'). The French working class in 1934 was moving sharply to the left. Both the

Communist Party and the Socialist Party (the SFIO) were growing and the beginnings of united action between them had aroused considerable mass enthusiasm. The French Trotskyists were weak, largely petty bourgeois in composition and propagandist in mentality. Trotsky argued that they must take an 'organic place in the ranks of the united front' but that they were 'too weak to claim an independent place'.

So they must enter one of the two mass workers' parties. In practice that meant the Socialist Party (because the regime of the Communist Party was such that entry into it was impossible).

The basis of the entry should be stressed.

Firstly, the extreme weakness of the Trotskyists precluded any serious alternative.

Secondly, that there was a serious and rapidly leftward moving left wing in the Socialist Party.

### No basic concessions

Thirdly, that there were to be no concessions on the basic revolutionary principles to which Trotsky and his supporters adhered. As he put it in one of his first articles advocating entry:

'Naturally the League (the French Trotskyist organisation) cannot enter the Socialist Party other than as a Bolshevik/Leninist faction ... Openly posing the question of admission, the League will say: "Our views have completely vindicated themselves. The united front is getting under way on the rails of the masses. We want to participate actively. The sole possibility for our organisation to participate in the mass united front under the given circumstances is by entering the Socialist Party. Now as never before we consider it to be more necessary than ever to fight for the principles of Bolshevism, for the creation of a truly-revolutionary party of the proletarian vanguard and for the Fourth International. We hope to convince the majority of the Socialist as well as the Communist workers of this. We will bind ourselves to pursue this task within the framework of the party, to subject ourselves to its discipline and to preserve the unity of action."

Should there be any doubt as to what Trotsky considered to be 'the principles of Bolshevism' at the time we give one other quote from the same article:

'The task of the Bolshevik/Leninist does not now consist in the repetition of abstract formulas on the united front ... but in the formulation of definite slogans, concrete activity and the perspective of struggle on the basis of the policy of a mass united front. It is the task of the defence to set up soviets and hasten their transformation into organs of the struggle for power.'

Lastly, entry was conceived of as a short, sharp operation. Again let us look at the French case. The Trotskyists entered the Socialist Party in the summer of 1934. By June 1935 Trotsky was (according to his secretary Erwin Wolf) arguing with his French supporters that 'the SFIO chapter

was almost closed' and that they should orient themselves to creating an independent revolutionary organisation outside the Socialist Party. In July the first Trotskyists had been expelled from the Socialist Party and by the beginning of 1936, after more expulsions, entry was at an end. During those last six months Trotsky waged a very vigorous polemic with those of his French supporters who considered there was still more to be got out of remaining in the Socialist Party and wanted to make various concessions and manoeuvres in order to stay in.

### After the war the international Trotskyist movement faced a crisis of perspective due to the prolonged boom and the unexpected stability and expansion of Stalinism.

Each of the other entries Trotsky proposed was on a similar time scale. As he put it in December 1935 in a letter to his Polish supporters advocating entry into the Polish Socialist Party:

'Entry into a reformist centrist party in itself does not include a long perspective.

It is only a stage, which under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode.'

That, then was the entry tactic as advanced by Trotsky. How does *Militant* compare with it? First of all the origins of the *Militant* tendency.

From 1944 to 1949 Ted Grant, the *Militant's* founding father, was a leading member of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), an organisation outside the Labour Party, which counted in its ranks virtually all British Trotskyists of the time (including Gerry Healy and Tony Cliff). After the war, the RCP, along with the rest of the international Trotskyist movement was faced with a crisis of perspective due to the unexpected and prolonged post war boom and the unexpected stability and expansion of Stalinism.

There were a variety of responses to these unexpected developments. The majority of the international Trotskyist leadership, most notably Ernest Mandel and Michel Pablo, refused to acknowledge the post-war boom, confidently predicted imminent slump which would produce mass radicalisation of the reformist parties. They therefore advocated entry into these parties. But with a crucial difference from Trotsky's 'French turn'. Far from entering under the open banner of Bolshevism, Mandel and Pablo advocated Trotskyists going in and 'developing with the rhythm of the mass struggle' ie forming a left reformist tendency which would develop along with the anticipated masses around it into a revolutionary one. Their instrument for this in Britain was Gerry Healy. He entered the Labour Party along with a minority of the RCP and established the paper *Socialist Outlook* in 1948.

### Post-war stabilisation

Grant, along with the rest of the RCP majority, rejected the more extreme fantasies coming from Mandel and Co. They recognised the boom (though they had no notion of how prolonged it would be), they rejected the idea of entering the Labour Party to prepare the way for an imaginary left wing, and they persisted with trying to build an independent party. But by 1949 post war stabilisation had taken its toll even on a fairly sober independent party-building perspective. Continually declining, the RCP wound itself up, with most of its leadership about to quit politics and with the remainder of its majority under instructions from the Fourth International to fuse with the Healy group still pursuing its mad chase after mass radicalisation in the Labour Party.

Grant apparently was unhappy about this. At the time he had no illusions about the development of a mass left wing in the Labour Party and he was very rapidly expelled from the Healy group (as were the SWP's predecessors, about to become the *Socialist Review* group).

So, when Grant joined the Labour Party in 1950 it was with neither Trotsky's 1934 perspective of a short, sharp struggle to re-

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crut a significant number of leftward moving workers to revolutionary politics, nor with the Fourth International's fantasy of preparing for a mass left wing in the near future, nor, indeed with *Militant's* present perspectives. Rather, he and his friends, joined with the same attitude that the *Socialist Review* group did—with no illusions about any dramatic gains, or long term perspective, but because, given the boom, there was no alternative.

### That single difference

Indeed it could be argued that in 1950 there was very little to separate the handful of people round the *Socialist Review* group and the handful of people round Grant, apart from their different analyses of the Stalinist regimes.

That single difference, however, was to have its consequences. A decade and a half of boom, operating in a reformist party, takes its toll on even the best theoretically equipped of revolutionaries. The great advantage of the theory of state capitalism was that it kept eyes constantly focussed on the real working class. The great drawback of the theory of degenerated workers' states is that it substitutes forms for that living class. There is always the danger that that formalism spills over from the analysis of Russia. If Stalinist Russia is a workers' state, then why should not the Labour Party, with its decaying wards and its increasingly middle class membership, become *the* mass party of the working class.

That is exactly what happened to Grant. By the next time either his supporters or ours had any serious opportunity of growing, in CND and the Labour Party Young Socialists in the early sixties, Grant had already developed a far greater emphasis on the Labour Party than us. It was not however yet sufficient to preclude a rather uneasy cooperation between us in the production of the paper *Young Guard* in the Labour Party Young Socialists in that period.

The real parting of the ways came with the election of the Wilson government in October 1964 (the month, incidentally when the paper *Militant* was launched). As the

anti-working class nature of this government became apparent there began a small but significant exit from the Labour Party to the left as well as a speed up of the more general decay of the party organisation, including its youth wing. New possibilities opened up for revolutionaries first of all in various fragmented industrial struggles against the labour government, and then in the Vietnam and student movements.

### If Stalinist Russia is a workers' state, then why should not the Labour Party, with its decaying wards and its increasingly middle class membership, become *the* mass party of the working class?

For revolutionaries like ourselves who regarded the Labour Party as an uncongenial but necessary refuge during the boom, the lesson was quite clear—exit from the Labour Party. If opportunities for revolutionary recruitment inside (never good) were diminishing, and opportunities outside opening up then any rationale for being in the party disappeared. The very rapid growth of our organisation between 1968 and 1972 was vindication of this perspective.

*Militant* however remained firmly inside the Labour Party. This was justified on the basis that a leftward moving working class would always return to the traditional party of the working class (although that is exactly what did not happen in the period 1964 to 1974) and that revolutionaries had to be in there waiting for them (presumably even if that meant foregoing other possibilities of growth in the meanwhile).

Even accepting the argument at revolutionary face value it was a significant break from Trotsky's formulations on the entry tactic. In practice however it entailed a lot more.

The long term perspective inside the Labour Party which *Militant* was advancing at least from 1964 requires above all else that you stay in. That requires that your supporters be the best party workers, the best canvassers and so on. And it requires that your 'revolutionary' politics should be formulated in such a way as to have an echo in your environment on the one hand and on the other so as to avoid provoking expulsion by the bureaucracy.

So arose *Militant's* most visible feature: its 'Marxist programmes' for a 'socialist' Labour government, crowned by the 'nationalisation of the 200 monopolies'. It fits with the 'resolutionary' style of the wards and General Management Committees (and indeed may do rather well in them: as early as October 1968 Ted Grant was writing that 'the three million votes cast for the resolution from Liverpool of the Marxist left at the 1968 (Labour Party) conference represents a modest success for the methods of Marxism').

On the other hand it fudges the questions which would immediately bring revolutionaries into sharp and fatal conflict with the Labour Party bureaucracy (and indeed, the mass of the membership): the questions of a revolutionary party and of soviet power.

In earlier times, and especially with regard to foreign countries, that fudging leant towards *Militant's* revolutionary past. Thus in a 1968 *Militant* pamphlet, *The French Revolution*, it is argued:

'In the situation that existed (in France in May 1968)—with three times the number of workers on strike as in 1936—all that was needed was for the Party of the mass of the working class to boldly seize power and set up the proletarian dictatorship. The way to this has already been established by Marxism. In Russia in 1917 the workers had their own democracy—soviet democracy—which was able to challenge and crush the bourgeois democracy.'

### Just a programme


Elsewhere in the pamphlet there is still a fudge:

'Had the troops been able to see a clear lead from the workers a genuinely peaceful revolution would have been more than possible. Peaceable not in a parliamentary sense but because the forces of reaction would have been too weak to resist.'

And even for France in 1968 the issue was presented as what the 'mass party of the working class' *could* have done if it had had a 'Marxist programme' rather than in terms of building an independent revolutionary party.

Even in 1968 *Militant* would not have been so bold as to what it said about Britain. (Labour Party bureaucrats are more tolerant about talk of the revolutionary road in foreign countries). But the slide since then has gone beyond fudging to an open and avowedly reformist interpretation of the same 'Marxist programme' they were advocating when they still had some links with their revolutionary past.

The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is abandoned. 'We don't believe in it' stated Peter Taaffe on the *Meet the Press* television



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programme last Autumn.

Soviet power and smashing the bourgeois state are not mentioned in the 1981 pamphlet *Militant: What we stand for*. Instead it is clearly stated that:

'An entirely peaceful transformation of society is possible in Britain, but only on condition that the full power of the Labour movement is boldly used to effect this change.'

The transformation is to be carried through by the passing of *Militant's* 'Marxist programme' through an Enabling Bill in Parliament.'

Any remaining ambiguities are clarified by Peter Taaffe in his article on 'Marxism and the State' in the June 1982 issue of *Militant International Review*:

'However in the pages of *Militant*, in pamphlets and in speeches, we have shown that the struggle to establish a socialist Britain can be carried through in Parliament, backed up by the colossal power of the labour movement outside. This, however, will only be possible on one condition: that the trade unions and the Labour Party are won to a clear Marxist programme and perspective, and the full power of the movement is used to effect the rapid and complete socialist transformation of society.'

### The chosen vehicle

Of course once the need to smash the bourgeois state and the need for soviet power has been abandoned so too is the need for an independent revolutionary party. The Labour Party is the *Militant's* chosen vehicle for the parliamentary road to socialism, and they reject absolutely any possibility of splitting or being forced to split from it. As a recent typical editorial response to the witch-hunt puts it (in *Militant* 25/6/82):

'The witch-hunt will never succeed. *Militant* supporters will fight tenaciously for their right to put forward their ideas and policies as Labour Party members. Moreover, they will gain the support of the vast majority of Labour and trade union members. With their help, *Militant* supporters will continue to work for the Labour Party, to recruit workers into it, to canvass for it, and above all to argue for socialist policies within it. Marxism has always been a trend of opinion within the Labour Party—indeed it was the major trend in its early days—and no amount of bureaucratic diktats will drive Marxism out.'

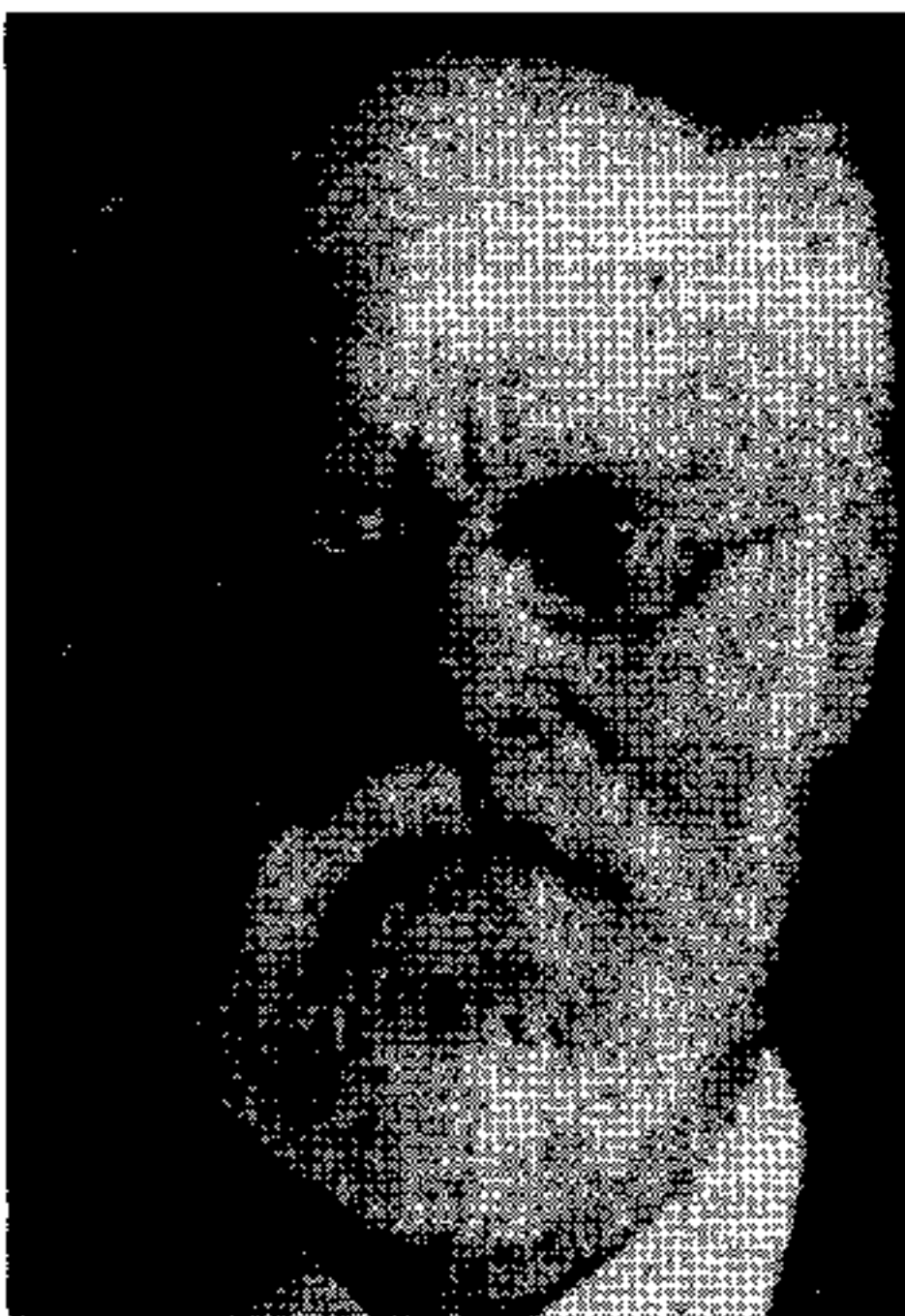
So far from being a revolutionary group entering the Labour Party, *Militant* today is a left reformist tendency inside it, accepting its fundamentally parliamentary basis, but committed to turning it to the left.

In modern terms it is a rather peculiar left reformist tendency. Few left reformists in Social Democratic parties today would claim to be Marxists. Fewer still, whether in Social Democratic or Communist Parties, would advance the perspective of a total nationalisation of the economy at one single step. Most accept one variety or another of 'alternative economic strategy' which *Militant* still firmly rejects.

But *Militant's* current political position is

by no means novel. A clue to its pedigree can be found in the apparently quite extraordinary assertion in the last editorial we quoted that Marxism 'was the major trend of opinion' within the Labour Party in its early days. Now of course with regard to the Labour Party this is nonsense, whether the claim is made for real Marxism or even something that labelled itself Marxist. But so far as the pre-First World War parties of the Second International outside Britain are concerned then it is certainly true that something that called itself Marxism was the major trend of opinion.

The centre of that trend was the massive German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Its leading spokesman was the editor of SPD's theoretical journal, Karl Kautsky, a man internationally regarded (including by Lenin at the time) as 'the pope of Marxism'.



**Karl Kautsky, leader of the mass German working class party, the SPD, which collapsed in the face of World War I.**

What did Kautsky's 'Marxism' consist of? He decisively rejected a piecemeal reformist strategy as proposed by the 'revisionist' Eduard Bernstein at the turn of the century. He most emphatically regarded the mission of the SPD as the total transformation of society. But this was to be achieved by a parliamentary majority of the SPD nationalising the whole of industry, and instituting various reforms in the upper echelons of the state.

The parallel with *Militant's* current perspectives is almost exact. With one exception. Kautsky regarded the SPD as already able to implement such a parliamentary transformation once it achieved a majority. *Militant* believes that the Labour Party has to be won to its 'Marxist programme' before it could achieve such a transformation.

Nor do the parallels between *Militant's* and Kautsky's 'Marxism' end here. Kautsky's 'Marxism' in addition to travelling along a parliamentary road was also extremely fatalistic. The crisis of capitalism of its own accord impelled the masses to ever increasing support for the SPD which must inevitably provide it with its majority and its

conquest of power. Any reading of *Militant* finds it peppered with similar sentiments. For *Militant* the downturn in class struggle over the last few years is an illusion. Their reaction to the last Labour Party conference is typical. As *Militant* (8/10/82) put it:

'This year's conference marked a movement to the right at the top of the Labour Party. But at the same time it reflected a continued swing to the left within the Labour movement.'

The whole illusion of Kautskyite 'Marxism' burst wide open with the First World War. It was this that led revolutionaries like Luxemburg, Trotsky and Lenin to call for the building of new revolutionary parties, based on the perspective of soviet power, splitting not merely from the Dennis Healeys of their day but also from the whole Kautskyite tradition. The fundamental rationale for that split causes acute embarrassment for leading *Militant* supporters today, as a glance at the recent *Socialist Worker* interview with LPYS chairperson Laurence Coates amply shows. Just how do you square the circle of advocating politics which are exactly the same as Karl Kautsky's while claiming on your left flank that you stand in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky?

### Danger signs

Reference to the capitulation of the SPD in the face of the First World War may seem rather wild with regard to the *Militant* today. But the danger signs are already there when it comes to some of the more 'touchy' questions of the present class struggle in Britain. *Militant's* record over the Falklands war has already been documented in this magazine. It goes alongside *Militant's* long-standing record on Ireland, where it has long refused to campaign for Troops Out and regularly portrayed Republicans as 'sectarian' twins of the Loyalists. *Militant* (10.12.82) was criticising Ken Livingstone for trying to provide a platform for Sinn Fein in London.

More important, two pressures similar to those that worked on Kautsky's SPD are at work on the *Militant* today, working to continue its rightward evolution.

Kautsky's 'Marxism' increasingly existed in the SPD as a decorative cover for the conservative trade union bureaucrats who in reality ran the party. Nothing quite so grand with today's *Militant*. But its recent, very successful, turn towards Broad Left trade union politics is bound to exercise an important influence on *Militant* itself. It is going to be pulled to the right by its refusal to criticise the behaviour of supporters and friends in the trade union bureaucracy.

Kautsky's 'Marxism' was also very concerned with 'legality', with refusing to countenance any 'adventures' that could bring down the wrath of the German state on its organisational gains (this after all was the only thing that could interrupt the inevitable march of history). Of course *Militant* does not have that sort of legality to contend with. But it does have the 'legality' of the Labour Party. All the signs of its behaviour in the current witch hunt are that it will make further concessions to that legality to avoid what for it is now unthinkable, exit from the party.

# Polite disobedience

Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* was one of the major releases in December. It coincided with the two day protest at Greenham Common and it is as certain as night follows day that many CND activists and supporters will see the film, and see in it a practical and moral justification of non-violent civil disobedience. It is essential that these views are refuted.

Four months ago I wrote an article on what lay behind the politics of Mahatma Gandhi (SR 8:82). It is worth belabouring the main point. Despite Gandhi's claim that non-violent civil disobedience (*satyagraha*) had a universal moral foundation, it had in fact a very specific material origin. It was the only means by which the Indian capitalist class could gain a mass base for their campaign for independence from the British without the risk of those same masses trying to take over the whole operation.

Gandhi's ideology of *satyagraha* was the mechanics of achieving this. Unfortunately, this ideology effectively limited the mass base of Indian nationalism to caste Hindus, a fact to which the makers of the film appear to be utterly oblivious.

## Political coincidence

Throughout his career Gandhi was financed by most of the leading industrialists of west India. These included the Sarabhais, textile magnates in his home state of Gujarat, and the Birlas, the second largest industrial group in the whole of India. They made sure that he never lacked money, and he regularly consulted with them.

This is not to say that they created Gandhi. What happened was the coincidence that his politics happened to fit their political requirements, with the added bonus that he possessed considerable skills in organisation and propaganda.

They came together between 1917 and 1920, recognised that they needed each other, and stayed together until the end in 1948. But these people, and their crucial role in Gandhi's politics, are also completely absent from the film.

It is crucial to realise the nature of Gandhi's strategy, which was summed up as Pressure-Compromise-Pressure. The Indian capitalists wanted an independent state. After 1917 the British had conceded that at some time in the distant future they would get one. The aim of the Indian capitalists and Gandhi was simply to advance that date as much as possible.

So each of Gandhi's mass campaigns (1920-22, 1930-33, 1942) occurred at a time of crisis for British capitalism. Each crisis ruptured some of the imperialist links with Britain (two World Wars and the Depression), and so each strengthened the Indian capitalists. At each crisis they measured their strength against the British (Pressure) to get closer to independence

(Compromise). Although the British weathered each crisis, the Indian capitalists left each crisis period much stronger than they had entered it.



So the objectives, methods, and timing of mass civil disobedience were determined by the interests of Indian capital. For instance, it would have made much more sense to launch the second movement in 1928, a year of massive working class struggle, and when there was a mass campaign of protest against a British Parliamentary Commission that was touring India, rather than wait until 1930. But linking workers' struggles with the campaign against the British was the one thing that Gandhi consistently rejected. He always argued for social peace between Indians.

He did so because he did not want to change the social order but simply to replace the British rulers by Indians. He always insisted that his supporters obeyed the law

and always argued that the British had a perfect legal right to arrest them, only protesting when the British went beyond legality by brutalising prisoners. After arrest his supporters were instructed to cut themselves off from anything that was happening outside and simply and passively await the day of their release.

The passivity of non-violence, then, was not really intended to exert a moral influence, despite what Gandhi said. It was intended to make sure that the campaign for independence did not threaten the social order. The most apt memorial for Gandhi is the state created by the people who he helped to power – as vicious and oppressive a capitalist state as any on earth.

Civil disobedience involves accepting the rule of your oppressors. In India, it meant accepting the legality of British rule and the British police. At Greenham it meant a passive acceptance of the role of the Thames Valley police.

## Compromises

A real festival of the oppressed is one that disperses the oppressors and destroys all their works. All civil disobedience gives in the end is a festival of the compromisers, in CND's case the partisans of a non-nuclear NATO, whose vision of the future is a robbers' pact with the Warsaw pact.

When it comes down to it, all civil disobedience will bring us is a squalid deal between Reagan and Andropov, and otherwise leave us in the same condition as before.

What we want is what happened in India, and what was omitted from the film. Mass action by workers, which if it had been harnessed could have driven the British from India years before they were, and which could have created a different independent India. Mass action by workers here now could prevent the deployment of Cruise and Trident and could cripple British involvement in NATO. That's a better vision for the future than lying in the road waiting your turn to be carted off to Newbury police station.

**Barry Pavier**

The making of this film was not encouraging for the hopes of a good anti-racist, anti-Raj film. During its filming in 1981, sixty Indian members of the production team complained to Sir Richard Attenborough (the director/producer) of racist abuse by their British colleagues. Earlier, in January, while Attenborough was filming the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre sequence, they had gone on a one-day strike to extract an apology after the Indian special effects technician Arun Patil was slapped by his British supervisor. All through filming the British crew received a weekly expenses allowance of Rupees 2550 (£140) while Indians got a maximum of Rupees 1400 (£77). In some grades Indian staff were paid as little as Rupees 200 (£11) a week! While the British workers were put up in posh hotels, the Indians weren't even paid overtime rates for working from 5am to 8pm, or later. All this while the Indian National Film Development Corporation was pouring in over 2½ million pounds of government subsidy.

## Occupy the cities



**Report from Afghanistan,**  
*Gerard Chaliand.*  
*Penguin Books, £2.25.*

This book has two big virtues. It's short and it's very well written. But the politics are a bit bizarre. The first third of the book describes Afghanistan before the coup of April 1978. Chaliand was never there before 1978 and seems not to have seen the scholarly studies published since. So he feels free to say the society wasn't feudal but traditional. I don't want to get into arguments about what 'feudal' means, but political power certainly was in the hands of the big landlords. Chaliand says it was traditional because he wishes to downplay the defects of the old society.

The reasons for this emerge in the last part of the book. Here he says that Russian military strength and aggressive foreign policy are the major threat to the world and to peace today. Peaceful co-existence is over. So Europe and the West should seize the opportunity and aid the Afghan resistance. If we don't fight them there we might have to closer to home.

It's not surprising anybody should say that. What's surprising is that Chaliand is the author of previous books sympathetic to the insurgents in Guinea-Bissau, the North Vietnamese peasants, the Kurds and the Palestinians. Now he seems to be trying to persuade Western governments to fight the Russians. It's not at all clear why. Perhaps he's gotten lost in some

sort of Gaullist Maoist fairyland.

Of course there is a temptation for anybody who supports the Afghan resistance to try to line up the West in their support. But Reagan and Mitterand are no more friends of the Afghans than Andropov. They're just further away. They enjoy a good guerilla war in Afghanistan. Keeps the Russians on their toes.

Where Chaliand is good is on military strategy. He's clearly been into guerilla war for years, and has interesting things to say about the resistance. Like everybody else, he complains that it is hopelessly split and has totally inefficient chains of command. Like everybody else he fails to notice that the Afghans don't want to be part of a united state or to have chains of command. That's part of what they're fighting. But he does give a good potted guide to the factions.

And he makes sense of Soviet tactics. He says that from the beginning they decided not to try to conquer the countryside. It would take half a million men and tie them down like the Americans in Vietnam. Instead they decided to garrison the towns and hold them for twenty or thirty years. Meanwhile they wait for a new generation of Afghans to accept the Soviet occupation as fact.

The resistance has been able to do little to blunt this strategy. They don't have the military strength, the weapons or the organisation. But they do have the overwhelming support of the countryside. It's a question of how long they can hold

out without winning.

I think the answer is a long time. And Chaliand is right that there's little hope of breaking the deadlock in Afghanistan itself. But there's every prospect of breaking the hold of both the Russian and American regimes in Europe in the next decade. That's why we shouldn't be

asking our governments to arm the Afghans.

In sum, this is an interesting book if you are trying to stay closely abreast of current military developments in Afghanistan. Otherwise, forget it.

Jonathan Neale

## Black and a woman

**'Ain't I a Woman:**  
**Black women and feminism'** by  
*Bell Hooks, Pluto paper £3.95*

This book is American and is addressed to the American Women's movement. It sets out to expose and reconcile two facts. One that American black women are oppressed as women, that the black movement is sexist and male dominated. Two, that the Women's movement is and always has been racist and dominated by whiter upper and middle class women. It is not an optimistic book, as Bell Hooks says:

'For ten years now I have been an active feminist ... Initially I believed that the women who were active in feminist activities were concerned about sexist oppression and its impact on women as a collective group. But I became disillusioned as I saw various groups of women appropriating feminism to serve their own opportunistic ends. Whether it was women university professors crying sexist oppression (rather than sexist discrimination) to attract attention to their efforts to gain promotion ... or women writers superficially exploring feminist theories to advance their own careers ... Feminists themselves, as they attempted to take feminism beyond the realm of radical rhetoric into the sphere of American life, revealed that they remained imprisoned in the very structures they hoped to change ... It did not serve the interests of upper and middle class white feminists to discuss race and class.'

Ms Hooks examines the history of black women in American society from slavery to black power, demonstrating how they were and are oppressed by stereo-typing as black mamas or the embodiment of evil and sexuality. She also describes the racist history of the early women's movement through the 19th century to the more subtle racism of today.

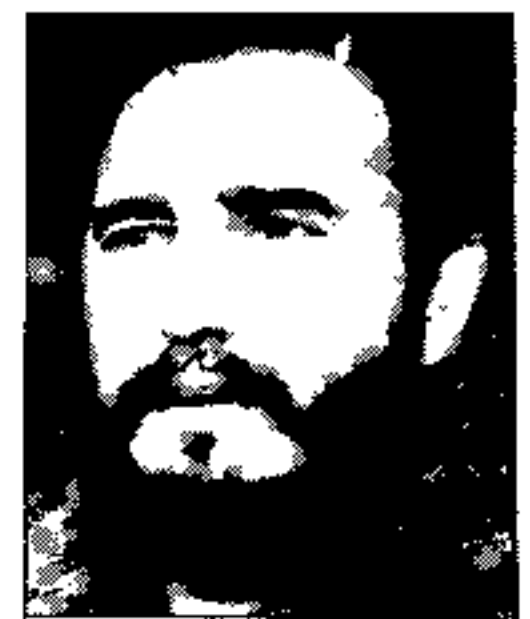
In 1852 in Akron, Ohio was held the 2nd Annual convention of the women's rights movement. Against cries of 'don't let her speak' from the white audience the black activist Sojourner Truth spoke against the ideas that women were too weak and gentle to be equals with men. It's a great speech from which the title of the book comes and deserves quoting. It is also the cry that Sojourner Truth shouted at an anti-

slavery rally in Indiana baring her breasts to prove that she was a woman.

'But what's all dis here talking 'bout? Dat man ober dar say dat woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best places ... and ain't I a woman? Look at me? Look at my arm! ... I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me — and ain't I a woman? I could work as much as any man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well — ain't I a woman? I have borne five children and I seen 'em mos all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a woman's grief, none but Jesus hear — and ain't I a woman?'

That response of 'don't let her speak' from the white audience at the women's rights convention was typical of the time. From the 19th right to the 20th century the women's movement of America was openly racist. But as Bell

### **CASTRO, CUBA AND SOCIALISM** *by Peter Binns and Mike Gonzalez*



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Hooks shows the 60s reborn feminism remains as racist and white dominated as ever, if more subtle, to the point where few black or poor women are involved in it. At the same time she shows how the black power movement of the 60s became one where women were only accepted in the role of wives and mothers oppressed by the black super-macho.

As I said before this is not an optimistic book especially as Ms Hooks having proved and demonstrated her two points fails to see any way out of the dilemma. All she is left with is to urge and plead a change of heart by feminists:

'Resolution of the conflict between black and white women cannot begin until all women acknowledge that a feminist movement which is both racist and classist is a mere sham, a cover-up for women's continued bondage to materialist patriarchal principles, and passive acceptance of the status quo. The sisterhood that is necessary for the making of feminist revolution ... begins with the individual woman's acceptance that American women, without exception, are socialised to be racist, classist, and sexist, in varying degrees, and that labelling ourselves feminists does not change the fact that we must consciously work to rid ourselves of the legacy of negative socialisation ... we must assume responsibility for eliminating the forces that divide women.'

You feel that even Bell Hooks feels this exhortation has a hollow ring to it after her description of what's wrong with both the black and women's movements. The book ends with an acknowledgement that hers is a voice in the wilderness. Yet it is at least an honest attempt to tackle very real

problems and contradictions. But the attempt fails, Hooks never breaks out of the contradictions that she describes.

Though Ms Hooks uses the word class quite a lot and even the word 'classist' there is no understanding of class society. For working class read poor. A view of society comprising of class conflict, classes making and remaking themselves in struggle is a million miles from this book. Bell Hooks is very well aware of oppression, both racism and sexism, she describes in some detail the uses of racist and sexist ideologies to divide and delude, but she has no over-all framework to put oppression into. The words 'capitalism', 'imperialism' and 'classes' are used but only as swear words against society. There is no understanding of what these words mean, how capitalism works, or how oppression is connected.

The other main problem with the book is its use of words. It is written in a jargon (patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism etc) that is never explained and that mystifies rather than clarifies. Key nouns — women, men, whites, blacks — are used confusingly: at times she uses 'women' to mean all women at other times women influenced by feminism, sometimes the two definitions are used in the same paragraph. It leads to no end of confusion, but it is not just a quibble with words, Hooks substitutes women-feminists for all women in the manner that some Trotskyists use the word 'worker'.

Hooks gets herself in a great confusion with these key nouns as she gives them political attitudes and stances. Women are made to have collective attitudes and beliefs. It leads her to state ideologies as if they were collective decisions of a group:

'By flaunting their sexual lust for the bodies of black women

and their preference for them as sexual partners, white men successfully pitted white women and enslaved black women against one another.'

Hooks makes everyone accountable for the ideologies of society, as if groups such as women, men, blacks, have a collective attitude. Rather than analyse the effects of ideas and their interaction with people she places the individual or a group as the ones responsible. The pernicious idea that black women represent sensuality and evil becomes a conspiracy of white men to play off black and white women against each other.

This means that she then gets trapped in the contradictions of her own making. Having accepted that men are to blame for women's oppression and that women have to organise separately, she then describes in detail how white women have taken over the feminist movement and how racist they are. She shows how black women's experience of oppression is different from middle class white women's oppression and how they are oppressed by white women.

But by using oppression and its effects as the only criteria there is no reason why black women should work with white women who are both racist and 'classist'. Hooks gets trapped by her own tools of

analysis. She wants to argue for a non-racist women's movement to fight for a 'feminist revolution' but within the terms of her analysis all she can do is urge and plead with the privileged white women to be altruistic.

With no materialist base to her arguments she both gives too much credence to, and is trapped by the seemingly all-powerful influence of ideology. After all why should middle-class white women agree to her pleas? At the very end of the book she accepts that hers is a small minority voice shouting in the wilderness:

'We, black women who advocate feminist ideology, are pioneers ... We hope that as they (our sisters) see us reach our goal — no longer victimised, no longer unrecognised, no longer afraid — they will take courage and follow.'

And so the book ends with Hooks as a gallant pioneer trusting that somehow, she doesn't know how, the rebirth of the women's movement will occur and sweep forward to a 'feminist revolution'. If ever there was a book crying out for a materialist base to underline her descriptions of oppressive ideologies, for a marxist class analysis to put the contradictions of oppression into it, this is the book. Noel Halifax

## Euro-Narodnism

### What is to be done?

Nikolai Chernyshevsky  
Virago, £3.95

Nikolai Chernyshevsky was an intellectual who paid for his beliefs with his life. Not a quick easy death, but 25 years in the stinking prisons and exile settlements of the Tsar's penal system. His bravery and will power influenced a generation of Russian revolutionaries, including Lenin and Victor Serge.

I must confess I was somewhat surprised to discover that Virago were publishing his novel *What is to be done?*, a point I shall return to later.

It is important to remember that this novel is only part of the revolutionary activity of the author. Chernyshevsky was a Narodnik who contributed regularly to the progressive journals of his time. Though a utopian he made the move towards materialism at a time when the working class in Russia did not exist as an agent of social change.

His underground activities led him to be incarcerated in the Peter Paul fortress where, in 1863, he wrote his only novel. After eighteen months he was exiled in Siberia. He was not to return home until a few months before his death in 1889.

For a book written in 1863 it is amazingly prophetic and advanced in its ideas. Chernyshevsky argues

for the complete liberation & equality of women as part of a society built on reason and enlightenment.

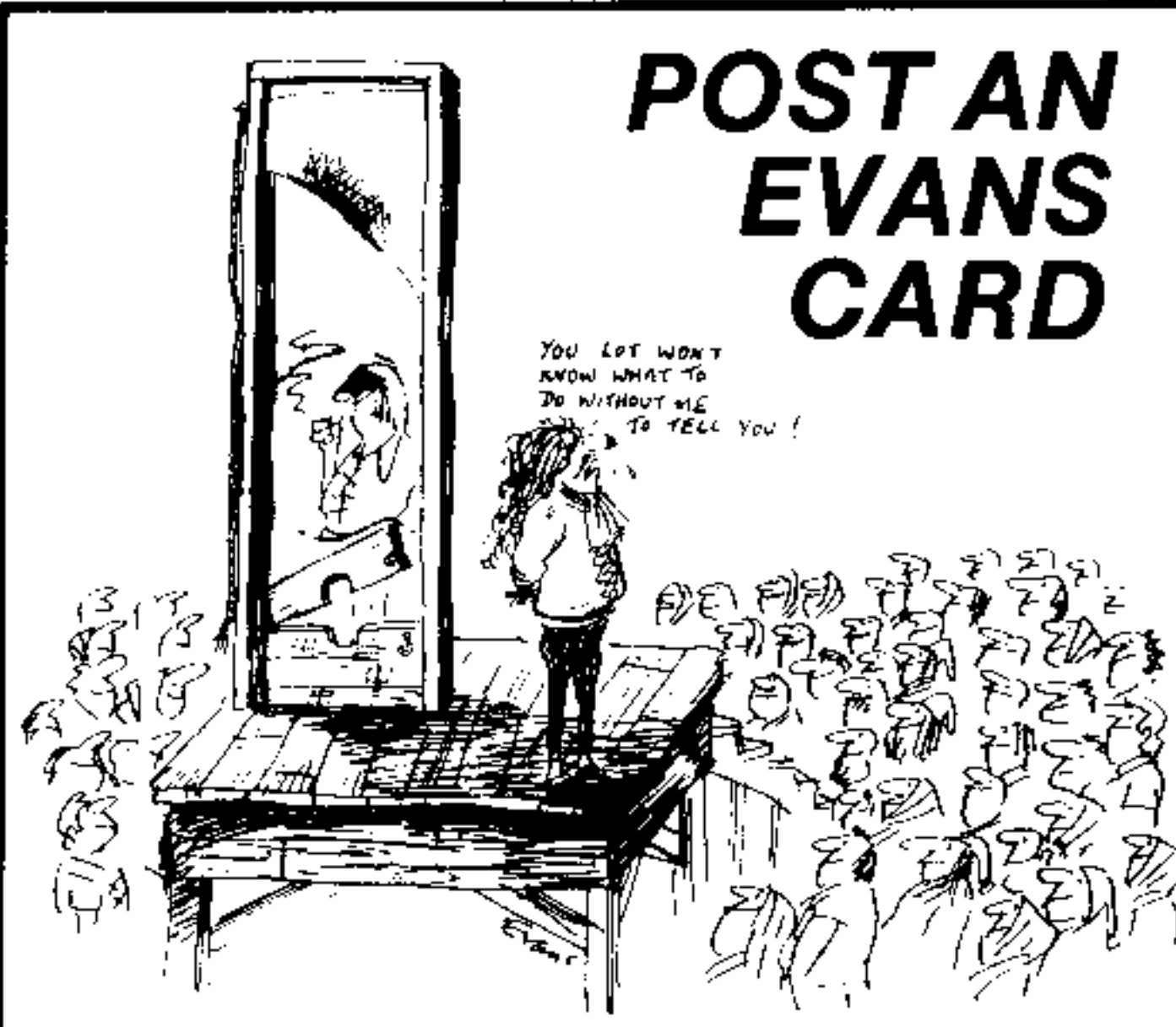
He paints a beautiful utopian dream of a land of plenty and complete human co-operation. He believes it is possible to achieve this by willpower and education. Now before the working class existed as a universal agent of change that is progressive, and the dream often precedes reality.

In Chernyshevsky's time those who escaped from feudal aristocratic relationships to find economic independence in the towns were mainly middle class. Their break with feudalism and the wish for liberal freedom brought them into conflict with the Tsar's absolutist regime. Therefore to Chernyshevsky the life style and intellectual pursuits of these people appeared to be the material that social change would be made of.

It was not until 1889 that the first Russian Marxist (Plekhanov) argued that the only revolutionary movement that can triumph is that of the workers. In 1889 Lenin's pamphlet proving 'The development of capitalism in Russia' appeared.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 proved without doubt the existence of the working class as a revolutionary class. Once again the dream had preceded reality.

Narodnism could no longer play



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a progressive role, the will power and life style of the intellectual was not enough. Now this brings us full circle to the point raised at the beginning of this review, why has Virago published this?

In a nutshell, EURO-NARODNISM. For the novel, in isolation from the struggle and development of the Russian Revolutionary Tradition, loses its revolutionary essence. It is no fault of Chernyshevsky's that what was progressive in 1863 is not so in 1983. To believe in Socialism in 1863 required great courage, vision, and will power. But History plays cruel tricks on individuals and their works, for what Lenin found inspiring now appears dull and tedious to the 20th century reader.

The book is a call to consciousness-raising and the pur-

suit of life style as a way to change the individual and society. Now this is exactly the kind of activity the Virago co-operative can indulge in, and unlike Chernyshevsky they will not have to suffer 25 years of hard labour for the privilege.

Unless you are the kind of person who enjoys wearing a hair shirt, you can give this a miss as it is dull, didactic and boring.

If you would like to rediscover the revolutionary kernel of Chernyshevsky, Victor Serge wrote a marvellous tribute to him in 'Birth of Our Power', chapter 23.

If you wish to save Narodism from the hands of the Euro-Narodniks (remember what they did to Gramsci) then Cliff's 'Lenin Vol. 1, Chapter 1' is time and money far better spent.

**Andy Strouthous**

## Three real bargains

### Journeyman Chapman Series

It would be difficult to find three books more diverse than those published in the Journeyman Chapman series. At £1.95 each they are a real bargain and all well worth buying.

The Time of the Toad by the celebrated Hollywood screenwriter Dalton Trumbo is perhaps the most intriguing. First published as a pamphlet in 1949 it is a powerful blow by blow account of the anti-communist witchhunts that took place in Hollywood shortly after the second world war.

Dalton Trumbo was certainly well qualified to write about the subject, he was himself made famous as one of the Hollywood

10, a group of film people who were blacklisted and some even imprisoned for refusing to co-operate with the House Committee of Un-American Activities.

The Novel on Blue Paper is the first printed version of an unfinished novel by William Morris. For all those interested in the work of William Morris the book is a must.

The last of the series, The Twelve and the Scythians, by the Russian revolutionary poet Alexander Blok is worth getting if only for the magnificent illustrations by Yurri Annenkov.

It is a wonderful example of art responding passionately to a revolution and the people who made it.

**Peter Court**

## Intellectual indigestion

### Fabianism and Culture

*Ian Britain*

Cambridge University Press £19.50

### The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian Britain

*T.W. Heyck*

Croom Helm £14.50

Professor Eric Hobsbawm long ago remarked that those who study the Fabian Society 'must sooner or later have discovered... that they were wasting their time.' He was right but the Fabians continue to attract a crop of books and doctoral theses. This is partly because of the crazy logic of the academic world but also because the strand of socialism they represented is, unfortunately, alive and well.

Margaret Cole's 'official' history of the Fabians recorded their vast achievements in gaining office and today everybody from Tony Benn to Shirley Williams is, or has been, a member of the Fabian Society.

The continuity of succession is not unbroken but it is nevertheless real enough.

This vision of the role of 'intellectuals' is one which is familiar in the twentieth century. It is common to all those schools of 'socialism' from Pol Pot to Tony Benn in which enlightened individuals will lead us to the promised land. It obviously has nothing to do with the self emancipation of the working class.

The only difficult question to answer here is what on earth such people were and are doing mixed up with the working class.

As far as the Fabians were concerned, they tried very hard not to get mixed up with workers. They opposed the foundation of the Independent Labour Party. They were unenthusiastic about the formation of the Labour Representation Committee. They spent far more of their time and energy trying hard to influence, and indeed enter, the Liberal and even Tory, parties

than they did trying to relate to workers.

The problem they faced was that although the bourgeoisie had won power centuries ago it had compromised with the older aristocracy. The structure of intellectual life was dominated by privilege rather than meritocracy. People who spoke with cockney accents like Sidney Webb were very much the exception at the Colonial Office. One of the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, the 'career open to the talents' had never really been carried out in Britain.

But the bourgeoisie had no intention of ever finishing things off. It got along quite well with the present set up. A few intellectuals did not matter very much. Any attack on privilege would stir up the working classes in a most undesirable fashion. Consequently the Fabian pleading fell on deaf ears.

In the Fabian scenario it was the job of the working class to provide the muscle for the completion of the bourgeois revolution, to put Sidney, Beatrice, George Bernard

and their acolytes into the sort of position to which they were entitled by their talents. The Chinese Mandarin was always a very attractive figure for Shaw.

But if that was the negative side of the story, the positive side was even nastier. The Fabians came to political maturity in the epoch of inter-imperialist rivalry. They quite simply believed that private capital was not very good at preparing the nation and its empire for the struggles that this entailed. So they became the advocates of state capital, of social reform in order to improve the quality of the working class, and the vigorous defence of empire.

They were pursuing their own class goals. Any relationship with the working class movement was always something of a tactical alliance.

That basic vision underlies the alternative planners and economic strategists of today. The modern Labour left is in good part the direct descendant of the Fabians.

**Colin Sparks**

## A new reformism

### Lucas Plan - a new trade unionism

*Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliot  
Alison & Busby, £2.90*

In times of no easy solutions any 'new' ideas can receive a welcome in the movement. In a period like the present reformist solutions can often appear revolutionary in content. Hilary Wainwright is a tireless campaigner for 'workers plans'. Over the past seven or eight years she has been involved in a variety of attempts to find a way from the present impasse by 'radical' alternatives to the crisis. She is also a fine writer capable of understand-

ing and expressing the frustrations and worries of rank and file trade unionists; what she is not is a revolutionary socialist.

Rather a harsh judgement on someone who continues to speak from the platforms of the far left? I think not, what she represents is the degree to which many former self-confessed revolutionaries (Hilary was for a number of years a member of the International Marxist Group) have drifted to the right into the mainstream of Bennite reformism. Indeed Hilary could be regarded as one of the ideologists of the 'new' reformism.

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This is shown very clearly in her new book co-authored with Dave Elliot the *Lucas Plan... a New Trade Unionism in the Making?*. The book itself is an extremely interesting and in places moving account of the smashing of the Lucas Shop Stewards Combine Committee by the joint efforts of the Company, the downturn, and the Labour and Tory Governments. I use the word 'smashing' deliberately because regardless of the gloss put upon the events described and the talk of a 'new trade unionism' there is no doubt that the Lucas Combine Committee was taken to the cleaners by managements and the leading militants described in the book victimised. Mike Cooley, in many ways the focal figure of the book, and a widely respected socialist militant in North London for many years, now shares a job with Hilary Wainwright working for the GLC's 'department of alternative plans'. Eight grand a year each for two and a half days a week can't be bad, but I wonder if Mike wouldn't prefer to be back at his drawing board at Lucas, particularly since one of the main achievements of the GLC Unit this year has been to persuade the stewards at Associated Automation in North London to form a workers co-operative rather than to fight for their jobs.

Consider the illusions being peddled by Wainwright and Co. that it will be possible given a sympathetic government (preferably of course led by Tony Benn and Eric Heffer) for workers to gradually assume control of their workplaces through the medium of 'alternative plans'.

The plot would run roughly as follows. A Labour Government of the 'left' would be elected and they would place at the hands of the working class the means of coercing the capitalist class into implementing workers planning.

Thus on page 260:

'The importance of political sup-

port from within the elected institutions of the present political system rests on two features of Government in Britain - and parliamentary democracies in other modern capitalist societies. Firstly, the government's role in the economy; the government controls either directly or indirectly much of the finance which enables capitalist industry to flourish but which could be used to support moves towards workers self-management; Secondly, the elected government has a legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of people, *over and above any economic institution or interest...* A supportive government then is a potentially powerful ally for workers in industry with proposals for organising their work place to meet social needs. This is why the initial support of the ministers of the Dpt. of Industry was so important in helping the Lucas Plan to get off the ground... The reverse of this dependence of the Lucas workers Plan on government support for its implementation is that the hostility which the Combine later faced from the Labour Government when the Plan was ready nearly destroyed the Combine, and with it the alternative Plan.'

This from a writer who just three or four years ago was a contributor to the major 'left' alternative of the late seventies 'Beyond the Fragments'. The naivety is frightening. Does Wainwright really believe that Labour Governments are in the business of challenging capitalism's power at the point of production? The answer is unfortunately a capital YES! Listen to the following gems of 'socialist' theory.

'What is needed then is an alliance between a socialist government and those work place and locally based organisations which could create this counter power to the extra-

parliamentary strength of capital. In the short term this applies to socialist controlled local and county councils. In Sheffield, Greater London and west Midlands, Left Labour Councillors have taken the initiative to create such alliances'.

In the latest edition of 'Capital and Class' Wainwright compares the GLC with the Paris Commune... 'Nuff said.

If they were only writing (or rather re-writing) reformist theory I don't suppose much damage would be done, after all why read Wainwright when Kautsky and Robert Owen are still in print. What is dangerous about these people is their pretensions to act as political advisors to groups of workers who are finding themselves in struggle over redundancy.

The story of the Lucas Combine is spelt out in admirable detail, and I would recommend our comrades to read it. All the lessons of the downturn and the seventies are implicit in this book. The story of the late seventies is there and let me say also as an engineer I have great admiration for the work that those workers put into that struggle.

They showed great courage and imagination, what they lacked was a clear political leadership, and that was their downfall. The Lucas Plan is an excellent blueprint for transforming Swords into Ploughshares

after the Revolution. The problem we face is getting ourselves to the point where the revolution is on the agenda. In order to get to this happy state we need to fight to increase workers' self-confidence in themselves and their organisations.

This means destroying any illusions they may have in Parliament and its ability to legislate 'socialism' from above. It means an implacable struggle against all forms of Utopianism. There never was the least chance that the Lucas management would accept the Workers Plan, there never was the least chance that the Labour Govt. would do anything other than compromise with Capital. For the Gerald Kaufmans of this world 'workers power' isn't even in their vocabulary.

At the beginning of this article I said that reformist solutions can often appear to be revolutionary and revolutionaries can even be made to appear conservative. The truth is, comrades, we can offer no easy routes to socialism, nor should we ever try to confuse the working class into pretending there are... workers plans are a nice idea, our society shits on nice ideas, Lucas Aerospace and the Labour Government shat on the Lucas Plan. Wainwright and Elliot admit this, their trouble is that they don't really understand it.

Jim Scott

## Toad in a hole

### Wildwood

Jan Needle

Coronet, £1.25.

Very few agricultural rebellions have had the impact and success, albeit temporary, of the Wildwood insurrection in 1907.

In a labour force noted if anything for its docility, the raising

of an armed militia and the storming and seizing of a manor house, renamed 'Brotherhood Hall', to be used for and by the community as a whole. The Insurrection was brought on by the effects of a severe winter, mass unemployment, and the callous, despotic behaviour of the local land-owning gentry. Its end came only when one of its leaders defected and led the insurrectionists into a trap.

The underlying causes of its demise, its conception of liberation coming from a small military elite detached from the community as a whole and the crying need for a revolutionary party based in the working class, are never really discussed in the book. But at least two of the participants learnt those lessons, subsequently going to the midlands to organise in industry, and incidentally starting a small brewery to fund their work.

Without a doubt those two, Boddington Stoot and Dorothy Ferret, formed the political backbone of the storming of 'Toad Hall', removing the despotic Toad and his cronies, Ratty, Mole and Badger from the backs of the Wildwooders for many months.

And if you have never read Jan Needle's re-write of *Wind in the Willows* from the point of view of the Ferrets, Stoots and Weasles you really should. **Martin Adams**



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# Getting all wired up

Cabling Britain for television reception is part of the race to keep ahead in the new technology. **Marta Wohrle** shows that it is unlikely to benefit the rest of us.

The Thatcher Government has given the green light for the cabling of Britain. Cable television is being introduced while there is a deliberate running down of public services. With a government pledged to push basic services into the private sector, the construction of cable network must be wholly financed by private companies. And that means that while the consumer will ultimately pay for the cable service, the sort of goods it produces will almost entirely be dictated by profit.

A fully fledged cable television system in Britain would mean that towns the size of Nottingham would have around 30 separate cable networks serving specific geographical areas and communities, as well as the four existing broadcast networks. London could expect to have anything up to 100 different channels. Those with the something to gain from this 'media revolution', from the government to advertisers to a bunch of liberal vegetarians calling themselves Community Communication (ComCom), have welcomed it with starry-eyed euphoria.

They argue that there will be more choice, that there will be more opportunity for educational programmes, that an abundance of local channels will be available for community programming and the airing of disparate political voices, and that house and car buying and even the weekly groceries can be done in the comfort of the living room. The few arguments against cable merely grumble about hours of untrammelled pornography, the threatened moral well-being of the public and declining standards of taste.

## Nothing new

Cable is clearly not going to be innovative. Whole channels will be given over to old movies or sitcoms, sport, Blankety-Blank rip-offs, even advertising. If it goes on cable it will have to be proven safe. The cost margins that will face operators will not have them scattering seed on good but unproven ideas. The large and profitable companies that produce the independent television we watch now will be producing the same cultural goods. And there are many more private sector entrepreneurs with a greedy eye on cable. Wall Street and the city are extremely interested in the cable business. In America it has already been proved that big business is willing to take the gamble and invest the necessarily huge amounts of capital.

And cable will be expensive. The cost of wiring Britain's more urban half will be around £5 million. It will cost around £300 for a local link into each home. Those who will pay the initial costs will be the advertisers. The financial growth projected for cable television will mean cable conglomerates, and the advertising companies behind them, will be some of the most powerful companies in the country – as powerful as the American car industry was in the 1950s and 1960s. The distinction between programmes and commercials will break down. While the so-called local and community services will be carrying cultural goods made by multinationals rather than by local working people.

Cable will only open up the way for minority broadcasting if the minority is large, vocal and rich. Even if operators were to allocate free channel space (out of generosity or because they are forced to by law) programming will still cost about £15 to 20,000 an hour. If subscriptions and advertising won't pay that leaves public or private sponsorship – and the public purse is certainly not forthcoming.

## Pay for TV

Cable's foot in the door of Mr and Mrs Average's home is likely to be 'pay TV'. Access to cultural goods will be linked to being able to afford it. Output for the educationally deprived (the great potential for broadcast education) is not likely to flourish in a medium which the people they are aimed at can't afford or can't receive it because they are too thin on the ground.

The new medium will mean a whole host of new services, but they will be of the Tele-shopping, -dating and -voting variety. And the number of jobs to be created out of this new off-shoot of information technology will be minimal. The Greater London Council calculates that cable television will destroy more jobs than it creates. An estimated 8,500 jobs that would appear in TV production would be swamped by the 15,000 jobs lost due to American imports and viewers turning away from the BBC and ITV. With the number of independent companies, largely with non-unionised labour, the strong position of the ACTT, maintained by a monopoly of a highly skilled white-collar sector, will be seriously undermined.

Areas in which jobs might go would include offices and the postal networks, because cable TV networks, used as computer networks, would speed the advance of office automation and electronic mail. Interactive television, (essentially being able to talk back to the telly), is part of the 'information revolution'. It has its uses, for example in learning a foreign language, but will be dominated by things like the already prepared *Daily Mirror* (MirrorVision) service with Marge Proops giving advice.

But what of the consumer? The reality is

that there will be as many TV sets in a home as there are people living in it. The consumer electronics industry is currently trying to beat the recession by selling second and even third sets into British homes. The Japanese are trying to sell us the idea of higher definition television and wide screens the size of the living room wall.

Cable and video are only other ways of watching television and they suffer the same limits as domestic television and the way it centralises information. TV orders the world into producers and consumers, politicians and people, those that are vocal and those that are not. Electronic interactive television is not a substitute for participation in collective discussions of the issues of the day. The way we watch TV will become more fragmented and alienated. With hundreds of channels to choose from, the likelihood of watching and discussing the same programmes as your workmates (or even members of the same household) becomes even more remote.

## It has possibilities

Though cable television looks like becoming another alienating tool in the hands of capitalists, it doesn't have to be so. It has possibilities far beyond the immediate tenets envisaged by the Hunt report. A common carrier system, not unlike the ordinary telephone, could help by allowing people to communicate through the cable network, providing a very useful visual link. And wresting the control from the tiny handful of profit-orientated companies would immediately release a vast and powerful communications network to the people.

Public ownership of the means of production and a genuine diversification of interests will create a situation in which the full potential of cable could be realised. Cable could increase the number and types of cultural goods and allow access to different sorts of experience that could be discussed and shared. But as it stands, cable will widen the inequalities of access to technology and culture and simply widen the information gap. □

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## Abolish private property

'If you socialists had your way, no-one would have their own house, everyone would have to use the washeteria, and holidays would be a week at a state-run holiday home at Margate...'

When we talk about the abolition of private property as the basis for socialism, what often comes back is the reply that no-one would be able to own things of their own, like a colour telly or a washing machine.

In many ordinary people's minds, especially under the influence of Thatcherism, the right of the capitalist to profit is the same as the right of the council tenant to own his or her own home. By the same token, 'socialism' becomes the opposite. Abolishing private property would therefore seem to include abolishing the right to one's own house.

### A social power

All this is based on a fallacy – a long-standing one (Marx deals with it in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848), but a fallacy nonetheless. When Marxists talk about the abolition of private property they mean the abolition of private property as a *social power* over other people.

For instance, ownership of a house as somewhere to live in is in reality no different from ownership of the food you eat in order to live. Clearly, there is no question of abolishing that, though the wide inequalities of distribution would have to be overcome. But the person who owns ten properties, only one of which he lives in while using the nine others to charge rent, is in a different position. Not necessarily a capitalist in the technical sense, of course; but certainly someone whose ownership of private property is a social power.

What Marxists have rather more in mind

is private property as the manifestation of the antagonism between capital and labour. Marx puts it thus in *The Communist Manifesto*: 'Does wage-labour create any property for the labourer? Not a bit. It creates capital, i.e. that kind of property which exploits wage-labour, and which cannot increase except upon condition of begetting a new supply of wage-labour for fresh exploitation.'

The point Marx is making is that workers don't create *directly* for themselves – a woman working in a textile factory couldn't live on the clothes she makes. Nor could she exchange them for tins of meat produced in another factory. Workers are *excluded* from ownership or control of the products they themselves create. They neither possess the factories nor the machines and tools needed to make things. In that sense they are *property*.

The consequence of their propertylessness is that they have no option but to sell themselves day in, day out to a boss in exchange for a wage. They have no independent means of their own out of which they can feed and shelter themselves. They have no right to appropriate to themselves what they produce and exchange it with what others have produced.

The boss, on the other hand, by virtue of his ownership, duly sanctified by the law, has exactly that right. He can turn his profits either into fresh capital or into conspicuous consumption.

For wages return to the workers only *part* of the value of what they have produced – enough, generally speaking, to maintain their existence and that of the next generation. This includes not only the basics – food, clothing, for example – but the kind of personal possessions that socialists are sometimes accused of wanting to do away with; cars, washing machines, TVs, etc.

The fact that the *extent* of such personal

possession has startlingly altered since Marx's time proves not that capitalism has changed its spots, but that mature capitalism requires a different kind of workforce from the one it required a hundred and fifty years ago. A washing machine, because it cuts the amount of time required for necessary household drudgery, signifies the possibility of greater, rather than less, exploitation of the workforce.

(That, of course, is not an argument for the abolition of the washing machine. But the advent of this and other obvious benefits does not alter the essential point – that workers are propertyless because by definition excluded from ownership and control of the means of production.)

Much the larger part of the value of what workers produce is pocketed by the capitalist, who adds it to his total amount of private property, alongside 'his' factory, 'his' machines and 'his' investments. The wage form conceals this essential antagonism and confuses what is meant by 'private property'.

The fact that the individual capitalist has been replaced in many instances by a salaried managing director or state bureaucrat proves not that 'private property' has been slowly whittled away since Marx's day, but that the form of the antagonism between labour and capital has changed. Much property may now be 'collective' or 'public' – but workers are still excluded from control over it in exactly the same way as they were over their bosses' property in the nineteenth century.

### Real enjoyment

The basic relationship, no matter how many TVs or how few individual bosses there are, is unaltered, and will only alter when 'private property' has been abolished; when, in other words, capital ceases to exert an antagonistic social power over the very people who produce it.

At that point, of course, real enjoyment of personal possessions can begin. No doubt, many kinds of communal forms of life will be adopted as a solution to the narrowness of private existence. But there is no reason to believe that collective control over production will prevent people from having a telly in every room (and a video as well), if that is what they want.

In Marx's words:

'We by no means intend to abolish this personal appropriation of the products of labour, an appropriation that is made for the maintenance and reproduction of human life, and that leaves no surplus wherewith to command the labour of others. All that we want to do away with, is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it.'

'In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour (ie capital—GJ). In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer.'

Gareth Jenkins