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We have the power
THE MINERS STRIKE

Strategy for defeat

When the strike at Thomas Scotts bakery in Liverpool went down to defeat at the end of February, it signalled not merely the defeat of the union organisation in the factory. It illustrated all the failings of the Broad Left strategy in the trade union movement.

Alan Gibbons looks at the bakers' dispute and the role of one of the most prominent Broad Left leaderships.

It would be difficult to find a union with better left wing credentials than the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU). After the bitterly-fought national strike in 1978, the BFAWU executive urged a 'no talks with the Tories' line. At the 1983 TUC the union led opposition to the 'new realism' of Len Murray and Co. Joe Marino, the BFAWU General Secretary is a leading Militant supporter. His statements were the centrepiece of literature advertising the Broad Left Organising Conference. BFAWU officials are paid a salary much closer to their members than most trade union officers. So why was the union defeated, and its most militant factory closed?

Breaking resistance

In December last year Allied Bakeries, part of the huge Associated British Foods, demanded radical shift changes and fifty redundancies at their Liverpool plant. Allied Bakeries are involved in a fierce discount war and breaking resistance at Scotts — one of the best organised plants in the group — was the precondition for boosting productivity and profits throughout Allied's UK operations.

The union refused to surrender and on 8 January its members staged an indefinite sit-in. Four days later Allied won a court injunction to evict the workers. The union was not prepared to meet a national attack with national action and tried to conduct resistance at a local, sectional level. It told its members to obey the court injunction and end their occupation. They lost a key base for their fight and made it possible for management to remove bakery equipment later when they decided to close the plant.

The 300 drivers and office staff were laid off while the 400 production workers set up their picket line. For the next month, the Scotts strikers fought alone. There was little information about the strike in the other Allied plants, there was no preparation for solidarity action, there were no cash levies. In other words, the Scotts strikers found themselves in the same isolated position as

members of any union, whether right or left-led.

Many strikers began to respond to arguments about spreading the strike. Scab bread was being pumped out from the Starbake bakery in South Wales and became the first target for flying pickets from Liverpool. BFAWU may have moved a resolution against the anti-union laws at the TUC but it proved as intimidated by their existence as any other union. Local union officials ordered the secondary picketing to be lifted and the strikers return to Liverpool.

They were not overruled. There was no national encouragement to step up the picketing of key bakeries in the group and build a groundswell of action towards a national all-out strike.

The executive did call a series of token, one-day stoppages covering the Yorkshire and Lancashire bakeries. The strikes were completely ineffective. Organisation in the other bakeries was generally so weak that no picket lines were mounted, leaving management to get on with production.

Localised, token strikes could not be expected to crack a determined corporation like Allied Bakeries. The name of the executive's game was negotiation not escalation and every tactic was aimed at bringing the company to the negotiating table.

On 8 February, after a month long phoney war, it was Allied who once more upped the stakes. The company would close the factory unless the workforce returned to work on its terms — a no-strike agreement and another 123 redundancies. The Bakers Union instructed its officials to withdraw from any further talks. This response was totally inadequate. The ultimatum was not from a local manager but the board of Allied Bakeries. Only indefinite, national strike action could win.

The strikers themselves pressed the executive to grasp the nettle. A mass meeting rejected the company's ultimatum and demanded a national strike. That night the executive agreed to ballot its 6,000 members

in the Allied Bakeries group for industrial action. The ballot question was vague, and did not specify what the industrial action involved. Allied managers had constantly pushed company propaganda for a month with little to counter it from the union.

The executive did arrange for Scotts speakers to address union branch meetings across the country. *Socialist Worker* argued that:

'the Scotts workers need to get round to every Allied Bakery with leaflets on the gates as well as speakers at the meetings ... It is a campaign that needs to involve every Scotts worker, not just the officials or one or two workers. Its message needs to be short and sharp, vote yes for action, start organising for an all-out strike immediately.'

This did not happen. The majority of the strikers waited passively for the union leadership to deliver the goods. Just two bakeries, Southall and Coventry voted to support Scotts. The strikers had no choice but to negotiate severance terms.

It is not that the motives of the Broad Left executive were dishonest. However, full time officials are removed from the discipline of the workplace and the reality of the day-day-class struggle. They do not lose wages during a strike. Their entire role depends upon collective bargaining and orderly industrial relations. Strikes present a disruption to the ordinary running of the union. Even the lay members of the executive tend to assume the interests and attitudes of the officials rather than those of the rank and file.

To hope to build a fighting trade union from the top down was and is a hopeless project. The existence of a left wing executive did not coincide with a general growth in confidence and militancy in the bakeries.

The Scotts defeat was the inevitable result of electing left wingers instead of building strong workplace organisation. Some Scotts activists now blame the 'selfishness' or backwardness' of workers in the other bakeries. If this is the only conclusion drawn the future is bleak. The alternative is to build a network of politically conscious militants capable of rebuilding confidence and organisation to defend conditions and deliver solidarity to workers in struggle. It is around such politics that a new shop stewards' movement must be built, *independently* of the trade union leaders—right and left.

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Test of strength

The miners' strike is an important test for the government, but it is also an important test for the working class movement. Victory for the miners could materially alter the balance of class forces in our favour. Defeat will undoubtedly make the fight for socialism that much harder.

Even before the miners' strike began, there were some signs of a slight shift in the mood of sections of the class. The size of the one-day strike in defence of trade union organisation at GCHQ was one indication.

The response of a number of engineering factories to the strike call is indicative of what underlies this shift. There is a very small upturn in the economy going on in a number of industries that has meant order books have started to look a bit thicker.

For some years now the problem facing militants who wanted to fight the Tories or even their own local management has been that it is very difficult to convince the majority of workers of the possibility of winning and thus of the value of even entering a struggle. A changed economic outlook, even one changed ever so slightly, has meant that here and there militants have managed to get a wider hearing. And in other cases it has meant that the militants who have been worn down by years of failure have been surprised by the new mood of anger.

It is important to be clear just how fragile and limited all of this is. The response to the GCHQ day of action is the only solid piece of evidence so far, and good though this was compared with previous efforts, it was still, by the scale of the problems faced, small and

patchy. It involved only a tiny minority of workers and it remained a token action. By itself, it did not signify a turning point.

It is against this background that the importance of the miners' strike has to be judged. The outcome of the dispute is of course important for the future of organisation in the mining industry, but given the delicate balance outside of the industry it has wider implications too.

It is not simply that if the miners win then the mood in the whole of the class will be shifted. That is, of course, true. But just as important is the fact that in order to win, the miners will have to rely on the solidarity action of other groups of workers. They will actually be testing the fragile evidence of renewed confidence every time they call for support. If the miners win they will have shown that the response to GCHQ was no flash in the pan but was something that can be developed and built upon.

Conversely, of course, defeat will not simply mean a setback in terms of a renewal of the mood of gloom and pessimism which has marked the last few years. Worse than that, the renewed confidence built out of the tiny victory around the day of action will have been tested under sterner conditions and found wanting.

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WEEK ONE



The miners' strike itself is not the product of any such shift in confidence. Rather it bears the marks of a quite different response to the crisis: retreat and defeat.

The background to the strike is not only the long overtime ban called in support of the annual wage claim but also several years of a successful management offensive on pit closures. The NCB strategy of closing the less profitable pits and concentrating production in a few large, modern pits with heavy capital investment and high productivity has been very successful so far. Pit after pit has closed. The South Wales miners were able to win some concessions back in 1981, but these have been steadily eroded since and the pattern over the last couple of years has been one of virtually unresisted closures.

MacGregor managed to push through massive redundancies in the steel industry virtually without resistance. Part of the reason for this was undoubtedly the fact that the steel workers fought a long and bitter battle against the government in 1980 and lost. Although MacGregor himself was not appointed until after the strike he is certainly sharp enough to realise the link between a smashed strike and the inability of workers to resist his plans.

Resistance

At the beginning of March things must have looked pretty good to the NCB. They knew that the overtime ban had been costing miners a lot of cash and they knew that it was not at all popular in certain areas and amongst certain groups of workers like the winders. The worst of the winter was over and coal stocks were still very high. But they also knew that the ban had stuck, there were a lot of local disputes like the ones in South Yorkshire, and there was still resistance from the NUM.

Their reasoning probably ran like this: now is the time to go on the offensive. Let us close the first pit in Yorkshire for 'economic' reasons. Either it will go through with the minimum opposition because the overtime ban has taken the edge off resistance, in which case we will have set an important precedent, or there will be resistance in Yorkshire. However, because of the divisions inside the union any resistance will be isolated, we can contain it and crush the centre of organised opposition to our overall plans.

It must have looked a good plan. It was, after all, based on a fairly accurate reading of the divisions in the NUM. As we show in a later article, the unity built up in the NUM around the battles of the early 1970s has been severely damaged by the impact of Tony Benn's productivity scheme which shifted the focus for pay away from national negotiations towards pit by pit discussions over bonuses.



While Yorkshire miners struck and organised flying pickets Scargill was fighting the NCB in the High Court over the pension fund

And it was also based on the educated guess that if there was resistance in Yorkshire the area leadership would talk about the need to involve the rest of the union but would not take any steps which might upset the local bureaucrats in other areas.

The plan was a good one, but it foundered on the unexpected resistance of the rank and file in some of the Doncaster pits. As Duncan Blackie shows later in this issue, the disputes around the overtime ban had produced a layer of younger militants who were ready to act independently of the wishes of the Yorkshire NUM leadership.

The course of the first week of the strike can be explained in terms of the relationship between the NCB, the Yorkshire NUM leadership and the rank and file.

The NCB displayed no sign of retreating. On the contrary, in the first week of the strike they announced another closure, this time in the small Cumbrian coalfield. And they also attempted to make sure that the strike was confined to as few areas as possible by taking the NUM to court to try to prevent picketing of the Nottinghamshire area.

It was the rank and file in the Doncaster area that made the running, organising mass picketing of the Nottinghamshire coalfield and spreading the strike. The Yorkshire leadership originally opposed the mass pickets and the attempts to spread the strike outside their own patch, preferring not to upset their colleagues in Notts and elsewhere. It was only after they had failed to stop the rank and file, and had been overturned at a number of meetings, that they moved to take control of the strike and the picketing by shifting to the left.

A number of political lessons emerged

very clearly from the first week of the strike.

The most obvious of these was the way in which mass picketing can be successful in spreading a dispute. The experience of the last few years, for example at Warrington, has tended to suggest that the mass pickets cannot turn round the course of a strike. This time, the Yorkshire pickets were obviously successful in stopping pits.

The difference lies in the relationship of the mass picket to the course of the strike. At Warrington and in some other cases the mass pickets have been the focus for militants frustrated by the failure of a long-running dispute to make any real headway. Even where they succeed in stopping the works in question for the duration of the mass picket their effect is primarily symbolic.

The mass picketing in the miners' strike has had quite a different function. This is not a long drawn out siege of a particular entrenched workplace but part of a rolling strike movement. It has certainly had its symbolic side and there is an element of campaign within it that has been protracted over more than one picket. But the mass flying picket has been a central strategic part of the strike.

If the strike is to win, that strategy will have to be extended. Only mass picketing outside of the coalfield is going to win the dispute.

It is in this context, too, that the question of violence has to be considered. The media made much of the fact that the pickets were prepared to use force to close down other coalfields and there is no doubt they hope to use it to isolate the miners from other sections of workers.

We start from a defence of the violence used in order to win an industrial dispute.

From our point of view workers have the right to use any and every means necessary in order to win their struggles against the enemy class. Any reservations expressed are merely tactical ones within the framework of that support.

In this case, anyway, a great deal of the actual violence was not between miner and miner but between picket and police.

There was, however, an element in the picketing that was clearly aimed at other workers. This was entirely justified. In any industrial dispute there are always those who want to sabotage it by working. They have to be persuaded not to scab. If that can be done by the power of argument and appeals to solidarity, then all well and good. But if those appeals to class consciousness fail, then it is quite right to raise the stakes and prove that workers are capable of enforcing their will over that of dupes for the boss class.

Usually, this issue arises in the case of hardened scabs. There is no question that the long tradition of the movement — glorified in such songs as 'Blackleg Miner' — has been to stop such people working by any means necessary including violence.

In the case of the Notts miners, the issue was and is a little different. Although there is undoubtedly a minority of people who are determined to back the Coal Board, all the evidence is that most of the miners are prepared to be won over. In those circumstances the use of large mass pickets which show quite clearly that they are prepared to stop other miners going in to work is a regrettable necessity. We do not glory in that sort of violence, but we defend it as a necessary weapon in the class war.

Flying pickets

The actual base of the pickets has been a small number of pits in the Doncaster area. At the start of the strike several hundred, mainly young, miners from these pits formed the backbone of the flying pickets. They organised the pickets from mass meetings and were sufficiently coherent as to vote down a suggestion from the Yorkshire area executive that they should abandon their forays into Nottinghamshire.

Now while this represented a substantial number of miners from the pits in the local area, it was in no way a large proportion of the total number of Yorkshire miners involved in the strike. Alongside the activism of these pickets, then, there was the passivity of the majority of miners.

The problem is made particularly acute by the way in which the local bureaucracy responded to rank and file pressure. Like all intelligent bureaucrats, they realised that they had to move to the left in order to have any hope of taking control of the dispute. So very quickly in the first week the Yorkshire area executive moved to support the pickets.

The fact that the officials were forced to support the pickets and that faced with court action they felt obliged to defy the law, represented a victory for the rank and file, but without some sort of experienced independent leadership there was and is the danger that the bureaucracy can use its shift to the left to damp down the dispute. This is indeed

what seemed to be starting to happen towards the end of the first week, when the pickets were increasingly being organised by way of telephone calls to individuals' homes rather than at mass meetings.

Changing the mechanism of organisation is more than a technical question. For a start the individual miner now had little chance to generalise his own experience and to discuss the strategy of the strike with other miners *in the context of organising the struggle*. And, of course, if pickets are organised by telephone then the person at the other end of the phone does not have to argue with a mass meeting about whether to call this or that picket; they simply don't have to make a call. The shift represented a powerful potential weapon in the hands of the bureaucrats.

WEEK TWO



As the strike moved into its second week it began to look as though the heroic efforts of the first week had been in vain. The mass picketing had worked to a certain extent. The vote for strike action in the most heavily picketed area, Nottingham, was higher than it had been previously. But it was not high enough.

It looked as though the strike was faltering. The ruling class decided to try to put the boot in. The massive police operation was clearly based on the belief that the ballot had settled the issue of the strike spreading. It proved a serious miscalculation: although the police could harass miners trying to picket their colleagues, there was little they could do to stop the steady flow of pit closures due to miners joining the strike.

The reason was simple. It is one thing to vote against strike action, and indeed to cross a picket line once you have resolved not to strike. It is quite another to have your entire community taken over by the police, to be stopped and asked to identify yourself by coppers two or three times on your way to work, and to go into the pit through long lines of policemen. They achieved what arguments about solidarity had failed to achieve. It proved that the stakes are high and that the issue is one of miners versus the state rather than just some local dispute involving only the militants.

Once again, there is a general political lesson to be drawn from all this. There are those on the left who point to the massive police mobilisation as evidence of the strength of the state and of some sinister shift towards creeping fascism or a 'strong state'. We have to say first of all that this is not a new development. Miners, and other groups of workers, have been attacked by the police for as long as anyone can remember. The state exists to help the ruling class win its fights against the working class, and it is hardly a new development to find policemen breaking strikes.

The first thing to say is that the local police

committees and whatever, which, in the mining areas, are almost all Labour-controlled, played absolutely no role in the whole business. When the chips are down the committees are useless.

More important has been the illustration of the *limits* of police power. A massive mobilisation of police from all over the country has been needed to control a few thousand miners operating in a relatively limited and predictable area. Even as a military exercise it has only been effective in so far as it has not been challenged by the mass of miners. Stopping a few thousand is one thing, stopping tens of thousands is another. The success of the police has rested on the passivity of the majority of miners.

In this case, the political price was that the underlying class issues of the strike were brought out into the open. What might seem to be an unfortunate squabble between two groups of workers increasingly became an obvious confrontation between workers and the state.

The conclusion that we can draw from all of this is that, when faced by sharp increases in the repressive power of the state, the only effective way to respond is by increasing the number of workers involved and generalising the issue into one involving a confrontation between classes. It is that political lesson, rather than the military successes of the police operation, which has been decisive in the second week of the strike.

The steadily increasing number of closed pits due to the increasing political generalisation of the strike was the key feature of the second week, but it became increasingly obvious that the strike would not be won in the coalfields alone. The question of stopping the movement of coal outside the coalfield became more and more pressing.

And at that point, it is the mood, state of organisation and the self-confidence of the rest of the working class movement that once again becomes crucial to the question. If the strike is going to be spread, it will depend upon the efforts and energy of the left in the trade union movement winning the arguments on everything from collections to raise money for the dispute to action to enforce blacking.

BLOC

There was, at the end of week two of the miners' strike, an excellent opportunity to test the current state of the left of the movement at the Sheffield conference of the Broad Left Organising Committee.

The Broad Left Organising Committee conference in Sheffield on 24 March was both a success and a failure.

It was successful in that it brought together 2,500 delegates from many different workplaces, union branches and industries. This is the biggest number at any such rank and file gathering in recent years.

It showed that the defensive struggles of recent months have led many activists to ask how a successful fightback can be waged. Its failure was that it did not provide real answers to those questions.

The motivating force behind the confer-

ence were supporters of the Militant. But they would not claim they could have pulled those sorts of numbers by themselves. They depended upon the sort of ad-hoc alliance with other sections of the Labour left that makes up the Broad Lefts in individual unions. And so the most prominent advertised platform speakers were Tony Benn, Joan Maynard and David Blunkett of Sheffield council.

The whole Labour left is characterised by the gap between its general socialist propaganda on the one hand, and what it sees as political activity—electoral activity, whether inside the Labour Party and the unions, or for councils and parliament.

The Militant have perfected this distinction to a fine art. Some of their speakers at the conference were very good indeed at advancing the arguments about the bankruptcy of the present system and the superiority of the socialist argument. They would have played a very positive role in pulling any wavering Tories or half baked social democrats to the left.

But all they could suggest in terms of immediate action was campaigning to replace right wing trade union leaders by left wingers. They had little to say as to how to overcome the main things which enable right wing bureaucrats to maintain their hold — the passivity and persistence of right wing ideas among many rank and file workers.

Speaker after speaker insisted that 'when a lead is given, workers will fight'. But that 'lead' depended on a policy of long term electoral manoeuvring to win positions.

Some of the left Labour speakers were aware of some of the limitations of this approach. Pat Wall, the Militant candidate for Labour in Bradford at the last election, warned that 'For far too long Broad Lefts have used ourselves as an electoral machine to get this or that leader elected. But once they are elected then what they fear most is being held responsible to those who elected them. Anyone in leadership can bend easily otherwise.'

But such caution was thrown to the wind by other speakers; Alan Quinn, speaking from the platform as a member of the TGWU executive, went on at length about the glories of his own union, with its present leadership. It was, he said, playing a pivotal role in the movement'. And this had to be continued by making sure Ron Todd was elected as general secretary.

TGWU delegates who remember Todd selling out disputes like those in Halewood and Cowley last year must have wondered whether the conference organisers really took seriously warnings like Pat Wall's.

The point is not that the people who motivate BLOC want sell-outs. They are usually as horrified by them as anyone else on the left. But they see activity overwhelmingly in terms of electoral activity, and this leaves them with no choice other than to enter uncritically into the alliances with people like Todd that are necessary for electoral success.

The complete absence of any notion of what a non-electoral approach to the fightback entails came across most vividly in a speech by Terry Fields, the Militant supporting MP from Liverpool. In the course of an excellent exposition of the case for socialism, he argued back against speakers from the floor who had insisted that the most important thing was getting financial and other support for the miners' strike:

'When people say take collections for people on strike, we put an alternative, we say take the wealth of the City of London and give it to the working people.'

The most vital thing for any socialist, the link between the here and now and the socialist transformation of society, is completely missing from such an approach. There can only be one such link for any Marxist — the class struggle.

It is when they struggle that workers begin to see what society is really like and how they as a class can act collectively to change it. And so the question that has always to be

answered is that of how to build involvement in the struggle — 'What is to be done?'

If you don't pose things like this, then you find that however good your general arguments for socialism, you have no mechanism for changing society except reliance on elections. You end up speaking about the wonders of socialism and its inevitability, making great speeches about the wonders of working class struggle in the abstract — and then resorting to the dirtiest sort of electoral manoeuvres.

Such an approach is particularly appealing at a time when the working class is on the retreat. At such times the argument for socialism easily becomes divorced from the practicalities of the everyday struggle. Some socialists go as far as to begin to break their links with the working class completely, others defend a version of Marxist ideas in which electoral activity replaces the concrete struggles of workers.

This is what happened in Germany in the 1890s and the early 1900s, with the argument between the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein and the struggle-less 'Marxism' of Kautsky. This is what is happening within the Labour left today, as some follow Eric Hobsbawm in his abandonment of class politics and others see the Militant approach as some alternative.

Fighting spirit

In the process, discussion of the needs of the immediate struggle against the Tory offensive all too easily gets replaced by mere rhetoric about 'the power of our class' and 'the need for left leadership'.

Intervening in the class struggle at present means organising the minority of the class who want a real fight against the government so as to enable them to begin to lead the passive majority. Collections for the miners play an absolutely vital role in that. Such collections begin to pull together the active minority and to draw behind them some of the more passive majority. It contributes to the class struggle and begins to shift the way society is developing. It lays the ground for more active forms of solidarity — mass pickets, demonstrations, political strikes.

Of course, there is more to building the fightback at the present than just collections. There is the question of building in each large factory or locality a militant, fighting spirit among some sections of workers that can provide a lead for much larger groups of workers.

There is the question of reclaiming shop steward organisation from the pressures that have often led to bureaucratisation in recent years. There is the question of how to win mass picketing controlled by rank and file strike committees against the pressure of the trade union bureaucracy to retreat before the Tory laws.

This was related to another weakness of the conference. It contained relatively little representation from some key sections of the class, those in industries like engineering and motors. These were heavily involved on the day of strike action over the union ban in GCHQ, and there are some signs of a revival of shopfloor struggle in these sections after



Police and pickets—a confrontation between workers and the state

years of retreat.

But the nature of union organisation and of the bargaining structures in these industries mean that you cannot appeal to activists in them simply by talking about national, electoral issues.

The left has only been able to advance in the unions organising these industries when it has first established itself a base through sectional struggle in particular factories.

Members of the Socialist Workers Party who were called to speak at the conference put these arguments as well as possible, given the brief time allowed to individual speakers. We got 400 delegates to a lunchtime meeting on the miners' strike. And several of the Labour left speakers in the conference denounced us by name.

But it would be wrong to claim that we easily won the argument with the mass of the delegates. About 1,500 of the delegates were clearly not committed to any organisation. They would applaud some points made by SWP speakers, but would applaud even more energetically many of the speeches of the Labour left.

The task ahead

At the time of writing it is impossible to predict with any certainty even the events of the next few weeks, let alone the overall outcome of the miners' struggle. There is no doubt that picketing, particularly of rail workers, is starting to prove effective and might have some impact in the near future. On the other hand, a section of the NUM bureaucracy itself has come out openly in favour of miners crossing picket lines. The future of the dispute is obviously finely balanced.

We can, however, draw some overall lessons out of the events of the last few weeks.

The first few weeks of the miners' strike have shown us how a war of position, which is what the overtime ban was *par excellence*, can turn very quickly into a war of manoeuvre. The flying pickets, the successes and the reverses they experienced, and the sharp shifts in the tactical situation that followed from that were all examples of such a new phase.

This potential for sharp shifts in the character of the struggle is unlikely to be confined just to the miners' strike. Although there is as yet no firm evidence that the overall character of the struggle has changed, the possibility of such sharp flare-ups against a background of trench warfare is clearly a real one.

This has consequences for how socialists operate in the present period. We have in the past stressed that in a period when the working class is on the retreat it is important to start off from a realistic assessment of the situation and to seek to win to socialist ideas the small number of militants who are pre-

pared to fight even in the difficult climate. Such a task inevitably involves a very high level of political sophistication on the part of socialists.

On the central question of whether the main stress had to be electoral, they were closer to the Labour left. This is to be expected, given the character of the class struggle at the moment. There has been the beginnings of a change of mood among workers in recent months, and this will probably be speeded up by the miners' strike. But workers still have little experience of successful struggle and still do not have faith that they can win victories by relying on the strength of their class. Under such circumstances, the idea that there is a short cut by relying on the Labour Party or by manoeuvring to change union national leaderships will have a strong appeal.

Revolutionary socialists have to learn to argue in a non-sectarian way with people who believe this, while showing in practice what the real alternative is — rebuilding the strength of shopfloor organisation through the struggles of particular sections of workers and re-establishing solidarity through campaigning for support in the workplaces for whichever group is at the forefront of the struggle.



That assessment remains true, but there is a danger that it sounds rather one sided. It has never been the case that this activity of winning the minority takes place in a vacuum. It has always been important to relate to the actual class struggle, and that invariably involves talking to large numbers of workers who while involved in a particular struggle are not yet ready to generalise their political ideas to overall opposition to the system.

Socialists face the difficult task of both relating to the real needs of the struggle as perceived by large numbers of workers and of winning towards a clearer socialist commitment those fewer militants who begin to see the need for a more general opposition to capitalism. It must be stressed very firmly that the need is to do *both*.

In part this problem is another aspect of the famous distinction between agitation and propaganda. As Lenin points out in *What is to be done?* the distinction is one between a large number of ideas directed at a small audience (propaganda) and a few ideas directed at a large number of people (agitation).

For us today, though, the problem is not one of laying down an abstract rule for the balance between the two: that is obviously something that will change over time as the balance of class struggle changes. Rather socialists have to be careful that we do not adopt a completely one-sided approach and

engage in one activity at the expense of the other.

The miners' strike is a good test of the ability of socialists to adopt that tactical flexibility. It has presented the opportunity to speak to a much wider audience than has been the norm over the last few years and it is the duty of serious socialists to grasp the moment with both hands.

That is something which it is easy to agree with in the abstract but which can be quite difficult to put into practice in a concrete situation. For some people it goes against the ingrained habit of the last few years to suddenly find that you are not a lone and isolated voice crying in the wilderness. The temptation is to think that you must have said the wrong thing since people who are usually indifferent, cynical or hostile are now applauding your ideas.

It is vital that socialists seize the opportunity they are now presented with and learn to speak in the terms of agitation to large numbers of workers. It is highly unlikely that we will have any significant effect on the outcome of the miners' strike: there are too few socialists around for that. But we can gain respect for our ideas, win a new audience and shift, however marginally, the emerging generation of militants who are cutting their teeth around this strike, both in the pits and in solidarity, towards socialist ideas.

Whatever the outcome of the miners' strike, that task is an important one. It is most unlikely that, if the miners win, then the struggle will continue on an uninterrupted upward path to the seizure of power by the working class. And it is most unlikely that if the miners are defeated then that will mean that there are no more strikes anywhere for the next few years.

Of course, the outcome matters. If the miners win the general pattern will be one of improvement; if they lose the pattern will be one of decline.

New confidence

Consider where we are starting from. This strike is much more difficult than that of 1972: then there were mass pickets but the miners were united and determined. This time the mass pickets have had to work very hard even to close down some pits. And we have to be clear that in 1972 there were defeats for the working class as well as victories. Although the victory of dockers over the industrial relations act gave a new confidence to every militant, it was immediately followed by a building workers' strike which, although hard fought and militant, was in fact defeated.

The probability is that this time round there will be ebbs and flows, perhaps of an even sharper nature. Therefore the task will continue to be one of maintaining a clear political position which will enable one to survive the worst aspects of any ebb in struggle while retaining sufficient tactical flexibility to intervene on a mass scale when the opportunities arise.

If those lessons are learnt now, then the chances of building a bigger socialist current capable of materially affecting events will be made that much easier.

Striking from below

The mass picketing by South Yorkshire miners did not come from nowhere. Duncan Blackie reports on the political arguments that produced mass action.

The starting point of the militancy in South Yorkshire was the overtime ban. As a tactic for winning the wage claim it was a total disaster. It led to passivity for the militants. Every miner was losing money, and some were losing much more than others. At a time when the NCB wanted to cut output, Scargill was boasting that the ban was effective and costing the NCB money. The seven month coal stocks were hardly affected at all.

But the ban did lead to a large number of niggling little local problems. A rash of strikes broke out all over South Yorkshire when managers and deputies went in to do extra maintenance work. The ban also meant lay-offs when essential safety work had not been done. These too, often provoked small local strikes in response.

On 5 March Yorkshire Main colliery was threatened with closure after pickets refused to allow managers to do safety work to deal with a gas build-up. The same day, at Goldthorpe near Doncaster, pickets were threatened with disciplinary action after allegedly venting their anger on management cars.

At Manners Main 1,400 miners were out over meal breaks and the dispute looked like spreading to several other local pits.

Miners at the Frickless/South Elmsall Colliery walked out when energy secretary Giles Shaw visited the pit on 29 February.

Small disputes

Thus there took place a number of small disputes, with not much direction or co-ordination overall. But it did mean that a significant number of rank and file miners were involved in fights with the NCB.

The local NUM officials spent the few weeks before the strike dashing from pit to pit arguing with miners to allow management into the pits. In one case they had to persuade miners to allow management out. When pickets were accused of violence, Yorkshire president Jack Taylor said: 'We do not condone violence at all. We are in a very serious situation and we expect our members to act in an orderly fashion and in a disciplined way.'

Despite the officials, 5 March saw 23,500 Yorkshire miners away from work, 9,000 of them on strike. Seven of the 15 South Yorkshire pits had responded to the strike call over the meals' dispute at Manners Main.

On 2 March the NCB announced that they wanted to close two Yorkshire pits: Bullcliffe Wood and Cortonwood. These were the first threats of closure of Yorkshire pits on

economic grounds since the current wave of NCB attacks began. Unlike South Wales and Scotland, Yorkshire miners do not have a long experience of seeing battle after battle against closure fizzle out. They were ready to fight.

On Monday 5 March a meeting of the Yorkshire NUM executive took place. It was originally called over the meals dispute but the closure question soon dominated proceedings. A lobby of 400 miners pushed for a county-wide strike starting the following Friday night. By 6 March, the whole of the South Yorkshire area was closed down. By Friday 21 Yorkshire pits were out on unofficial strike. Taylor was still running around trying to stitch up a deal.

The national executive meeting in Sheffield on 8 March and lobbied by 500 miners from Yorkshire and Scotland, had little alternative but to try to keep up with events. Scargill and McGahey were both very careful to avoid calling for spreading the strike, and even when Yorkshire was all out Taylor was pleading with miners not to go out and picket in other areas. 'Let them make their own arrangements,' he said.

His own attitude towards the strike was revealed when a picket at South Kirby was hit by a director's car:

'At a time when we are exercising such

restraint, we deplore both this unnecessary violence and the impossible attitude of the board towards our members and the future of our pits.'

Fortunately, the strike was not in his hands. The real motor of the dispute was now the rank and file militants who were pushing the strike forward against the wishes of both the Yorkshire and the national executive.

On the night of Sunday 11 March there was a mass meeting of 1,000 miners at Armthorpe colliery near Doncaster. The question was what to do next. A rank and file miner, and SWP member, spoke for spreading the strike.

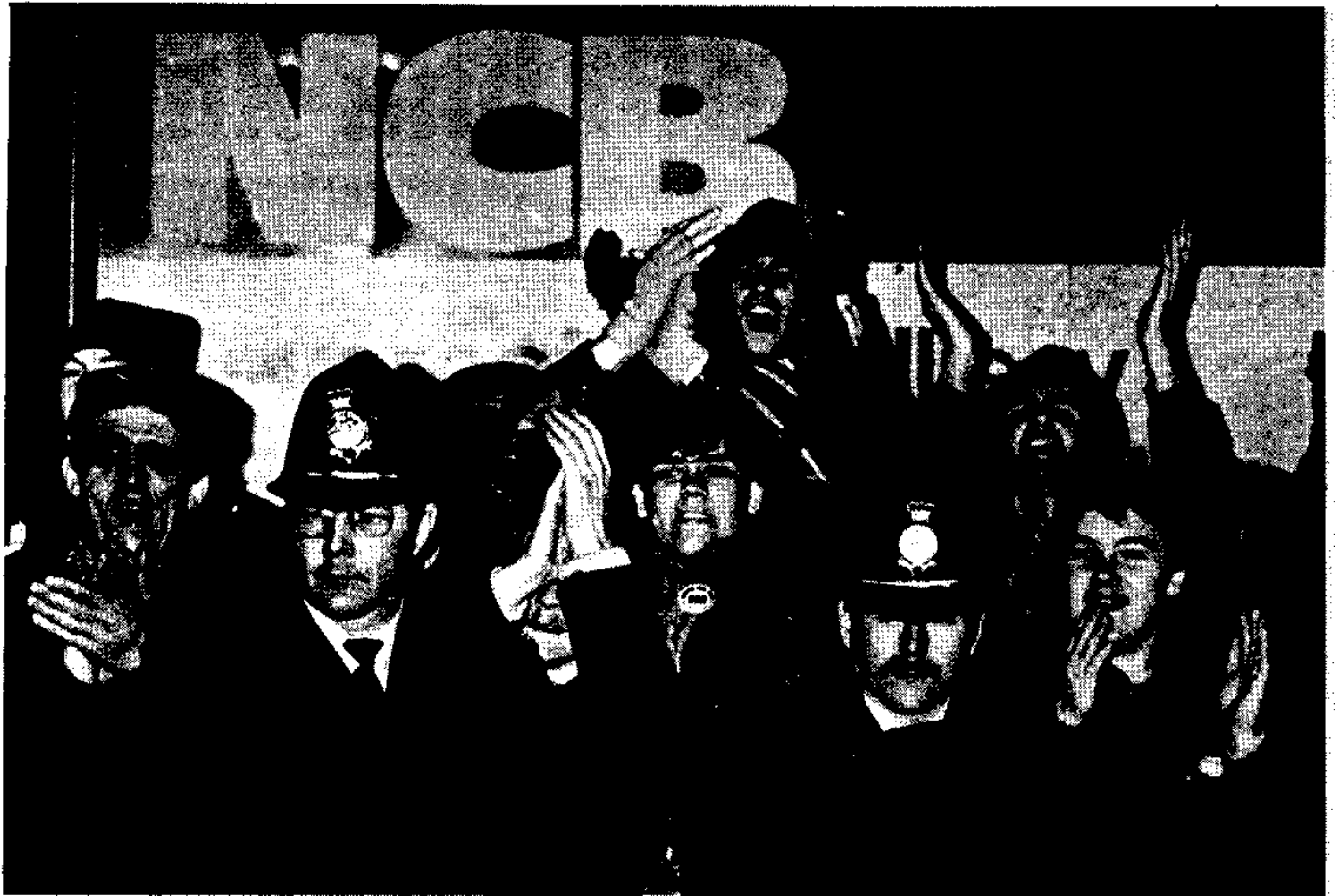
He argued about what the Tories were up to at GCHQ and the strength of response which the day of action had shown could be mobilised. He talked about the seriousness of the situation and about the need to fight both the closures and the anti-union laws that would be used to cripple any fight back.

With 1,000 miners already out on strike, he argued, it was stupid not to draw these people into further activity by sending out flying pickets to Nottinghamshire and other areas. That was the most important argument: the strike would only be spread by rank and file miners going out and arguing for solidarity action. The executive would simply postpone matters and wait for a national ballot to take the heat out of the situation. That would only benefit the right wing.

When the vote came, only eight miners were opposed to flying pickets. The meeting then immediately moved to organise on their



A policeman gives 'advice' to some Yorkshire miners



Yorkshire pickets cheer and police look on as miners at Beavercoats, Notts, refuse to cross the picket line

decision. Names were taken of those willing to go out the next day. On the Monday morning the Harworth pits was closed by pickets from Armthorpe.

That very same day, the Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire executives did a deal to try to stop the flying pickets. Ray Chadburn, the Nottinghamshire president, claimed to have instructed his members not to cross picket lines, but the officials at Harworth were encouraging miners to do just that.

The Yorkshire side of the bargain was to send area vice-president Sammy Thompson to a special meeting at Armthorpe to try to stop the pickets going out.

Thompson, like so many others in the NUM bureaucracy, had once been a very good militant. It was he who had organised the flying pickets in the Rescue Brigade dispute in the 1970s. But away from the rank and file and sitting in a cosy office he started to change. Now he spent most of his time with managers and other union officials and his response was to try to contain any action as quickly as possible.

At the meeting, around 300 miners from various pits, including Armthorpe, Hatfield and Yorkshire Main, heard Thompson argue for calling off the pickets. He got a hostile response and the meeting voted to continue picketing. The very next morning a mass picket at Beavercoats in North Nottinghamshire closed the pit down. The militants had been able to beat the bureaucracy not just with resolutions but in action.

By the afternoon of that Tuesday the Yorkshire executive had met and changed their line to one of endorsing the picketing.

It has to be strongly emphasised that the pickets were the dynamic of the strike. In some disputes picketing is one facet of the strike, a useful or even essential activity for maintaining the struggle, but not the driving force of the thing. In the case of the mines, the picketing was so bound up with the progress of the strike that as soon as it stopped and the more active strikers started to take it easy, the bureaucracy regained control and the management could take the offensive.

Building for the flying pickets meant arguing from the basics. Since 1974 80,000 miners, nearly half the total, have joined the industry and have never been through a national dispute before, let alone learnt in practice about the nature of picketing.

Flying pickets

The most basic argument of all took South Wales as its focus. Yorkshire militants argued that the history of resistance in South Wales was an admirable one, but that the tactics had not been too effective. The Welsh miners had relied too heavily on appealing to the union leaders for support, and had not got it. The Yorkshire militants argued that the only way to make sure of support was to go out and win it by picketing.

The success of the flying pickets, who by Thursday had succeeded in closing the whole of the Notts coalfield, was based on the enthusiasm of the younger miners and the experience of the older militants. It was these older militants who won the arguments for the mass picket, but once the decision was made, it was the younger militants who

played the decisive organising role.

Again on the picket line itself the elements of enthusiasm and experience were combined. At times in the North Notts coalfield it was possible for the younger miner to get trapped into thinking every Notts miner was a died-in-the-wool scab who needed the same sort of treatment as a manager. The more experienced miners were able to take up the arguments with the Notts men.

The closure of the Nottinghamshire pits was not achieved just by determined picketing but by argument as well. That was proved by the fact that once the Yorkshire miners had closed a place down they were able to move on and leave the picketing to local miners won over to the need to spread the strike.

The closure of the Notts pits depended partly upon solidarity and the tradition of respect for a picket line and partly because of the convincing argument that if fellow miners would not respect a miner's picket line it would be that much harder to argue with workers at power stations and coal depots about the need for solidarity.

The key to turning the dispute from a purely local one into something of national importance lay in a local leadership emerging on the Monday morning that could see that the situation was ripe and initiate the pickets. It was militants at Armthorpe who provided that edge and pulled a large number of pits behind them.

This was not an accident. Armthorpe has a long tradition of solidarity. Grunwicks, the Anti-Nazi League and numerous other campaigns. This is a record shared by Hatfield

and one or two other collieries in the Doncaster area. When one of these pits moves there is a well-established tendency for the others to follow very quickly, so the strike was built from a firm local base.

The pickets organised themselves very well, using telephones and CB radios to move from pit to pit as the situation demanded. Particularly in the early stages the police were totally outmanoeuvred.

At the area level things were less impressive. For example, the Yorkshire area produced no literature or leaflets for the pickets to use. SWP members who turned up at the picket lines with party leaflets had the pleasant experience of miners taking over handing out the only material available that put the arguments for strike action.

In fact, the whole development of the strike was one that produced a very rapid political generalisation. Not only were large numbers of miners actively involved in the strike but the police tactics and the NCB use of the courts helped to drive home the lessons. Any socialist at Thursby colliery on the morning of the first Thursday of mass picketing would have seen a pleasant sight: a *Sun* reporter was thrown over a fence by miners. Some of those critics of the press were *Sun* readers themselves a few days before.

In some cases involvement in the strike has been very impressive. For example at Armthorpe there was a core of around 200 people in the first week who were regularly

involved in picketing. Unfortunately, that was not repeated throughout the coalfield. In many pits the strike has meant that miners simply sat at home and listened to the news.

The difficulty in bringing out the Notts coalfield has been an important element both in the strike itself and even more in the ruling class propaganda against the strike, so it is worth looking at the situation more closely.

Nottinghamshire is historically a less militant area and the vote of 26.5 per cent for strike action was considerably better than previous results in the coalfield. Their reluctance to fight is partly explained by the fact that the field is productive and many of the miners, some of whom have been relocated from other wrecked areas, feel very confident in their own future. It is also the case that they have been getting more bonus payments than workers in other coalfields.

In fact, in the first week, the attitude of most Notts miners to the pickets was very far from shameless scabbing. Most wanted to work, it is true, but when it came to crossing a picket line most were prepared to respect union traditions. The real violence was caused by the police. Where they did manage to smash through a picket line there were usually only a dozen or so deputies prepared to follow them in.

Police violence sometimes assisted the work of the pickets. At Ollerton colliery a picket was killed and the pit stopped. The Yorkshire pickets moved on to Thursby.

About 200 pickets massed at the gate and while they and the Notts miners turning up for work observed two minutes silence for their fallen brother, the police launched a charge on the pickets. Two Yorkshire miners were hospitalised, but the Notts miners were so sickened by the police tactics that only a handful of deputies were prepared to follow the police into the colliery.

Thursby had voted just four days earlier not to strike, by 800 votes to 17. After the picket and the police attack the colliery closed down and it was kept closed by local miners mounting a picket.

The whole of the first week of the strike was an object lesson in the politics of rank and file. It was not a case of the rank and file having to organise independently because the officials are all right-wing scumbags. The Yorkshire leadership of the NUM is made up of people who are on the left of the trade union bureaucracy and have good records of militancy behind them. Scargill and Taylor, for example, are the men who organised the flying pickets in 1972.

Even before the strike Scargill was the major bogeyman of the bourgeois press but there has been a growing gap between his rhetoric and what has actually happened on the ground. Scargill and Taylor have been among the most effective proponents of the broad left strategy in the unions. They have seen their job as winning things for the members and only calling on the rank and file to act as an occasional stage army. In fact, in this dispute, the rank and file have had to bypass the machine in order to get anything done at all.

Layer of militants

This is not a question of personal failings on the part of Scargill or Taylor. A whole layer of the militants who came to prominence in the battles of 1972 have moved into the comfort of a union office. Only a few of the people who learned their politics in those mass struggles have remained in the rank and file. This time round, however, the struggle has thrown up another layer of young militants.

It is this layer that shows what is meant by rebuilding a network of workplace militants. This is not an abstract proposition for the distant future. In the coalfields the embryo of such an organisation already exists.

Whatever the final outcome, the first week of the miners' strike showed us a taste of things to come. The upturn of the 1980s will not be the same as the early 1970s. Disputes will be much more bitter and much more nasty. In comparison with the 1972 strike, 1984 is very weak, with sharp divisions inside the mining workforce very obvious today. In 1972 the mass picketing was directed outside of the NUM; this time it is part of an attempt to forge unity.

Future battles will be fought with the legacy of the downturn to contend with. The lack of confidence and sharp unevenness in the class will not disappear overnight. The police have wasted little time in raising the stakes and this will occur more and more frequently as the ruling class is forced to take workers head on. The miners' strike gives us a picture of the future.

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Rank and file initiative



How solidarity was won last time

The miners have since the national strikes of 1972-74 held a special place in the recent history of workers' struggle. Gareth Jenkins looks at that history and strips away the myths.

When, in the mid-1960s, the National Coal Board reached agreement with the National Union of Mineworkers to introduce the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA) no-one could have foreseen the eventual consequences in the 1972 strike.

The agreement phased out the old piece work system, which the NUM had long condemned. But what replaced it had no advantages in practice for miners. For, in destroying the vicious piece-work system, the new agreement also did away with the ability of well-organised pits to bring up earnings from a low basic level.

From a pre-war position of 84th in the earnings league table miners had climbed to near the top by the 1960s (in 1960 a Barnsley miner could earn £25 a week, which was twice the national average). The NPLA rapidly reversed these gains. In 1966 a

faceworker at Houghton Main, Barnsley, got up to 120s per shift; by 1970 that had fallen to 89s 10d, the national rate under the NPLA.

But the high earnings enjoyed by miners before the NPLA had nothing to do with the NUM nationally (the NUM had a longstanding reputation for being on the right of the TUC). Throughout the 1950s the NUM never claimed an increase of more than 25s a year and never threatened to fight. Yet the strike record in particular areas was very high. The reason was obvious.

Now, if you could no longer earn a decent living by negotiating substantial bonuses around the local rate, then there was little point in striking. You became dependent on national and area officials to resolve problems — a point that delighted the NUM bureaucracy. The tradition of local militancy that had been the strength of the union became, due to the NPLA, its weakness as miners failed to look beyond their own pit.

But eventually, the accumulated bitterness spilt over into unofficial action in the autumn of 1969 over the NUM's 'moderate' pursuit of a claim for 27s 6d. If the dustmen could fight for and get an increase of £2 10s, so could the miners. The whole of Yorkshire came out, together with some pits in Scot-

land and South Wales, for a period of two weeks.

This new confidence set the mood for the 1970 claim. Against the national executive's advice, conference decided on a £5 claim. When the NCB replied in September with an offer of £2.10s (their highest ever, but totally inadequate in the face of rising prices), the NUM were forced to ballot the membership on strike action. Since a two thirds majority was then required the executive were reasonably confident that they would not be forced into doing anything.

Despite a barrage of media abuse, the miners voted 55 percent for action — a majority, but not sufficient under the rules. The NCB gave another 10s and the executive recommended acceptance in a second ballot.

An explosion of rank and file anger — again, principally from Yorkshire — met this decision. Within a week, 3,000 were on strike. However, the Yorkshire militants were not prepared to leave it there. They organised to spread the action by the tactic that was used with such success two years later — the flying picket.

They would meet centrally early every morning and select key pits. Once these were brought out, the rest in the locality would normally follow suit. Despite some resis-



1978: Rescuemen's picket, Armthorpe, Doncaster: Scargill limited unofficial action

tance (at Glasshoughton, Castleford, the right-wing secretary called in the police), the tactic worked like a dream. By the end of the first week between 50,000 and 70,000 were out. The whole of South Wales joined in by the start of the second week. There were stoppages in Scotland, Kent and Durham, and work to rules in Derbyshire, Durham and Lancashire.

At its height, this unofficial action involved 100,000 miners in 140 pits. What killed it was sabotage by the Yorkshire area secretary, Sydney Schofield. At an emergency Yorkshire council meeting at the start of the third week he persuaded the substantial minority of pit delegates opposed to the strike to go back and break the majority mandate in favour.

The militants were forced to go back over ground already covered. The strike began to contract and eventually the NEC were able to use a national ballot to enforce a return to work.

Unofficial action

But the fact that defeat could be laid at the door of a single treacherous individual says something about the limitations in the unofficial action. The most serious was the failure to hold regular meetings involving more than the most committed to discuss tactics and to pump out propaganda. In short, a start on building independent rank and file organisation was neglected.

The need for independent organisation was shown in two ways. First, there was the trust in official machinery. The crucial area council meeting, where Schofield pressurised delegates into breaking the mandate, was only lightly picketed. Militants assumed that formal decisions would be respected (it was already known that a majority were in favour of strike action). But away from the pits delegates could be leant on by the bureaucracy.

Secondly, there was the behaviour of the leading left-winger in the NUM, newly elected general secretary, Laurence Daly. He, too, bent under pressure from the milieu in which he worked. So, despite an election programme advocating 'guerrilla' action, Daly had urged, in response to the militancy in 1969, that the time was not ripe (but would be in 1970); and in response to the militancy

in 1970, he urged a return to work in the interests of 'unity' in the union.

Miners were relearning for themselves how to struggle effectively. Mistakes were inevitable. But the question of rank and file organisation (and the failure to resolve it) was eventually of crucial importance — as the subsequent history of the left in the NUM showed.

There was gathering momentum for a decisive trial of strength between the miners and the coal board. Ironically, the NPLA was responsible for it. In curtailing militancy in its pit-bound form, the NPLA had also ended localisation. But, in unifying rates, the NPLA had also generalised the militancy.

The pay claim for 1971 was the largest ever put in (increases of between £5 and £9) and was answered by a derisory offer from the NCB. Since not even Gormley could sell a £1.60 offer to the members, the 1971 special conference voted for an overtime ban and a ballot on strike action.

The percentage in favour of strike action had been steadily growing over the previous years. On this occasion it went over the magic 55 percent mark required under the new rules for implementation, though only just (58 percent).

The strike began on 9 January 1972. The executive had no intention of pushing hard. For them it was no more than a bargaining counter for extracting fresh concessions from the NCB. They were determined to keep the strike as orderly and quiet as possible.

The rank and file militants had quite different ideas, and within days conflict erupted between the members and the leadership. The first clash came over the question of letting safety work continue. The NEC (including Dai Francis of the CP) tried to insist on letting it go ahead, but in the face of firm picketing only 46 out of 289 pits were manned by safety men. Despite howls of protests from the NCB about the long-term effect on the pits, not one was made unusable as a result of strike action.

The second clash came over the picketing of NCB offices. Miners were determined that the clerical members of the union working in the offices (often better paid than miners) should join the strike. Despite lurid press stories about 'girls being jostled' and spat at, most NCB offices were closed and many of

the women joined the picket lines.

These may appear side issues. The point was that in insisting that the stoppage be total, rank and file miners were also insisting on *their* control of the dispute, and not the leadership's.

It is impossible to go through the 1972 strike in detail. But what needs to be grasped above everything else is that the miners could not have won *on their own*.

The flying picket that they had used to spread the 1970 unofficial strike within their own ranks was now used to secure solidarity from other groups of workers.

Right from the beginning, every power station in the coalfields, was heavily picketed, stopping essential supplies (even bread!). In most cases the miners got the support they needed. When, on 4 February, a miner was killed by a scab lorry (encouraged by the police to smash through picket lines), the funeral was joined by thousands of other workers — power workers, building workers, engineers, railwaymen and teachers.

The most celebrated trial of strength with the police to stop the movement of coal was the battle of Saltley gates, a coke depot just outside Birmingham. On their own, the miners would not have won. Every increase in the number of pickets was matched by an increase in the numbers of police.

Saltley gates

For ten days the pickets from Barnsley were routed by the police, some injured. Even a thousand pickets could not prevent the police from letting scab lorries in and out of the depot. All that changed on 9 February when the Birmingham East District of the AUEW called for an all-out strike and demonstration by engineers the following day.

The many thousands of engineering workers that marched on Saltley tipped the scales decisively in favour of the pickets. A young AUEW steward vividly described what happened:

'The marchers seemed to be endless, and soon the space in front of the gates was crammed full of engineers and miners from Yorkshire, South Wales, Staffs and even Durham and Scotland. We were soon to learn that 40,000 engineers had responded to the strike call and 10,000 had joined the march and picket. For the first time in my life I had a practical demonstration of what workers' solidarity meant. We all felt so powerful. We felt we could rule the world.'

The chief constable, being a sensible man, knew when he had been beaten. Saltley was closed.

But Saltley was not the only example of solidarity action by other workers. Lorry drivers, dockers, seamen and railwaymen all played a vital part in the struggle. Money flooded in. Shop stewards collected thousands of pounds.

The explanation for the solidarity was that large sections of the working class saw in the miners' struggles a chance to fight for their own interests against the Tories.

With power stations failing, many factories closed, and the strike rock solid, the

Tories were forced to give in. On 15 February the government set up the Wilberforce enquiry. It represented their last chance. Had the NUM insisted on the full claim and ignored the enquiry (which they certainly had the power to), the government's authority would have been shattered.

Within three days (surely a record) the enquiry reported. The NUM executive was as eager to settle as the government now was. The miners certainly got most of what they wanted, but the settlement contained two very dangerous clauses that were eventually to give the employers back the initiative that they had lost.

The clauses were of differing importance. The first was that the agreement would run for an unprecedented sixteen months. That meant it ran out at the end of February 1983 — and a battle which began in spring, when the expectation of warmer weather would make lack of stocks less vital, would have a lower chance of success.

More important, though, was the commitment from the union to future discussion about productivity. It was the crucial chink in the agreement that allowed the NCB to prepare for a future attack on jobs and conditions when the circumstances were favourable.

The NUM put the whole package to secret ballot. There was no discussion and the leaders advised relaxing the picketing. The left on the executive were not disposed to rock the boat. They kept quiet about the dangers inherent in the agreement — no doubt in the interests of 'unity'. The acceptance, not surprisingly, was overwhelming.

The Broad Left emerged with increased credibility from the strike. McGahey crushed a right-winger in the vice-presidential elections, Scargill became president of the Yorkshire area and the national executive now had nearly a dozen Communist Party and left Labour members.

Even so, Gormley was also able to use the Wilberforce agreement to stitch up the 1973 claim. Consequently 1973 was as bad a year for other workers' claims as 1972 had been good.

New battle

When the miners returned to battle in 1974, it was not a re-run of 1972. Apparently, the strike was even more successful. It did, after all, bring down the Heath government — something that had been avoided in 1972. On the other hand, it was a much more passive affair, with much lower rank and file involvement.

At a special delegate conference in October 1973, Gormley surprised the left by calling for a complete overtime ban, including weekend maintenance and safety work.

Gormley's tactics had nothing to do with militancy. He intended the overtime ban as a substitute and not a preparation for strike action. He hoped that a long, drawn-out ban would defuse the undoubted militancy that existed.

The Broad Left did nothing to expose these tactics and fell in line behind the ban. Accepting from Scargill what they would not



Feb 1983: South Wales miners occupying NCB offices. There were 143 registered strikes in the mines in the first five months of 1983

from Gormley, militants were lulled into a false sense of security. Few believed by the end of November that the ban would not work.

When the right pressed for a ballot in mid-December, to most militants it looked like a manoeuvre to end the action. The Tories, meanwhile, went onto the offensive. The fifth state of emergency in three years was declared just before Christmas, aimed at ensuring coal stocks till the spring. The evidence suggests that this was propaganda and that in fact stocks were not that low.

Whatever the reality, though, it had the effect of stepping up the miners' action. The ballot right at the end of January 1974 produced a massive 81 percent in favour of striking. The result was all the more remarkable since up till two weeks before both right and left had encouraged members to believe that the overtime ban alone was sufficient to win.

Gormley did his best to sabotage the strike but did not dare call it off ('the members might walk all over us', he declared). But he was determined to clamp down (in his own words, 'to keep picketing under control').

Pickets were restricted by the executive six to a line as permitted under the Tories' anti-union legislation. Because of the low number of pickets supplies could be brought into power stations and steel depots. At Saltley, that proud symbol of rank and file solidarity in the 1972 strike, lorries queued up to get in and out.

According to the *Sunday Times* an NUM official admitted that fewer than 2,000 were involved in picketing (it had been well over 8,000 in 1972) and stressed that the union was 'desperately trying to reduce the points of conflict, such as arose in 1972.' The Transport and General instructed its members not to cross picket lines. On the other hand, 'normal quantities' of oil were to be allowed into power stations and steel works.

Once again, the left fell in line behind these tactics. The Communist Party secretary of the Scots miners uttered dire threats against any 'outsider' found on the picket line. There was no attempt to defy the executive line and push for the kind of mass picketing that had characterised the 1972 strike.

One reason for the left's caution was fear of harming Labour's election chances.

If you believe that working class advance is dependent on Labour coming to power then you have to subordinate everything to

that end.

When the Tories were (narrowly) defeated at the polls, the Labour government was in no position to refuse the miners anything. On 6 March the new employment secretary, Michael Foot, announced the settlement. Once again, the executive let the government off the hook.

The left had been insistent that the claim should be met in full and even added to. Now, they rushed to defend what was offered. The faceworkers received the full amount, but both underground and surface workers fell well short.

The lack of rank and file involvement in the strike could be seen in the settlement. The most militant (the faceworkers) got everything asked for. But the most noticeable feature of the 1972 strike when the rank and file fought hardest for the lower paid surface workers was absent in 1974.

Special cases

Also because the NUM agreed to use Pay Board figures the only way in which it could argue that the miners should get more than than notionally allocated to them was to argue that they were a special case.

This was a departure from 1972. A high level of activity had taught many miners in 1972 that they had won because of general support from outside their ranks. If they were a special case, then everyone was a special case. But the low level of activity in 1974 strengthened the idea (dear to bureaucrats' hearts) that victory was due to the brilliant way in which negotiators had used facts and figures to convince the other side. Once again the left inside the NUM fell in line.

Nonetheless the 1974 strike was seen as a political victory by workers over the Tories, and the miners' strike was followed by action by many groups of trade unionists whose confidence had been boosted.

The new Labour government painted a bright future for the miners. The government promised to expand production over a ten year period.

The NUM executive were jubilant. There was, however, a small catch. The report stated: 'Realisation of the potential output for which these plans provide also depends on realising the assumptions on which the plan is based that output per man shift

(OMS) can be raised by some 4 percent a year.' That meant, for anyone able to do simple sums of matching rising production against rising productivity, a *reduction* in manpower of 35 percent. In agreeing to the deal the NUM signed away the rights of 85,000 men to their jobs.

The first test came with the NCB's proposals for a scheme paying bonuses to men exceeding production targets. The advantage to management was that they could manipulate targets on different faces and in different pits according to whether they wanted them open or shut. Different levels of bonus payment would destroy unity.

The left countered with a scheme which would have paid average bonus rates according to national production targets. They defeated the NCB in the November 1974 ballot but at the cost of rejecting only one particular form of productivity, not the principle itself.

This left the way open for a counter attack by the right. If wages did not improve, the frustration would persuade miners that *only* productivity dealing could give them better wages. And with wages being held by the Labour government's social contract that kind of right wing argument began to find an echo among miners.

The crunch came in 1977. The NUM conference rejected a fresh attempt by the right to introduce a productivity deal. The result was close — close enough for Gormley to put the deal to ballot though constitutionally his right to do so was shaky. The left's response was pathetic. They resorted (in vain) to the bourgeois courts to protect union democracy and stop the ballot going ahead, in preference to relying on agitation among the rank and file to stop Gormley.

Even when the ballot confirmed the conference decision (55 percent against the deal in a record 80 percent turnout) the left still failed to learn the lesson. Gormley did not give up. He got the executive on 9 December to set aside the ballot decision, and authorise area deals.

Incentive scheme

Once again the left (including Scargill) had recourse to the courts, which once again backed the right wing. Thereafter, the areas resisting incentive schemes gave up one by one. First the Scotland area executive voted 20 to 6 for a local deal (McGahey stated that he didn't want Scotland isolated or their living standards to decline against other areas).

Then it was Yorkshire's turn. Scargill refused to campaign to 'influence' the decision (on the grounds that his views were known). The result was 26,451 in favour, 15,681 against. A mere two months before the opposition was more than double that figure. But by the time of the ballot (in January 1978) claims that bonuses would be up to £20 and £25 were having their effect.

The consequences of these area schemes is plain. Wide variations in pay (for example, the week ending 23 April 1983 showed North Yorkshire miners earning £90 a week average bonus as against £25 in Scotland) have weakened miners' unity and has fragmented the fight against the NCB's pit



1977: Energy minister, Tony Benn, visiting Doncaster two days before the divisive incentive scheme he promoted was authorised by the NUM executive

closure programme.

The broad left has paid a terrible penalty for its political failure. First it conceded the argument about creating a profitable industry. It is a more 'radical' version — the subsidies, import controls, etc which it expects from a Labour government — but there is still the basic acceptance of the same priorities.

It has been unable to dissociate itself from Labour attempts to modernise the industry — and therefore from Labour plans to impose productivity dealing. Ironically, it was 'radical' Tony Benn (praised by Scargill as the miners' true friend) who promoted the incentive scheme, 'which Scargill so eloquently denounced at the 1983 miners' conference.

This leads us to the second aspect of the failure of its politics, one that can be clearly traced in the progress of Arthur Scargill from rank and file militant (who justifiably made his name in the 1972 strike) to president of the NUM.

The lesson of the 1972 strike — that only rank and file activity can beat the employer — came to be seen as secondary. Taking over the machinery of the NUM from the right-wing appeared more effective. Change from the top is the link between this and the delusion that with Labour running the British economy a start can be made on implementing socialist measures.

Thus as Scargill moved to becoming Yorkshire president, the rank and file organisation that had been the strength of the union in the area during the 1972 strike was allowed to decay. The Barnsley Forum, with its regular monthly meetings to discuss industrial, union and socialist politics, disappeared, leaving the left with a base of left officials only. Those educated by the struggle in 1972 and 1974 had nowhere to go.

Next, came neglect of rank and file struggles. In the 1978 rescuemen's dispute, Scargill used his powers of persuasion to limit the unofficial action and eventually got a return to work on little more than a promise to resolve the longstanding grievance. He 'forgot' that the strength of the union is built out of the myriad tiny trials of strength that give workers the confidence to take on the big issues.

The year 1981 saw the Tories retreat hurriedly on the issue of pit closures. When they were announced the South Wales pits went into action, followed by Kent the same day. Fearing it had provoked more than it could handle, the government suddenly found the financial subsidies it claimed weren't available. *Within a day* the NCB cobbled up a deal with the NUM. Even the concessions were insufficient to get the miners back to work despite pleas from Gormley and the national executive.

Yet although the strike was spreading, defiance collapsed in all areas (except Kent) by Friday. Now, it is not that Scargill failed to support the action. Quite the contrary. On Thursday 19 February he announced plans for a total stoppage in Yorkshire the following Monday quite correctly on the grounds that the guarantees were inadequate.

But the fact that Scargill stuck to that date instead of bringing it forward (some Yorkshire pits were already out following the South Wales lead) was instrumental in slowing the momentum of the action. Had he brought it forward, the weight of the largest coalfield in the country might well have been decisive in halting the NCB's stealthy offensive against 'uneconomic' pits.

The only conclusion is that Scargill was anxious to observe the constitutional niceties in the run-up to the presidential election so as to avoid offence to the middle ground.

The same constitutionalism came to the fore in the 1983 South Wales action to stop closures. The miners were persuaded to wait for the ballot rather than go out and picket — with disastrous results. Scargill's justification was that if the strike situation in the South Wales area had been left as it was it would have 'provoked near civil war. It would have divided the union.'

Rank and file

Consequently he preferred the ballot in the certain knowledge that the call for action would be lost:

'It was better, in my view, politically ... to have a temporary set-back at the hands of the members than to have a defeat inflicted upon us in an actual conflict, official or unofficial, by the government and the Coal Board.'

In Scargill we have the curious spectacle of an undoubted left-winger whose calls for national action fall on deaf ears (he has in fact led no strike since 1974). With Gormley it was the other way round. Here was a vicious right-winger who in spite of his own deepest instincts led two national strikes to victory.

Yet it is not the case that there has been no militancy for Scargill to relate to. In the first five months of 1983 alone, there were 143 registered strikes, and in the autumn 13,000 Barnsley miners came out on unofficial strike. Lacking rank and file organisation Scargill has lost touch.

Neglect of these opportunities to build a national opposition to closures is something the miners are now paying for. Victory in the current struggle will owe nothing to Scargill's politics and everything to the re-discovery of the rank and file solidarity that won the 1972 strike.

Profits up as jobs slaughter goes on

Unemployment in Britain continues to rise. But so do profits. Pete Green looks at what is happening in the British economy.

Profits made in Britain rose by between 25 and 30 percent last year — not including the North Sea Oil industry. After a rise of about 14 percent in 1982 that represented a significant increase from the depths of the slump in 1981.

As Samuel Brittan writing in the *Financial Times* on 10 November last year wrote:

'The most spectacular aspect of the present economic upturn is one that has received least attention: namely the improvement of profits.'

Now Sam Brittan is an arch-monetarist, brother of the thug who is currently home secretary and responsible for the police beating up pickets at Warrington, and no doubt a pretty horrible man himself. But if there is one thing on which Marxists ought to agree with Brittan (and disagree with the many people in the Labour Party who fail to understand how capitalism works), it is that profits matter.

As Brittan goes on to say in the same article:

'Profits have a strategic significance not easily shown in such models (ie most of the academic models used to forecast the British economy). They provide the basic cash flow for investment. This can be supplemented by bank borrowing or new issues (of shares) but corporate ability to raise money is itself determined by past and prospective profitability...

'More important, but less often stressed, profits provide the incentive for investment and expansion. There is no point in expanding capacity or introducing new methods if the yield is less than the cost of borrowed funds, or what the company can earn in the financial markets...'

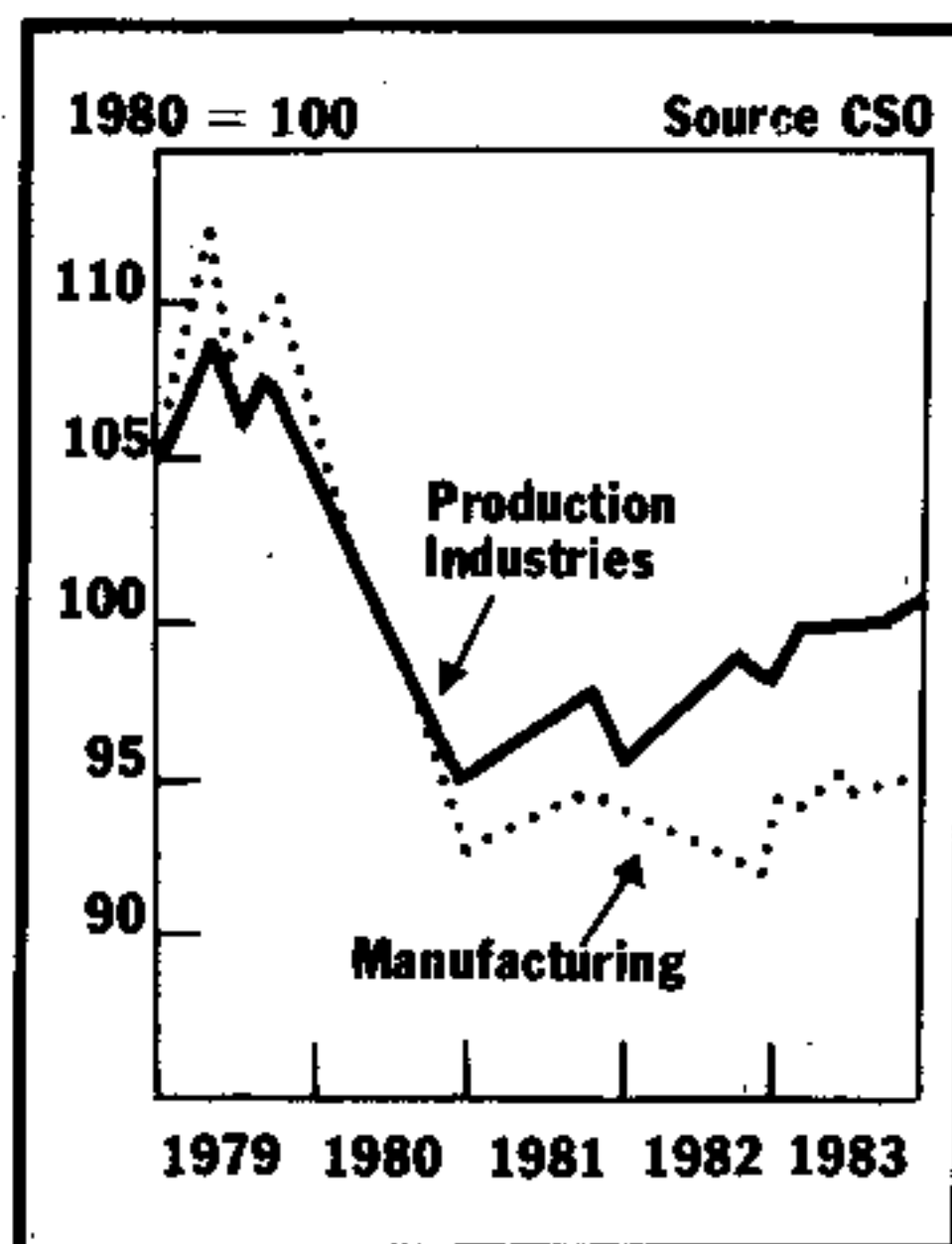
Capitalism, in other words, only expands and invests on the basis of profits made in the past, and in the expectation of making at least more money in the future than it can gain by leaving its spare cash in the bank. Without that expectation even companies which are making large profits will not bother to invest in new factories and equipment (Arnold Weinstock's giant General Electric Company which has over a billion pounds in spare cash, is a good example of that in recent years).

Yet there is a problem with Brittan's argument. Profits are not the only thing to have risen in recent months. In January unemployment rose again by 121,000 to an official figure of 3,200,000. Even allowing for the effects of winter the underlying trend is still upward. According to the Labour Research department, the old basis of counting the

figures (changed in November 1982), unemployment is now about three and a half million. Throw in the married women who never signed on, and all those youths on YTS schemes, and the total is well over the four million mark. Indeed, in the last few months the business pages of the press have been marked by the contrast between two types of headline.

On the one hand, a succession of companies announcing their success in boosting profits. ICI, profits more than doubled to £619 million, for the year 1983-84. Courtaulds, profits more than doubled to £47 million for the six months to last September. Fisons, the agricultural group, profits up 48 percent. ICL the computer group, profits nearly doubled. Imperial, the food, drink and tobacco giant, profits up 27 percent to £195 million. Standard Telegraphs and Cables profits up 43 percent; Tate and Lyle up 43 percent as well. BSR, the electronics group, from a loss of £32 million to a profit of £13 million. GKN and Tube Investments, two of the engineering companies most severely hit by the slump, both expected to announce substantial increases in profits for the last year.

This is despite the rise in wages, of which so much fuss has been made. Recent events on this front are dealt with elsewhere in this



issue. But two points are worth emphasising here.

One is that the overall figures for earnings conceal as much as they reveal. They include overtime payments which have risen rapidly again in recent months with the recovery in demand. They exclude part-time workers who now make up about a fifth of the total British workforce. They ignore the success of the Tories and companies in moving away from the idea of a 'going rate', towards a much greater spread of settlements.

Pay agreements are now ranging from a 20

percent cut for school cleaners in Hertfordshire, who are threatened with privatisation, to 20 percent plus rises for technicians and programmers in short supply for the computer industry. There have been shifts towards more local bargaining, aimed at relating pay increases to the profitability of a particular factory, or to agreements on productivity, changes in working practices etc.

The second point is that for many companies increases in the cost of wages and salaries, have been more than offset by other factors. One is the fall in the price of raw materials on world markets. The other is the increase in output per worker. 'Unit labour costs' (the wage costs for a unit of output) rose by only 2½ percent in 1983, half the inflation rate. But this increase in productivity is unlikely to be sustained. Unit labour costs actually fell in Germany and Japan last year.

Certainly the British ruling class has nothing to be complacent about. Nevertheless the issue for them is clear. Is the revival in profitability a justification of all that the Tories have stood for — letting the market work unhindered, forcing the weakest to the wall, and the rest to put their own house in order? Have we seen that drastic restructuring of British industry which was needed after years of 'featherbedding', declining profitability and lack of competitiveness? Has the slump proved in the end to be the drastic cure which the Tories always intended, purging the system of cumulative rot, imposing a new climate of discipline and hard work down on the shopfloor, and pushing the unions onto the defensive?

Let's leave aside the question of how far the Tories have really cut back on the role of the State. The latest examples of massive government subsidies to Rolls Royce and to the 'privatised' British Aerospace for its investment in the European Airbus project, suggest that market forces are not exactly having a free hand. But that's another story.

Redundancies continue

Meanwhile the redundancies continue. Fords (£194 million profit in the UK in 1982-83) announces that the Dagenham foundry and 2,000 jobs are to go. British Leyland continues its slaughter (a thousand in the trucks business, 1,560 at Land Rover over the next two years); 3,500 to go from British Rail Engineering; 1,840 from British American Tobacco's cigarette factories in England; 2,000 from the United Biscuit factory in Liverpool; 850 jobs lost at British Aerospace; 688 from power station constructors NEI in Gateshead. Over 1,000 at the Scott-Lithgow shipyard, even after its takeover for next to nothing by Trafalgar House.

Not least there are the continuing losses in the civil service and local government after years in which these have helped to bolster the overall job figures. And now the miners are on strike to defend 20,000 jobs in the coal industry, possibly including compulsory redundancies for the first time in years.

In many companies the increase in profits and the redundancy notices have been two sides of the same picture. Companies have responded to the slump by slashing their loss-making operations, ruthlessly

rationalising their businesses, and sacking workers. Some have withdrawn from whole areas of activity altogether — with Tube Investments selling off what was left of its Aluminium interests, and Dunlops handing over its crippled European tyre interests to Sumitomo of Japan (in which, however, it has a 40 percent shareholding).

Even in the much battered British textile industry, the nine largest companies have tripled their profits since 1981. But a third of the workforce has gone. Courtaulds has abandoned nylon production, reduced its British payroll by almost half since 1979, and seen its returns on its British assets move from losses of £11 million to profits of £29 million. Illingworth Morris the largest wool company has cut its workforce by 63 percent to only 4,000 today. The British textile companies have adopted a dual strategy. They have moved overseas, and farmed out labour-intensive operations to low-cost third world producers. In Britain they have introduced new technology, with computer-operated machinery capable of laying out and cutting cloth at high speed and accuracy. Output per worker has increased by 25 percent. At the tailoring end very profitable firms like Marks and Spencers keep the pressure up on their subcontractors, who in turn rely increasingly on sweated labour and homeworking in areas like East London to compete with imports.

Cost-cutting

The impact of cost-cutting measures and increases in productivity have in some cases been dramatic. For the first half of 1983 British Leyland announced a trading profit of £1.3 million. Interest payments of £41 million still put it into an overall loss of £39.7 million. But that in itself was a substantial improvement on the £106 million which went down the drain in the first half of 1982. BL has benefitted along with its competitors from a fall in the price of materials such as steel and components. It saw demand begin to boom after the change in the hire purchase regulations last year. But it has also seen productivity rise from around six cars per worker a year in 1979 to about 13 cars per worker today. Fifty-five percent of the workforce has gone since 1977.

Productivity increases only serve to put more on the dole if markets are not there. At Leyland Trucks output has collapsed from its peak in 1977, amidst fierce global competition. Sales to Nigeria have fallen from 2,500 to a mere 100 trucks a year. But in the Austin Rover car division the combination of robots and the climate of fear introduced by Michael Edwardes has, for the moment, worked.

Profits have risen therefore across the board in British industry. It is no longer just a matter of shopkeepers, electronic whizz-kids, war merchants, and drug dealers making money, which is how it looked back in 1981. The banks are still doing well despite the debt crisis. Oil companies are still raking in over a third of all the profits made in Britain. But the important point for us to understand is that hardly any of the large British industrial companies have gone bust, and many of the casualty cases of the last few

years, such as ICL, Courtaulds and GKN are looking healthy again.

The most obvious difficulty with the story of Tory success is that the British economy is still performing very badly. Levels of output, as the graph above shows, have still not returned to the level of 1979, despite over two years of 'recovery' from the depths of the slump.

One aspect of this is that the consumer boom of the last nine months has led to a sharp rise in imports. Demand has increased by 9 percent from the depths of 1981, mainly because those in work have responded to lower inflation and interest rates by cutting their savings and going into debt. Yet manufacturing production in Britain has risen by only 4 percent. The gap has been filled with imports of consumer goods such as video recorders.

For the first time this century imports of manufactured goods are greater than exports. The balance of payments on current account is still in surplus, however, because sales of North Sea Oil have held up. The oil however will not last forever. For the moment the foreign exchange, the dollars and marks it brings in, are being used to subsidise a boom in luxury imports, and a £9 billion a year outflow of capital to which we shall return.

That in itself does not worry the British ruling class very much. But critics of the Tories within the establishment are disturbed at another development. As that collection of former treasury advisors and ageing Keynesians, the National Institute, put it recently: 'the main weakness of the recovery so far has been a lack of investment', and it goes on to make an interesting comparison with the 1929-33 slump. Then the bottom of the slump lasted longer than in the 1979-83 period but the recovery when it came was sharper, with a larger increase in investment.

Investment has risen slightly overall in the last year. But the Institute predicts that investment in manufacturing industry will still be 30 percent less than in 1979 at the end of 1984. Neither investment in services, finance and communications, nor the much publicised but actually rather small inflows of Japanese and American money to set up electronics factories in Scotland, will compensate.

Indeed Christopher McMahon of the Bank of England recently noted that net investment in manufacturing has been negative in the past three years — ie it has not even covered the cost of replacing the existing stock of capital equipment. Instead companies have been siphoning off funds out of their depreciation allowances, to sustain the level of dividends to shareholders, even when profits have collapsed. The shareholders look after themselves but the long-term competitiveness of British industry will suffer.

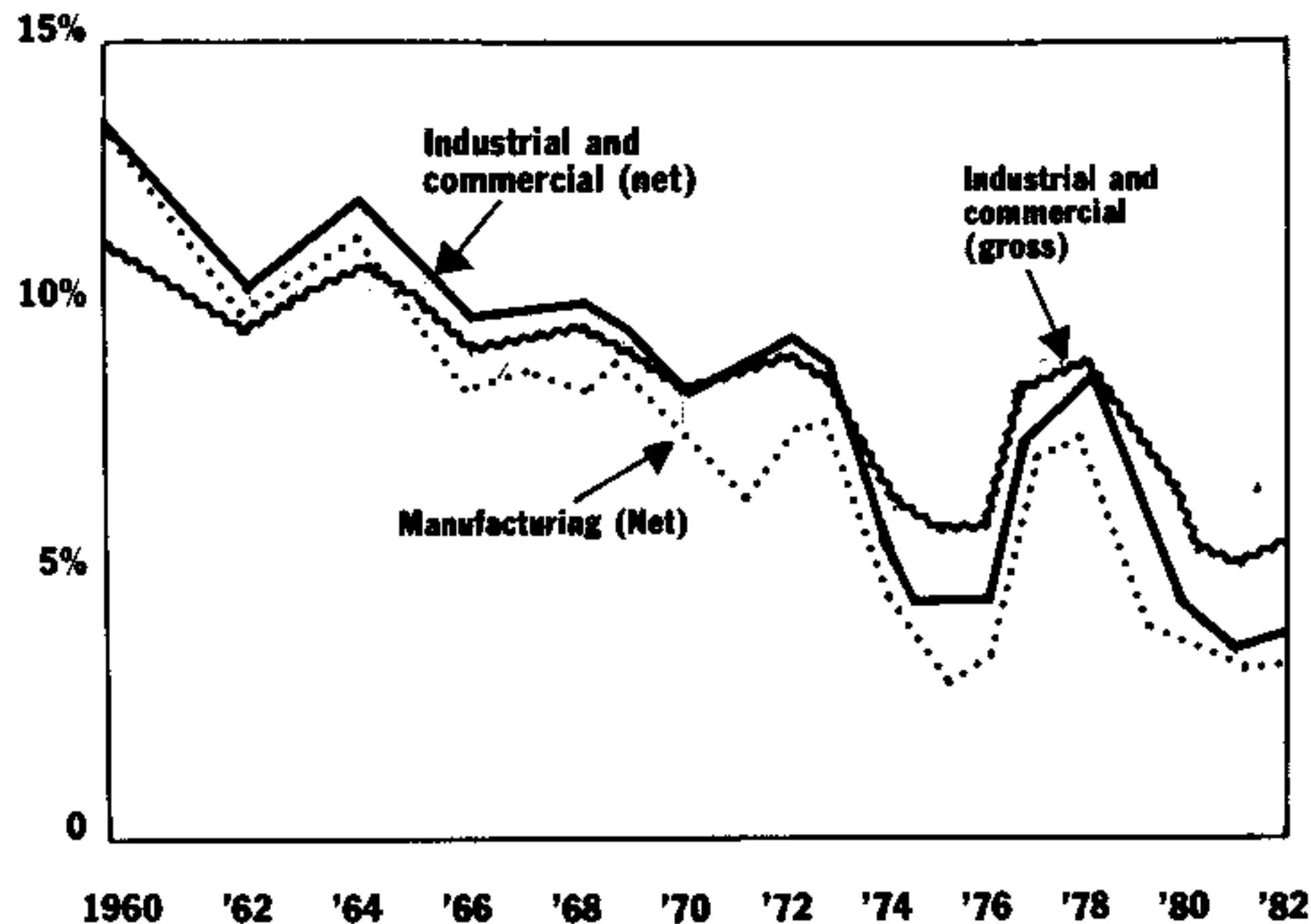
Extra profits

All those extra profits are justified in the name of providing more investment and more jobs. But the investment that is taking place is more likely to replace existing workers than add to their number. Much has been made of Peugeot's decision to invest £20 million at the Talbot plant in Coventry. It will keep the plant alive. But the company nevertheless is planning to 'double output with virtually the same labour force'.

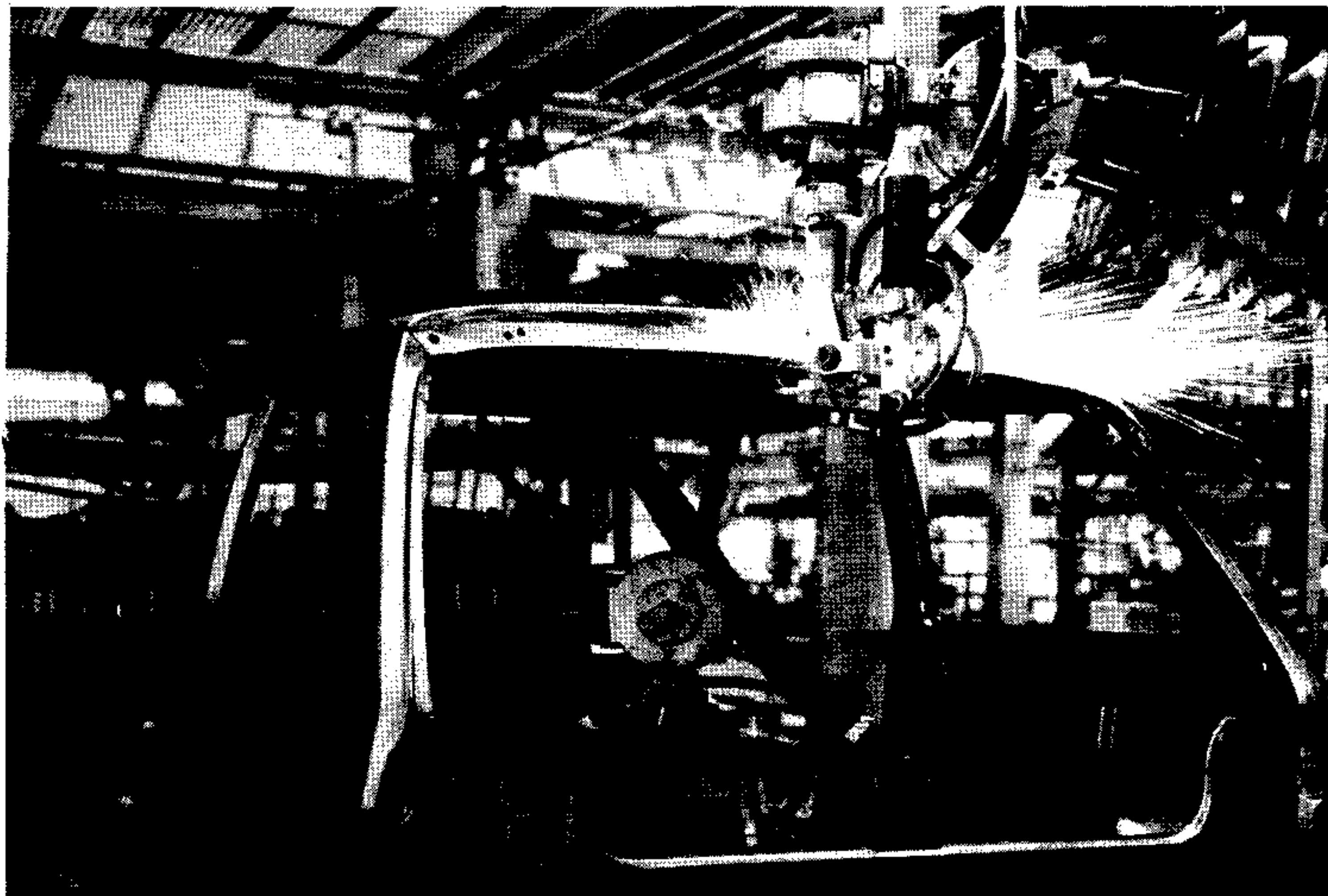
But why is this? Why hasn't the rise in profits led to a rise in investment? What are they doing with all that money if they're not using it productively?

One answer to both questions which is much favoured is that it's all going overseas. There is some truth in this. British investment overseas has doubled since 1979. The total of non-bank private assets owned by British companies now stands at a staggering

**RATES OF RETURN
excluding North Sea Oil**



source: Department of Industry



British industry's profits rise as thousands more workers are thrown onto the dole. Years of low investment still demand more cuts

£87 billion worth. Most of the recent increase has come from pension funds and insurance companies. But in the three years after 1979 British industrial companies expanded their directly owned assets abroad by £19,000 million.

Many companies in Britain rode out the slump on the basis of their overseas profits. Many intend to expand further. ICI's chairman said recently that he was looking to spend over a billion pounds in the USA or the Far East, where 'the markets are growing'. In an extreme case, the old record player company BSR has completely changed its identity, writing off its British assets, buying up two electronics companies in the Far East, and finally moving its base to Hong Kong, all since 1979.

But to see the problem simply as one of multinationals moving their assets overseas is wrong and dangerously misleading. It misses the point that the money leaving the country is in most cases *not* being used to set up new factories elsewhere. It is being used to purchase shares on Wall Street or to take over other companies. In the rest of the world, as in Britain, companies making profits are using them to buy up other companies on the cheap. It's a much surer way of making money than launching into new ventures anywhere. (The crisis of profitability is, whilst uneven, still worldwide).

British American Tobacco (the same one which is closing down its cigarette factories in England with the loss of 1,840 jobs) has, for example, spent 385 million dollars to buy up the Marshall Fields department store chain in the United States, and has bid £968

million for the Eagle Star Insurance company in Britain.

Which brings us back to the question and to Sam Brittan. Why is investment still so low, despite the rise in profits? The answer, as the latest Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin put it, is that whilst rates of profit are back to 6 percent or so from the all-time low of 3 percent in 1981, they are still well below the 10 percent-plus levels of the 1960s and 'well below the level necessary for a healthy rate of investment'.

Heavy debt

The *Economist* magazine recently made a similar point:

'Real rates of return on capital and the share of profits in GNP have fallen for a decade. The ravages cannot be repaired overnight. Neither can companies' weakened balance sheets.'

The last point refers to the heavy debt owed by many companies to the banks, which is being paid off before any new investment is considered.

A rise in profits will have to be sustained for several years before companies will regain confidence in the possibilities of expansion. For the moment they will continue to scrap ageing plant, install new machinery, but not go in for building additional factories, nor providing extra jobs. Surveys by the CBI have suggested that, nationally, output in industry could rise by 15 percent without any more labour being taken on.

The rich are continuing to do well under the Tories. Figures from the low pay unit

show that those 'earning' ten times the national average have seen their take home income increase by more than ten times as much as those on two thirds of the average. That is mainly due to the tax cuts the Tories made back in 1979.

Meanwhile Sam Brittan continues to insist on the overriding necessity of wage cuts. Whatever the feebleness of his arguments about how this will cut unemployment, Brittan is simply expressing the needs of the British capitalist class. The pressures of international competition persist. Worldwide the crisis in profitability is leading to attacks on working class living standards. By comparison with Sweden or West Germany British wages are not high. But the continuing weakness of British industry after years of low investment still demands the sort of 20 percent cuts the *Economist* has demanded, to compensate.

Yet their prospects of achieving such reductions are poor. Brittan, noting that the rise in unemployment has flattened out, went on to argue, in the same article from which we quoted at the beginning, that 'the biggest threat to the sustainability of the recovery is a re-escalation of wage earnings which would eat into profits...'

British capitalism has had its slump. It cannot easily afford another. Yet as people become more conscious of the recovery they will perhaps ask just why they should make more sacrifices. The volatility of the situation has been the most striking feature of the last few months. The demands for higher profits mean that there will be many more sparks to set any smouldering timber alight.

Militants lead the action

The Day of Action on 29 February was the most impressive day of strikes since the Tories took office. It was much more successful than the previous days on 14 May 1980 and 22 September 1981. Over one million workers struck. **Andy Zebrowski** looks at how the response to the TUC call was organised and what the lessons for socialists are.

The 29 February Day of Action showed a qualitative change in the mood of workers up and down the country. Years of resentment have built up. Workers felt they could have a go at the Tories, if only for a day.

The response was very uneven. Whether a union was right or left-led had no impact on the support for strike action. There were few strikes among members of the NUM, NUR, ASLEF, POEU, NUPE and SOGAT — all Broad Left controlled unions.

The key elements in most places was the presence of a minority of militants who were prepared to push the strike call as far as possible and at very short notice. The strike would not have occurred if Len Murray had not called for it. But in spite of it being called bureaucratically, it was the rank and file that organised the action.

A number of important lessons were highlighted on 29 February.

In engineering and the car industry factory after factory which had not seen action for ten or more years came out.

At Longbridge, socialists on the joint shop stewards committee unsuccessfully pushed for a half-day stoppage. Jack Adams, the convenor, argued that it would isolate the stronger sections of the plant from the weaker. A call for a one-hour stoppage was the result.

Sectional meetings were held throughout the plant. In some places the mood was volatile. Workers were expecting more than the meagre token of one hour. In CAB-1 (Car Assembly Building) workers approached shop stewards demanding proper strike action. The militants decided that instead of holding sectional meetings the feeling was strong enough to hold a shop meeting. A shop is equivalent to a factory mass meeting — some 1,400 workers. The vote was 4 to 1 to strike for half a day. Further meetings in CAB-2, where the new Honda will be built, and the paintshops came to the same decision. Altogether 2,000 workers struck and the rest of the 11,000 strong plant was laid off.

In the past few weeks there have been several short stoppages in the plant. Issues range from the right to elect extra stewards to fighting speed-up. The mood of the work-

force had been heightened by these responses to management attacks. The militants had correctly gauged this mood. Holding a shop meeting meant that the weaker sections would be pulled up by the stronger and not the other way round.

To move to a mass meeting, missing out section meetings, would have been a mistake. Where militants have built up organisation in their section this should be used to encourage others to come out. The only way to overcome sectionalism among workers—the idea that disputes are of concern only to the immediate workers involved—is paradoxically to build in the section. Then the strong section can show other workers by example how to fight, and spark off wider action.

At Dudley Road hospital in Birmingham on the Monday before the Day of Action an emergency district shop stewards meeting called a mass meeting for the eight hospitals in the area. Leaflets were given out on all the shifts. In the event only 50 to 60 people turned up to the meeting. The electricians had been prepared to take action but changed their minds on seeing the meeting.

Shopfloor organisation

It would have been better for the stronger sections, in this case the Central Sterile Supplies and the domestics, to take action and picket the hospital, calling for others to come out in support.

Even where it was not possible to win strike action on the 29th there were still possibilities to raise the arguments for action. In one post office in Birmingham the branch officers refused to hold a meeting to call people out. A young SWP member went around arguing with people and managed to collect a petition of 150 names in protest against the lack of action. By reacting quickly he was able to use the issue to discover the people who were willing to fight.

The decision whether to come out when you are a small minority of people depends on the particular situation. In some cases it could lead to isolation from the rest of the workforce and possible victimisation. In others it has only a small risk and could improve shopfloor organisation. The minority could be hardened and enthused by the experience.

For example, in London a NALGO clerical officer used the opportunity to have a civil servant address a small meeting. She came out for a half a day with seven others. 'A couple of people have come up to me since then asking for speakers from other workplaces,' she told *Socialist Review*. Not a massive gain but in a weakly organised workplace an important step forward in building for future solidarity.

In Glasgow militant teachers were faced with the EIS blaming Len Murray for not allowing enough time to organise. One teacher pulled out 13 people. Others took

small numbers on delegations to the big rally at the Kelvin Hall after losing the vote for strike action. Some Communist Party members attacked SWP members for not coming out as individuals. 'They took a moral attitude to the whole thing,' said one teacher, 'while we were arguing for an organised workplace response'.

Even where this failed in one school the teachers agreed to pay the wages of the delegation. This meant that four people went around the teachers collecting money. In a place where union dues are automatically deducted from salaries this is a useful way of establishing rank and file contact.

But taking minority action and arguing for a delegation is a reserve position. It is only done when wider action is not possible or has been defeated. It should not be used as a substitute for wider action.

Good though the response on the 29th was, no formal rank and file organisation is possible while the level of workers' struggle remains low. Often the only organising link was provided by *Socialist Worker*. All over the country militants were contacted by SWP members and told about plans for the Day of Action.

In Manchester, a council gardener had the choice of coming out for a half day strike with the tiny minority who read *Socialist Worker*. Instead he and the buyers of the paper spent a couple of hours arguing with the rest of the workforce. In the end 20 came out. He got in touch with other stewards and 20 from another park came out, as well as the Mobile Workers' Department. Another depot where the shop stewards buy *Socialist Worker* also had a minority of workers walking out.

A further example occurred in Glasgow. A teacher who reads *Socialist Worker* heard what the SWP teachers were doing in their schools. This spurred him on to call a meeting. He managed to pull out 40 teachers.

At Kelloggs in Manchester three *Socialist Worker* readers put pressure on the shop stewards to call a meeting. The first shift walked out followed by groups from the afternoon and night shifts. This happened in spite of the management having to butter-up the workforce the previous Friday. They had been taken to the Free Trade Hall and given beer and a buffet.

Sometimes good results were achieved but the full opportunities not made the best of. In East London, socialist teachers managed to bring out people in their own schools, but they didn't try to spread it to others. If other areas are any judge the action might have worked.

Civil servants in Stoke Newington in London went around speaking at other workplaces, encouraging all workers to strike. They helped make sure that the council workers took action.

SWP civil servants went down to Fleet Street arguing for action. Although they didn't get to speak at the AUEW mass meeting, their presence helped to push the meeting to support the stoppage. In fact SWP was part of the pressure that won the calling of the mass meeting in the first place.

In West London civil servants went to a variety of workplaces and helped to bring out engineers at Charing Cross Hospital and



GCHQ: New mood enabled militants to seize opportunities

Hammersmith Housing Department.

At Scott-Lithgow socialists argued at a 100-strong shop stewards' meeting for a half day stoppage. Only 13 supported the motion. It was decided to send a delegation to the rally instead. The mass meeting overturned the stewards' decision.

Yarrows provided a good example of how socialists can operate. The main argument aside from solidarity with the GCHQ workers and the attack on union rights was

that the Yarrow and the GCHQ workers have the same employer—the government. Yet the senior stewards argued against action on the grounds 'we should keep our ammo dry'. In the end a half day stoppage was proposed to the mass meeting. Someone proposed a whole day stoppage from the floor. It was carried. The argument was couched in terms of 'we might as well not bother coming in in the morning, if we're having the afternoon off', but it also showed

the workforce's willingness to have a go.

In Manchester an SWP member in the Signals and Telecommunications division managed to get a meeting and call 45 technicians out. He approached the NUR guards stewards, three of whom were SW readers. A meeting could not be organised in the time available. So six of them picketed from midnight until two the next afternoon. An almost total shutdown from Manchester Piccadilly resulted. He also went to the Permanent Way workers (track maintenance) to inform them of what was going on. Between 40 and 50 of them struck. Forty NUR members came to the big Manchester rally. By reacting quickly and getting in touch with people outside his own immediate workplace, he was able to spark off strike action from a key group of workers outside of his own workplace.

This particular example throws into contrast the politics of winning positions in the union machine and rank and file action. A few weeks earlier the Broad Left had won control of the NUR district council, getting every seat on the executive. Yet it meant nothing in terms of winning action, none of them were able to get any sections out.

In Camden, London, there has been a problem of racism among the dustmen. An SWP member ensured that the civil servant who addressed the dustmen's meeting was black, and *they* came out.

It was clearly easier to get action when a civil servant was on hand to argue the case, but this had to be organised. In Telford the local SWP has a paper sale outside an engineering factory. After they learnt that a mass meeting had been called they got a civil servant along to the meeting and won the call for a strike.

Official backing

Civil servants from the local Jobcentre in Kilburn, London went to the housing department where they pulled out 10 NALGO members from one section and a handful from two others.

The Day of Action would not have happened without the official call. It is misreading the situation to imply that it would; more importantly, official backing helped socialist militants to mobilise the more backward workers.

Socialists can and do miss opportunities—the point is to learn from our mistakes. On the 29th the most common error was to wait for the official machine to move and do the work. In Edinburgh social services, though there are seven socialists among the shop stewards, they didn't argue for action till the 29th itself. They waited for the NALGO executive to put out a call. By the 29th it was too late to muster support and the call was defeated.

The only way socialists can counter the routine and conservatism of their workplace is to link up with others. To build links between the isolated militants—to start to prepare the groundwork for solidarity action—means responding quickly to any change in mood of the workers. The 29th was a result of such a change of mood, and from such links between militants can the upturn be built for.

Budget busters

Liverpool City Council stand alone in defying the Tories' rate capping Bill. They are facing not only the government but also the national leadership of the Labour Party that is backing the seven right wing rebel councillors in the Labour group. **Alan Gibbons** looks at the campaign mounted by the council.

The Tory plans to 'cap the rates' of various local authorities and to abolish the metropolitan counties are very much a political move. Although they want to reduce the overall amount of the social surplus that is spent on the various services that local authorities provide, they have another aim in view: they want to smash up any potential or organised opposition to their overall plans.

Just how crude these plans are was revealed when the *Financial Times* of 21 February ran the proposals of the government's rate bill through a computer. They found that the financial result of the operation would be to cost the treasury at least £1.5 billion.

The main reason for this is that the government found it impossible to devise a bill which hit their Labour controlled targets and at the same time did not have the Tory-run areas howling with pain. So they have been forced to bodge together a deal that subsidises the Tory areas and which will cost them money in order to win a political victory.

Kinnock

So much you would expect from the Tories. But the Labour leadership, and in particular Kinnock, have tried to cool down opposition rather than build it up. Most councils including many 'left' councils like London and Sheffield have been only too ready to compromise and retreat.

Liverpool has been a different kettle of fish. There the Labour council has fought long and hard to maintain the level of services that it was elected to provide, and which it believes the shattered city needs.

Kinnock's advisers meanwhile have dreamt up a 'compromise' that gives an out to every rightist and waverer, both on the councils and its workforce, who wants to find an excuse for avoiding a fight. It is a classic stab in the back.

What is more, it has provided a useful political smokescreen for the abandonment of their election pledges by seven of the local Labour councillors. Although elected, like the rest of the councillors, pledged to break the law if necessary to defend the services of the council, they have backed off as the prospect of illegal action grows nearer.

Once again, they have proved that when

the pressure is on the Labour Party is quite unable to maintain unity in the face of a ruling class offensive and there will always be a layer of people prepared to compromise rather than fight.

But these people, although capable of backstabbing, are not the dominant force on the councils. That is provided by the supporters of the *Militant* newspaper. They have been quite prepared to break the law to defend the workers who elected them. They have not wavered on that and they should be congratulated.

But fighting the class war needs a bit more than blind determination. It also requires some sort of scientific analysis of the forces in play and some sense of how the fight will develop. The tragedy in Liverpool is that the supporters of *Militant* have been unable to do that.

The consequences look as though they might be serious. As the crunch approaches, it is starting to look as though the failure to analyse the situation will have led to failure to build effective opposition.



Terry Fields MP: outraged at right-wing treachery

Derek Hatton, deputy leader of the council and *Militant* supporter, said Liverpool's fight: 'Would act as a beacon to many other local authorities to follow suit, which would result in the bringing down of this Tory government and the return of a Labour government pledged to socialist policies.'

The district Labour Party's 1982 document outlining the 'No cuts, no rate rises' policy argued:

'The entire strategy of the district Labour Party is based on the premise that the council position should be used as a platform to expose the political bankruptcy of capitalism, educate the working class and provide a political leadership on a local level to ensure a fightback against the Tory policy of cuts in public expenditure.'

'A beacon', a means of 'exposing the political bankruptcy of capitalism.' These hopes have unfortunately not been matched by the campaign.

There were regular threats of defections by a group of right-wing Labour councillors as the 29 March budget day grew closer. Former Lord Mayor Paul Orr said: 'I am not a kamikaze councillor and I don't think anything will be achieved by being disqualified from office and made bankrupt by their action. There are five or six of us who believe this.' Margaret Delaney said she would risk expulsion from the party rather than vote for an illegal budget.

The leaders of the district Labour Party consistently denied the seriousness — indeed, the existence of the right wing threat, in spite of a fragile three-vote majority.

At public meetings Hatton declared, 'I know of no split in Labour's ranks.' *Militant* gave rumours of a split similar short shrift: 'The Labour Party in Liverpool is a united party.'

On 7 March six right wingers finally broke ranks. They announced they would not support an illegal budget. Incredibly, *Militant* supporters Tony Mulhearn and Terry Fields MP were 'outraged', 'shocked and angered', though the right wingers had been saying as much for months. Derek Hatton went further and said that the right wingers would still support the illegal, deficit budget despite their statement: 'I refuse to believe that on the day there will be anything but a united Labour group.'

Not only was there no attempt to prepare supporters for the right wingers' sell-out; there was no attempt to organise lobbies or demonstrations in their wards.

If the Labour group's attitude to the right wing faction was wilfully short-sighted, its open reliance on the national leadership of the Labour Party has been nothing short of suicidal. Neil Kinnock has dodged the banana skins of principle and integrity with all the skill of a ballerina. Support for Liverpool is a nettle he has no intention of grasping. At the Nottingham Labour local government conference Kinnock told councillors that they had a duty to stay in office to try to minimise the impact of cuts in services and jobs.

Kinnock has twice snubbed invitations to speak in Liverpool. The Liverpool party might have taken the hint and mounted a campaign against the inevitable offensive against them by Kinnock and the parliamentary leadership. Or at least a note of criticism.

Yet after Jack Straw the man who orchestrated the expulsion of six Blackburn supporters of the *Militant* Tendency arrived in Liverpool in February for talks, Derek Hatton was very confident that 'we will have the full support of the Labour Party leadership. Mr Straw and Dr John Cunningham... have indicated they don't think we have any alternative.'

Even on 7 March, when the Labour Party Environment spokesman, Dr John Cunningham, came out unequivocally in support of the right-wing group on the council, calling them 'brave and sensible', Derek Hatton persisted in the ludicrous claim that the Labour Party was backing the left's stand. He thundered at the council meeting: 'Not only will they (the right wing councillors) be dealt with by the Party, they will be dealt with by the trade union move-

ment and the vast majority of people in this city.'

But *who* in the Party? When the Clay Cross council was under attack in 1973 Harold Wilson left it high and dry, arguing: 'The law of the land, however unfair, however oppressive, must be obeyed until it is repealed.' Can we really expect any better from Neil Kinnock?

Liverpool's Labour Party drew radically different conclusions: 'The lessons of Clay Cross must be learned. A conference must be called of all Labour groups and local authority unions.' But to mean anything, such a conference could only have been built independently and *in conflict with* the Kinnock leadership. Yet Liverpool's position effectively undermined independent rank and file action by hitching the entire struggle to Kinnock's coat tails. They attacked the national leadership only after he had shaken them off.

The impossibility of a united campaign is graphically demonstrated by the attitude of the other left Labour councils.

A *Militant* editorial quoted David Blunkett, left wing leader of Sheffield council as saying: 'There will be a great deal of sympathy for Liverpool. But the other left wing authorities are not in the same position as Liverpool so there is no way they can take the same stand.' Every left council except Liverpool plans to wait until 1985 before mounting a fight.

Militant's dependence on the Labour Party leads it to cover for the very Labour left politicians who would leave the workers of Liverpool to fight alone.

What is most dangerous is that trade union activists tend to see Labour control as the answer to all their prayers. It is a senti-

ment on which the council capitalises. On 23 September last year 850 local authority stewards attended a meeting in works time. It was not a working conference but a Labour Party rally. The message was: 'It's your socialist council. Back it.' Loyalty to the council became the first duty of any local authority trade unionist. The council union leadership saw keeping Labour in office as central.

Broad Lefts

In a council handout, the unions were *fourth* on a list of target groups after the general public, community organisations and the voluntary sector!

The Liverpool Labour Party's electoralism is carried into the unions through its Broad Left strategy. *Militant* Tendency literature blithely ignores any distinction between rank and file workers and the full-time trade union officers who represent (and misrepresent) their interests at the negotiating table. Progress is not measured by the extent of grassroots shop stewards organisation but in the 'shift of mood towards the ideas of Marxism.' The CPSA, POEU and Bakers' Union are cited as evidence of this shift.

Hardly anyone asked: 'What happens on 30 March?', even though the Labour group looked almost certain to collapse. The one day strike became an end in itself, not a step towards the indefinite, all-out strike essential to defending jobs and conditions. A one day stoppage in Liverpool would not shake a government that could ignore *national* action over GCHQ.

To argue for indefinite strike action is to be seen as a raving maverick. Such action it is

argued would be 'premature' and 'frighten off' support for 29 March.

Finally, the Liverpool Labour Party has never admitted that the local and national union leaderships might be a problem. If Liverpool NALGO members strike, they will face not only the Tories but an executive who sold out the Liverpool typists. If Liverpool GMBTU members strike they will also have to deal with David Basnett. If TGWU members strike, Ron Todd won't exactly be militancy personified.

The problem for the Liverpool councillors is that if the Labour Party is the essential arena of struggle and the Labour Party has moved right, you have to accommodate to its shift in order to maintain support.

Ian Lowes, in the pages of *Militant* does concede the real situation that confronts council workers:

'If the Labour group doesn't carry out the policies they were elected on then our jobs are on the line. If the Labour group attempt to carry out the policies they were elected on our jobs are still on the line.'

It is the task of revolutionary socialists to argue the alternative: an all-out, indefinite strike by the council workforce, drawing in other sections of workers. This depends on *politics* — revolutionary politics — which sees power not in local government or parliament, but at the point of production in workers' independent organisation. It sees a victory in Liverpool being possible only independent of the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy. This will only be consistently pursued by a party whose ultimate aim is to destroy rather than reinforce parliamentary reformism. The real powers in the Labour Party are Neil Kinnock and the trade union leadership.



The 'choice' facing Liverpool Labour councillors: resisting the Tories or more cuts

Kinnock's stacked deck

After Tony Benn's by-election victory at Chesterfield and against the background of the miners' strike and Liverpool City Council's fight against rate capping Pete Goodwin puts Neil Kinnock's 'new look' Labour Party in perspective.

One of the central traditions of reformism is the division between the political and the industrial. It is a tradition that is particularly strong in Britain. And nothing better illustrates it than the way in which Labour politicians suddenly fade into the background during an important industrial dispute.

Ramsay MacDonald did it during the 1926 General Strike. Of course he had to say things about the strike. But what he said did not really count for much at the time. The important business of calling, conducting and selling out the strike was left to the TUC leaders.

It has been the same with Neil Kinnock over the last few months — over the NGA, over the GCHQ day of action and now over the miners. Each time Labour's rising star has demonstrated his star quality by stepping deftly back out of the limelight.

It has taken a bit of practice. Over the NGA people actually noticed that Kinnock remained silent for a few days. But then he said what was expected of him; he was

against breaking the law, but the whole mess was the fault of the Tories. Having said that he happily left centre stage to Len Murray. Over GCHQ Kinnock shared attention with the union leaders while the matter remained one of outrage at infringement of civil liberties. But when it came to taking industrial action then it was Len Murray who had to give the green light. Whether or not Neil Kinnock thought there should be some strike action on 28 February was something which the million or so who struck neither knew, nor, apparently, cared.

With the miners' strike Kinnock was quicker off the mark than with the NGA. But his message was the same: the Tories were being provocative, the mining industry was a national asset, violence was to be deplored. Having said that then things could happily be left to Arthur Scargill, Ray Chadburn and if necessary, Len Murray. Again, no-one seems to have bothered to ask Kinnock whether he supported the strike or not.

But although Labour politicians stand back from industrial struggles, that does not mean that they do not benefit from them.

Again the example of Ramsay MacDonald is worth recalling. MacDonald benefited both from industrial militancy and industrial defeats. The militancy of the first world war and post-war years played a large part in the transformation of the Labour Party into the major electoral alternative to the Tories thus putting MacDonald into Downing Street. The defeats enabled MacDonald to marginalise the left in his party.

Some of the same factors, though combined in a rather different way, apply today. Having incorporated the left in the Labour Party against a background of industrial defeats, Kinnock is now very well placed to be the main immediate political beneficiary of any upturn in industrial struggle.

Ironically, Tony Benn's clear-cut by-election victory at Chesterfield marks a new stage in the co-optation of the Labour left behind Neil Kinnock. It is worth looking at more closely.

Benn himself has claimed that 'the lesson of Chesterfield was that if we advocate our policies with commitment and without abuse, we get through to people ... I hope that our experience at Chesterfield will encourage others in the Labour Party to fight with clarity for the policies that have been accepted and adopted.'

The claim is a myth. A far more accurate description of the by-election campaign comes from the Kinnockite *New Statesman*:

'In the weeks available to him after his adoption, Tony Benn concentrated on Chesterfield not on the development of political ideas or arguments but on his own particular brand of community politics. What he projected so successfully was as much his open and engaging personality as his policies.'

The *New Statesman* thought 'it was exactly the right tactic' and so they were polite about the campaign. One could be ruder and point to the sheer gusto with which Benn embraced Hattersley and Healey. The high point of the campaign so far as the television watching public was concerned was Dennis Healey's visit, complete with the cracks about Torville and Dean and the songs by the pub piano. Benn didn't criticise the media for that.

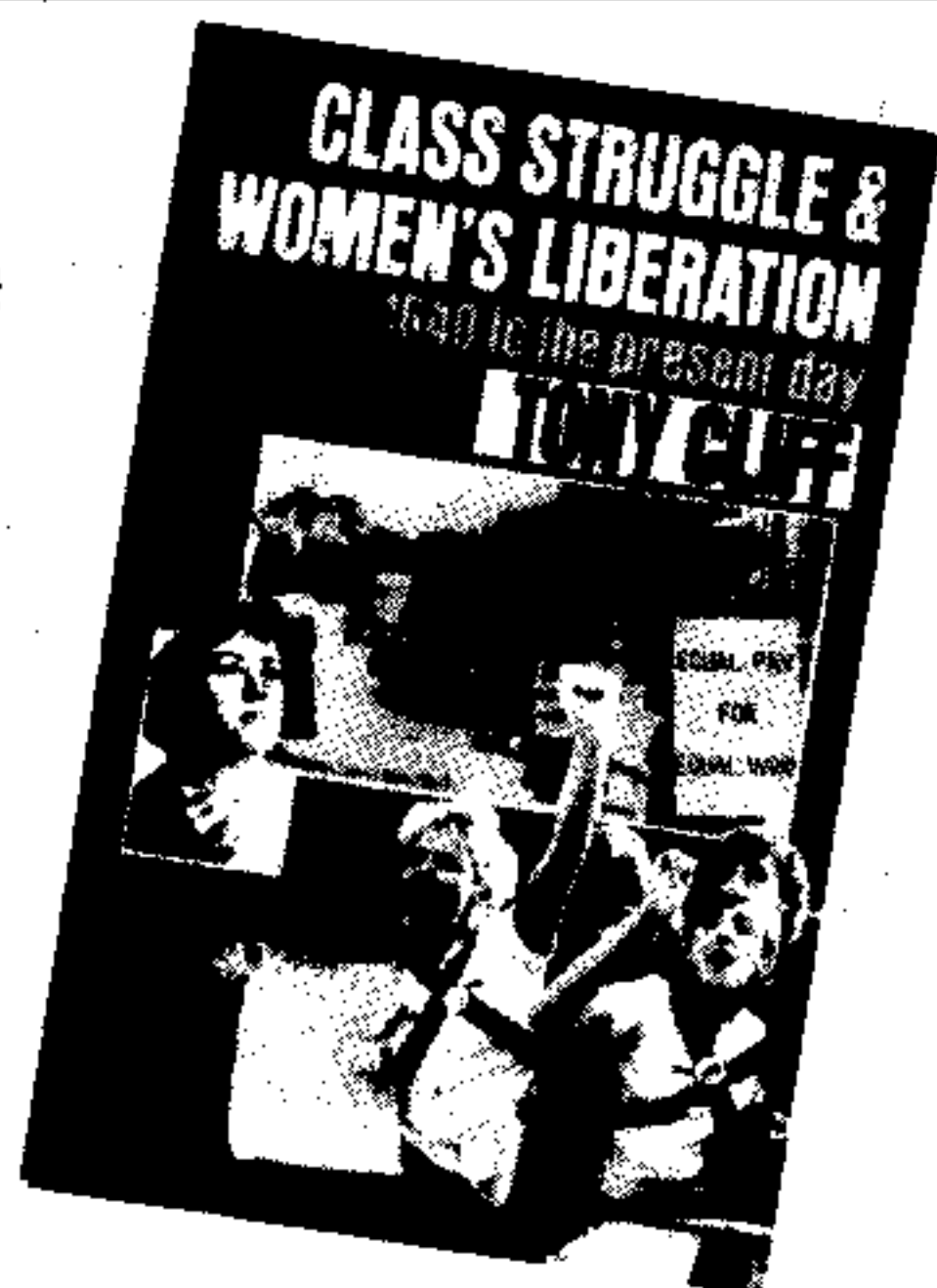
Nor did any of the Labour left have anything other than enthusiasm for this type of campaigning. Indeed *Socialist Action* (the current brand name under which the British section of the Fourth International is trading) went to great lengths to justify Benn's tactics. Here is just a sample of what they had to say:

'It cannot be seriously suggested that Benn fought his election on anything other than the party's election policies — including unilateral nuclear disarmament ... the notion of a Benn move to the right is foolish through and through ... To argue that Benn should not have fully involved the Labour leadership in his campaign is to say, in effect, Benn should have campaigned on the basis of challenging the existing party leadership ... To put forward that strategy would be to assume a political polarisation and divide which does not currently exist ... Tony Benn's campaign was so successful because he correctly judged the political mood and situation in the labour movement. He united in action with Kinnock, Hattersley and Healey to defeat the Tories and the Alliance — as he should.'

Socialist Action's verdict reveals just how far former revolutionaries can sink once they try and cover up their identity in the Labour Party. But, more important, it speaks volumes for the general mood on the Labour left in which unity behind Kinnock is now

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not even subject to nagging doubts.

Chesterfield came less than nine months after Kinnock declared himself a candidate for the Labour leadership. Yet in those nine months he has achieved virtually one hundred per cent success in drawing the Labour left behind him.

One other aspect of the Chesterfield campaign should be noted. The eventual result (Labour's share of the vote was more or less the same as at the general election) was not as good as Labour should have expected from the opinion polls. But it was considerably better than they had feared given Benn's past treatment by the media.

As it turned out Benn got a smooth ride from television and press (over all probably a better deal than either the Conservative or Liberal candidates got). But his good result was also due to a smoothly run and intensive electoral campaign. Labour professionals complemented themselves on not scoring any goals and on their cleverness in not having a daily press conference. Benn claimed that some 13,000 people attended his meetings in Chesterfield during the campaign. It is probably not much of an exaggeration, because a survey of the *Newsnight* panel of Chesterfield's voters indicated that more than 50 percent of them had actually seen or met Benn during the by-election.

That extremely high figure would be unrepeatable outside a by-election and it owes a lot to Benn's particular personal pull. But it shows the way in which the Kinnock Labour Party is moving — not just squeezing the left but also rebuilding Labour's electoral machine.

Disavowed

The way in which that machine is being built may be laughably slick to us, but nevertheless it is working. The very fact of Kinnock replacing Foot as Labour leader boosted Labour's showing in the opinion polls by several percentage points. In February the next stage was reached when, for the first time since the Falklands war, the Marplan poll for the *Guardian* put Labour narrowly ahead of the Conservatives. Other opinion polls since have confirmed that it is Kinnock's Labour Party, not the Alliance, that is benefitting from the government's banana skins.

So the Brahms-backed party political broadcasts are doing their job. And so surely will the Tracey Ullman video (Kinnock's campaign committee is no doubt well aware of Labour's recent weakness among younger voters).

But the Kinnock party is not being moulded simply at the level of the media. There is also some effort to supply an element of campaigning. That campaigning has to be strictly electorally oriented and it may look distinctly pathetic by our standards. But nevertheless it is necessary to reinvigorate Labour's electoral machine. So far it has resulted in the Campaign Ambulance (with a petition against NHS cuts) and now the Campaign Bus! Not very spectacular, and all very carefully controlled, but we are likely to see more of this type of thing.

Alongside these centrally directed cam-



Healey and Benn: the agility of Torville and Dean?

campaign initiatives go some rather more unofficial ones, chiefly conducted by the former Labour left. The most notable of them is the campaign against rate capping and the abolition of the metropolitan authorities conducted by Ken Livingstone, David Blunkett etc. The lack of focus on industrial mobilisation and strike action in this campaign will be a catastrophic weakness in terms of actually defending local authority jobs and services. But the campaign itself will probably be of considerable electoral benefit to Labour in the medium-to-long run.

Livingstone and Blunkett are bending over themselves to be moderate and respectable in their efforts to defend their local authority power base. That fits in well with Kinnock's strategy.

But what of the other centre of local government campaigning, Militant-led Liverpool? Indeed, what of Militant in general? Aren't they the one joker in Kinnock's neatly stacked deck?

It is true that Militant suffers less extremely than the rest of the Labour left from the separation of political and industrial. It still has two regular pages of industrial coverage (something which would be quite alien to, say, *Tribune*). It quite naturally leads on the miners' strike (again, unlike *Tribune*). And of course in Liverpool it has taken a stand against Tory local government cuts which goes way beyond the pathetic legalism of the Labour leadership (and, incidentally, has been criticised by *Tribune* for doing so).

The problem for Militant is that to maintain its position it has to participate with the rest of the Labour left in the great Kinnock-moving-right-show. In Liverpool that is unfortunately clear (see Alan Gibbons' article in this issue). Time and again Militant have pretended that they have or will get the support of Kinnock. For example on 19

March after the Labour local government spokesman, Cunningham, had supported the right-wing defectors from Liverpool Labour group and after a meeting in which Kinnock had specifically disavowed them, Militant supporter councillor Derek Hatton emerged from the meeting to proclaim:

'We are confident that more and more support will be given by the parliamentary leadership.'

The co-existence with Kinnock is not likely to be disturbed by *Militant's* stand on the miners' strike. For although obviously *Militant* goes way beyond Kinnock it in no way goes beyond the left union leaders. It does not criticise them and it does not propose any course of action which would embarrass them. Indeed it proposes little in the way of action at all. Instead it just proclaims that the miners will automatically get on with it. Any weaknesses in the strike are ignored. Take this extract from their 16 March lead as typical:

'The battle lines are drawn. Once on strike miners will be determined to go back only with a victory under their belt. If necessary they will dig in for a long bitter struggle.'

Given that the left union leaders including the leaders of the NUM are and will remain firmly behind Kinnock *Militant* is not going to find itself out on a limb here.

So although *Militant* is the only section of the Labour left to retain a serious independent public profile (and that will continue to gain it recruits) its independence will be subject to the need to co-exist with Kinnock.

We will increasingly be the only ones arguing hard against illusions in Kinnock. And because a lot of newly politicised people (starting on the miners' picket lines) are going to have illusions, we had better start mugging up our arguments.

Islam and reaction

Karl Marx, the Jewish atheist, wrote of Christianity that it is 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people.' Jonathan Neale argues that the same is true of fundamentalist Islam.

Recently we have seen and heard a lot about fundamentalist Islam. The Ayatollah's face stares at us from the television, the insurgent Shia militia moves into Beirut. It isn't hard for the commentators to explain. Christian west and Muslim east have been at each other's throats since the crusades. There is a rich vein of stereotypes to mine. The Ayatollah and his ilk are 'mad mullahs', 'fanatics' and 'whirling dervishes'. They are reactionary and irrational.

For British socialists much of this propaganda rings an uneasy bell. Fundamentalist Islam does seem reactionary, sexist and irrational. Yet we feel a certain uneasiness. We don't want to be associated with the commentators. It all seems a bit too imperialist, a bit racist.

It isn't. The television may be racist. We aren't. Fundamentalist Islam is reactionary. It is based on the bourgeoisie but appeals to far wider groups. It is implacably hostile to socialism, trade unionism and women's liberation.

But we must not let anyone say that being vicious and reactionary are only to be expected from backward and revolting arabs. They are qualities that are hardly alien to the West. Orange bigotry in Northern Ireland and Southern racism in the United States are but two examples.

In Turkey, in fact, the 'Grey Wolves' have managed to combine fundamentalist Islam with European fascism.

Reactionary populist creeds are a dangerous enemy. Look at what happened in Iran. In the summer of 1978 the movement against the Shah had reached an impasse. The people marched in the streets again and again. The Shah's army shot them down in tens and hundreds, and still they kept coming back. Marchers wrapped themselves in white burial sheets to show their willingness to die. The army obliged. The movement would not go away, the army would not budge. Then the working class moved.

There was a general strike. Car workers elected factory committees. Bank workers stopped the movement of money. Most important, the oil workers stopped. They were highly skilled and irreplaceable. The oil dried up. The flow of money that kept the Shah in power dried up with it. Workers felt their power.

Others responded to it. Army generals began booking tickets to Geneva. The move-

ment in the streets took heart. Soldiers began to fraternise with the crowds. By February air force technicians were handing out arms to the people in Tehran. The Imperial guards marched on the air bases, the leftist guerrillas rallied to the defence of the airmen. The armed forces disintegrated. The Ayatollah Khomeini flew in to a tumultuous welcome.

The left was jubilant. The workers had flexed their muscles and toppled one of the world's most 'secure' and hated tyrants.

But the Ayatollah and his brand of Islam had the support of a majority of the peasants. The right won control of the factory committees and the streets. The Ayatollah is still there. The left is in prison.

They use the same torture chambers as the Shah. The same men run the same machines. Now they are no longer called SAVAK, but SAVAMA. There is one small change. They are worse.

In the prisons the guards rape over and over again. They brand women on their breasts and shoot whole families together, the children with the parents. The state tries to kill all homosexuals and all believers in the Bahai faith. Prostitution carries the death penalty and to be a woman on the left is often proof enough of prostitution.

Bourgeois terror

Evil is done smugly. The family of a leftist come to the prison to collect her body. The gaolers give them a small amount of money. They explain it is brideprice. They say Islam forbids the execution of a virgin. Last night one of them married her so that this morning they could kill her.

On the Iraq border an endless war drags on. In the prisons they give one of our comrades a sedative. They take a syringe of blood, and another and another. They leave a pale corpse and send the blood to help the wounded at the front.

None of this is sanctioned by the Holy Koran. It is bourgeois terror at full throttle, nothing else. But it wears an Islamic face. Fundamentalist Islam has succeeded in mobilising masses in support of reactionary politics. And not just in Iran.

In Afghanistan Muslim guerrillas fight a holy war against the Russian invader. In Russia the Muslims have clung to their mosques for eighty years as the one surviving symbol of resistance to the Russians and the state. In Pakistan and Libya dictators use Islam to bolster unpopular regimes. In Syria, Morocco and Nigeria religious forces are prominent in anti-government riots. In Turkey the Grey Wolves organise assassination squads. In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood got Sadat and is now growing quickly as a focus of discontent. In the holy city of Mecca itself, 300 fundamentalists invaded the great mosque in protest against the corruption and vice of the Saudi royal family. They gave their lives for the faith in hand to hand fighting against the Saudi army

in the corridors underneath the mosque.

Fundamentalist Islam is different in each country. There are differences of history, doctrine and organisation. In some countries it is isolated. In others it is the core of the opposition. But there are similarities.

Fundamentalist Islam is everywhere based upon the more traditional sections of the bourgeoisie. In Iran they are called the 'Bazaaris': the people of the market. (The word means the same thing as bourgeois, burgess, burgomeister, bergman.) They are the great merchants and the petty traders, the silversmiths and the bicycle repairmen, the carpet merchant and the street pedlar, the great money lender and the respected scholar in the mosque. The great mosque of the town sits at the centre of the bazaar. Mohammed, after all, was a city man and a moderately successful merchant.

Other sections of the petty bourgeoisie are important too. In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood was started by a government clerk, and has always rested on the support of minor civil servants. In Afghanistan the resistance is often led by graduates of Kabul university's theology faculty.

What unites all these people is an ambivalent attitude towards the capitalist state. On the one hand it is slowly forcing them out of the centre of the economy. Banks replace money lenders, graduates of foreign universities bully clerks. On the other hand, they want to control the state for themselves. Their plundering merchants' hearts want a piece of the action. In Iran now Bazaaris and Mullahs are falling all over each other in competition for the Toyota parts dealership and control of the Chrysler factory.

At the same time Islam is a focus for cultural resistance to the West. The onslaught of Western ideas and Western technology in the last century has been immense. It is an onslaught that has been ushered in by the same forces that have pushed the Bazaaris to the margins of the economy. In Iran the peasantry identified 'Western' lifestyle and morality with the middle class that supported the Shah and was responsible for running the state machine and managing big business. It was seen as an example of a vicious and corrupt regime flaunting the values of its Western imperialist backers. In the Middle East the traditional bourgeoisie have felt humiliated and envious. They have turned for solace to Islam, with its proud, austere and learned traditions.

Reactionary Islam may be bourgeois in its base and its cadre. But it strikes many chords in the villages and some in the factories. There are several reasons for this. One of the most important is the long tradition of Islamic resistance to imperialism.

In Afghanistan the British invaded in 1838. The Afghan leaders took bags of gold as bribes. The occupying army ate up all the spare grain, the price of bread doubled and people began to starve. Come Christmas the Afghans drove the British army into the gorges outside Kabul and all but one man were killed in the snow. They fought under the banner of Islam.

In 1878 the British invaded again and were driven out in another holy war. In 1919 there was another war. For a hundred years the

British fought the Pathans on the Pakistan side of the Afghan border. The Pathans never won, the British never conquered. In the 1930s the British army in India was stationed along the frontier, playing war games on the Waziris and the Shinwaris. It is no wonder that Afghans now turn to Islam to unite against another heathen invader.

In Iran the Muslim clergy joined in the merchants' general strike of 1890 against the English tobacco monopoly. They joined in and partly led the 1906 constitutional revolution against the king. Many mullahs were involved in the opposition to the Shahs from 1926 on. Many supported the National Front government toppled by the CIA in 1953. Ayatollah Khomeini led mass demonstrations against the Shah in 1963. Hundreds were shot down, and he was jailed and deported. When the regime fell in 1979, the Ayatollah and the Muslim right had paid their dues.

Ghaddafi in Libya dressed up state capitalism in the language of Islam. He has to. From 1912 to 1930 the Libyans fought a guerrilla war against the Italian conquerors. The Italians pioneered many now familiar techniques of pacification. They herded the Libyans into concentration camps, poisoned the wells and massacred the camels, sent planes out over the desert to search for and strafe any human life. The Libyan ruling class deserted. The Italians bought one religious leader after another. But always a new religious leader was found, and for eighteen years they fought on under the banner of Islam.

Resistance

In the Sudan now Numeiri has suddenly become a born-again Muslim. Partly his government is in hock to the Saudis. But also he is looking over his shoulder at the Ansaris. This religious order is the core of the right opposition in northern Sudan. Nobody has forgotten the Mahdi, the Ansari leader who drove the British out a hundred years ago and killed General Gordon. His descendants lead the Ansaris now.

The Muslim right has other sources of support in the villages. The Shah of Iran was not just a tyrant equally at home on the ski slopes and in the casinos. He was also the personal owner of hundreds of Iranian villages. His relatives, his generals and his toadies owned thousands more villages. The Shah's exclusive hunting preserves covered thousands of square miles. He and his father had broken millions of nomadic herders by stealing their grazing, forbidding their migrations and effectively killing their herds.

When revolution came the villagers and nomads in many areas took the bus into town to protest against the Shah, risking their lives in the street. At home in the village the peasants took the occasion to drive out the landlord. The nomads returned to the migration.

Again, in Afghanistan the mullahs have for many years led the resistance to all forms of encroaching state power: land taxes, schools, army garrisons, grazing permits and the like. The Afghan peasants now are not just fighting against the invader; they are fighting the state under the banner of Islam.



Populist reaction—a dangerous enemy

Militant male chauvinism is another important strength of the appeal of fundamentalist Islam. For the merchant classes the seclusion of women and the rights of property have always gone hand in hand. Women are property. It isn't surprising to hear such men talk of veiling women and chopping off the hands of thieves in the same breath.

For peasants the case is somewhat different. A few rich families in the village might wall off their women folk: poor men worked alongside their wives and daughters in the fields. Seclusion was impossible. Yet for the poor the veil remains an important symbol of women's subjection. The poor man who cannot veil his woman cannot control her. This is most true for the working man in the city. When his wife goes to work in another factory he is no longer her lord or paymaster. For the poor man his wife may be his last and only stake in the system. And in the countryside a man who reveals his weakness by being unable to defend the honour of his women may well find his fields taken as well the next year.

In the Middle East today the peasants and workers are beginning to enter the stage of history in their own right. The Iranian workers may have followed the line of the Ayatollah: they also slung out their managers and struck for higher wages. Workers and peasants in the Middle East are, after all, *believers*. They phrase their hopes and demands in the language of Islam because that is their language. Those demagogues who would use them must also speak in that language.

This presents revolutionaries in Muslim countries with great difficulties: strategic, tactical and personal. A straightforward denial of Islam usually means a break with

all your family and often political isolation as well. It may mean death. It is no wonder that most revolutionaries either fudge their beliefs or try to develop a form of 'progressive Islam'. But in doing so they put themselves hopelessly on the defensive. The Ayatollah and the Muslim Brotherhood are, after all, right about what the Koran and Islam stand for. To meet them on that ground is to concede defeat.

Revolutionaries have to stand out for a secular and anti-religious politics. Marx, after all, was speaking of Christianity when he said that 'religion is the opium of the people'.

Nor is secular revolutionary politics doomed in the Middle East. In Egypt, Turkey, Kurdistan and Morocco the left does have a base as strong as the right, if not stronger. The working class has grown and is growing. They will not remain locked forever in the traditions of a backward-looking village past.

Islamic reaction has little hold in the PLO or among the Palestinian people. There is a reason. Over ten percent of the Palestinian Arabs are Christians. Before 1947 they were concentrated in Galilee, now a part of Israel and then under Zionist threat. In the thirties there was a six months general strike under bourgeois leadership. To maintain Palestinian unity the leadership argued that the movement had to be rigidly secular. So it has remained with the PLO. George Habbash, the founder of the PFLP, comes from a many dedicated Palestinian activists from a Christian background. And because a tradition of struggle against imperialism and the existing state had been built which was secular and militant, Islamic reaction has been unable to get a secure foothold among Muslim Palestinians.

War and reaction

Horrible TV pictures of the casualties of the Iran-Iraq war continue to remind us that this brutal conflict is continuing on a large scale. **Phil Marshall** looks at the background.

The Gulf war has continued for over three and a half years because both Washington and Moscow have preferred instability in the region to the possibility of victory for the Iranian or Iraqi regimes. The superpowers have provided arms and occasional encouragement to both sides, cynically stirring the pot and allowing Baghdad and Tehran to send hundreds of thousands of young workers and peasants to their deaths.

But who are the superpowers so anxious to keep in power? Is there anything to choose between the two regimes? Should socialists support one side or the other?

The recent history of the two countries has been very different. While Iran has experienced the rise of the mass movement that toppled the Shah in 1979, Iraq has seen 20 years of rigid control by a series of tight-knit bureaucracies advertising themselves as 'Arab socialists'.

The present leadership of the Iraqi Baath (Resurrection) Party came to power in 1968, ten years after the nationalist coup that

toppled British-supported monarch Faisal II. The 1958 'revolution' was carried through by army officers under Colonel Abdel-Karim Kassem, in an operation that echoed the Free Officers' coup of Nasser in Egypt in 1952.

The coup was a simple military takeover but had been preceded by years of opposition activity in which Iraqi workers and the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) played prominent roles.

Iraq was one of the first Arab countries to develop an industrial sector, based on the oil industry and on the military machine built up by the British during World War II. By 1954 industrial workers numbered 130,000, with over 40 percent in establishments of over 100 workers—a far higher level than any other country in the region.

There were important strikes in the late 1940s and again in 1953 when the tobacco workers in Baghdad and the oil workers at Basra in the south organised for union recognition. By the end of the 1950s the General Federation of Trade Unions claimed 275,000 worker and artisan members. As organisation developed so did the influence of the ICP, which played a key role among the largest concentrations of workers—on the state railway, Basra port and the oilfields.

When news spread that the monarchist regime had been toppled in July 1958 huge

demonstrations filled the streets of Baghdad, with the ICP playing a prominent mobilising role. The party—now stronger than any comparable organisation in the region—opposed the military government and grew rapidly, capturing leading positions throughout the unions. Some Iraqi oppositionists still argue that by 1959 the ICP was strong enough to make a serious bid for power, but in a sudden turn-around the party moved to a position of support for the Kassem government.

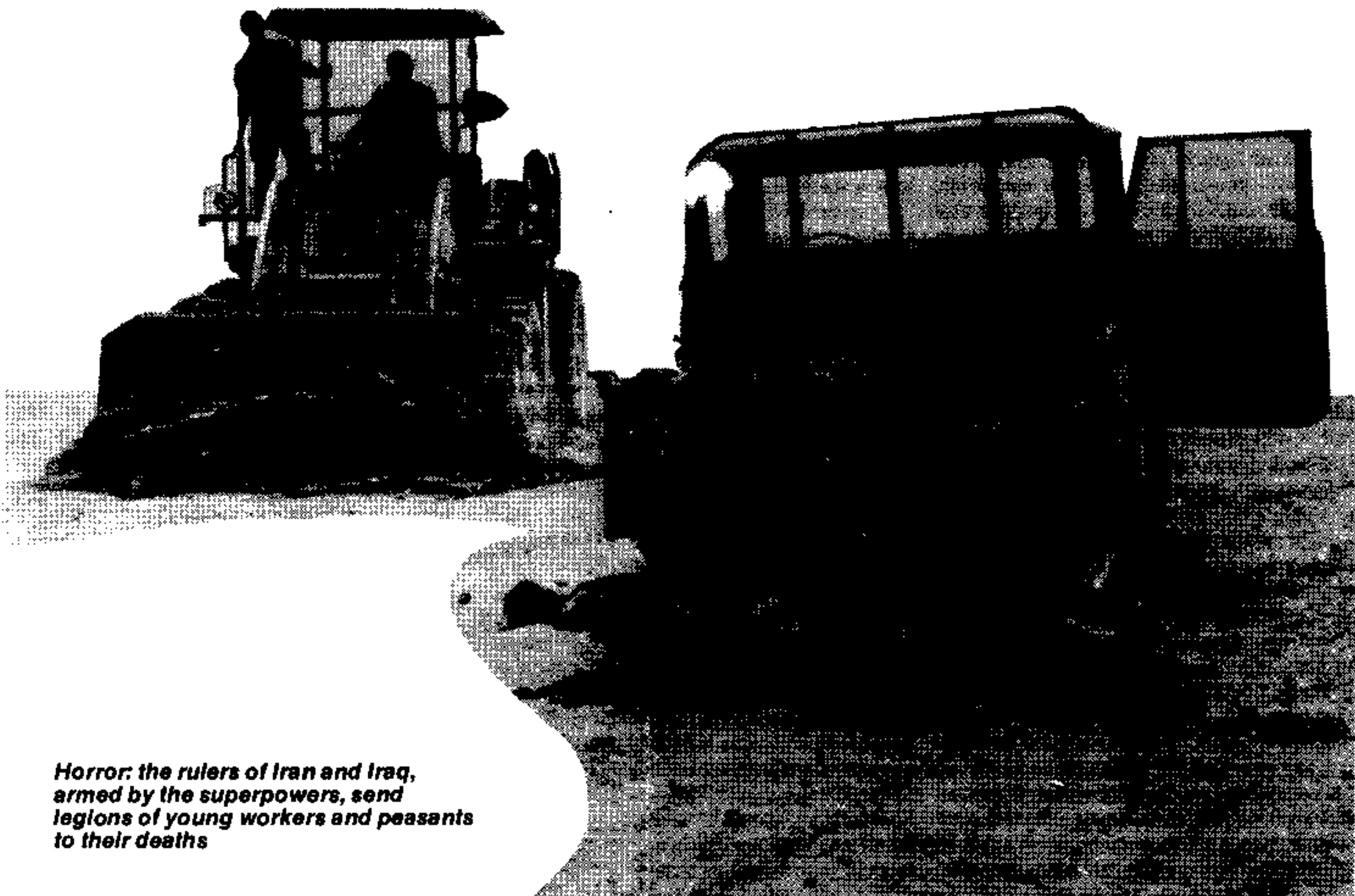
The move was a critical one. Apparently motivated by Moscow's desire to adopt a lower profile in its Cold War confrontations with the United States, the shift caused disorientation among the party's many supporters. The ICP now called for the formation of a 'broad national front' with Kassem, in support of 'progressive measures of government policy', and canvassed for ministerial positions.

Anti-communist

The government would not admit the party and, sensing its opportunity, initiated an anti-communist campaign, with repression directed against ICP cadres and supporters. Still the party followed Moscow's line, refusing to use its real industrial strength to fight back and causing further confusion on the left.

If February 1963 Kassem was overthrown in a coup organised by nationalist army officers and the Baath Party. Purges and mass murders of communists and workers activist followed immediately—an estimated 5,000 were killed.

The Iraqi working class movement has



Horror: the rulers of Iran and Iraq, armed by the superpowers, send legions of young workers and peasants to their deaths

never recovered from the trauma of 1963. When the Baath Party ousted the softer nationalists in 1968 there was no hint of workers' opposition. The Baath has maintained tight control over Iraqi politics ever since.

During the period of Baathist control Iraq has continued to develop rapidly. Unlike neighbouring Arab countries Iraq has a large population (14 million), substantial oil reserves and plentiful supplies of water. Of all the Arab states of the Gulf region Iraq has been regarded as most likely to 'take off' as a centre of industrial and agricultural development.

By 1980 gross domestic product was increasing at an annual rate of 21 per cent.

In 1977 government figures showed that there were almost 850,000 workers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport, against a million peasants and a further million in services.

But the rapid growth in the number of industrial workers has not been accompanied by a rise in the level of struggle. The Baathists developed an intensely repressive regime that has maintained pressure on workers and on Iraq's main religious and national oppositions—the Shia Muslims of the south and Kurds of the north.

The Baath originated in Syria in 1940, recruiting among small businessmen, functionaries and young army officers. It was aggressively anti-communist, arguing that it would represent 'Arab spirit against materialistic communism'.

In the mid-60s the Iraqis split away and soon came under the control of Saddam Hussain and a clique of family and friends the 'Tikritis'.

Strong state sector

The Tikrit clique developed an ideology emphasising national development on the basis of a strong state sector but with some areas remaining under private control. Modest land reforms were enacted. With a party cadre drawn largely from the military and technocratic layers the system was a classic of the state capitalist model pursued by nationalist movements in Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Libya and Yemen in the 1950s and 60s.

Under Saddam Hussain the party developed a particularly vicious repression, with Saddam himself setting the tone by supervising executions of opponents.

The atmosphere of terror created by this level of repression has been an important factor in limiting workers' opposition but more so the nature of the Communist Party. While the party never recovered the influence it enjoyed in the early '60s, it nevertheless retained considerable support as the only coherent opposition force. In 1973 the Baath induced the ICP to join a 'Progressive National Front' government.

The Baathists concentrated their energies on a military campaign against the Kurdish guerrillas and then in 1976 and 1977 Saddam turned on the ICP, arresting and then executing leading activists. By mid-1979 the ICP was again underground with thousands of members and supporters imprisoned.

But like all such systems, the Baathist

regime is vulnerable. Baghdad was horrified when the Shah of Iran's huge apparatus of repression was unable to crush a mass movement in which industrial workers played a key role. With the threat of Kurdish rebellion in the north and a growing Shia opposition mobilising in the south Saddam decided to pre-empt any effort to spread the Iranian revolution and invaded.

Saddam seems to have been encouraged by the United States and Saudi Arabia. While the Saudis had long been rivals of Iraq in the region, the realisation that the Iranian movement might spread throughout the Gulf, threatening to bring down the western-supported monarchies, led them to move closer to Iraq.

When Iraq launched its offensive the fundamentalist regime of Khomeini was already engaged in systematically destroying the working class and popular organisations that had emerged in 1978 and 1979.

The mullahs dismantled workers' committees and smashed the national minorities—the Kurds, Turkoman and Baluchi. An offensive was declared on the guerrilla organisations of the left—the Fedayeen and Mujahidin. Only the Stalinist Tudeh Party, which supported the government, was spared.

The Iraqi invasion produced determined opposition from the Iranian forces, especially the irregular revolutionary guards in the cities of the south. The Iraqis were soon bogged down and after several months of stalemate Iran began to go onto the offensive.

The left in Iran was badly confused by the events. The Tudeh Party and the guerrillas supported the government on the basis that the fight against Saddam proved Khomeini to be essentially 'anti-imperialist'. Revolutionaries argued that defence against the invading forces was legitimate, as a victory for Iraq would instantly remove the modest freedoms still enjoyed by the working class. However they also maintained that Khomeini's regime remained profoundly reactionary and that any Iranian military offensive should be opposed. They were soon proved correct when the government used the war as a device to tighten the screw on all internal opposition.

Today Iran presents a depressing picture. With the partial exception of the Kurds, the national autonomy movements have been crushed. Independent workers' committees have long since disappeared and the regime is bent on introducing archaic Islamic practices throughout society.

Power is now firmly in the hands of the 'technocrat' group of Prime Minister Musavi and Majlis (parliament) speaker Rafsanjani. Khomeini seems to have endorsed the policies of the group.

The 'technocrats' are bent on the restoration of full capitalist relations in Iran. They favour modest reforms—with some redistribution of land and control of foreign trade—but are mainly concerned with developing Iranian industry by giving local businessmen the chance to establish a bigger and better Iranian bourgeoisie.

One Tehran businessman claimed last year that 'things are better than they were under the Shah', explaining that with some

of the multinationals out of the picture local companies have a bigger chance in the market.

For almost three years after the revolution Iran was shut off to foreign trade. Now trade has resumed—principally with western countries formerly described as 'satana'. Trade with West Germany increased by 100 per cent during the first three months of 1983. Over the same period trade with Britain and Japan increased by 300 per cent. Iran is regarded as the boom economy of the Middle East and the multinationals are eager to return.

For the last three years the Iranian working class has been largely passive. Strikes have occurred—like that at the giant Isfahan steel works and in smaller plants near Tehran. But the momentum of 1978 and 79 has disappeared. The guerrilla groups never had a working class base, while the Tudeh Party supported the regime and has in turn been violently depressed—there is no focus of opposition in the workplaces.

There is little to choose between the regimes of Saddam and Khomeini. Each is brutal and deeply anti-working class. Each has sent legions of young workers to their deaths—Saddam out of fear for his party's grip on power—Khomeini for revenge and from a combination of religious fervour and Persian nationalism.

Slaughter

But Baghdad and Tehran could only have continued the slaughter with the support of the arsenals controlled by the superpowers. Iraq has been supplied by Russia, France and more recently, the US. Iran has been supplied more surreptitiously by North Korea, Britain and the US—channelling supplies through Israel.

Neither superpower wants a clear-cut victory. Each has problems in the region. US status is at an all-time low since the Lebanon debacle, while Russia has the continuing problem of Afghanistan. The war at least keeps two major regional powers from further extending their own influence, especially in the oil-rich lower Gulf.

As long as the supply of weapons continues the two sides can maintain their offensives. The odds must be with Iran for final military victory—with 40 million people Iran has three times the Iraqi population and a far stronger economy—but both Washington and Moscow have clearly stated that they do not wish to see Khomeini winning through.

For socialists the war is a sorry spectacle. What can be said is that the pressures imposed on both ruling classes by the conflict will sooner or later bring renewed opportunities for the workers' movement. The two countries have witnessed the major working class offensives in the Gulf region over the past 30 years.

In each case the working class has lacked the leadership which might have been able to ensure permanent gains, with both conventional Stalinist and guerrilla strategies proving hopelessly inadequate. The working class in the region will continue to grow—but can the revolutionary socialist tradition grow with it?

The workers who seized power

A new book *Red Petrograd* by S A Smith (Cambridge University Press £25.00) gives a detailed account of how ordinary Russian workers in one of the centres of the Russian Revolution organised not only to depose the Czar but to overthrow the capitalist order. Colin Sparks examines how the book demolishes common myths about the revolution, myths that are still thrown in the faces of socialists today.

You don't need to have been talking to SWP members for very long before the subject of the Russian Revolution of 1917 comes up. In discussion on almost anything from the miners' strike to the Lebanon we take as one of our points of reference events which took place a long time ago and in a country far away.

The reason that we have this apparent obsession is that the Russian Revolution is the best example of how workers can take control of society. What happened in 1917 in Russia was, quite simply, that ordinary workers overthrew first the Czar and then their own factory bosses and ran things for themselves. That is an historical experience of the greatest possible interest to socialists.

The ruling class and its ideological supporters repeat day after day that running society is an enormously difficult business, and that only those who rule are fitted for the job. The rest of us, they imply, are too stupid to ever be able to control our own lives.

Taking power

Those arguments stick. You will meet all sorts of people, including very militant workers, who agree that capitalism is rotten and that it would be much better if the world was run on the basis of need rather than profit, and then baulk at the idea that the working class has the energy and ability to run the world for itself.

From the Fabians back in 1888 to the supporters of Joseph Stalin in the 1930s through to the Ken Livingstones of today, there are those who think that the way to get socialism is to get the right people into positions of power from where they will usher in a world of peace and plenty.

The Russian Revolution is the best example of how wrong that pessimism about the working class is. It was concrete proof that workers, ordinary workers like you and me, can break with the stultifying ideas of their own inferiority and take power.

Because it is such an important example, we keep on referring back to it. And because it is such a dangerous example, the bourgeoisie and their hired intellectuals have

spent almost 70 years trying to obscure the truth of the revolution.

One of their favourite ploys is to argue that what happened was not a real workers' revolution but a coup in which Lenin and the tightly organised Bolshevik party aspired to grab power and run the whole show themselves.

S A Smith's book is a very interesting nail in the coffin of that ruling class argument.

Smith, an academic with left-wing sympathies, has studied the factory councils in Petrograd (now Leningrad) during and after the revolution. The factory councils were directly elected bodies based on the workplace and their delegates were subject to recall. They were quite like shop stewards' committees in many of their functions, although the fact that they were thrown up in the middle of a revolution meant that they had rather wider scope than we are used to. Even more than the 'soviets' or councils of delegates from all the factories in an area, these factory committees were the day-to-day voice of the workers.

The first myth that Smith demolishes is that the workers of Russia were in some way special and different from workers in the West. It was certainly true that industrialisation took place very late in Russia and that many workers were born into peasant families and often wished to return to the land, but there was also a hard core of workers, particularly amongst engineering workers, who had been born into proletarian families and were just as much real workers as anyone in Glasgow or Berlin.

Indeed, there were important ways in which the working class in Petrograd was much more a modern working class than its brothers and sisters in the West. Capitalism in Russia started late and almost from scratch. Very often factories had been set up, or actually run, by the most advanced technicians from the West.

The factories had therefore been planned from the start to take advantage of the most modern techniques of production. The planners had not been hampered by the need to fit advances around existing buildings or plant, and were able to design very advanced workshops.

Because the labour force was a relatively new one, it was, initially, in a much weaker position to resist than engineers elsewhere, say, with fifty or one hundred years of craft tradition behind them. There was no Russian equivalent of the craftist ASE defending the interests of the skilled and forcing the capitalists to compromise on new methods.

Of course there were skilled workers in Russian factories. The literate, highly trained worker, born in the cities and without roots in the countryside, was at the core of the Petrograd working class. And there was unskilled labour, often drawn straight from the village by the promise of relatively high wages, without urban skills and used in the dirtiest jobs.

The Petrograd working class was as modern, perhaps more so, than its equivalent in the older capitalist economies, but its divisions reflected this too. There were big differentials of pay between skilled and unskilled workers, between the mostly male workers of the engineering industry and the overwhelmingly female labour force of the textile industries.

There was, however, one way in which the working class of Russia was very different from that of the West. The Czarist state had always been determined to crush any attempts at independent trade union organisation. They had never been entirely successful — the normal processes of capitalist production had meant that some very limited negotiating rights had been won by workers at favourable moments in the class struggle. But there were none of the huge bureaucratised parties and trade unions that were, and are, the norm elsewhere.

The political world that the working class had to operate in was different in other respects too. The Czarist state was an 'absolute' one, like that of Charles I or Louis XII.

Leon Trotsky

It was this political backwardness that led many people, including the majority of socialists, to think that what would happen in Russia would be a repeat of 1642 in England or 1789 in France. These revolutions were what Marxists call 'bourgeois' revolutions because they swept away the power of the monarchy and the landed aristocracy and placed in power the capitalist class.

Almost alone amongst Russian socialists, Leon Trotsky argued that, because the Russian bourgeoisie was so tied to the Czarist state, and because the working class was so developed and advanced, there could be no bourgeois revolution.

Instead, the working class would, leading the peasantry, who formed the vast majority of the population, sweep away the Czar. They would not then simply hand over power to their exploiters — but would go on to take power themselves. This was the famous theory of permanent revolution.

Smith shows that Trotsky was right. The Czar's regime was not held up by a few policemen. It was now based on the production which poured out of the factories. The demands of the first world war had turned Petrograd into a boom city with new factories working flat out to meet orders. That output was guaranteed by managers, experts and foremen who used every barbarous method they could think of to screw more profit out of the workers.

In February 1917, the Czar and his secret policemen went down under the onslaught of militant workers and soldiers. The confidence that had overthrown an ancient despotism also turned to the question of how the factories were run. Smith shows how workers seized the opportunity to settle scores with their immediate enemies.

'Throughout the factories of Petrograd workers clamoured for the removal of all members of the management hierarchy



Ordinary workers who overthrew capitalism—a meeting at the Putilov factory to re-elect the Petrograd soviet. Part of their banner reads: 'Long live the feast of the universal army of workers'

who had made their lives miserable under the *ancien regime*, who had behaved tyrannically, who had abused their authority, who had taken bribes or acted as police informers. Sometimes administrators were removed peacefully, sometimes by force. At the Putilov works, the director and his aide were killed by workers and their bodies were flung in the Obvodnyi canal; some forty members of management were expelled during the first three "days of freedom".

'In the engine/assembly shop, Puzanov, *quondam* (former) chief of the factory's Black Hundreds (fascists), was tossed in a wheelbarrow, red lead was poured over his head, and he was ignominiously carted out of the factory and dumped in the street. In the brickyard of the same plant, A V Spasskii, the foreman, was deprived of his duties for: (i) rude treatment of workers (ii) forced overtime, as a result of which such incidents occurred as when the worker, S Skinder, having worked overtime, collapsed at midnight of exhaustion and had to be taken to hospital...'

The removal of the worst managers and foremen was followed by struggles against the whole capitalist class, even the bene-

volent ones. Workers fought for the eight-hour day and higher wages. The political revolution led to a massive wave of economic struggles.

The struggle increasingly involved workers through their factory committees taking decisions about the day-to-day running of the factories and challenging every aspect of management power. But when a capitalist was kicked out of his own factory he turned to the state to get it back for him. It soon became clear to workers that in order to settle with their own capitalists they would have to settle with all capitalists and with their state machine.

Ordinary workers

It was real workers, not some breed of supermen and women, who came to this conclusion. No-one should think that Russian workers were better than workers in the rest of the world, or freer from the prejudices and shortcomings that real people everywhere else have to struggle against.

In July 1917 the government planned to evacuate plant and equipment from Petrograd, dismissing most of the workers with two weeks' pay. They wanted to 'rationalise' war production and feared a German

occupation. Workers saw it as an attempt to break the revolutionary movement. The following is a typical resolution from workers in the Putilov works. After denouncing the plan as a counter-revolutionary plot, they went on:

'We the workers and peasants will stay put, since we believe that...the people will have the opportunity to take power into their own hands and then no crisis need occur. We suggest that Petrograd be unloaded of its monasteries, infirmaries, asylums, alms-houses, and many thousands of idle bourgeois. We also propose to find out why there is such a great concentration of Chinese in the city.'

This example shows that although workers had class hatred in ample measure and were prepared to fight for their class interests, it was not because they were less prejudiced any more than it was because they were more exploited than other workers.

The fact that an upsurge of militancy does not automatically transform the whole of the working class is a general one. It had only been in the course of a long *struggle* that the working class of Petrograd became conscious of the need to seize state power.

What the working class found itself en-



Three workers from the Putilov factory on street patrol

gaged in was a struggle for control. It began as a struggle to control the factories, but inevitably progressed to the question of the state. An economic crisis developed in the summer of 1917 and the factory committees found themselves forced more and more to keep the factories running against both the logic of profitability and the various attempts at sabotage by the owners.

What happened in the course of that struggle was that the composition of the local leadership in many factories changed. At the time of the overthrow of the Czar, for example, the pro-war Mensheviks had been strong in many of the largest factories — dominating, for example, the famous Putilov works. But as workers learned bitter lessons in the struggle for control, in the fight against closure and the battle against the reactionary military conspiracies designed to bring back the despotism, the local leadership changed. Increasingly, the factory committees came to be dominated by Bolsheviks since it was only they who put forward arguments that met the needs of the hour.

The Mensheviks, suffered from the problem that their leaders were in the government. The minister of labour in the Kerensky government was one Skobolev, who had won his spurs three years earlier whipping up enthusiasm for the war. In those circumstances the Bolsheviks, who fought against class-collaboration and put the needs of the workers at the centre of its demands, quickly gained support.

But it was their own experience of what was necessary in the struggle that convinced the mass of workers. The closer any organ of power was to rank and file workers on the shopfloor the more quickly it moved to Bolshevik positions. Smith records workshop committees of Bolshevik sympathy clashing with factory committees of Menshevik views. Then he records factory committees of Bolshevik persuasion clashing with soviets, union leaders and government. Radicalism and the drive for workers' power began at the bottom.

The role of the struggle to end the war in all of this is not very clear from Smith's

book. In his account the war and the economic demands it placed upon Russian society form a background against which the struggle for control was fought out. The simple issue of: 'Are you for war or peace?' does not seem to have dominated many factory meetings. Perhaps that is just a result of his perspective on the events, but there is a deeper point at stake.

If there is one thing that comes out of this book, it is that although the revolution itself may be a simple single act of seizing power, the reasons why the mass of workers support such an act is that it is the essential step towards solving their concrete problems. Revolutionary politics is not something that is grafted on to the workers' movement, nor is it a stage of consciousness which workers reach as the result of their enlightenment at the hands, or rather the tongues, of the enlightened socialist. It is something that arises out of the very logic of the struggle against capitalist society. The Russian revolution was a workers' revolution in the fullest sense: the working class took power from the bottom up.

In this perspective the war as a direct issue was of more importance to the army. The discipline of military life and the slaughter of the front turned the backward peasants into revolutionaries too — someone who disobeyed the orders of officers and would not shoot on his fellow toilers. In that light the war made the revolution possible because it destroyed the internal cohesion of the army and thus deprived the ruling class of the chance of drowning the workers' movement in blood.

Today's lessons

So another myth about the Russian Revolution falls: it was not some aberration produced by conditions of military chaos and therefore unrepeatable in different circumstances. Yes, the war was crucial in putting enormous stress on the economic and social fabric of Russia. Yes, the war was crucial in shaking the whole of society and in exposing the rotten bloodstained incompetence of the rulers. Yes, the war was crucial in demoralising and splitting the army. But the forces which made the revolution were influenced by the war and not produced by it. The motor of the Russian revolution was the nature of production in a capitalist society.

It is the strength of Smith's book that it shows how the revolution developed in the factories. Because of that tight focus it is not the best place to start your study of the Russian Revolution. For that read Trotsky or Cliff's second volume on Lenin. They have the wider sweep which puts things into better perspective without which large parts of Smith's book are difficult to follow.

With that qualification, the book is well worth your time. Get your local library to order it.

Smith shows that the Russian Revolution developed along lines that can be understood by looking at modern British society. It was long ago and far away but the *essential* conditions that turned a popular revolt into a working class seizure of power are ones that we can see all around us.

A new book by *Socialist Worker*
editor Chris Harman

Explaining the Crisis



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How capitalism isn't working

Lindsey German reviews *Chris Harman's* new book *Explaining the Crisis*.

In 1973, the biggest sustained boom in the history of capitalism turned into crisis. A quarter of a century of economic expansion, massive development of industry and rising living standards for workers came to an end.

Many of the features of Thatcher's Britain today are the result of the deep economic crisis which replaced the boom. They are a depressingly familiar list. Mass unemployment, the attempt to hold down real wages, savage attacks on health, education and welfare spending, and vicious immigration policies and they all point to two things. Firstly that the system itself is incapable of the unlimited economic expansion which characterised the 1950s and 60s. Second, that the ruling class's solution to the crisis is to make the working class pay.

They try to hold on to as much of the wealth produced as they can. If they can persuade or bully workers into accepting the same (or lower) wages for doing more work then they can increase their profit. If they can persuade women in the home to care for the old and the sick, rather than providing social services, then less of the system's surplus goes on schools and hospitals. If they can force immigrant workers to return to their country of origin rather than remain in countries like France or Britain, then less of the surplus is taken up in unemployment pay and other welfare benefits.

Degrees of crisis

The response of Thatcher and British capitalism is remarkably similar to that of the rulers of other advanced capitalist countries. Whether you look at the United States, Germany and France in the West, or Poland, Hungary and Russia in the East, the policies of the world's rulers vary only in degree.

Yet none of them can solve the crisis. One thing the world's rulers have in common is an inability to understand or deal with it. Yet there is an explanation for why the boom turned into slump, and why, despite minor recoveries, world capitalism cannot pull itself out of the crisis. In *Explaining the Crisis* Harman first looks at the theories of economic crisis which Marx developed in the 19th century. Marx talked of capitalism as a system whose dynamic is the accumulation of capital.

What makes the system tick is not the greed of the individual capitalist, but the fact that he is forced to amass more and more wealth in order to compete with other capitalists. But within that accumulation and the growth of capital are the seeds of the crisis. As it grows, the rate of profit—what the capitalist receives for his investment—tends to fall. To compete effectively the capitalist is forced to invest in

greater and more sophisticated machinery. But as he does so he invests *proportionately* more in machinery than in workers to work. Since the source of profit is the surplus value created by exploiting *workers*, investing more in machinery will lead to a fall in the rate of profit.

This law is at the heart of Marx's theory of the crisis. But it is not an iron law. Marx himself saw what he called 'countervailing tendencies' which offset the falling rate of profit and so allow the system to maintain periods of stability and sometimes expansion, as well as of slump.

Indeed only by explaining the long post-war boom Harman argues, can we develop an analysis of the crisis today. And the boom can't be explained without looking at how the world in which it developed had changed since early capitalism.

Traditionally, the accumulation of capital involved competition between individual companies making engines or shoes or cans of beans. The less competitive firms would be forced out of business by the more competitive. Eventually though, the tendency was for companies to develop into larger and larger firms which played an increasingly important part in their national economies.

Within each major nation there grew up a relatively small number of dominant companies. Increasingly their competition became national, which meant that military spending and competition between nations became more important. And increasingly the national state intervened in industry in order to enable it to compete with other nations. It could do this even if the individual capitalist's rate of profit decline, because it was able to direct the mass of surplus into areas even if there could be no immediate return on profit.

It became clear after the second world war that all the major nations were investing in one particular area above all others—the military. However, as arms spending rose, especially in the US, so did the rate of profit. Far from the system contracting the opposite happened:

'A historically high level of arms spending was accompanied by a stabilisation of the system, an offsetting of the tendencies for the organic composition of capital to rise and the rate of profit to fall, and a prolonged period of boom.'

The boom continued for nearly 30 years, sustained by a huge amount of arms spending which was 'waste'—not reinvested into the system. But it couldn't be lost indefinitely. To see why we have to look at the system as a world system. Arms spending benefited capitalism on a world scale, but was not shouldered equally by all the national capitals. Japan and Germany in particular did not use much surplus on arms.

Initially this meant they could invest in industries whose products could be exported to high arms spending countries, and could compete favourably. Exports became a

much more important feature of the world economy, and meant competition was increasingly on a world scale. Their capitals expanded at a tremendous rate. But eventually increased expansion and investment meant that the world rate of profit fell. Also, as the world system expanded, the amount of spending on arms *as a percentage* of total production fell.

The growth of multinational companies meant that each nation could no longer control the mass of surplus and direct it to ensure growth and employment. At the same time, the states tended to protect 'their' multinationals and prevent any of them going to the wall. This made it impossible for one multinational to take advantage of others going bankrupt and expand—so resolving the crisis in that way.

All these factors led towards a stagnation of investment and economic instability by the early 1970s. Other elements of modern capitalism also combined to intensify the crisis. Welfare services, or the cost of re-producing the workforce, involved increased public spending. The concentration of capital into fewer units tended to cause inflation.

State spending

All these led to a growing level of state spending—money which was neither re-invested as capital nor went on arms spending. As individual capitals expanded their horizons and their markets, the role of the banks became much more central. They were able to pool the surpluses not just of one capitalist state but of many and so facilitate world investment. But their role leads to more surplus being paid back to the banks in interest payments—so in the longer term they make the crisis worse.

The centrality of the banks means that the solution in the 30s and 40s to the crisis—state intervention to direct the mass of profit to certain areas of investment—is replaced by the re-emergence of the rate of profit. Only by getting an adequate rate of profit can the multinationals and individual states pay the interest rates to the banks.

Harman described it thus: 'the emergence of international finance capital means that we have entered the age of the state capitalist recession'. Unlike the 1930s, this means that what is at stake today is the future of whole nations like Brazil or Poland which hover on the verge of bankruptcy. This is a prospect which the world's rulers hardly dare contemplate in terms of its effects on other countries—both politically and economically.

These are the bare bones of the analysis which Harman puts forward. He deals at some length with other arguments as well. He looks at other theories of the crisis, and at the difference between the crisis today and the 1980s. The book though well written is not an easy read. The terms may be hard for people new to Marxist economics to follow. But it well worth reading—and provides one of the few coherent explanations for the state of the world today.

Explaining the crisis is available from Bookmarks, price £3.95.

Epoch of dictatorship

1984 Revisited: Totalitarianism in our century

Editor: Irving Howe
Harper & Row, 1983.

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the bookstore... another book about George Orwell comes out. Only this time, the book is really about totalitarianism. Confused? Let me explain.

Orwell may be the rage this year, but 1984 was big Cold War news ever since publication in 1949. Whatever Orwell himself felt, his last book was gratefully received by those on this side of the iron curtain who needed a short, readable picture of uncontrolled communism; Marxism gone mad. In the US above all, 1984 was part of an educational package that included air raid drills, anti-Red hysteria, and a completely distorted history.

It may well be that this was a wretched fate for 1984. Although we can fault Orwell for his suffocating pessimism, the book is basically a gripping novel-fantasy about a world of Stalinist counter-revolution and Western technocracy combined into one. In fact, by the late 1960s blatant Cold War stuff was looking pretty old fashioned, and 1984 became reinterpreted as a warning about centralised power. The strictly anti-communist use made of the book was replaced by something less charged. Orwell the anti-communist became Orwell the prophet.

On one level, 1984 Revisited is an attempt to cash-in on the title and the year. On another, less benign level, these essays are about restoring 1984 to its previous Cold War self. And with today's political climate, they might just succeed.

In fairness, the first part sticks closely to 1984 the literary text. The real meat of the book is in the second and third parts.

These sections feature several prominent Western neo-liberals and conservatives arguing for a renewed anti-communist attack. Robert Nisbet (whose book on the 1960s was entitled *Twilight of Authority*) compares Orwell to Edmund Burke, in making his case for a return to conservative values. Burke was the English reactionary who vehemently opposed the French Revolution. It is unlikely that Burke and Orwell would have had much to say to each other; Orwell's affection for aristocratic right-wingers was never too deep. Other essays include Milovan Djilas, who argues that Leninist political theory is laced with militarism; and Richard Lowenthal who describes how Leninist dictatorship has been supplanted by fundamentalist dictatorship in the modern world, and how both illustrate the failure of Western democracies to inculcate decent values

into the young people of the world.

In *Totalitarianism and the Virtue of the Lie*, by Oxford don Leszek Kolokowski, Orwell is praised as the novelist who really understood the horror of the socialist project. After all, socialism was the invention of intellectuals:

'The socialist idea emerged in the early 19th century as the oral response of a few intellectuals to social misfortunes brought about by industrialism.'

So it was pretty much bound to be bad news.

For Kolokowski, the trouble really begins in our century, when despots like Lenin and Mussolini (again, his argument, not mine) sought total control. Their search created totalitarianism:

'Totalitarianism — Russian Bolshevism, German Nationalism, Italian Fascism — was the bastard offshoot of the socialist tradition...in bastard children a similarity to parents is preserved.'

So the point is that all rebellion is: a) the dream of elite intellectuals, b) manipulated by despots and c) bound to end with Big Brother chucking everyone into the gulag.

Enough said — this is a must-avoid book, interesting only as a piece of 'ideological re-appropriation'.

Except ... perhaps something ought to be said about this concept of 'totalitarianism'. It gets used a lot in this book, as well as by American political scientists. Generally, the word refers to the Stalin and Hitler regimes, and of course both regimes were distinguished by mass executions, the use of terror to control the population, intense ideological pressure etc.

But the word has a more narrow meaning. In 1984 Revisited Robert Tucker defines it in three parts.

First, a totalitarian society is 'tied to the masses'. Second, totalitarians seek to 'remake the world according to a fanatically held ideological blueprint'. Finally, 'totalitarianism pursues total terror rather than the selective realistic' terror of earlier dictatorships. Thus the word implies a lot more than equivalents such as tyranny, dictatorship, etc.

The point that we must be clear about is that the word is supremely political — it is not a mild word invented by accident or in the course of scientific research. And it is political in a right-wing way.

Above all, 'totalitarian' is used to blur the difference between revolution and counter-revolution. Stalin was not 'tied' to the workers — he was against them, their independent industrial activity, and their political organisations and leaders. Stalin was concerned with crushing independent working class organisation, and under quite distinct circumstances, so was Hitler. The rule of both was characterised by

the defeat of movements for working class liberation.

'Totalitarianism' also conjures up images of a thirst for power that is rooted in human nature, not in history. Some writers using the term emphasize the individual leader, and others emphasize the collective rulers. Either way these images are often murky, since they focus on leaders, and not on political life, shop floor relations, and the relationship between the rulers and the bulk of the population. The result is that 'totalitarianism' describes a world, a political system, without subjects: rebellion is crushed before it can begin, due to the deployment of 'total terror'.

If we think along these lines then there is very little we can say or do about, for instance, the situation in Poland over the last four years. Totalitarianism is static, it is a

system that never changes. In Poland, the rulers are very bad, they jail workers' leaders, they act on behalf of their bosses in Moscow (and sometimes on behalf of the bankers of the West) etc. But not only is their rule only partial, they do not seek total terror. Therefore, there are ways and contexts within which organising can occur; workers in Poland may be defeated, but they cannot be crushed.

In other words, once we become specific then 'totalitarianism' loses any analytic meaning. Its use is about fostering anti-communism and hopelessness. Fortunately, we have at our disposal more useful concepts that are based on historical study and political economy. Instead of giving in to some nightmare, we should work on realising the dream.

Kent Worcester

Faith in corporatism

In Defence of the Mixed Economy

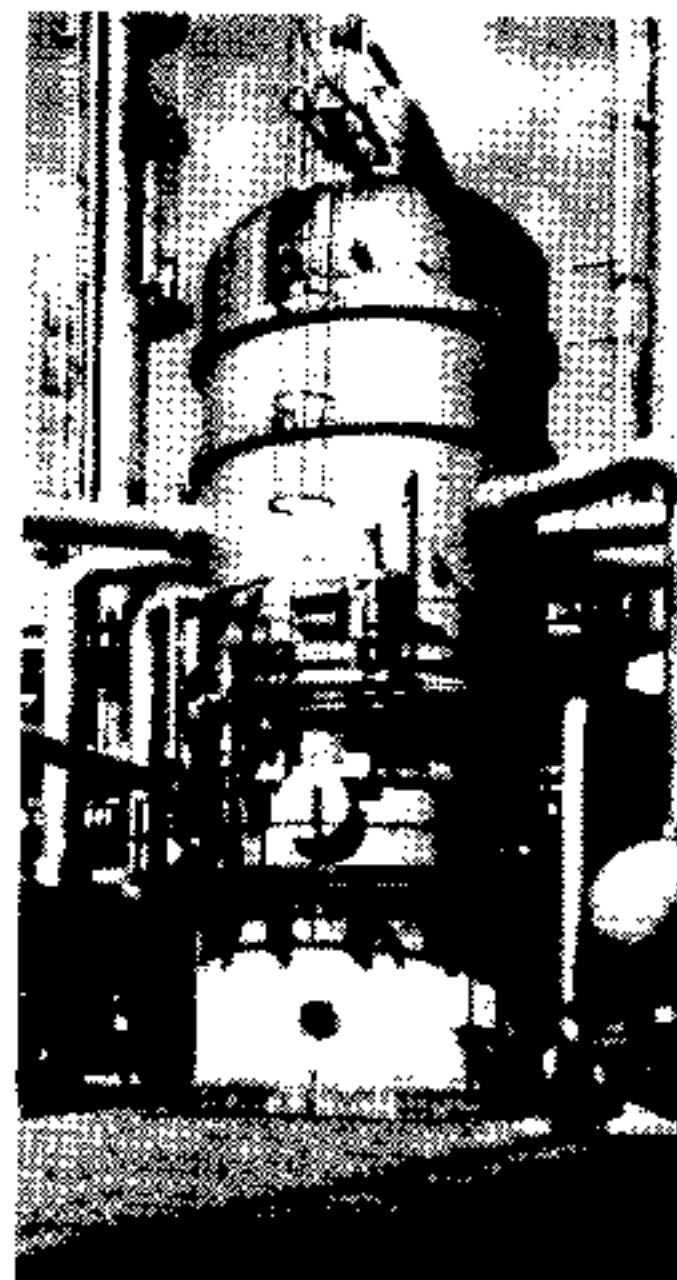
Andrew Shonfield
Oxford £15.00

Back in the 1960s Andrew Shonfield wrote an influential book called *Modern Capitalism*, in which he celebrated the post-war boom, the ability of states to manage their economies and the 'successful' mix of 'public' and 'private' enterprise.

As late as 1968 he could write of 'the likelihood that the average rate of growth in the Western industrial world will continue to be higher than that of even the most prosperous periods before the second world war'. A bit more state intervention here, a dose (but not too much) of long-term planning to manage the accelerating rate of technological change, and all would continue to be well.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this work, edited for publication by his wife Zulanna after the author's death, has a pervasive air of uncertainty about it. In the foreword, the editor comments that 'although the author felt a deep sense of disappointment about what had happened in the 1970s ... this book is essentially optimistic.' But it is the failures of the mixed economy, recorded by the author rather than the defence he offers that is most striking.

Shonfield is honest enough to acknowledge that in his earlier work he quite failed to grasp the manner in which the internationalisation of capital, the rise of the multinationals, the growth of trade, and the flow of money and capital across national boundaries, would undermine the power of individual nation-states. He deplores the 'withdrawal of the United States' from its role of 'world leadership'! But his own proposals for more international 'co-operation' simply fail to recognise the way in which the crisis has itself led to a savage intensification of



economic (and military) competition.

A large section of the book is devoted to an examination of the relative success of Japan as a 'corporatist phenomena'. He spells out usefully both the manner in which the dominant sectors of Japanese capital are closely integrated with and guided by the State, and how the union structure helps to restrain working class militancy. But in the last few years the strains on the Japanese economy have intensified, with the slump, of industries such as shipbuilding and chemicals, and a rise in unemployment. As Japan becomes more integrated into the world economy so the ability of the Japanese state to manage the crisis is diminishing.

Shonfield himself died an unrepentant corporatist. He argues quite correctly that some sort of corporatism, in the sense of government intervention in the economy and the management of class conflicts, remains a necessity for

capitalism, despite all the Thatcherite style rhetoric about market forces. His belief that:

'Corporatism — with its hopes for securing the active assent of labour to incomes policies and technological innovation — appears, particularly in a period of slow growth, as the key to effective management.' (p131). is revealing but misses the point. The depth of the crisis is such that the ruling class in Britain, as elsewhere, feels compelled to resort to more drastic measures. As Shonfield himself notes, restoring the 'rate of profit' has priority. If

that means kicking the Len Murrays in the teeth, whilst they're on their knees and relying on fear of the sack to keep workers in line, then so be it.

Andrew Shonfield would no doubt see that what the Tories are doing is an incredibly risky strategy. We must hope, from a rather different standpoint, that he is right. But this book is most interesting as an indication of how the recipes for growth and consensus politics of the 1960s are still being rehashed despite repeated evidence of their bankruptcy.

Pete Green

Personal experiences

Erotica and the Left

Lawrence and Wishart (£3.95)

This collection comes from papers presented at the Communist Party's 'Moving Left Show'. Starting from different angles with varying degrees of incomprehensibility it examines the relationship between the Left and Sexual Politics. It dispenses with tiresome clichés such as political lines, slogans, demands; and instead 'addresses itself to socialists as people not just paper-sellers or wage earners'.

The 'best' two are both autobiographical, written straightforwardly they most clearly demonstrate the underlying political direction of the book. The 'Body Electric' written by Noel Greig charts his own personal history, from the optimism of the 60s to the pessimism of the 80s. It shows reasonably well many of the shortcomings of men on the left. The problem comes in assuming that one can simply create valid political theory from one's own personal experience. Marxism is dispensed with as being too dogmatic, instead he looks back to the English Utopians and in particular Edward Carpenter; quoting Carpenter's advice:

'... the fall of a leaf through the air and the greeting of one that passed on the road shall be more to you than the wisdom of all the books ever written.'

The division of class in society is considered as simply one more division in the world, class struggle is seen as part of the problem and the working class reduced to the role of an 'also ran'. Rather the division of gender is considered paramount, no mention of how this battle is to be

fought. It concludes with a message of not 'Working men of all countries, unite' but ... 'Working men of all countries love one another!'

The other essay which was interesting was Zelda Curtis's 'Private Lives and Communism'. This looks at the attitudes to sexuality in the Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s, drawing on her own personal experience. Again it shows up very well the hypocrisy of the left in that period which was willing to tolerate homosexuality as long as it remained discreet and private. She illustrates the sexual stereo-typing of men and women in the Communist Party. But absolutely no mention is made of the politics, the suffocation of Stalinism. Without discussing the influence of Salinism — the type of politics it represents and the society it defends, the details she does provide are left in a vacuum. The problem is explained in terms of the attitudes rather than the politics of the membership.

This book doesn't say anything that hasn't already been said, its full of clichés, truisms, and a politics which rejects class struggle in preference to more cosy or romantic methods. Elizabeth Wilson sums it all up in her essay on A New Romanticism:

'... So, in exploring romanticism we may come to have less grandiose visions of what the political can accomplish, and cease to denounce all politics that does not promise us Utopia.'

The price of the book could be easily better spent.

Kevin Murphy

John Wayne OK?

Seeing is Believing by Peter Biskind, Pluto Press £6.95

For a long time I've been worried, I actually like some of John Wayne's movies. It wouldn't be so bad if one of them wasn't 'Rio Bravo', a film made as a deliberate conservative response to 'High Noon'. It seemed John Wayne considered Gary

Cooper's movie subversive.

Today it's easy to see that John Wayne was talking rubbish when he called 'High Noon' communist.

What isn't so easy to understand is how it could have been considered even remotely left wing. Similarly why is James Dean portrayed as the archetypal Hollywood rebel when



in all of his films he portrays characters struggling to conform?

In his book about Hollywood films of the fifties Peter Biskind not only supplies answers to these questions he also provides the reader with a very revealing picture of the nature of political debate during the Cold War. He demonstrates throughout that the fifties was neither a period of relentless political reaction nor a golden age of full employment and economic expansion.

Even over so simple a problem as what to do with aliens from outer space Hollywood could be counted on to put forward several conflicting responses. In the film 'The Thing' the answer was simple—you electrocute them, but in 'It came from Outer Space' co-operation was advocated. Even the nature of this co-operation was the subject of debate. In 'It came from Outer Space' the hero works with the aliens as he is intelligent enough to realise that despite their fearsome appearance they are harmless and

need to be protected from those earthlings who would allow their fears to lead them into unnecessarily aggressive action.

In 'The Day the Earth Stood Still' the alien is far from harmless, in fact he threatens the earth with annihilation if humans persist in going to war with each other. Throughout the movie the alien is shown to be acting in the interests of humanity in spite of the fact that very few humans want to have anything to do with him.

When you realise that in the fifties aliens from outer space were a thinly disguised metaphor for the Russians you begin to realise that there was more going on in America than red baiting.

In short 'Seeing is Believing' is a thought provoking and entertaining book and if it were at least three pounds cheaper I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to everyone. Unfortunately at £6.95 it's very much one for film enthusiasts only.

Peter Court

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM

Issue 23

■ Women's liberation and revolutionary socialism

Chris Harman

■ Rereading 'Nineteen eighty-four' in 1984

Paul O'Flynn

■ How far has shop-floor organisation been weakened?

Dave Beecham

■ Perry Anderson and western Marxism

Alex Callinicos

For your copy send £1.50 (plus 20p post) to ISI, PO Box 82, London E2 9DS, or see your Socialist Worker seller



Biting back

At the time of writing I have yet to receive a reply from a baboon. If Rod Hudson is to be believed this is most surprising. To point out that baboons eat meat and use tools has no relevance at all, unless Rod seriously believes a baboon could develop into a human.

Baboons do not cook, make sophisticated tools or utensils, nor can they harness fire. The gap between the human brain and that of lower primates is vast. That cannot be explained by stating that humans are capable of abstract thought. That is true, but it only describes the human brain as it is now, not how it developed. To ignore the development of the human mind is equivalent to saying that consciousness determines being. If that is true, then Marxism must stand on its head, and the materialist conception of history is worthless.

In the world of modern agriculture the human mind and body can get sufficient nutrition without eating meat. However, there were no health food shops in pre-history, nor were textiles or woollens available. The faculty of human intelligence is hereditary (not the level of it) and it is also affected by diet and environment.

Imagine a race that is undernourished for centuries; its physical size would be affected and eventually become a hereditary trait. Such changes can be observed even in the modern world, the size of races is not fixed or constant. The average height of the Japanese is now greater than 40 years ago.

When the first anthropoids appeared, they required a diet far more nourishing than leaves or wild berries. The fruit, and vegetables we have today is a result of thousands of years of cultivation. Living from hand to mouth does not leave much time for the development of skills. A poor diet would lead to apathy. Gathering does not require a high level of social organisation.

The human body is not that efficient at digesting raw meat. To obtain the only feasible nourishment available in concentrated and constant supply, hunting and cooking had to be developed.

Social co-operation, the need for tools, weapons and harnessing of fire had to be developed to satisfy human needs. In the struggle with nature, and in dominating the animals around them, and the social co-operation required, the material basis for human consciousness was laid.

Though the level of production was extremely low, it was far in excess of anything in the animal world. It meant surplus rather than a scarcity. This allowed time for abstract thought, and the development of skills like agriculture and the domestication of animals. The stage of development of any society depends on its material base.

Religion, philosophy and science are only possible if the productive forces are present. Without buildings there cannot be church, or schools, or stock exchanges.

The development of the human brain and mind can no more be separated from its meat-eating past, than the need to breathe oxygen.

The Eskimo could not have survived in the arctic without eating fish and meat. Certainly no lower primate could exist there. Vast sections of the human race have customs and traditions built around the use of meat, eg Kosher, and Halal. That's why recently in Bradford the National Front used the concern for the welfare of animals as a pretext to start a wave of racism against Asians.

No doubt most animal libbers would be appalled at that, but as soon as you put animals on a par with human beings such dangers are inherent.

To deny the role of meat-eating, and the use of animals in the development of the human race, is not only utopian but can lead to thoroughly reactionary views.

Andy Strouthous

Animals 2

I am the Central Scotland contact for the Socialist Campaign for Animal Rights and I am writing in response to the recent article by Andy Strouthous.

I felt personally insulted by the article as it was animal rights that brought me to human rights and socialism in the first place.

Andy Strouthous' arguments against animal rights are more usually found in right wing magazines, so I was shocked that you printed this poorly researched review of these so-called animal rights' books. Richard North, author of *The Animals Report* is by no stretch of the imagination an animal rights' campaigner. In fact the only *real* animal rights' book in existence is John Bryants' *Fettered Kingdom*.

Mr Strouthous says that there are: 'Fake arguments in support of vegetarianism. Mr North claims that rearing animals for food is an inefficient form of producing protein'. This is not a fallacy, it is a scientific fact, which anyone with a knowledge of the production of protein would support.

Mr Strouthous claims if everyone was vegetarian there would be a genocide of animals as no-one would feed them. This is one of the most pathetic arguments in favour of meat eating that I have ever read. Is everyone in the world going to turn vegetarian overnight? It will happen over a number of years and we won't have to kill those animals as we simply won't breed as many as we presently do. As more people stop eating meat the number of

animals bred for food will obviously decrease. I am familiar with this argument as it is what Tories usually say to me when they wish to defend their selfish habits.

How can a socialist say that it is wrong for capitalists to exploit 'the workers' but at the same time for the 'workers' to eat battery eggs? Capitalism is based on exploitation, so what is the difference between exploiting people or animals? Most people are against factory farming but they still eat battery hens. They are too selfish to go without their eggs and bacon. It is easy to sign a petition about your solidarity with Latin American workers but it takes a bit of willpower to stop eating battery eggs, etc.

MPs etc are frightened to death by animal rights campaigners as they realise that people who campaign for animals will also campaign for humans. You may see animal rights groups as extremists, but what they see is a group of people who demand that every living animal (including of course, humans) has the basic right to live without fear of suffering.

By slagging off the animal rights movement all that you do is lose the support of people like myself. I will still be buying *Socialist Review* in the future, but you will have to form a more realistic attitude towards animal rights before I will become a member of your group.

Alex Neilson

Bureaucratic strikes

Geoff Brown (Letters *Socialist Review* 63) objects to talk of the 'bureaucratic general strike' on the grounds that the bureaucracy will never call a general strike unless it is forced to by rank and file pressure from below.

He argues that the general strike involves generalisation, whereas the whole basis of the bureaucracy is 'sectionalism'.

Such an argument rests upon elementary—and very dangerous—mistakes.

The trade union bureaucracy does not *just* rest on sectionalism. It organises workers so that it can use them as a lever to gain things (reforms for them, positions for itself) within the existing system. Its whole existence depends upon it being able to mediate between workers' organisations and the ruling class.

It has no future if such organisations do not exist. And so it has to fight against the most elementary of all forms of sectionalism, that in which each worker sees himself or herself simply as an individual competing with other individuals on the labour market. The union bureaucracy needs workers to generalise sufficiently for them to be organised.

If Geoff Brown doubts this, he should read any trade union journal, even the most 'moderate', and listen to the conference speeches of any trade union leader.

Of course the union leaderships want to restrict the scope of this generalisation. They want organisations they can control, not organisations which fall under the control of the rank and file. And so at the same time as encouraging a very limited form of generalisation, they also play up all sorts of sectional divisions.

But they are not always free agents. In so far as the bureaucrats succeed in crippling the fighting strength of workers, they encourage the ruling class to believe it can manage without their services. Then the bureaucracy has to try to show workers' organisations still exist—if only to prove to the employers they still need it as a

policeman.

And so trade union bureaucrats do call general strikes and do encourage the level of generalisation among workers needed to get them going.

In 1920, for instance, when the Kapp putsch threatened to destroy the power of the union bureaucracy in Germany, the conservative bureaucrat Legien called for a general strike.

In 1936 in Spain, the bureaucrat Caballero went even further when faced with a fascist uprising—he called for the arming of the working class.

So far Len Murray has been able to avoid such extreme measures. But he did storm out of a meeting with Thatcher last month and call for a half-day of strike action over GCHQ. Socialists could not simply pretend that call had not come. We had to recognise Murray's very dubious motives in calling it. We had to realise that if it turned from token action into real struggle, Murray would soon be doing his utmost to bring it to an end. We had to fight for rank and file activists to organise independently of Murray, although under the cloak of the official call. But we had to take it seriously.

If Geoff Brown's argument were taken to its logical conclusion we would end up with a position some ultra-lefts did adopt in Germany in 1920. People who called themselves 'left' communists issued a leaflet in Hamburg saying 'the general strike is general nonsense'.

The result was that strike action in Hamburg was very limited and very much under the control of Legien and his bureaucracy. By contrast, in places like the Ruhr or Chemnitz where revolutionaries had a more realistic approach, they succeeded in turning the strike into an armed uprising which went completely out of Legien's hands.

We have to make sure that if the pressure of the Tories ever forces Murray to call a bureaucratic general strike, he too finds he cannot control the forces he has conjured up.

Chris Harman

Meat &/or veg?

Dear Sirs,

Socialist Review would appear to be a magazine of informed socialist comment, but Andy Strouthous' review of 'The Animals' Report' by Richard North is beginning to make me read more carefully between the lines.

I have rarely read such flippant trivia in more than 20 years of reading and absorbing left-wing ideas.

His argument against single issue politics is accepted, although to say that the endless list of such causes is proof of failure begs the question 'What success can the SWP (and other revolutionary political organisations) point to?'

To be specific about North's book — 'He thinks workers would happily pay more for free range eggs and chickens'. My father (an ex-labourer) drives several miles into the country to buy free-range eggs at an extra cost. They taste better. He isn't a vegetarian. Strouthous's contempt of North's suggestion displays an arrogance towards workers' ability to choose sensibly.

'Domestic animals only exist to provide food. Liberated turkeys could not live in Britain.' The animal groups referred to in North's book see as an immediate priority to animal liberation policies of breeding control similar to those advocated by most sensible human beings for *Homo Sapiens*. Many domestic animals provide food (goat's milk, hens' eggs) without being domesticated for their own flesh. When they die their natural death, what then happens to them can depend on the herbivorous or carnivorous inclinations of their keeper.

Strouthous quotes Engels—'Man did not come into existence without a meat diet...'—and indicates that this is part of a natural historical development of man as an animal. Has the vegetarianism of Hindus and Buddhists been a backward step?

The answer is typical — 'Whether people will still eat meat or hunt is impossible to predict. That decision will be made by the workers.' Surely the resources of the planet will be a part of the equation. Producing animal protein for man is *inefficient* and it was interesting today (20/2/84) to note that the oldest man in Britain died at the age of 111. He was a vegetarian.

I shall continue to involve myself in single-issue politics — at the moment these include animals' rights, CND, ecological issues, local democracy, pay and conditions of teachers and sometimes I pursue these issues through the reformist political party of which I am a member. I will continue to read

Socialist Worker and *Socialist Review*. I will learn many things and I look forward to your view of the society we want to build. But a different author, please!

For Peace, Women's and Animal Rights, a non-racist and unpolluted society, and all other single issues called Socialism.

Dave Nuttall,
Essex

Human needs

It is clear from the avalanche of letters that animal rights' raises strong passions. Those comrades who attacked Andy Strouthous raise serious points and deserve a serious reply.

For us, a serious discussion has to start from Marxist principles. That means that we do not discuss things in the abstract, as principles of morality or eternal human needs or whatever. We discuss concrete situations and concrete forces.

And we start from concrete needs. Marxism is about satisfying human needs. This principle, which informs our attitude to space travel and to coal mining, also determines our attitude to the treatment of animals.

In the case of animals, even to discuss their treatment is to start from human needs and concerns. Only human beings make the conscious choice either to slaughter animals or to pet them: cats just slaughter mice because it is their fixed nature.

Eating meat is a concretely formed historical human need in certain societies — our own for example. And it is a need which capitalism often finds it difficult to satisfy. Workers often find themselves unable to buy the animal products they *want* to eat. This, in Poland for example, can launch them on a struggle which raises the possibility of socialism.

Whose class interests does it serve to make the central point of your propaganda that workers can satisfy their physical requirements quite adequately by giving up meat? It is the argument of reactionaries to say that workers should tighten their belts. It serves the interests of the ruling class.

We are for workers satisfying their human needs and if that means slaughtering animals wholesale, so be it. We are, for example, very much in favour of local councils employing rodent control officers whose profession it is to massacre as many rats and other vermin as they possibly can.

Such pests commonly infest working class housing, and because the housing is inadequate, cause much more trouble than a couple of mice in the wine cellar of Buckingham Palace. We want them removed from workers' housing.

Although many of the critical letters attacking Andy were motivated by generous impulses,

the writers should think carefully about what their ideas mean in the class struggle today. Andy was perfectly right to say that taking an issue, any issue, out of its concrete class context and treating it as a matter of eternal morality leads to reactionary conclusions.

To take a contemporary example: there is currently a major agitation in Bradford against the provision of Halal meat in council schools. This agitation was started by animal supporters who are no doubt sincere anti-racists. But they have provided a focus for every racist to crawl out of the woodwork and denounce the 'primitive' needs of workers who believe in Islam.

Now we are opposed to Islam just as much as we are to Christianity, because they are both reactionary ideologies that divide the working class. But we nevertheless support the right of Muslim workers to eat meat slaughtered according to the dictates of their religion.

We defend those rights against the attacks of racists and those who provide unwitting cover for racists, while at the same time carrying out propaganda against all forms of religious ideology.

Clearly, there are other ways in which animals are used, which serve the interests of the ruling class: fox hunting is the classic example. We have no interest in defending the rights of capitalist farmers to chase

animals with dogs. No one in the SWP will shed a tear if hunt saboteurs ruin the pleasure of some pink-clad reactionary.

But equally we have to say that to make the wrecking of hunts or whatever the centre of your political activity, in a world dominated by the threat of nuclear war and in which workers and peasants suffer fates as horrible as those of any animal, shows, at the very best, a distorted sense of priorities. At worst, concern with animals can mask a contempt for human beings. Hitler, after all, was a vegetarian as well as an anti-Semite.

The fact is that during the downturn the various animal right groups have attracted a substantial following and much of it is working class. Their hostility to factory farming and fox hunting is often a halfway house on the road to socialism. We have to argue with them openly and seriously about the issues involved.

These arguments are not primarily about how animals will be treated under socialism: Andy is quite right to say that we do not know how such things will be ordered. Much more important is the fact that capitalism is first and foremost a machine for exploiting human beings, and it is to our own liberation that we must turn our energies.

Colin Sparks

Chicken treat

The letters attacking Andy Strouthous' review in last month's *Socialist Review* all seem to miss the point of what he was saying. What he argued is that there is a distinction between humans and other animals, which is that the latter are guided only by instinct. Human beings are conscious and therefore capable of, among other things, controlling and using nature as a way of improving human living standards.

So an important part in the development of society has been the subordination of nature to serve the needs of men and women. This is true whether you talk about the move towards cultivation of plants, the herding of animals—or whether you talk in the modern world of dams, irrigation systems etc to prevent 'natural' disasters like floods or famines.

Under capitalism there is no question that there have been major advances in control over nature. Factory farming, for example, has made an immense difference to our diet. Millions of workers are able to eat meat and now have a diet much richer in protein than ever before. I remember as a child that chicken was a real treat which you only got at Christmas. Today it is one of the cheapest meats available all the year round. I think that is an advance because I don't see why there should

be foods which are only available to the rich. Of course the snobby cookery writers in the *Observer* will claim that it doesn't taste like it used to. They forget that for most people it didn't taste of anything.

The real problem for us today is not that animals are subordinate to humans but that the control is in the hands of a minority, and is not used to benefit the mass of workers. Our fight for socialism is a fight to liberate *humanity* which means that animals will still be subordinate to humans—but this time to the needs of the mass of humans. That doesn't mean everyone under socialism will be forced to eat meat three times a day—people will be able to choose on the basis of plentiful supply and knowledge about the virtues of various foods etc.

But eating or not eating meat will not be—and should not be—a moral question, which I suspect it is for some of the people who attack Andy's letter. We're not in favour of gratuitous cruelty to animals—like tying tins to cats' tails—but we are in favour of using nature's resources to benefit ordinary working men and women. After all their diet has been improved by modern farming techniques—and Andy is quite right to denounce as reactionary those who claim otherwise.

Lindsey German

Pessimism or optimism?

Should revolutionary socialists be optimists or pessimists?

Our opponents accuse us of both.

Sometimes the problem with us is supposed to be that we are far too optimistic. 'I wish I *could* believe in revolution but it will never happen here.'

Other times the problem with us is supposed to be that we are too pessimistic. Tony Benn uses that line when we talk about what happened in Chile or about a future Labour government being no different to the last.

As for ourselves we probably feel that we shift from pessimism to optimism and back, depending on the state of the class struggle.

Over the last few months there seem to have been a lot of such shifts. Optimism when the NGA defied the law and pulled Fleet Street out against the courts. Pessimism as they went down to crushing defeat. Optimism about the day of action over GCHQ. Pessimism once we realised the Tories had nevertheless got away with it at Cheltenham.

And that was before the miners' strike burst upon us. It would be rash to predict whether that will be producing despair or elation by the time you are reading this.

There is a problem here. Revolutionary socialists are out to *change* the mood of the working class, not just to *reflect* it. Being optimistic when the class struggle is going well, pessimistic when it is going badly, is quite understandable. And it shows that we are in touch with the world around us. But it is nevertheless simply *reflecting* that world. It is not intervening to change it.

Two-sidedness

So we are back to our original question. Should we be optimists or pessimists? The best one-line answer I know was given by the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci writing in the revolutionary years that followed the first world war. He borrowed a phrase from the Swiss writer, Romain Rolland, and offered it as a motto for revolutionary socialists. The motto was:

'Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will.'

The two-sidedness of the motto comes from two-sidedness in the world of human action. Marx put that two-sidedness of human action this way:

'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.'

Revolutionary socialists always have to make the most sober calculation of what circumstances are limiting human action in any given situation. That is why we need 'pessimism of the intelligence.'

Plenty of revolutionaries have forgotten

that. The anarchists of old, or some of the student Maoists of a few years back, thought that all that was needed was an effort of will, of sheer determination. They soon came up against reality though — it crushed them.

But it isn't just impatient ultra-left revolutionaries who want to ignore the need for pessimism of the intellect. More often you find that syndrome among reformists. They are perennial 'optimists of the intelligence' because they want to forget awkward facts. Above all they want to forget the ways in which the capitalist system limits their actions. Remind them of those limits, remind them for instance of the nature of the state, and they turn round and say we are pessimists.

But our pessimism of the intellect, our sober calculation of the real situation, only has a point to it if it establishes the means for changing the situation. That is where the 'optimism of the will' comes in. Indeed, we weigh up the situation so cold-bloodedly *because* we are so passionately committed to changing it. We are obsessed with discovering the exact lever of change to pull at any given time.

It is quite possible for revolutionary socialists to forget that. You find that because some of the most clear-sighted revolutionaries in the period before the first

world war could see every pitfall of reformism there was, they did nothing but make abstract propaganda for socialism. They saw only the limits of reforms and so they did not fight for them. Even strikes were only tinkering with the system and so were either ignored or condemned.

We could never be quite so stupid. But that doesn't mean that we are immune to some of the same dangers. We have spent several years now arguing that the state of the class struggle is not good. Quite rightly it has been 'pessimism of the intelligence' with a vengeance. We have had to slam every piece of reformist wishful-thinking, from the belief that selective strikes could stop the Tories in their tracks to the delusion that a few top level appointments of women to various bodies strikes a significant blow for women's liberation.

All absolutely essential. But it sometimes seems to slide into 'we won't support this selective strike because it is bound to fail'. The slide comes when you forget that pessimism of the intelligence *always* has to be coupled with optimism of the will. Even in the grimmest of times, you still have to look for the levers of change to pull, however small they may be.

Similarly even in the best of times, you can't pull the levers, however big, by sheer willpower alone. Hopefully, by the time you read this we will have seen a bit of that side of Gramsci's philosophy in action. 'The strike cannot be won without mass picketing'—pessimism of the intelligence. Getting out and organising the picketing—optimism of the will!

Pete Goodwin

