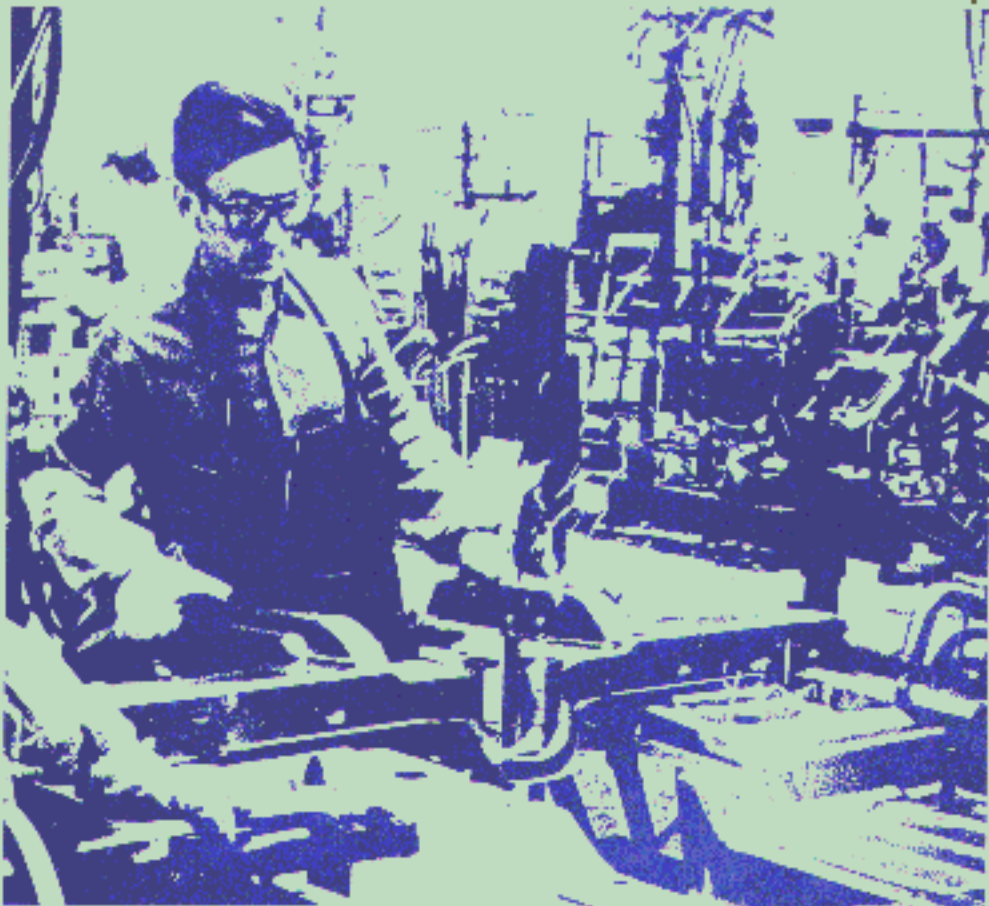


# socialist worker Review

November 1984 Issue 70

60p



**COWLEY: The story  
of a car factory**

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# NOTES

## of the month

### MINERS

# Long, drawn out and bitter

BOTH sides are digging in for a long winter. Or that's how the coal strike looks as we go to press.

The NUM looks like refusing to accept the same deal that the pit deputies' union, NACODS, accepted at the last minute from the Coal Board. As Scargill has argued, such a deal would give the miners even less than they were offered in negotiations in July. So they are determined to stay out, much to the disappointment of the TUC, who have spent their time since the September TUC Congress trying to cobble up a compromise deal.

Thatcher seems equally determined to stay put. She has always taken a hard line in the dispute, and although she was more conciliatory in recent weeks, the NACODS retreat will be a green light for her to go ahead. She will recognise that their decision can leave the NUM more isolated.

Other factors influencing Thatcher's hard line are the level of the coal stocks, and to a lesser extent the government's ability to import coal to help break the strike.

The strike itself is very uneven. In some areas there is dissatisfaction with the level of picketing. The bureaucracy in many areas is increasingly reluctant to provide money for picketing, which leads to a level of passivity on the ground. Any sequestration of union funds by the courts could also hamper activity on the ground.

So the government are determined to continue regardless, and force the miners' union to a humiliating settlement. But they have the problem of not being sure that they can succeed on a number of levels. They—and more importantly their supporters—are not convinced that either side can 'win' the dispute in any outright terms. *The Economist* pointed out last month 'Mrs Thatcher is not now going to "win" the

miners' strike outright.'

The strike is a war of attrition in which both sides are evenly matched. Neither is advancing. But neither shows much sign of giving up. And although the TUC has done precisely nothing but sit on its hands since its September Congress, there is still a reasonable possibility that power workers in some stations will refuse to handle coal from the pithead stocks.

There are other factors weighing against Thatcher's position. The strike is a huge burden financially, both in direct costs and in terms of its effect on the wider economy (see below). And while Thatcher may feel justified in continuing on this footing (treating the expenditure as a second Falklands war) she does so at the expense of other parts of her economic strategy. Interest rates may rise again, and wage rises are much higher than she can have hoped.

### A crucial test

The test for the strike will be the moving of coal stocks from the pit heads to the power stations. Despite the government's talk they will have to start this movement by the end of January at the latest if they are to avoid power cuts. Even though they are maintaining their hard line, the prospect of troops moving coal against bitter opposition from miners cannot be one that they relish. It is a massive operation and one which can serve to escalate the dispute more than anything so far.

On the miners' side, a crucial test is the level of solidarity they can command. In the next month, the TUC's words should be turned into deeds, as the time for moving the coal stocks approaches. But those workers not directly involved in the power stations or the transport of coal have a vital role to play.

The level of solidarity through collections and levies is increasing in many areas. The minority of workers in every workplace who support the miners need to organise support groups in the workplaces, committed to doing just this. They will assume more and more importance in the months to come.

The miners can win. But the fight promises to be long, drawn out and bitter. It is not the time for facile optimism, but for realistic solidarity. That means stepping up the support for the miners among other workers. The collections, food convoys, twinning with individual pits can all ensure that the miners are not starved back to work. ■

### ECONOMY

# Moneymen get nervous

THE TORIES are coming under increasing economic pressure. After five years of monetarism, austerity measures and severe slump, they are still no nearer to solving the crisis.

Even without the effects of lost coal production, the figures show clearly that the much acclaimed recovery of the British economy is fizzling out. Manufacturing output, scarcely affected by the strike except for suppliers to the coal board, fell by half a percentage point in the first half of 1984. That has contributed to the latest rise in unemployment. Even on the government's heavily manipulated figures it is now at a new record level of 3,300,000.

Not surprisingly some businessmen and commentators are looking enviously across the Atlantic. In the USA Reagan's arms spending has fuelled a sustained boom, pushing up profits and creating over six million jobs in the last 18 months.

Profits, it should be stressed, have risen in Britain too. Latest figures show an average increase of 23 percent in the last year, though from a very low level. But that increase will not be sustained this year in present circumstances. The effect of the miners' strike, forcing the government to buy off sections of workers, and encouraging others to push for more, means that wages are still keeping ahead of inflation.

That is why defeating the miners has been the priority for the British ruling class. Even Tory wets such as Peter Walker, who want a bit more government spending, have resisted concessions on the industrial front.

The prospect of even a 'fudged' settlement to the dispute has made the money-men nervous. The announcement, on Wednesday 17 October, that NACODS were finally calling their members out on strike led to a sharp fall on the stock exchange. Combined with intense competition in world oil markets, forcing the British North Sea Oil

# NOTES

## of the month

Corporation to cut its price, it also provoked a flight of funds out of the country.

The stock exchange has acted as a barometer of ruling class confidence about the miners' strike for the last eight months. In May and early June in the run-up to Orgreave, and again during the first dockers' strike in July, the FT index (which averages out what is in effect the second-hand value of stocks and shares) fell sharply.

In August and September as the strike was pushed back on the defensive and the back-to-work movement seemed to be growing, the index rose. Shareholders were able to recoup on paper all that they had lost in the previous fall.

Renewed fears that the miners might win, and, more crucially, of the effects this would have on the class struggle generally, led to the latest round of panic selling. On the 17th the index fell by 28 points, the largest one-day fall on record (though, in percentage terms, the collapse following Labour's victory in the 1974 election, after the miners toppled the Heath government, was bigger).

On paper, the fall in share prices cost a number of rich individuals, insurance companies, and the like, a lot of money. £8,600

million was wiped off the value of shares in three days.

But if NACODS fail to come out, or the strike is settled, the value of shares will recover. The stock exchange is anyway so detached from the real world of production that the ups and downs of share prices are only of symbolic importance.

For the government it is the fall in the pound which is posing more serious problems, threatening to upset their whole economic strategy. The pound has been falling steadily against the dollar for a long time now (as anyone unwise enough to visit the United States this year would have discovered). That has had more to do with events in the States, especially high interest rates, than the state of the British economy.

Now the pound is falling against the main European economies. On October 19 the trade-weighted index fell below the lowest point of the sterling crisis of 1976, which forced the Labour Government to turn to the International Monetary Fund.

That's not just due to a loss of confidence by the international money-dealers in the Tories' chances of smashing the miners.

The British balance of payments has been deteriorating rapidly. The fall in the price of oil and the weak competitiveness of much of British industry in the face of imports, are partly responsible. However, the disappearance of the 1983 trading surplus of £2 million is mainly a result of the strike. Extra imports of coal and oil have cost over £1,900 million so far this year.

The danger for the Tories is that the fall in the pound could turn into a rout. Once the multinationals, banks, and Kuwaiti investment trusts start to move their large amounts of spare cash the flight will feed itself. No one will want to be left holding devalued pounds when they could hold dollars or marks which are rising.

For the moment the crisis is not yet as serious as that of 1976. But already there is

fear, despite the denials by Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson, that interest rates will have to be raised again, to try and keep money in the country. That will hurt mortgage holders and businesses which are in debt or want to borrow. It will further depress the economy.

For the moment the Tories are sticking to their guns. Indeed the fall in the pound means that they have few options. As the *Financial Times* leader observed on 20 October, in reply to the critics of Nigel Lawson in the City of London and elsewhere:

'The quick-fix reflation they seem to be silently willing would be a disaster. It would lead to a total loss of confidence, the pound would fall faster and interest rates would rise.'

In other words for the Tories and the bulk of the British ruling-class there is still no alternative. The workers must be made to pay for their crisis. That means a determination on their part to defeat the miners which should not be underestimated. ■

### TORIES

## Thatcher's unease

BEFORE the bomb which shook the Grand Hotel last month, there was a feeling of unease at the Tory Party Conference. This might seem surprising. Thatcher has probably over three years left before she has to face re-election as Prime Minister. She has a massive parliamentary majority. And her standing in the opinion polls is still remarkably high. But there are a number of problems which dog the Tory Party and threaten not to go away.

Perhaps the most important is unemployment. Even Thatcher's most loyal right wing supporters are demanding that she does something to halt the rising jobless figures — increasing at a rate of over 10,000 a month. According to one opinion poll 68 percent of her own Tory supporters believe she is doing a bad job in reducing unemployment. Despite the fact that they are spending more on various job creation schemes, the predominant impression the Tories put over is that they don't care about the issue.

As the big business magazine *The Economist* points out:

'These employment measures have risen in cost second only to energy support since 1979. Nothing better illustrates the Conservatives' ideological confusion than Mrs Thatcher's inability to turn this bounty to political account. She appears ashamed of her own extravagance and reluctant to draw credit for it.'

Worry about unemployment and its political consequences even moved Thatcher to talk of it as a 'scourge'.

But the Tories haven't developed a new-found concern about the effects of long-term unemployment on the health and well being

## socialist worker Review

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of individual workers. What concerns them much more is the effect on the 'social fabric' that their policies can have. In this sense the issue of unemployment provokes many of the same fears in Tory hearts as the miners' strike.

The Tory strategy over the past five years, backed by much of the ruling class, has been to use unemployment to hold down wages and to curtail the power of the unions (backed up by the anti-union laws). By doing this they hope to make British capital competitive on the world market. They have therefore been prepared to see unemployment rise. And provoking the miners' strike has been part of that strategy of picking off various public sector unions.

The danger for the Tories now is that they can provoke a reaction among certain sections of the population which may have long-term implications. Sections of the ruling class and of the Tory Party now appear to be wondering if it is either possible or desirable to rule by coercion.

This manifested itself in a great deal of talk around the Tory conference about the rule of law. On the face of it, this means praising the police, condemning 'violent' (or indeed any) picketing and standing up to the bombers. But beneath the usual Tory rhetoric lies a deeper worry.

The ruling class always tries to rule where possible by consent. In other words it tries to give the impression that its rule and the law which backs it up is impartial, and that most people agree with its use. Some of the worry from the Tories is that this consent has — in some areas at least — broken down. This is the case for a large number of striking miners and their families; for fairly large numbers of inhabitants of the inner cities; and — it appears from their conference — a considerable minority of Labour Party activists.

As Malcolm Rutherford in the *Financial Times* put it:

'Quite clearly the Government has been more worried than it is prepared to admit in public about the possibility of uncontrollable violence breaking out on the picket lines or even of a renewal of the troubles in the inner cities.'

There are two things which worry the more intelligent sections of the ruling class about all of this. One is simply — is it all worth it? Does the (admittedly relatively low and selective) level of coercion pay off? Many must be wondering.

The second is that the level of polarisation which has been created may have more long term and serious effects than anyone has foreseen. That is the danger of a serious anti-Tory opposition which is not based on a Labour majority in Parliament. The *Financial Times* again:

'The opposition remains divided and there is no alternative government ready to take over. The thought was being entertained quite seriously this week that the Tories could win the next election with another increased majority. But what if they do that and unemployment is still climbing? The very thought adds point to the fears about an extra parliamentary opposition.'

None of this means that the Tories are going to cut the rate of unemployment or agree to the miners' demands. They still don't want to settle the strike because it will be seen as a defeat for them and they believe they can exploit the weaknesses of the strike if they wait long enough.

But Thatcher's conciliatory speech at the Tory conference gives some indication that they want to give at least the appearance of being willing to be reasonable. *The Economist* has advised them to stop treating all the trade union leaders as outcasts. Certainly with a growing though still small minority of workers looking to fight, the ruling class will at least consider turning to the lieutenants of labour rather than the open coercion of the state. ■

## WAGES

# Fighting back

ONE OF the central planks of Tory strategy has been to use the threat of unemployment to hold down wages. In some senses it has been successful. Big set piece confrontations with groups of low paid workers like the hospital workers in 1982 have resulted in very low wage rises in the public sector especially.

But there has been a change in the last year. Despite the fact that unemployment has increased and is still going up, wages are also rising at a rate higher than the ruling class would like.

For over a year now, the underlying increase in earnings has hovered between 7 and 8 percent. But in some areas of industry it is higher. One estimate puts the rate of increases in engineering at between 8 and 11 percent. The current pay disputes in the car industry bear this out. The revival in that industry means that the threat of unemployment appears more remote, and car workers are more confident that they can bargain for higher wages.

# NOTES of the month

This highlights a problem for the ruling class which we have been pointing out in the *Review* for some time. Once there is a revival in certain industries, workers within that industry are much more likely to take action to reverse the erosion of wages and conditions suffered in the worst years of the recession.

The wage claims and wage rises seem set to continue, at least in industries like cars over the next few months. And they can be explosive in other parts of the private sector.

Not only that, the impact on public sector wages can be quite sizeable. Last year's figures show significantly higher wage rises in the private than in the public sector.

But they also tell an interesting story about the two sides of the class struggle. One reason why the fear of unemployment has less effect on employed workers today is that there is a deeper gulf between the employed and unemployed than it might at first appear. Those in work tend to hang on to it, while nearly half of the unemployed have been so for over a year.

Even between those in work, there are great differences in terms of the nature of disputes, their success or failure. On the one hand disputes like those in the car industry or at Bristol's British Aerospace show an increased confidence and an ability to win at least sizeable portions of what has been demanded. At the other end of the scale, groups of workers fighting over the basic right to work very often find their disputes end in defeat.

A minority of workers at Cammell Lairds shipyard in Birkenhead occupied a rig to save jobs. The majority of their fellow workers (laid off by the dispute) went along with a 'back to work movement'. Thirty seven of the occupiers ended up with a month in jail, with little support from their fellow Lairds workers. The vast majority of the workforce accepted the Tory arguments about not striking, needing a good work record to attract new jobs and so on.

The Barking and Hammersmith hospital disputes show similar features. Privatisation of various services meant a loss of wages, and sometimes jobs, for the workers concerned. Despite long and bitter strikes, and widespread sympathy from other trade unionists, the hospital workers have not found it at all easy to prevent privatisation or stop other workers doing their jobs.

What all these disputes show is the double-edged situation in the working class

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## of the month



President Mubarak

movement. The effects of what we in the Socialist Workers Party call the downturn — sectionalism, lack of solidarity, lack of confidence to take on the boss — continues unabated. It colours the disputes which *do* exist — as the minority of Lairds workers have found to their cost. But within that overall situation, there is a bigger minority now prepared to take action where they feel they have a good chance of winning. ■

### EGYPT

## Boiling point

EGYPT'S workers have reminded the government that they remain the most potent political force in the country. Last month strikers from the huge Kafr Al Dawa textile mill near Alexandria organised demonstrations which resulted in attacks on government buildings and railway stations, and a running battle with the police. The workers achieved a notable victory when President Mubarak announced the withdrawal of the food price increases that had provoked the strike.

The events began on 27 September when workers from the plant refused to accept

their wage packets. They argued that their pay would not cover 30 per cent increases in the price of pasta and cooking oil and increased national insurance contributions. They also protested at the government's introduction of a two-penny loaf. They believed this would soon replace the penny loaf which for years has been the most essential element in the diet of the Egyptian poor. Three days later the workers staged a protest march. When police intervened three people were killed.

In 1952, Kafr Al Dawa workers became famous for a strike in which they defied the new military government of Gamal Abdul Nasser, which had come to power in a coup only months earlier. Nasser crushed the strike with great brutality, arresting scores of workers and executing two leading militants.

Like workers at Egypt's other major industrial workplaces the Kafr Al Dawa workers were involved in a series of struggles from the mid-Sixties that culminated in the upsurge of 1977. Then strikes and demonstrations paralysed Egypt as hundreds of thousands of workers, peasants and urban poor rioted through villages and towns across the country. The events were stimulated by exactly the same issue as that which produced September's strike — and the riots had the same result.

In 1977 President Sadat's price rises of between 5 and 50 per cent on basic foods and fuel, and a 30 per cent reduction in the size of

the penny loaf were also withdrawn, and a 10 per cent public sector wage increase introduced.

The 1977 and the 1984 events illustrate the deep crisis which has long affected the Egyptian system. For several years the population has been growing at one million a year. It now stands at 47 million. In a country in which only 4 per cent of the land is cultivable there is great pressure on resources. Huge imports of food are necessary and basic foodstuffs are subsidised with \$2 billion annually. Bread subsidies alone currently run at \$1 billion, most spent on buying second-rate wheat from the United States.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have long pressured Egypt to reduce subsidies. In 1977, when Sadat obliged and produced a crisis in which the working class was within an ace of bringing down the government, Egypt's foreign debt was \$16 billion. Today the debt stands at \$21 billion. Since the assassination of Sadat in 1981 the US has supported Mubarak's government with \$2.5 billion a year in military and agricultural credits, but the subsidy problem remains.

As pressure on the land increases and migration into the major cities steps up, Egypt's urban crisis becomes more acute. It is almost impossible to find housing and millions of families live in sprawling slums and even in cemeteries and rubbish dumps. Only the heavy food subsidy stands between millions of Egyptian poor and starvation.

But when the strike and demonstrations at Kafr Al Dawa started, President Mubarak dared not allow other workers to follow their example and swiftly ordered food price cuts, more production of cheap bread in poor areas and a price freeze on public sector manufactured goods.

The Kafr Al Dawa events are an important reminder of the power of Egyptian workers. There remains, however, a huge gulf between their repeated explosions of activity and the ability of the Egyptian left to organise consistently in the workplaces. The Communist Party ceased to offer an alternative over 20 years ago when it dissolved in the belief that Nasser's military-technocrat bureaucracy was completing a 'socialist transformation' of Egyptian society. What remains of the party today is an electoral front of little importance and no coherent pole of attraction has developed on a left still dominated by Stalinist politics with its strategies of class blocs and alliances. For the last five years the fundamentalists of the Muslim Brotherhood have made the running.

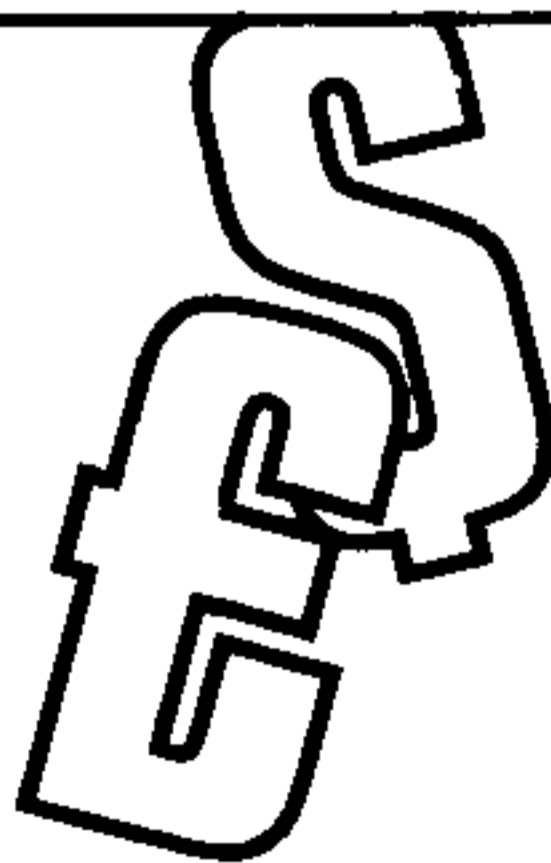
The Egyptian events come in the same year as the explosions in Morocco and Tunisia. For Arab revolutionaries who do look for an alternative to the sorry Stalinist tradition of bureaucratic and compromising parties, these struggles are another pointer to the possibilities in the region. The power for change does exist. What is presently lacking is the conviction that there is a form of independent revolutionary organisation that can be built in the workplaces. ■

Additional material for *Notes of the Month* from Phil Marshall and Pete Green.

## Explaining the Crisis

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# Supporting the miners

'YOU CAN tell a kid that daddy's on strike, but not that Father Christmas is! They're trying to starve the women and kids so that the women will nag the men to go back to work.' Barbara Curtess, a miner's wife from Penrhiwceiber, South Wales, spoke to *Socialist Worker* last month. She sums up the government's strategy.

The financial strain after eight months of striking is enormous. The question of solidarity is therefore absolutely crucial.

The problem though is that much of the sympathy with the strike has not been transformed into active solidarity. One of the main reasons for this has not been an unwillingness to act, but the low level of organisation. 'Wanting to do things but not knowing how', is how one supporter of the miners put it.

Yet in areas where the support has been organised properly the level of active solidarity has been very impressive. The organisational key to such solidarity has clearly been the miners support committees. Where such committees have been actively organising and encouraging involvement, large sums of money have been collected and real links have been built between the miners and the support committees.

Take a city like Oxford. Here the support committee has been functioning since the beginning of the strike and has up to now raised the very impressive sum of £55,000. It has also worked closely with South Wales miners, organising joint pickets of local power stations, and continually drawing fresh blood into the support committee.

If this can be done in Oxford it is easy to imagine the enormous potential in cities like Newcastle, where until recently there was no support committee. Properly organised solidarity in such places could mean very large amounts of money being raised, and many new workers being drawn into supporting the dispute.

In other places committees have existed for some time, but have been unable to break out beyond a relatively small number of left activists. Again here there are a number of ways in which such committees can grow very quickly. Gloucester support committee was amazed when a public meeting with Paul Foot speaking drew 70 new people along. The meeting was used as a spring board to get many others involved in active support work.

One of the most effective ways of building the links between strikers and support committees has been the twinning or adoption of a pit. The dreadful tale of the miners wives' action committee being forced to close the soup kitchen at Westoe colliery in South Shields through lack of funds is one that can be repeated if real links are not built between individual pits and their supporters.

Here the story of Camden NALGO support committee in London provides an excellent example. It chose to adopt Bentley

pit in Doncaster and each week provides £600 to the local miners. As long as this level of support continues it should ensure that the Westoe experience will not be repeated in Bentley. In addition it also helps to build the identity between the two groups of workers.

A worker on the North Sea off shore supply boats, Bernard Verney, explained the importance of this personal connection.

'In theory we have supported the miners since the beginning of the dispute, but it wasn't till one of the lads we work with who comes from a mining village linked us with a specific pit that we began to get real solidarity. Recently our boat sent off £70 to the Tempest colliery in Durham. We are hoping it will catch on and other ships will adopt pits.'

Again the example of the *Sun* workers emphasises the point. The NGA chapel has organised a number of delegations to visit the



pits, and miners have regularly visited the *Sun*. So when Rupert Murdoch labelled Silverwood miners the 'scum of the earth' the printers took it as a direct insult to themselves, and the miners they had organised alongside, and stopped the presses.

The building of miners support committees is the key to raising real solidarity. So it is essential for socialists to understand how such committees can be built.

Where committees exist every socialist and trade union activist must be encouraged to get involved. Where they don't exist, they should be built. This means approaching local Labour Parties, shop stewards committees, trades councils and union branch officers. In particular it is an ideal issue on which to approach readers of papers like *Tribune* and *Militant*.

The committees can link together those collecting either inside the factory or in the locality. If only a small number are collecting in a workplace it might help to leaflet the factory to set up a gate meeting with a miner

or miner's wife. By such means you can find those willing to back the miners.

To achieve this simple task takes enormous work. In many workplaces collections have been irregular. Stewards and union activists have become demoralised at the lack of support. Miners support committees either locally or in the workplace can help overcome these problems.

In some workplaces shop stewards aren't as yet backing the miners. There it is possible to leaflet the place from the outside and set up a meeting to see what rank and file support exists. That means discussing with those individuals how to start collections. Often miners support committees can collect on the gate alongside miners. Consistent delegation work with miners can also help change attitudes.

Raising the level of solidarity is becoming increasingly urgent. At some stage the Tories are likely to try and shift coal stocks from the pit head. Solidarity action from other workers will be vital to stopping this.

The idea of getting other workers to join miners' picket lines seems remote. But that is where twinning comes in. Where workers have built close links with a mining community it is easier to organise direct solidarity. The action by printers on the *Sun* shows this.

However it is done, it is vital to bring together those people willing to collect. That way you can increase the number of sections being covered. If the money is collected weekly it is an enormous help to send a delegation up with it to the pit which has been adopted. That way, collectors see first hand the importance of their work, overcome any isolation and return with first hand experiences.

Building support for the miners feeds into the task of rebuilding shopfloor organisation. Regular collections and the setting up of workplace support committees link activists. People who have written off anything happening in their own workplace can begin to see how things can be changed. Someone who learns to take a regular collection and handle the arguments is beginning to learn how to organise their section. Today's collectors for the miners can become a new generation of shop stewards.

Finally, we have to face up to particular weaknesses among groups like the electricians or steel workers. Given the defeats these groups have suffered and the leaderships they have it is not surprising that their confidence has been knocked for six. But if they see other workers increasing support for the miners, and see close links being built between miners and other workers, that can break the tremendous isolation they feel.

Raising the level of solidarity generally makes it easier for those individuals in the steel plants and power stations who want to back the miners to raise their heads and argue the case.

As Christmas nears the task becomes more urgent. The collections of money, food and toys all take on a growing importance. If the miners are to stay on strike into the new year it is up to those of us that support them to make sure that Father Christmas is one person who isn't on strike this Christmas. ■  
Sheila McGregor

What do  
we mean  
by.?

# Class struggle

'THE HISTORY of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.' These famous opening lines from the *Communist Manifesto* seem, at first reading, a bit too simple. For it's clear people have struggled over all sorts of things throughout history, nearly all of which have had little or nothing to do with class.

There have been thousands of battles and wars over religion, over territorial claims and over wealth. There have been umpteen bitter clashes between people speaking different languages and supposedly having different blood in their veins.

This is particularly true today. Religion seems to be the leading divider between people, with a long list of bloody struggles ranging from out and out carnage between Iran and Iraq to spasmodic clashes between the Flemish and the Walloons in Belgium.

At the same time as these sometimes massive struggles between whole countries and groups of people erupt, the everyday battles between rich and poor, peasant and landlord, worker and boss, oppressed and oppressor, continue.

The vast majority of those involved in these struggles and battles will have their own reasons for doing so. Moreover very few will say it's because they are members of a particular class.

However, classes are a bit like gravity. They exist whether people are aware of them or not. They are born out of the economic

foundation of society, and have existed ever since people began producing a surplus beyond their immediate requirements.

Alongside this first surplus appeared a class of administrators, priests and merchants. This class was initially beneficial to the further development of productivity through their supervisory capacity and scientific studies.

Gradually, however, they developed interests that were totally antagonistic to the rest of society. They came to demand more and more from the labouring majority, and built armies to defend their wealth, and religions to justify it.

This division between the majority who labour, and the exploiting minority who live off that labour, has taken many different forms since the earliest birth of classes. Underlying all of them have been fundamental economic relationships such as that between slave owners and slaves, landlords and peasants and bosses and workers.

These economic relations have been the dynamic to the thousands of religious and cultural wars and battles that pepper history. The daily skirmishes in every factory and every office are the expression of today's dominant economic relationship — that between capitalist and wage labourer. It is a relationship that necessarily divides people into two classes, having completely opposing interests—interests which, in the end, affect every aspect of their lives.

There are times when the cohesion and subsequent actions of one particularly powerful class can gain such a momentum that they lead many others into battle against what becomes a common foe.

## Every idea questioned

The classic examples of such times are the bourgeois revolutions — the 17th century English civil war, the 18th century American war of Independence and the late 18th century French revolution.

These revolutions — particularly those in England and France — weren't just those of the emerging bourgeois class clashing with an intransigent and entrenched monarchy and church. These revolutions lifted the lid off a cauldron of bubbling resentment and

frustration among the mass of peasants and labourers.

It was because these struggles came to involve so many and went so deep into society that they became so powerful. They were powerful enough, not only to knock off a few heads, but overturn all the old entrenched ideas, philosophical assumptions and beliefs about human nature that had dominated for hundreds of years.

They formed the conditions within which every conceivable idea about life — from sex to politics — was questioned. They laid the basis for the development of a whole array of new notions about the way society could and should be organised. Moreover, this questioning and these new notions, affected society from top to bottom. Nothing of the old feudal society was left untouched.

Most importantly, these revolutions led to the overthrowing of the feudal system of exploitation — that between landlord and peasant — and its replacement by a new and far more productive economic relationship — that between capitalist and wage labourer.

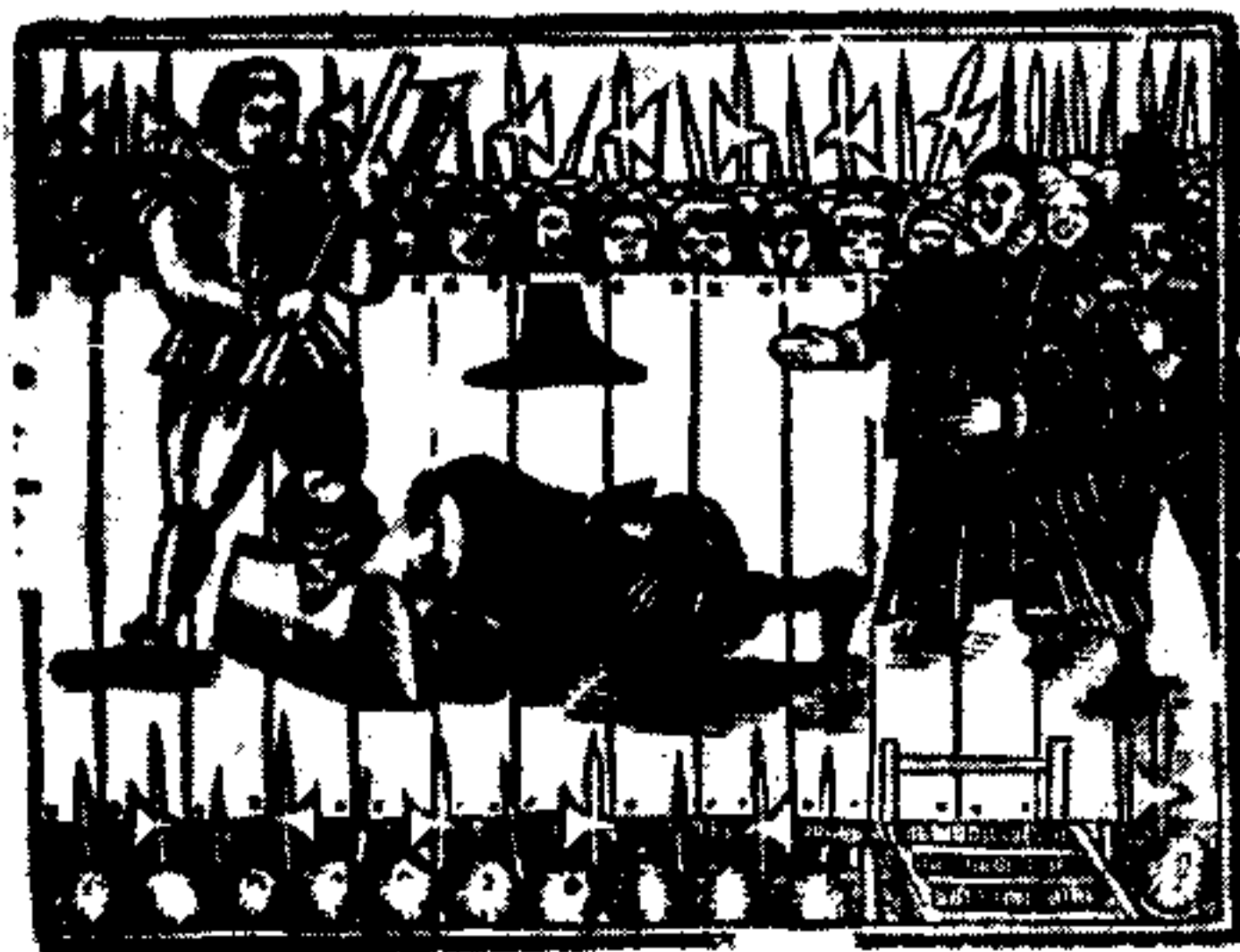
Moreover, they laid the foundation for a whole new set of ideas about human nature, economics, and science, to become firmly entrenched throughout society — leading to their domination today as those of the capitalist ruling class.

From the time of the English revolution onwards all the old feudal laws and traditions that had prevented the growth of free wage labourers and the development of trade and manufacture were abolished.

The repercussions of these developments reached a peak in America one hundred years later and again, on a massive scale, in France in 1789. Here the huge feudal state that had grown up to defend the old regime was finally overthrown in a glorious revolution whose shock waves ran throughout Europe for decades.

The most important thing to come out of the turmoil of the French Revolution wasn't just liberty, equality and fraternity. It was the victory of bourgeois property relations their maintenance in law, and defence by the state.

Underlying the flag waving, the guns and cannons, the barricades and the guillotine





were massive economic forces which had grown up in feudalism and which were forcing their way, under the banner of the bourgeoisie, into their domination over the lives of exploited and exploiter alike.

As a result new forms of struggle have emerged. Workers struggle for higher wages — not like peasants, for their own land or lower rents. Capitalists strive for higher productivity, longer working hours and a lowering of wages—not, like feudal landlords, for higher rents and greater control over the land.

But even though the dynamic of struggle has changed, it is still expressed in religious and cultural ways. If anything these forms of struggle conceal and divert the ongoing battle between classes even more than ever before.

A good example was the struggle to overthrow the Shah of Iran in 1977-78. Iran is a country with a large agricultural population and a small working class. As a result there are many, many different classes there — the main ones being peasants, landlords, workers, bosses, shopkeepers and Bazaaris (merchants and small capitalists), the professional middle classes and the clergy.

What united them all in one way or another was the struggle to rid their country of a highly repressive and brutal regime. What sparked this struggle was a crisis in the economy, leading to workers striking, and small capitalists squealing for change.

These events quickly spawned a massive wave of protest, culminating in the revolutionary overthrow of the Shah's state. But because the working class was neither ready or prepared to lead this revolution, the state was replaced by that of the now highly reactionary Khomeini and the mullahs.

Their freedom to organise under the Shah's regime had put them in a very good position to fill the vacuum of leadership left by the working class.

But Khomeini and the mullahs aren't just a bunch of vicious Islamic fundamentalists. At the end of the day they are firmly incorporated into world capitalism and therefore represent the interests of capitalism in Iran. They do not do so in the old way of the Shah — in the direct interests of American capitalism — but in a way that lines the

pockets of indigenous capitalists first and foremost. Hence Iran's position among the American Administration's three most hated countries in the world.

But because Iranian capitalism is weak in comparison with world capitalism in general and American capitalism in particular, the mullahs have to lash out even more viciously than the Shah to ensure no one rocks their boat. Hence their use of the Shah's torture camps and methods of political killing. And their resort to 'religious war' to divert people's attention from the internal crisis of the country.

### A source of disunity

Another ongoing example of how religion conceals class is, of course, that of Northern Ireland. Here the religious divide goes back centuries, and the British ruling class, who initiated it in the first place, and who have fostered it since, have made great advantage of it.

By establishing a system of privilege for one section of a religiously-divided working class, British capitalism was able — and still is able — to ensure a ready source of bloody disunity among the working class in general. And this to the degree that even the 'privileged' section can be, in comparison to the English working class, bought off cheap.

It is this disunity that is the real tragedy of Northern Ireland — a disunity that has its repercussions among the southern working class as well, and which weakens them both.

But even though religion and culture still divide people and lead them away from fighting their real enemies, the overall development of capitalism constantly creates the conditions for class struggle to re-emerge. As Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist Manifesto*:

'Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat.'

Since they wrote this 'splitting up' has got greater and greater. The development of a world working class, and a world capitalist class increases with the expansion of capitalism in general.

This means that class has become more

and more of an issue among people the world over — particularly when international capitalism is going deeper and deeper into crisis, and people are forced more and more into conflict with their exploiters.

As the crisis deepens, and eruptions occur in different countries, people will turn to the most powerful and best organised class for leadership against their rulers. In some countries, like Iran, classes other than the working class, will be better prepared to take that leadership — as the mullahs were in 1978.

In highly industrialised countries like Britain, however, the working class, because of its organisational power, and its crucial position in the production process, is the most potentially powerful class in society. It is also the class that is most likely to come into conflict with the ruling class.

The obstacle to class struggle here is, therefore, not so much the existence of other classes as that of demoralisation and lack of confidence to fight within the working class.

This is illustrated by recent events when, after a period of four or five years of demoralisation, sections of workers are fighting back. It is this which explains why more and more miners will say they are fighting for their class. And it is this which also explains why, as a result of the miners' strike, more and more will claim membership of the working class than for years.

That said, however, there's a lot more to class struggle than claiming to be members of particular classes. What Marx emphasised wasn't just class struggle but that 'the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat* (and that) this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to the *classless society*.'

In other words, becoming conscious of class also means becoming conscious of the class enemy, and seeing the need to join the fight to smash that class enemy.

In conclusion, classes, and the struggle between them, differ from gravity in one very important way. Although they exist whether people are aware of them or not, they were first and foremost created by people. And just as they were created by people, so they can be destroyed. ■

Alan Gibson



# The people's revolution?

THE OUSTING of a bloody dictatorship, and the sweeping social reforms and public commitment to popular power in Nicaragua which followed the Sandinistas' overthrow of Somoza; have been a source of inspiration to socialists everywhere.

It is an impressive achievement. Since the 1979 revolution illiteracy has been reduced from over half the country's population to less than three per cent and every child has a place at school. Hospitals, health clinics and health programmes — like the vaccination campaign which eradicated polio in under four years — are available to all as of right. By the fifth anniversary of their revolution the Sandinistas had distributed more than two million acres of land to the peasants.

These reforms have been carried out in spite of a brutal imperialist war on both the military and the economic front waged against this tiny country of less than two million people.

The right of Nicaraguans to determine their own future hangs by a slender thread and their struggle to keep it demands unconditional solidarity from anyone who calls him or herself a socialist. This is not because Nicaragua is a socialist country, as many of its supporters claim. It is because whatever chance workers and peasants here and in the rest of Central America have of controlling their destiny will receive a massive setback if American imperialism subjugates the region.

## The right to strike

The main speaker at Nicaragua's May Day celebration was Jaime Wheelock, one of the nine Commandantes of the revolution and former leader of the Proletarian Tendency of the FSLN which argued, unsuccessfully, in the sixties and seventies, that the movement add class struggle to its anti-imperialist programme.

'The working class is in power in Nicaragua', Wheelock told the crowd of 30,000. 'The revolutionary leadership, the Sandinista National Liberation Front, is the organisation that returned power to workers after taking it away from Somocismo.'

'The Sandinista Liberation Front is the representative of workers and peasants. It is the Sandinista National Liberation Front that is at the head of power, that is in the vanguard and with it the workers of Nicaragua.'

Three months later in the middle of August workers at the state-owned Victoria brewing company staged an unofficial strike and occupied their factory in support of a wage claim. 'We support and love the revolution, but we also love our children and have an obligation to support them', one worker told a reporter from the New York Times. 'They say that the revolution is for the people but it doesn't always seem that way.'

Having been threatened with prosecution by the Minister of Labour for having dis-

regarded the law in relation to strikes the workers returned in exchange for a promise that their demands would be resolved fairly.

There have been few strikes in Nicaragua since 1981 because they were outlawed under a state of emergency which was only lifted recently in preparation for the forthcoming elections.

The brewery workers were affiliated to the CST, the Sandinista Workers Federation, the largest of eleven trade union federations in Nicaragua, with over 100,000 members. The CST supported the no-strike legislation, for the reasons given by their head of international relations, Francisco Gonzales:

'To strike is a historic right of workers. It's not possible to understand why it has been suspended if one doesn't live here. You have to experience the tremendous

inherited difficulties, the problems resulting from outside aggression, the pressures created by the imperialists' refusal to grant credits, the diplomatic pressures, the direct counter-revolutionary military aggression supported by the CIA. A union member living in Nicaragua will understand why the right to strike has been suspended. In this country at this time, any strike, no matter how small, ends up favouring the counter-revolution'.

Every statement Gonzales makes about the objective conditions facing the Sandinistas is true, but the steps the Sandinistas have taken to deal with them are a far cry from the institution of workers' power.

In 1979 the Sandinistas assumed control of an economy stricken by crisis. Imminent



Nicaragua's black market



**Militia at refugee camp, Central Nicaragua**

collapse was staved off only by injections of foreign aid, principally from social democratic European governments. The conditions for that aid was the cessation of the limited expropriations that had been carried out. Banking and insurance had been nationalised, as had most of the mines and around a quarter of the manufacturing industry. It was a condition with which the Sandinistas complied. In the 'national interest', to enable the new state to survive, state ownership of the means of production was deferred. Nicaragua has a bigger private sector than Panama with 68 per cent of its economy still in the hands of the old ruling class.

As a consequence of that Nicaragua's economy depends on the co-operation of the private capitalist sector, and the Sandinistas have sought to secure that through an alliance with the 'patriotic' or 'progressive' sections of the bourgeoisie who had not followed Somoza into exile.

However it is presented, Nicaragua's mixed economy operates by the same rules as the world system of which it is part — those of capitalism. That meant providing some material incentive to the private sector, honouring a foreign debt which this year totalled some 200 million dollars whilst diverting ever more resources into a war which has cost 204 million dollars in damage to the economy — an economy based on the

export of agricultural crops, which has been stricken by the international recession.

In the face of this the Sandinistas adopted a policy of austerity — attempting to raise productivity whilst holding down wages.

Prices have soared, and real wages are estimated to have fallen 50 per cent since 1979. Poverty is rife, in town and countryside.

### **State of emergency**

Through the mass organisations they lead — such as the association of agricultural workers, the Sandinista Workers Federation, and the Committees for the Defence of Socialism—the Sandinistas have waged a political propaganda campaign whose message is 'sacrifice now, for the sake of the future'. Here as in every other country it is the mass of the people who are bearing the burden of that sacrifice, which has meant not just economic hardship but a virtual suspension of civil liberties.

Not only have strikes been outlawed, and strike leaders arrested and jailed — the right to criticise and publicly question the government's policy was also removed under the state of emergency. However reluctantly, the Sandinistas have increasingly moved to police the working class and peasantry on behalf of capitalism.

Externally, they have followed a similar policy — the subordination of solidarity

with other working classes to the needs of their own state. At an international trade union conference in Managua this April, Victor Tirado one of the nine Commandantes, told delegates:

'The Sandinista policy is not based on exporting the revolution. If we wanted to export revolution we would not receive the support of Mexico. The Contradora Group would not take us seriously.'

All of this follows from the politics of nationalism. Battered by an imperialist war and world market forces over which they have no control, their only room to manoeuvre lies in persuading the people to accept their policies. And the problems are increasing. The blockade and mining of the ports has meant millions of dollars of lost exports. The war is now so serious that conscription has been introduced. The strength of the dollar has resulted in soaring prices of imported goods, and acute shortages. Rationing has now been introduced. For the workers and peasants of Nicaragua that means further sacrifice and increased productivity. ■

**Story and pictures by Joanna Rollo, recently back from Nicaragua.**

# Bob the bosses' man

THERE'S a joke doing the rounds in Australia at the moment, which goes like this:

**Hawke (Prime Minister):** 'How're we doing in the polls?

**Adviser:** 'The latest news is we've got seventy per cent of the vote.'

**Hawke:** 'That's great. Now we go for the other thirty.'

**Adviser:** 'No chance, Bob. That's the hard core of the Labor Party.'

Like most good jokes, this one has a dose of the truth in it. Bob Hawke has just announced that there will be a general election on 1 December. He is currently scoring about seventy per cent in the opinion polls, and everyone expects a landslide Labor victory.

The British media's coverage of politics in Australia has tended to focus on the allegations of the links between Hawke and the ALP and organised crime. From a socialist point of view, what has been happening in the class struggle in Australia is much more interesting and important.

Until March 1983, when Hawke won the election, the ALP had been out of power for all but three of the previous 34 years. The government of Gough Whitlam in the mid-seventies was the exception. That period was ended with the dismissal of the government by the Queen's representative in Australia, the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr.

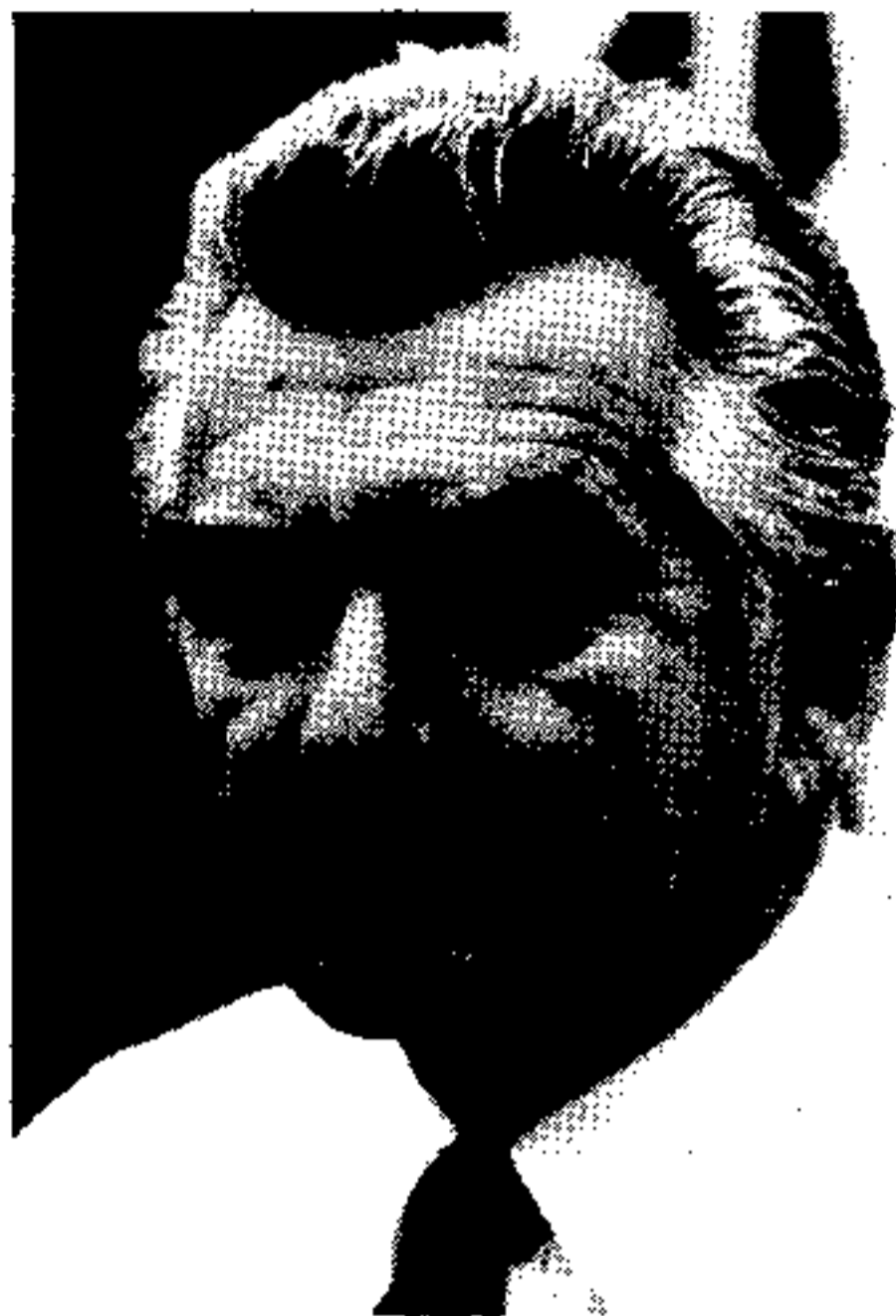
This blatant action understandably gave a tremendous boost to republican feeling in Australia. But it also had its effects on the right-wing of the ALP, including Hawke, who decided that the road back to government lay in being very, very right-wing. Even the moderate reformism of Whitlam was to be junked in favour of a new emphasis on regeneration of the economy—the rhetoric of modernisation rather than any form of socialism.

There has been one important exception to this, and that is Medicare—a national health service. This was introduced by Whitlam, and Fraser—then leader of the National-Liberals—pledged 'Medicare is safe with us'.

Of course it wasn't. They abolished it. So Hawke's reintroduction of the scheme is very important to his reputation. Hawke has been able to use Medicare, and is likely to be able to for some time yet.

The new Medicare is funded by a levy on income tax, which is very useful since it doesn't show up in the inflation figures, whereas payments to private insurance schemes did.

Pay policies have been a feature of most reformist governments' programmes. Hawke is no exception. Just after he won the election, he introduced a pay freeze. At the same time, the dollar was devalued, making imports more expensive. Since then, there has been 'pay restraint' that is to say, workers' real wages have been held down.



**Bob Hawke**

This policy was put together with the union leaderships—not a difficult task for Hawke, since he was head of the ACTU—the Australian equivalent of the TUC—before becoming leader of the ALP. Of course, pay restraint has been dressed up with the usual promises on the 'social wage' and a role for the unions in 'planning' the economy.

## Hawke's boom

The real results of eighteen months of Labor rule can best be summed up with two facts: profits are at their highest level for ten years, and strikes are at their lowest level for fifteen years. For the moment at least, Hawke's deal with the union leaders is paying off in holding back the demands of the rank and file, and incorporating the unions into the Hawke strategy for job losses and higher productivity.

It has been easier to sell these policies because after several years of severe recession and the appearance of mass unemployment for the first time since the thirties, Hawke is lucky enough to have a boom on his hands. This is largely due to the recovery in America and Japan, which has fed through very directly to Australia, due to the strong economic links between them.

This boom hasn't had much effect on unemployment, though, which has only fallen from ten per cent to nine per cent. Fear of job loss, as well as the class collaboration of the union leaders has limited militancy, but the bosses fear that the pick up in the economy will mean that workers begin to fight back. Consequently, they are threatening disaster if there are any increases in wages at all.

The recent conference of the ALP in July demonstrated the weakness of the left in the party. They lost on all the major issues, including the ban on uranium mining, the

presence of US military bases, and the admission of foreign banks. The conference also voted for an end to demarcation disputes and 'other archaic industrial practices'—which actually help to preserve jobs.

While there have been individual resignations, and in fact people were burning their Labor Party cards outside the conference in protest at Hawke's nuclear policies, he has got away with it as far as most of the left is concerned. There are several reasons for this. One is Medicare. Another is the pressure on all reformist lefts to unite with the leadership when they are in government. After all, the central aim of reformists is to win elections, and having won them, to stay in government no matter what. Hawke's electoral popularity is a powerful weapon against criticism from the left. Thirdly, there has been a GLC-type gravy train of national proportions. The ALP controls four states as well as the federal government, which adds up to a lot of jobs for the boys—and girls.

An interesting set of policies were passed at the conference, under the heading of an industrial policy. What is interesting about them is that many of them resemble ideas dear to the heart of the Labour left here, but they were all advocated by the Hawke cabinet, not by the left. They include planning agreements, industrial democracy, controls on multinational companies, prices and incomes policy, and the Economic Planning Advisory Council.

The federal government will also provide incentives for research in high technology. The planning mechanisms include 'agreed industrial relations procedures, guidelines on demarcation and other disputes, maintenance of a stable and predictable incomes regime, and rapid introduction of new technology with minimum disruption'.

The issue of foreign investment is much bigger in Australia than here. A common view on the left is that Australia is a semi-colony, which has to develop its own industry. So the emphasis on Australian capital can be made to seem 'left-wing'. In reality, what the Hawke government is aiming to do is integrate Australia more firmly into the world economy, removing trade protection, encouraging new technology, rationalising industry by promoting mergers so that companies are big enough to compete, and raising productivity.

And while Australian business itself is generally happy with Hawke, all the policies of 'planning' will come to nothing if capitalists don't choose to invest. The price of investment is high profits, and that means job losses and lower wages. As long as Hawke can deliver the unions, the bosses will be happy, though that still doesn't mean they will go along with Hawke's plans.

What lies ahead is almost certainly increasing disillusionment with the government on the shopfloor, but we know from experience that years of class collaboration by union leaders leave their mark. The number of revolutionaries in Australia is tiny, and they have a difficult task in the next few years trying to relate to the minority who will be looking for an alternative to the Australian Labor Party. ■

**Sue Cockerill**

## WORK PLACE NOTES

Julian Goss has worked for Cardiff City Transport for seven years. He talks about the problems of organising on the buses.

MANAGEMENT have been able to tighten up on discipline in the last couple of years. People are no longer leaving. They see the steelworks and pits closing down; they see the National Bus Company close two depots in Cardiff. And they know there's a lot of qualified PSV (Public Service Vehicle) drivers around.

Whenever someone gets disciplined for even some quite minor thing, the tendency has been for them to get sacked. Not massive numbers but individuals here and there—enough to encourage a feeling of looking over your shoulder. The sort of things they use are minor infringements of regulations, which management used to turn a blind eye to. Like incorrect dress, taking a wrong turning, smoking in the cab and bad time keeping.

We saved one job a year or two ago. We moved to a system of giving no change. This driver got a kid on the bus who only had a fifty pence piece. He told him to wait at the front of the bus for the next person with change. He was sacked. We heard about it and said, 'this is absurd, we should strike, stop the wheels'. The union blokes had been content to go through procedure but they rushed in to see management and the driver was let off with a much more minor punishment.

The union branch has tended to be a mechanism for getting lots of overtime. The job runs on it. You have to sign if you don't want it. People come to rely on it. If we cut it out completely we could force another hundred jobs. But unless you can pose a realistic fight on wages or jobs you can only argue about it in a propaganda sense. Apart from the trade union argument there's also the fact that we have a very stressful job, with the traffic and the inspectors and passengers on our backs.

### Fighting the machine

The bus workers were among the earliest sections to be organised in the T&GWU. Our branch leadership is well practised in using the rule book to prevent anyone from upsetting the appletart. You have to be a member for two years before you can stand for election, and we only have elections every two years. So it was four years before I could stand for election to the branch committee. There are twelve committee members, a Chairman and Secretary.

This year only two of the monthly branch meetings have been quorate, so the committee usually decide branch policy.

The committee members are bound by a kind of 'vow of silence'. Two or three people who wanted to stand for the committee plus

two or three others who were *Socialist Worker* readers got together with me to produce a newsletter. Once elected I refused to keep the committee's secrets from the other drivers.

I disclosed the fact that we were being paid bus fares to go to meetings, even though as drivers we travel free. Also what our wage claim was. For this I was voted off the committee, a decision only narrowly ratified by the branch.

I stood again two years later. This time local T&GWU leader George Wright signed a couple of letters to our branch members arguing that I shouldn't be on the branch committee. I was elected anyway. At the first meeting the secretary handed out shop



**'THE UNION BRANCH HAS TENDED TO BE A MECHANISM FOR GETTING OVERTIME. THE JOB RUNS ON IT'**

steward's cards to everybody except me. The chairman got every one to check their neighbour's card and of course I was chucked out. This was again narrowly ratified at the branch by about 18 to 17. One hundred and fifty had voted me on but again I wasn't able to break the passivity.

Occasionally there are well supported meetings. That's usually when there's been a wave of assaults. It's the one issue people will strike over without arguing. It's usually only a token strike. Nowadays the committee goes in and cobbles up a deal whereby we'll strike for a couple of hours and the management will pay. It's so institutionalised it's not even proper industrial action.

Obviously the drivers get angry at the assaults and demand protective measures and immediate and extremely violent punishment of anyone suspected of being guilty. A special glass screen like you find in a bank was tried once—but it makes you feel like an animal in a cage. We argued successfully for radios about four years ago by threatening to take action if they were not installed.

We also argue that the assaults are a result of worsening service and higher fares. If there were no fares there would be very little conflict between us and the passengers.

Some see the sense in that but there's a big gap between the theory and what we can achieve when we can't even fight for a £1 wage increase or stop the attacks on our conditions.

Four or five years ago they put up the prices in the canteen at the beginning of the year—when we normally get our wage rise. That year it was still being negotiated. The committee got on its high horse but wasn't prepared to do anything. One of the drivers suggested a boycott of the canteen and a few of us campaigned for it. We could provide the makings and the drivers could dip in a few pence every time they had a cup.

Typically, the committee argued the drivers were a lot of rogues and would steal the money. But the action was 100 percent successful, the prices were forced down and we even made a profit!

The official one day strikes called over the years have been formally supported by the committee and full timers because the drivers are a very visible group of workers. But they never actually campaign to get the strike. The result is people turn up at the branch to vote down any action.

### Since the miners

The militants have been arguing for a shop steward system. Every time we put it forward it gets blocked by the union committee. They have a very powerful veto. On the odd occasion that they lose a vote at a branch, they simply raise the thing a couple of months later and get it reversed.

Until the miners' strike came along we weren't making much progress. Initially we brought a couple of miners down to a branch meeting. They might have been refused entry, so we arranged a meeting in the pub beforehand and fetched along anybody that was interested.

A couple of dozen drivers turned up in the pub. They asked questions about picket-line violence, where the collection money went and why there hadn't been a ballot. In the event the branch wasn't quite quorate but the miners were allowed in. A £50 donation and a weekly collection at work was agreed.

The collection was done for two weeks on payday and then the box was put in the canteen. It's still there gathering dust, of course. When things are not being actively pushed or argued for, then even those who are supporting it are doing it in an apologetic way. And people lose interest. Myself and a couple of regular *Socialist Worker* readers did our own levy which reached some twenty people paying 50p each.

Coming up is a big regional meeting to discuss privatisation. We will be collecting there. We plan to meet in the pub and form ourselves into a miners support group on the job. I already take our collection to Cwm colliery with a different driver each time. Now we need to get more than the three of us doing the collecting and get more people up to Cwm to meet the miners.

One of the biggest problems on the job is the atomisation. Sometimes you don't see some one on the same shift for two or three weeks. The only way round this is to meet people socially in the club. Besides it shows that you're human as well. ■

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# COWLEY

## THE STORY OF A CAR FACTORY

**HARRIET  
SHERWOOD and  
ANDY  
ZEBROWSKI** talked  
to two stewards at  
the BL Austin  
Rover's Cowley  
plant about what's  
been happening on  
the shopfloor in the  
last 18 months and  
the history of the  
plant over the last  
decade.

**W**orkers in the car industry are stirring. Pay settlements are due in Vauxhall, BL Austin Rover, Ford and Jaguar. Vauxhall workers have already taken strike action over their claim, and action is possible in the other companies.

But, more significantly in the long term, the last 12 months have seen a surge of small sectional disputes inside the industry. It doesn't follow that there will be any major battles inside the car plants in the immediate future. The effects of a decade of management offensive and the erosion of union organisation will take longer to overcome than a few months of relative militancy.

And, of course, the management offensive is by no means over. Although profits in manufacturing industry have increased over the last couple of years—in some firms by as much as 50 percent—the employers will be fighting to hang on to the goodies in the face of higher wages claims by the unions.

The latest report on pay from the employers' organisation, the CBI, spells this out. 'The industrial relations challenge cannot be overstated,' it says. 'Confrontation such as that in the case of the miners is a reminder that greater turbulence is by no means impossible and may be catching. Few companies would differ from the view that to varying degrees the climate is hardening. The challenge is there to be faced.'

The situation inside most of the car plants now is the same as the situation of a year or 18 months ago—but there are also differences. The general lack of confidence and organisation still exists, yet it's also true that workers are more willing to fight spontaneously on localised issues.

**T**he car factory where this can be seen very clearly is the BL Austin Rover Cowley assembly plant.

'There's an incredibly strong anti-management feeling in the factory. People will walk out over anything. They do it without thinking about it. But it's a different ball game when you're talking about a decision to go out and win something on a factory-wide basis. Although there's militancy all the time, it's not tied into any organisation at the grassroots.'

While Cowley workers have shown over the last 18 months that they are now prepared to down tools over local, sectional issues, they still lack the confidence and organisation to embark on a major battle.

Even very basic union organisation is missing in large areas of the assembly plant. For every steward's position that is filled, there's probably between one and two which are vacant.

'Usually you can't get anyone to take the job on. Even when you can, that's not the end of the problems. There was one young lad in the AUEW who decided he wanted to be a steward, so he asked for the form to be put up. Nothing happened—obviously the senior stewards thought he was a bit of a tearaway, and so the form never went up.

'The lad wrote to the district secretary, and phoned, and eventually up went the form. He was automatically elected because no one else stood.

'If you've been elected as a steward, you're supposed to go to the convenor's office and get your union card, and your proposer's and seconder's, checked. Then your name gets sent off to the district committee for approval. If it's approved, the lad gets his steward's card and rule book and a letter goes off to the company saying please accord facilities etc.

'What happened in this case was that it didn't come up at the district committee, and it didn't come up a second time, and then it came up and was approved. The letter was sent off to the company, but then management stalled on it, refusing to recognise him, for ages.

'Every obstacle's put in the way of people who want to be a steward. This lad is a steward now, after a long, long wait. Lots of people just give up when the same thing happens.'

Management at Cowley are refusing to recog-

nise a fair proportion of stewards who are elected, mostly because they claim that there's already enough steward provision for the area.

'But sometimes it's difficult for us to make sense of why they withhold recognition. They're just allowed to make an objection under the procedure agreement.

'The company didn't afford me facilities for a long time until my members kicked up. But on another line, a bloke was elected and not recognised but the members on the line weren't prepared to stop over it. He was never recognised and he's given up now.'

About two-thirds to three-quarters of workers in the assembly plant are members of the TGWU, and the rest are in the AUEW. The T&G is reckoned to be by far the more militant of the two unions with far better stewards' organisation.

'The Rover line is the best organised because they've always insisted that if there are any changes going to be made management must meet the stewards as one group. That hasn't been established on the Maestro and the Montego lines. The stewards there are still dealt with as individuals or in small groups.

'In the AUEW there's much less accountability than in the T&G. Once you're elected as an AUEW steward, you never have to be re-elected unless you seek it yourself or the members protest. In the T&G all the stewards come up for re-election in a block, so there's no getting away with it. But AUEW stewards are supposed to be re-elected individually.

'They are also supposed to have monthly shop stewards meetings, but there were never enough that turned up to meet the quorum, so they don't take place.

'And there's no Joint Shop Stewards Committee between the two unions at Cowley now. It was dissolved in the late 1970s. About two years ago a proposal was made that we reconstitute the JSSC, but the AUEW rejected it. We do meet jointly, but it's not formal or recognised. Every one of those meetings is ad hoc.

'Ever since the union dues have been on the check-off, there's no absolute necessity for a steward to go round and see his members. So you get a load of stewards who just sit around in the rest room. Sometimes they don't even know who their members are if new labour's started in their area.

'There's no provision made by the company for a steward to meet with his members. It would be deemed an unofficial meeting, production would stop and the steward would be putting his neck on the block.

'A steward can be released from his job with permission from the foreman to go up and down the line talking to his members individually while they're working. But obviously it would be better to have everyone together.'

'What they're after is multi-union shop stewards, which means there wouldn't be even as many as we've got. What they mean is that if you've got an area of mixed membership, both TGWU and AUEW on one particular track, then you'd have one steward who might be in either union but would serve all the workers.'

**T**he basis for the way stewards operate inside the plant is the 'procedure for the avoidance of disputes'. This document, to which the unions are signatories, lays out what a worker with a grievance is expected to do: raise it with the foreman, then with the foreman's superior, then put it in writing to management, and finally meet with management. All this time, work should continue. Only if the whole procedure is exhausted without a resolution of the dispute can 'constitutional' industrial action take place—after the requisite amount of notice has been given to management.

If work stops at any time during this procedure, it's unconstitutional and the steward is expected to tell the men to go back to work and take up the grievance in the 'proper' way. What this means is that a shop steward should never take part in industrial action unless it's 'constitutional', has been agreed by a mass meeting or is part of national action.

'This is puzzling to most people. They elect a steward to represent them in their problems at work and when something actually happens the steward is supposed to say, "no, you've got to discuss it with the company, you can't do anything". It's the very opposite of what a steward's job should be in terms of leadership on the shopfloor.

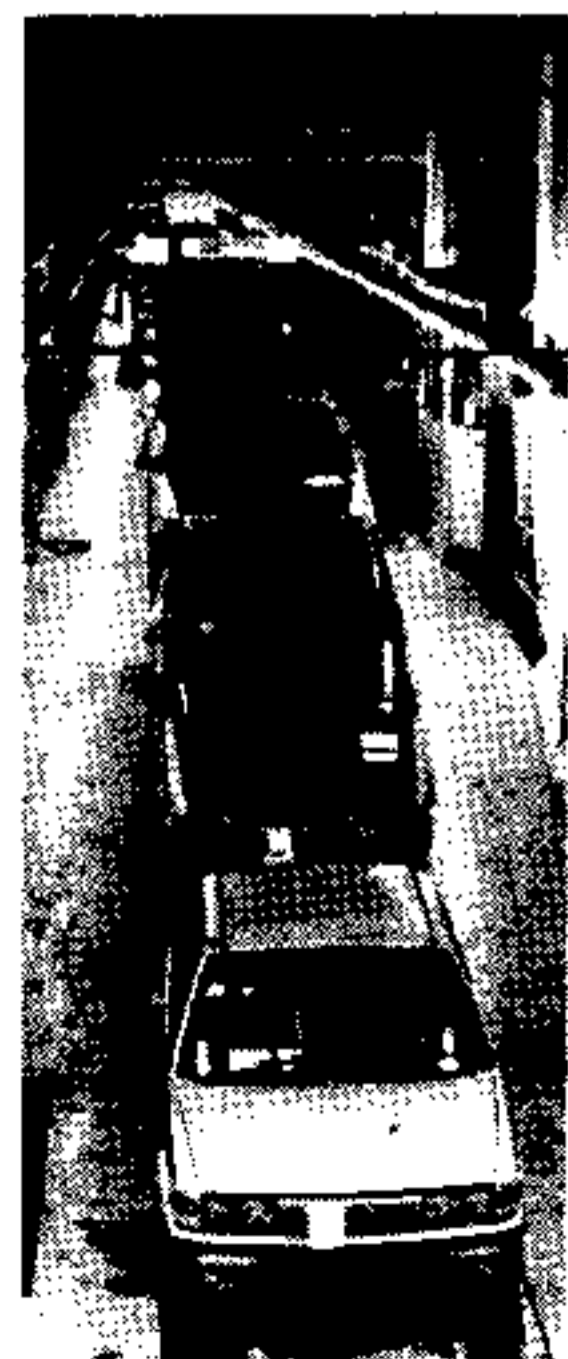
'Obviously, if enough people stop work, it stops the track and then a steward isn't tied to the line. Then you can go and see what's happening, find out what the dispute's over. But a steward wouldn't be in dispute himself.

'There are ways of getting round it, of course. You can more or less tell them to have a downer over it, but you can't actually spell it out and you certainly hope there's no one green enough to say to the company, the steward told me to stop working. If they can make it stick on you that you told someone to stop work, they'll have you. In the old days you could get away with it, you could stop work too. Now you'd be risking your neck.'

The low level of organisation in the assembly plant has been reflected in official work in support of the miners. Very early in the strike a lunchtime meeting, addressed by a South Wales miner, was called by the TGWU and AUEW at which Ivor Braggins, the T&G convenor, announced official collections would be held in the plant.

'For a long time after that nothing was heard. I approached a young Labour Party activist on my section and said let's start a regular collection. As soon as we started, other people were coming up and saying why isn't anyone else doing it, what about the promise Braggins made—and still nothing happened.

'Eventually they did start, but it's never been done in a thorough fashion or on a regular basis. Most of the political T&G stewards have probably done a one-off collection. A proper official collection was done at the mass meetings on the overtime ban, and about £300 was collected. But that's about the level of it.'





Michael Edwardes

The situation at Cowley is different from a year ago, but it's also clear that the organisational weaknesses and effects of battles which have been lost have by no means disappeared.

But the disputes of the last year or so have provided more opportunities than for a long time for beginning to repair the damaged confidence and rebuild union and shop stewards' organisation. More workers have come forward in the last few months to stand for stewards' positions as a result of the increased militancy in the factory. There have been more chances to argue for support and solidarity between workers, both within the factory and with groups elsewhere, principally the miners.

**T**rade union power was at its peak in the Cowley assembly plant in the early 1970s. Then 'mutuality', whereby the company had to have the agreement of shop stewards before making any changes, still existed.

Wages were based on a nationally agreed minimum rate. On top of this local piecework rates for each section were negotiated by the steward.

'Judged on its own, piecework is an inhuman system, where a man is working against himself in the worst possible conditions. Then the aim is to do the job faster with fewer men.'

'But if you've got strong organisation, you're able to have control over your own small area. If you've got a good steward, you make piecework play tunes the way you want. You have a tremendous amount of power to raise the rates. This was a period when wages went up and up, and it was done through piecework.'

In 1971 British Leyland started to introduce a new system of determining wages called Measured Day Work. Piecework bargaining was abolished. 'They realised they were losing control over wages, and they wanted to get it back.'

'What Measured Day Work does is transfer the focus from wages to effort. Now, wages you can measure—you just look at the numbers on a pay slip. But you can't directly measure effort—it's just an opinion.'

'There was a six week strike to reject measured day work and the company beat the stewards in the end. But they paid a big price. Our jobs were dead easy at first—people were playing ping-pong. Three men could merge their jobs together, two would hold it and the third would be out reading for an hour.'

'But having got it in, they'd removed the day-to-day, week-to-week control over earnings from the stewards. Wage increases went to once-a-year negotiations in the hands of the fulltime officials. And gradually the company clawed back the easiness of the job. They toughened up. Their idea was to give us a day wage for piecework effort.'

Management control was tightened by setting production workers hourly work targets which were established 'scientifically' through work measurement carried out by industrial engineers. In the early 1970s, after the introduction of Measured Day Work, there were numerous

walk-outs over the recommendations of the industrial engineers.

After a lot of lost production, British Leyland acted by 'swooping' on Alan Thornett, a leading militant in the plant. The company withdrew recognition of him as deputy convenor and chairman of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee.

'There was no fight from the union bureaucracy, no support from that direction, even though it was a clear case of victimisation. Instead the regional officials decided to have an investigation into what was happening at Cowley.'

The action the TGWU took was to split the Cowley T&G branch, which was dominated by Thornett's supporters, and form another, right wing led branch.

'Some right wing stewards were even given time off by the company to go round and canvass for the new branch. The militants realised that, even though it had been a piece of treachery that had created the new branch, that was where the members were. So they all transferred into it and took over.'

**I**n 1974 British Leyland went bust after its market share had been in decline for some time. The company was propped up with state money.

About a year later, and as a result of recommendations in the government's report on BL, 'workers' participation' was introduced. At the same time, union dues began to be 'checked off' at source, instead of being collected by the shop stewards.

'Workers participation was sold to the unions on the basis that the old ways can't continue. They said, the company's going to the wall, we've got to have a system whereby we can pull together, this won't encroach on the independence of the unions...'

'But once it started it came down to management giving the senior stewards perks, sending convenors on courses, brainwashing them into the company's way of thinking. Instead of the convenor being someone who served the members and who couldn't give a damn about the company's problems, he became someone who was taken into the confidence of management.'

Just before this, the TGWU officials had changed the system for electing the factory convenor, but only for the Cowley assembly plant. Instead of the stewards electing the convenor as happened in every other factory, in Cowley the election was to be by a secret shopfloor ballot. Union officials felt that the left wing dominated stewards would elect a left wing convenor, whereas the shopfloor was more likely to go for the officials' choice.

Reg Parsons was put up to stand against the left's candidate, Bob Fryer, the existing convenor. The national media ran a campaign against Fryer, and Parsons duly won the election.

'A lot of good T&G stewards were then lying



low, licking their wounds. Thornett had been victimised, the right wing were temporarily in the ascendancy in the TGWU, and workers' participation came in. It was at around this time (the mid to late 1970s) that the labour force started to decline. Several good militants left the factory.

'Eventually the elections came up again, and by this time disillusion with Parsons had set in. A campaign was started to get Bob Fryer back in. Bob won the election easily, and Parsons was dead and buried...'

In 1979, Michael Edwardes took over as chairman of British Leyland.

'He wasn't interested in workers' participation. He didn't want to sweet talk anyone or give them meals or anything like that. He just came in with his boots on.

'Plants were being closed all over the place. There was a lot of demoralisation. A lot of people took voluntary redundancy at Cowley.'

The major role of the stewards at this time was to ensure job opportunity. There was an agreement on seniority, which meant that if someone left the plant that job was offered to workers with the longest service first. The agreement meant variety and 'good' jobs were possible. This system was supervised by shop stewards.

However, Edwardes soon put a stop to this. Seniority was one of the things abolished by the 92-page 'blue newspaper', or 'slaves' charter' as it was known, signed by the union leaders.

Edwardes also introduced corporate bargaining to British Leyland. Under this, all negotiations were conducted at national level by national officials, away from the plants.

'Nobody could see a way of fighting back. The decline of the company could be seen. When the Maxi Ital was introduced in 1970, there were two tracks in the south works, working day and night, reaching a peak of 35 cars an hour on each system. That's 70 cars an hour coming off the line on a day and night basis. At the end of the Ital, about three years ago, the south works was producing a grand total of seven vehicles an hour on days only. It nose-dived.'

The lowest point was in 1980-81 when the Cowley assembly plant workforce numbered less than 3,500. In the early 1970s Cowley had employed around 20,000.

In November 1982, Alan Thornett—who was still being refused recognition as a shop steward—was finally sacked from Cowley. The transport section where he worked voted three-to-one to strike for his reinstatement. But the transport workers were persuaded by local TGWU official David Buckle to hold fire until a mass meeting to discuss the issue was held. The mass meeting failed to back Thornett, and no action was ever taken over his sacking. Militants were heavily demoralised by the episode.

However, the Metro had already been introduced to the Longbridge plant, and Cowley workers were promised the new model, the Maestro.

'The lift started with recruitment for the Maestro, when people realised they had a bit of job security. The Maestro was manned predominantly by "green labour"—new workers.

They had some of them almost running on the job, they were running things that tight. They'd sack people for coming in late twice and they'd be out before the union even got to hear about it. The company got away with it for a while. Then there was the handwashing dispute—and the worm turned.'

**T**hey treat us like bloody robots'... 'People have had just about enough of being screwed into the ground'... 'You can't call them management in there—they're gangsters'... 'You haven't even got basic union rights like being able to see your steward'...(strikers talking to *Socialist Worker*)

When the 'washing up strike' began at Cowley in April 1982 it was as if years of heavy handed treatment by British Leyland management suddenly backfired into an explosion of the workforce.

The roots of the present mood can be traced to this strike. Its immediate cause was management's decision to claw back the three minutes traditionally allowed at the end of each shift for workers to wash. The response was one which hadn't been seen at Cowley for years.

The strike lasted more than a month, a long time in Cowley's history. 'But it was lost eventually because no leadership emerged from the rank and file to combat the sell-out that the union officials actually got away with. At the last meeting which ended the strike there was no opposition. That's amazing when you think of the strength of feeling which brought us out.'

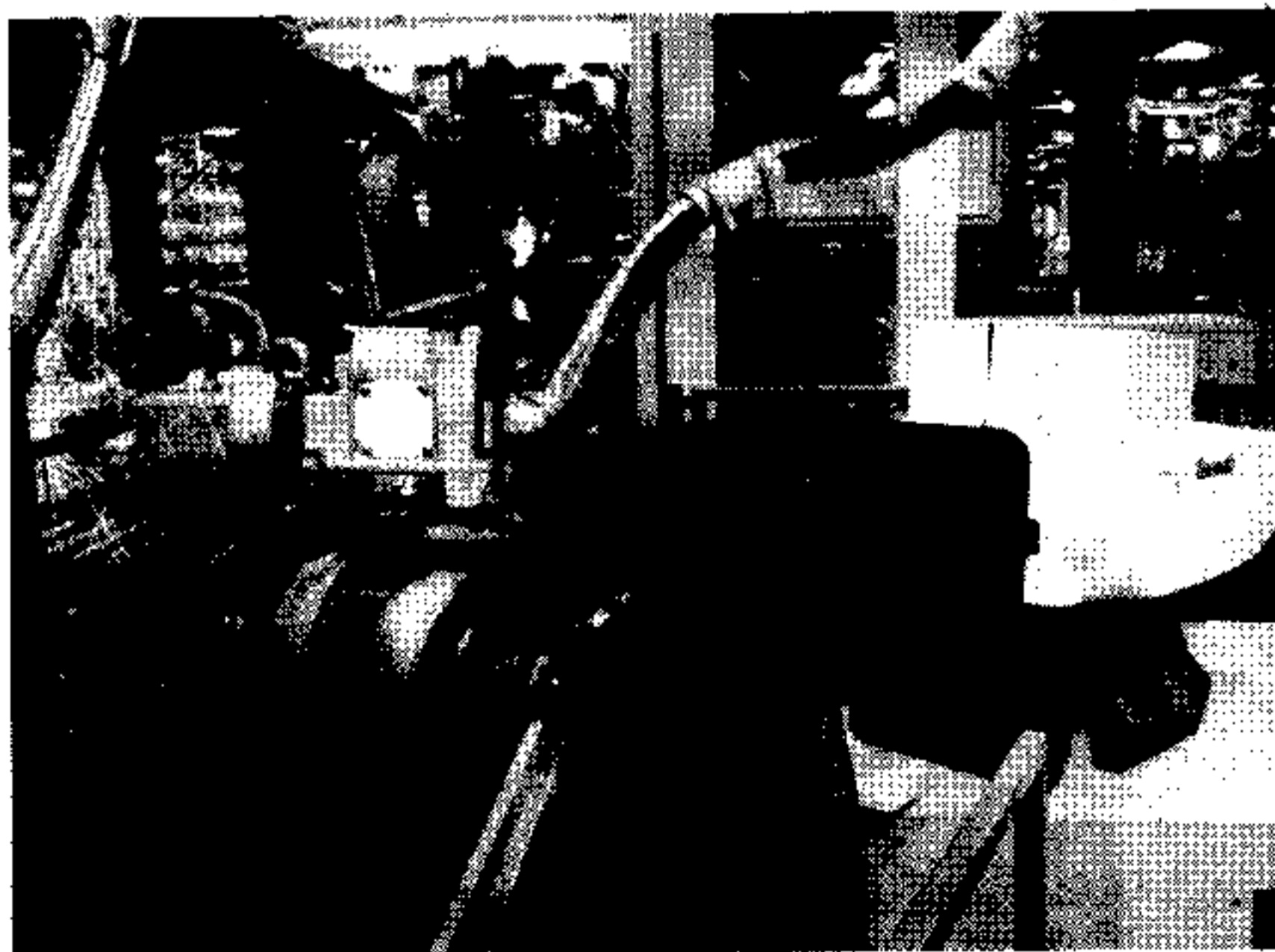
The deal was for a delay before 'washing up time' was abolished and for a four-man inquiry to look into grievances from both the unions' and management's side.

'And various things were said which indicated that earnings, principally the bonus, would be better if we returned to normal working. That helped defuse a bit of the feeling and then we had a period of peace.'

Less than a year ago Rover's new model, the



Alan Thornett



Montego, began production at Cowley. The labour for it was found by pulling back in about 600 workers who had been laid off when the Acclaim ceased production in mid-November last year—and some new labour was recruited.

'When you get lay-offs, you get a downturn in people taking action because it saps morale. But when people come back into the factory, it boosts it back up. The mood started to change again because of the introduction of the Montego—which was a car designed to sell in vast numbers—and the hard line from the company continued.

'When the Montego came in, people thought, "Great, a volume car, bonus earnings should go up." Instead of that the reverse happened. The company was still being tough and bonus earnings nose-dived, and of course people are very angry.

'Also—this was three months ago—we were beginning to think about the pay review. About this time Pressed Steel, the body plant, put on an overtime ban. They were fed up with low bonuses. Low for them was £13-14 a week—they're used to £25. Our bonus was down to about £4 or £5.

'You started to get a situation in the factory where there was stoppage after stoppage, meaning anything from half a dozen blokes stopping for 20 minutes. There were stoppages all the time. Stoppages over low bonuses, not being able to hold the job, out of sequence work, favouritism, over the non-recognition of stewards...

'We had all these stoppages, and finally we had a week when the company started screaming blue murder, saying that there was anarchy on the plant, and they started disciplining people for unconstitutional stoppages. There were over 700 disciplinary actions inside a fortnight.

'Then they called in the union officials and offered a moratorium.'

BL Austin Rover told the union that it would freeze all current disciplines and not begin any more and it would recognise four stewards out of six who had been denied facilities.

'They wanted two things in exchange. One was that the stewards would do their best to get people back to work when they walked out unconstitutionally. We're supposed to do that anyway. We're supposed to tell them to put the

grievance in procedure.

'Secondly they wanted the unions to enter into discussions over the restructuring of the unions on the plant. The company's complaint is that the union structure is "unwieldy" and "ineffective". The full-time officials grabbed onto this. They've always hated us at Cowley because it's never been really bureaucratised.'

The deal was accepted and there followed a quiet period at the plant—for about a week. Then the disputes started breaking out again. The company held the moratorium. They didn't start any more disciplines. But we never managed to hold our side.

'Then lots of people in the factory started demanding a mass meeting to ban overtime.'

A stewards' meeting decided to recommend an overtime ban to a mass meeting, not in order to increase the bonus, but as part of the lead-up to the pay claim. Certain groups of workers, including those whose overtime is 'contractual', were excluded from the ban. This recommendation was overwhelmingly backed by both day and night shifts.

The ban held very well, apart from one small area of the factory. But it soon became clear that the company was going to take a tough line.

Twenty-two dayshift workers in the paintshop refused, as part of the ban, to work an extra half-hour each day which management said was contractual by custom and practice, although not by formal agreement. The work was vital if the nightshift was to begin.

'The company wouldn't let these men start work because they'd refused to work the extra half-hour. Finally everyone was locked out on a daily basis as a result.

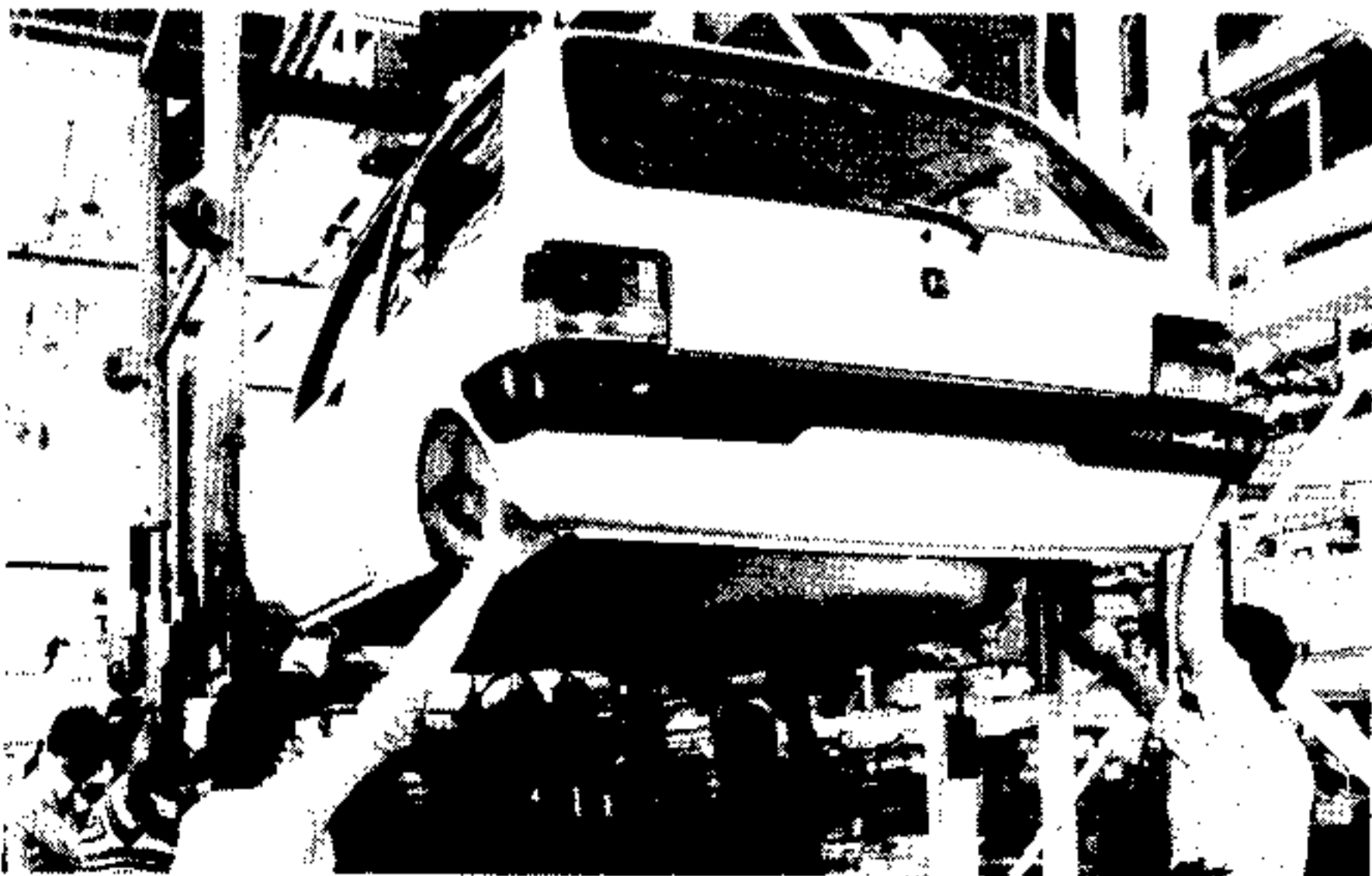
'We had a very stormy stewards' meeting which eventually agreed to recommend to the members that we should exclude these 22 men from the overtime ban. The first mass meeting, on the nightshift, overwhelmingly overturned the recommendation and voted to stand firm. The day shift mass meeting went the same way. As soon as the company heard, they locked us out indefinitely.'

A few days later, another stewards' meeting was addressed by the local fulltime TGWU and AUEW officials who said they'd been sent by national officials to sort it out. The stewards decided to send the officials and factory convenors to tell the company that the solution was in its hands.

'They came back and said the company had agreed to recall everyone. It was a bombshell. We never thought they would—we thought they'd lock us out until the week's holiday when we'd be ready to accept anything.'

In fact, it was agreed to make the extra half-hour worked by the paintshop men contractual. But the whole episode was seen as a climbdown by the management.

The overtime ban is continuing, and the next item on the agenda for Austin Rover unions is the pay claim. But, although the mood inside the Cowley plant is much more favourable in terms of a fight than it was at the time of the last settlement two years ago, there are still enormous obstacles in the way.



# ONE GREAT ACT OR MASS ACTION?

'We Marxists consider the tactic of individual terror inexpedient in the tasks of the liberating struggle of the proletariat as well as oppressed nationalities. A single isolated hero cannot replace the masses. But we understand only too clearly the inevitability of such convulsive acts of despair and vengeance. All our emotions, all our sympathies are with the self-sacrificing avengers even though they have been unable to discover the correct road.'

**T**HE above words from Leon Trotsky are a fine guide for socialists in the wake of the Brighton bomb. They have the advantage of both locating such bombings in a general political context, without on the other hand tail ending the tactics of the bombers.

When the Brighton bomb went off, those of us whose 'emotions and sympathies' are with the Republicans held our breath. Would the Tories be able to whip up a backlash? It says something for the standing of Thatcher's government that this has probably been the most popular IRA bomb of all—at least among the minority of activists in the working class movement.

It is doubtful if many miners who have had to endure the last seven months of Thatcher's attacks would have felt much sympathy. For them Thatcher's words about the evil of violence will make little impact. But perhaps in a strange way the claims of Sinn Fein's Danny Morrison may have.

'If that bomb had killed the whole British cabinet, examine what would have happened. There would have been a rethink in British political circles and it would probably have led to a British withdrawal in a much shorter time,' said Morrison. The IRA were even clearer when they added, 'Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once—you will have to be lucky always'.

If Morrison, and the IRA, are right then this has very serious implications, and not just for Ireland. Take the miners' strike, for instance. Why go through seven months of incredible self sacrifice if one or two supremely brave acts can solve the problem? If the real enemy is Thatcher and MacGregor, why not just bump them off?

The answer is that capitalism is not about one or two individuals, but about a class in society that will do whatever is necessary to protect its power and privilege. The ruling class is solidly behind Thatcher's attempt to smash the miners. Her death or that of MacGregor would do little to change the face of the confrontation.

The real fear of the ruling class in such a situation comes not from the threat of a bullet or bomb, but from the potential of real solidarity.

This applies in Ireland as well. Morrison is surely not going to suggest that the last 800 years of British rule are due to good luck on the part of British prime ministers, or an oversight on the part of the Republicans. In the last 15 years, it has been times when the *mass movement* in Ireland has been strongest that the British have looked in greatest difficulty.

This was true in the early days of civil rights, which threw the state into disarray, in the explosion of anger North and South, following Bloody Sunday, which brought the sectarian Stormont parliament tumbling, and in the period of the hunger strike. Not one bombing or assassination throughout the last 15 years has applied the same pressure, or caused as much difficulty.

Our main argument therefore with Republicans is not a moral one, but about the central importance of workers' self organisation and self activity. It says much about the weakness of Republican politics that they make no attempt to link what they have done with the fight of the striking miners.

**B**UT if Republicans can't see the need for generalising and showing that we face a common enemy, British socialists should. The response of some of the left press has been, to put it mildly, disappointing. Two papers, *Militant* (whose editorial starts with the amazing claim 'The bombing...will have incensed workers in both Britain and Ireland') and *Tribune* are worth looking at.

*Tribune* has over the past few years been very closely associated with the Bennites in the Labour Party. So it came as some surprise to find remarks like the following in the paper's editorial.

'In the Thatcherite thesaurus, the word *extremist* covers a multitude of sins. It includes, *correctly* (my emphasis), IRA bombers and General Galtieri. It also includes...the likes of Tony Benn, Neil Kinnock, and Ken Livingstone.'

*Tribune* doesn't like the latter, or striking miners, being included in the term. Far from trying to explain what fighting miners and oppressed Catholics in Northern Ireland have in common, it attempts to drive a wedge between them. It makes no condemnation of British rule.

The attitude of *Militant* is even more sur-

In the wake of the Brighton bombing, Pat Stack looks at the reaction of republicans and socialists. Overleaf, we reprint Trotsky's writings on terrorism, first published in 1911.



Danny Morrison

prising. They, like *Tribune*, seek to distance the miners from events in Ireland, instead of using the argument about police tactics and techniques to show that we face the same state and the same police.

'Northern Ireland has been used as a testing ground for methods of repression that could not have been used but for workers' revulsion against the assassinations and bombings by *sectarian groups* (my italics). Now some of these methods are being used against the miners.'

This really is a disgraceful and dishonest argument. The *Militant* leader-writer must know as well as anyone that the repression within Northern Ireland springs from the undemocratic nature of that state, that those who tried to reform it peacefully were brutally crushed and that the allegedly sectarian group, the IRA, grew massively out of that experience. For any socialist to argue that those fighting back against repression, sectarianism and undemocratic rule are responsible for the violence the state throws at them is unforgivable.

For socialists it is not the fact that the republicans fight that is wrong. The alternatives are the bankrupt parliamentary road of the SDLP or (*Militant's* preferred solution) setting up the British Labour Party. They are absolutely right to reject these paths. The problem is that the method they choose to employ necessarily places the mass movement in a subordinate role. Just as the parliamentary reformist says: leave it to me, let me change society for you, so does the individual terrorist.

He or she requires no more than passive support as they carry out the 'one great act' on your behalf. Many miners will have learnt in the course of this dispute that they can do more to bring down Thatcher through their own actions than all the fine speeches of Neil Kinnock. It would be a disaster if having learnt that they then turned to the braver, but ultimately no more successful, reformist option put forward by Danny Morrison. ■

bourgeois politicians have the right to pour out their floods of moral indignation about proletarian terrorism when their entire state apparatus with its laws, police, and army is nothing but an apparatus for capitalist terror!

However, it must be said that when they reproach us with terrorism, they are trying—although not always consciously—to give this word a narrower, less indirect meaning. The damaging of machines by workers, for example, is terrorism in this strict sense of the word. The killing of an employer, a threat to set fire to a factory or a death threat to its owner, an assassination attempt, with revolver in hand, against a government minister—all these are terrorist acts in the full and authentic sense. However, anyone who has an idea of the true nature of international social democracy ought to know that it has always opposed this kind of terrorism, and done so in the most irreconcilable way.

Why? 'Terrorising' with the threat of a strike, or actually conducting a strike, is something only industrial or agricultural workers can do. The social significance of a strike depends directly upon first, the size of the enterprise or the branch of industry that it affects; and second, the degree to which the workers taking part in it are organised, disciplined, and ready for action. This is just as true of a political strike as it is of an economic one.

In order to develop, the capitalist system needs a parliamentary superstructure. But because it cannot confine the modern proletariat to a political ghetto, it must sooner or later allow the workers to participate in parliament. In elections, the mass character of the proletariat and its level of political development—qualities which again, are determined by its social role, ie, above all, its productive role—find their expression.

Only the workers can conduct a strike. Artisans ruined by the factory, peasants whose water the factory is poisoning, or lumpen proletarians, in search of plunder, can smash machines, set fire to a factory, or murder its owner.

Only the conscious and organised working class can send a strong representation into the halls of parliament to look out for proletarian interests. However, in order to murder a prominent official you need not have the organised masses behind you. The recipe for explosives is accessible to all, and a Browning can be obtained anywhere.

In the first case, there is a social struggle, whose methods and means flow necessarily from the nature of the prevailing social order; in the second, a purely mechanical reaction identical everywhere—in China as in France—very striking in its outward form (murder, explosions, and so forth) but absolutely harmless as far as the social system goes.

A strike, even of modest size, has social consequences: strengthening of the workers' self-confidence, growth of the trade union, and not infrequently, even an improvement in production technology. The murder of a factory owner produces effects of a police nature only, or



## Trotsky on terrorism

**O**UR class enemies are in the habit of complaining about our terrorism. What they mean by this is rather unclear. They would like to label all the activities of the proletariat directed against the class enemy's interests as terrorism. The strike, in their eyes, is the principal method of terrorism. The threat of a strike, the organisation of strike pickets, an economic boycott of a slave-driving boss, a moral boycott of a traitor from our own ranks—all this and much more they call terrorism. If terrorism is understood in this way as any action inspiring fear in, or doing harm to, the enemy, then of course the entire class struggle is nothing but terrorism. And the only question remaining is whether the

a change of proprietors devoid of any social significance.

Whether a terrorist attempt, even a 'successful' one, throws the ruling class into confusion depends on the concrete political circumstances. In any case the confusion can only be short-lived; the capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them. The classes it serves will always find new people; the mechanism remains intact and continues to function.

But the disarray introduced into the ranks of the working masses themselves by a terrorist attempt is much deeper. If it is enough to arm oneself with a pistol in order to achieve one's goal, why the efforts of the class struggle? If a thimbleful of gunpowder and a little chunk of lead is enough to shoot the enemy through the neck, what need is there for a class organisation? If it makes sense to terrify highly placed personages with the roar of explosions, where is the need for a party? Why meetings, mass agitation, and elections if one can so easily take aim at the ministerial bench from the gallery of parliament?

In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it *belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness*, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes toward a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission. The anarchist prophets of 'the propaganda of the deed' can argue all they want about the elevating and stimulating influence of terrorist acts on the masses. Theoretical considerations and political experience prove otherwise. The more 'effective' the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education.

But the smoke from the explosion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement come disillusion and apathy.

The efforts of reaction to put an end to strikes and to the mass workers' movement in general have always, everywhere, ended in failure. Capitalist society needs an active, mobile, and intelligent proletariat; it cannot, therefore, bind the proletariat hand and foot for very long. On the other hand the anarchist 'propaganda of the deed' has shown every time that the state is much richer in the means of physical destruction and mechanical repression than are the terrorist groups.

If that is so, where does it leave the revolution? Is it negated or rendered impossible by this state of affairs? Not at all. For the revolution is not a simple aggregate of mechanical means. The revolution can arise only out of the sharpening of the class struggle, and it can find a guarantee of victory only in the social functions of the proletariat. The mass political strike, the armed insurrection, the conquest of state power—all this is determined by the degree to which production has been developed, the alignment of

class forces, the proletariat's social weight, and finally, by the social composition of the army, since the armed forces are the factor that in time of revolution determines the fate of state power.

Social democracy is realistic enough not to try to avoid the revolution that is developing out of the existing historical conditions; on the contrary, it is moving to meet the revolution with eyes wide open. But contrary to the anarchists and in direct struggle against them—social democracy rejects all methods and means that have as their goal to artificially force the development of society and to substitute chemical preparations for the insufficient revolutionary strength of the proletariat.

Before it is elevated to the level of a method of political struggle, terrorism makes its appearance in the form of individual acts of revenge. So it was in Russia, the classic land of terrorism. The flogging of political prisoners impelled Vera Zasulich to give expression to the general feeling of indignation by an assassination attempt on General Trepov. Her example was imitated in the circles of the revolutionary intelligentsia, who lacked any mass support. What began as an act of unthinking revenge was developed into an entire system in 1879-81.

There is no need to belabour the point that social democracy has nothing in common with those bought-and-paid-for moralists who, in response to any terrorist act, make solemn declamations about the 'absolute value' of human life. These are the same people who, on other occasions, in the name of other absolute values—for example, the nation's honour or the monarch's prestige—are ready to shove millions of people into the hell of war. Today their national hero is the minister who gives the orders for unarmed workers to be fired on—in the name of the most sacred right of private property; and tomorrow, when the desperate hand of the unemployed worker is clenched into a fist or picks up a weapon, they will start in with all sorts of nonsense about the inadmissability of violence in any form.

Whatever the eunuchs and pharisees or morality may say, the feeling of revenge has its rights. It does the working class the greatest moral credit that it does not look with vacant indifference upon what is going on in this best of all possible worlds. Not to extinguish the proletariat's unfulfilled feeling of revenge, but on the contrary to stir it up again and again, to deepen it, and to direct it against the real causes of all injustice and human baseness—that is the task of social democracy.

If we oppose terrorist acts, it is only because *individual* revenge does not satisfy us. The account we have to settle with the capitalist system is too great to be presented to some functionary called a minister. To learn to see all the crimes against humanity, all the indignities to which the human body and spirit are subjected, as the twisted outgrowths and expressions of the existing social system, in order to direct all our energies into a collective struggle against this system—that is the direction in which the burning desire for revenge can find its highest moral satisfaction. ■

**'The confusion can only be short lived; the capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them.'**

**'The smoke from the explosion clears away, the panic disappears, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before.'**

# Why the left is back in business

THIS YEAR'S Labour Party conference should have a quite special place in the 84-year history of the party. Never before has the conference been so obviously and directly dominated by the industrial struggle.

Go back even to the big strikes during Labour's early years and it is difficult to find a precedent. The great industrial unrest before the First World War left the party remarkably cold. And the General Strike of 1926 was fought and betrayed midway between two right wing dominated Labour conferences each of which had other things uppermost on its mind.

The only real parallel is the 1919 Labour Party conference at which a debate on 'direct action' loomed large. But the 1919 debate was about *possible* industrial action some time in the future. It wasn't about a major strike actually going on as conference met. On that score 1984 is unique. The miners have written a new page into the Labour Party history books.

The miners have also produced a more general effect within the party. They have halted nearly three years of right wing drift and put the Labour left back into business.

The revival of the Labour left's fortunes at this conference was symbolised by the vote on the issue of reselection of MPs. Neil Kinnock's pet scheme to modify the selection procedures so as to keep a few dead-beat Labour MPs from being reelected was thrown out. That was an important vote even though Kinnock's proposed changes probably wouldn't have made much practical difference. It was Kinnock's first serious defeat and it finally makes it clear that Labour's constitutional changes are here to stay.

In all probability it was the miners who produced this left victory. In both 1982 and 1983 the leaders of the T&GWU have been able to browbeat their delegations into backing the party establishment. The fact that they couldn't repeat the operation for a third year running, had little to do with either the merits of the case or internal happenings in the T&GWU. It was because the miners had changed the general mood.

## Withering right

The immediate effect of the miners' strike on the Labour Party was, then, both sharp and obvious at Blackpool. But what of the more long term prospects? Is Labour's 1984 left turn a five day wonder or is it part of something far more profound, a long term and fundamental shift of the party to the left? That is certainly what *Militant* argues ('the party is still on course and moving left'). It is a belief probably shared by most of the rest of the Labour left.

To see how much truth there is in this belief it is necessary to disentangle three separate elements in the Labour left's current revival.

First of all there is one respect in which the Labour Party certainly is changing 'leftwards' on a longterm basis: the gradual but systematic withering away of the old-style right wing in the party.

In the 1950s and 1960s a good proportion of the constituency activists were open right wingers. They in turn were quite happy to select open right wingers as their candidates for councils and for parliament.

Eleven years of Wilson/Callaghan government and the end of the post war boom have changed all that. There are now very few open right wingers amongst Labour's constituency activists. That means that of the *new* candidates for councils and parliament who are selected, very few are open right wingers.

Unilateral nuclear disarmament is a good indicator. Open right wingers have traditionally been virulently opposed. But today very few open opponents of unilateral nuclear disarmament are going to be selected as new candidates for parliament. Of course most of the sitting rightwingers will get reselected, so the process of change is quite slow. But already in this parliament for the first time probably a bare majority of Labour MPs would say they are unilateralists. In the next parliament it will be a big majority.

Now this progressive withering away of the old-fashioned right wing does have some important consequences. Over the past few years of left wing retreat the absence of a serious right wing cadre in the Labour Party made it impossible to drive out the hard left and so has enabled *Militant* to operate quite comfortably in the party, despite the witch hunt at the top. In the next few years the shift away from the open right wing is going to make it all the easier to muster real enthusiasm for getting a Labour government elected.

But alongside these real effects it is also important to recognise the fundamental limitation of this long term erosion of the traditional right wing. Those who replace the right wingers are far more often in the mould of Neil Kinnock, than in the mould of Tony Benn. In other words they are more often than not people who have a bit of superficially left wing style coupled with impeccably orthodox views.

It is those sort of people, headed by Neil Kinnock, who will form the majority of the next Labour government. (There will also be a very strong minority of old-style right wingers in it.)

There is a second element in the Labour left's current revival which also predates the miners' strike. It is the rise of the Labour left's fortunes in local government. And it is quite a curious story.

Local government was to be one of the 'new' Labour left's key areas of activity, indulging in 'socialist experiments' in places like Lambeth and most notably the GLC under the new Livingstone administration

electd in 1981. It was a key part of the Bennite upturn. But it quickly went sour. The new GLC seemed to be thwarted in its more popular schemes, subject to ridicule from all sides on most of its others and to be sliding towards electoral disaster.

What changed all that was the Tories ill-thought out scheme to abolish the GLC and Ken Livingstone's clever and effective campaign against it. From an electoral liability Livingstone has transformed himself and his GLC administration into one of Labour's key electoral assets.

Of course Livingstone's campaign has been fought on the soggiest of populist politics, including shared platforms with Tories and the Queen opening the Thames Barrier. It has also involved little real workplace union mobilisation. But Livingstone remains a left wing figure, still quite willing to proclaim his support for Irish republicans or his belief that the bulk of the economy has to be nationalised (although he doesn't do these things when the Queen is around or a by-election in the offing). And so the rebirth of the People's Ken has also been a powerful boost to the morale and attraction of the Labour left.

## Liverpool victory

The other side of the Labour left's local government upturn is Liverpool. It is a very different story from the GLC. *Militant*, who dominate the new Labour group which won Liverpool from the Liberals in 1983 have very little in local government elsewhere and traditionally little interest in that area of political activity. Far from the clever populism of the GLC, Liverpool's stand in refusing to make cuts or put up rates was a class conscious stand way beyond anything the 'new left' Labour councils were prepared to do. Furthermore it involved a considerable degree of trade union mobilisation as a central part of its strategy.

Lastly, of course, Liverpool has achieved what most people consider to be a notable victory.

Now again the limitations of all this need stressing. Liverpool's victory owes much to the miners, involved backtracking on the commitment not to raise rates and a large amount of the money apparently got out of the Tories existed more in the minds of 'creative' accountants than in reality. The union mobilisation in Liverpool was carefully controlled and limited from the top and no serious preparation was made for all-out confrontation.

Nevertheless the victory looked like a handsome one and made the quite disgraceful behaviour of the Labour parliamentary leadership over Liverpool look not merely shameful but also stupid. Coming as it does just before rate capping, which really does force the Labour left councils into a corner, it has played a considerable part in persuading the rest of the local government



**Kinnock: the honeymoon's over but the marriage is as firm as ever.**

Labour left to commit themselves to defy the law in the coming year. A resolution supporting that stance was passed at this year's conference.

Little may come of it. Left Labour councils may well indulge in brinkmanship but are they willing to give up office? Still the fight in local government is likely to be very important in the coming year. And at the moment the Labour left is certainly running fairly high on it.

The third element in the Labour left's revival is of course the miners' strike. Let me briefly outline the overall picture.

### Street collections

After a slow start in the first few weeks of the strike the rank and file Labour Party activists have engaged in support for the miners on a very large scale. No overall figures are available about money raised, and no systematic surveys have been done of people involved. But, my informed guess is that virtually every constituency Labour party will be supplying the personnel for at least one weekly street collection, that virtually all General Management Committees and ward branches will have taken collections, in most cases on a regular basis

and that a very large number have received delegations of miners or miners' wives. The sum of money raised by Labour parties for the miners probably now runs into millions.

Alongside activity there has also been a very obvious shift of attitudes. Amongst the 'new' Labour left (Militant very definitely excepted!) a certain dismissal of 'traditional' male working class and industrial militancy has long been fashionable. That, no doubt, goes a long way to explaining the initial lack of Labour left activity around the strike. But as the weeks wore into months so far as the miners were concerned that dismissal disappeared. 'Traditional', male, (and often very sexist!), striking miners were sure of a welcome, aid and accommodation. The women's miners support groups have seized the imagination of the Labour left. 'Women only' benefits for the miners have not been unusual.

This shift of the 'new' Labour left towards a very traditional working class struggle has also been reciprocated by the NUM. At last month's party conference the NUM delegation spoke in favour of the feminist resolutions and the NUM was the only major union to vote in favour of the resolution on black sections.

Finally it should be noted that Neil

Kinnock's attitude to the miners' strike really has caused much embarrassment to and anger from Labour Party activists as the strike has gone on. It really has ended the honeymoon.

*But the marriage is still as firm as ever.* That is the fatal flaw for the Labour left. The delegates at Blackpool may cheer Scargill to the echo. But they have to cheer Kinnock as well. For the end result of all their endeavour is to get someone into Number 10 Downing Street. And that someone is Neil Kinnock.

Despite all the enthusiasm for the miners, for the Labour Party as a whole they are still a side show. There are thousands of Labour Party activists working for hours every week to support the miners. But there will be rather more of them working rather longer for the next round of council elections. And far more working far longer for the next general election.

The miners' strike has got onto the agenda of most meetings. By now it is probably on regularly. But it still occupies a smaller space than the party's electoral activities.

And not only is the Labour Party still a fundamentally electoral party. It is one in which Neil Kinnock is, for the foreseeable future, unshiftable. Put it to them straight and no one on the Labour left would claim otherwise. But we have already seen what a Labour government under Kinnock and his team would mean. That is an issue which the Labour left skate over.

### Past parallel

I said at the beginning of this article that the only real parallel in Labour's history with the 1984 party conference was the one held in 1919. Under the pressure of the industrial struggles of the time, and with the Russian revolution fresh in delegates memories that conference discussed a resolution instructing the National Executive of the party to consult with the TUC leadership 'with the view to effective action being taken' to enforce their demands 'by *the unreserved use of their political and industrial power*'. And the motion was passed, by a majority of two to one!

That is rather further than the left got in 1984. Needless to say in 1919 the party leadership were quite happy to use the opposition of the TUC leadership to ensure that nothing was done about the resolution. But what is even more relevant for the political prospects today is that a right wing leadership of the Labour Party survived through that 1919 conference and went on with the addition of a new 'left wing' leader (Ramsay MacDonald!) to form the pathetically conservative Labour governments of the twenties.

That will be the fate of enthusiasm for the miners seen at the 1984 Labour conference so long as it remains trapped inside the Labour Party.

But the only way to get it out of that trap is not to preach from the sidelines but to get stuck into the joint support work and the comradely argument with those enthusiasts to make sure their Labour left revival continues to evolve leftwards out of the Labour Party and to revolutionary politics. ■

Pete Goodwin

# Lost Opportunities

**The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel**

Jill Liddington  
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FEMINISTS today often look back to the movement for women's suffrage at the beginning of the century as one of the most important movements of women in this country. At its height, up to a million women demonstrated in London for the vote. Cabinet ministers were attacked. Hundreds of women were arrested and many imprisoned for their militant tactics. But the story of the campaign to win votes for women is not simply one of brave middle class heroines breaking the law to draw attention to their case.

The issue attracted the support of numbers of working class women, who saw the campaign for the vote as part of the means of improving their living standards and conditions. This was particularly true in the north of England, especially Lancashire, where women mill workers tended to be more politically and economically independent than many other women workers.

In 1901, a delegation of fifteen Lancashire women presented a petition to parliament. The petition called for women to be given the vote. It was signed by nearly 30,000 women workers from the Lancashire cotton mills. They wanted adult suffrage, along with a number of other demands to improve the lot of working class people. The signatures represented a third of all women in the cotton unions, and a significant number of all organised women workers at the time.

One of the fifteen was Selina Cooper, the wife of a weaver in Nelson, Lancashire. Until the birth of her daughter a year before, she too had worked in the mill for fourteen years. Selina Cooper's story is told in a new book *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*.

## Political involvement

Selina Cooper became involved in politics in the 1890s, working in the marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and then the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Her most active period politically was the period which began with the petition — the campaign to win women the vote. She formed the Nelson and Colne Suffrage Committee in 1903, and three years later took a full time post as organiser for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

The outcome of the First World War had a profound effect on politics in Nelson as everywhere else. Selina Cooper welcomed the Russian Revolution in 1917 and for much of the rest of her life had a close working relationship with her local Communist Party.

After the vote was won (in 1918 for some women, in 1928 for the rest), she championed various causes, ranging from the rights of mothers to receive family allowance to the

Burnley and Nelson weavers in their various strikes and lockouts. She went on a women's delegation to Nazi Germany to try to help the wives of Communists held hostage by the regime. Incredibly, she was expelled from the Labour Party at the age of 77 in 1941 for supporting the anti-war Communist-backed People's Convention.

She was an active and committed socialist for most of her adult life and her story is extremely interesting. This is both because of the period through which she lived, and because her story brings out many of the confusions which existed in British politics before the First World War. In particular there were two issues which still cause some confusion among historians today. The first was the difference between the suffragists and the suffragettes. There were two major organisations which dominated the struggle

for women's suffrage.

The Pankhurst family from Manchester set up one of them — the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. At first this organisation was quite closely connected to the ILP, of which Emmeline Pankhurst was a member. It gradually moved away from connections with any political party, and increasingly towards militant direct action. Its members were known as suffragettes.

A few years earlier the bourgeois feminist Millicent Garret Fawcett formed the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) — a highly respectable and constitutional body.

Selina was not a suffragette but a suffragist. She supported the NUWSS. The difference between the two is usually portrayed as between those who believed in militant action, and those who wanted to press for constitutional change. It seems contradictory that a socialist like Selina should support the latter. But the two organisations were two sides of the same coin.

Neither set out to demand votes for *all* women. They wanted women's suffrage on



**Clitheroe Women's Suffrage Society, Nelson Station, 17 June 1911. Centre front, Mary Cooper; immediately right Selina Cooper; immediately left, Robert Cooper**



**Labour Party conference, Belfast, January 1907.**



the same basis as that of men. And at the time, only men with a certain property or residency qualification could vote. For somebody like Selina, involved in the growing Labour Party, it probably made more sense to belong to an organisation which stressed constitutional change rather than direct action.

This was particularly true because the Pankhursts had an autocratic and elitist attitude and believed that working class women were too weak to play more than a support role in the fight for women's suffrage.

The second confusion was the argument between women's suffrage and adult suffrage. For many socialists, the campaign for votes for women raised the question of whether to support votes for women on the same basis as men, or whether to fight for adult suffrage for all. The debate on the suffrage at the Labour Party conference in Belfast in 1907, to which Selina was a delegate, hinged round this question.

Some Labour Party members argued that women's suffrage on the same basis as men would only enfranchise middle and upper class women who would be natural supporters of the Tory Party. The supporters of adult suffrage included the SDF's Harry Quelch, who argued for the vote for all. Supporters of women's suffrage were clearly alarmed that their particular demand would be lost in the general call for votes for all. Their position is often supported by feminists today, who argue that the 'adult suffragists' were not concerned about votes for women.

But in reality the supporters of both sides were a mixed bag. Some of the adult suffrage supporters used the argument to prevent the women's suffragists from organising. And Keir Hardie argued for women's suffrage because he believed it was all that could be won. Adult suffrage was not winnable in the present.

### Dogged by reformism

The relationship between the suffrage movement and the Labour movement was dogged by the reformism of both sides. The Labour Party didn't want to call for reforms which would seem too distant and unrealistic to their potential supporters. The women's suffrage supporters, on the other hand, seemed content to settle for limited reforms which left the vast majority of working class women without the vote. Neither side understood the need to use issues — whether the militant tactics of the WSPU or the constitutional campaign for the suffrage—to build inside the working class movement and increase the level of struggle.

In this they simply reflected the weakness of the whole of the British Labour movement. The Labour Party had been formed to represent the unions in parliament. It reflected all the weaknesses of this approach. The conservatism and sectionalism bred in the craft unions which had dominated the workers' movement in the nineteenth century also dominated inside the Labour Party. In addition, Labour felt the pull of Liberalism, which influenced powerful groups of workers like the miners, and made them hostile to the question of women's

suffrage in particular.

Another element naturally had an effect on those good socialists — like Selina Cooper and her husband Robert — who joined the ranks of the socialist movement in the early years. The Coopers briefly were members of the marxist SDF in the 1890s. But like many of their fellow socialists they became disillusioned with the abstract propagandism of the SDF and turned to the much more practical, 'realistic' ILP. But the ILP, although much more radical than most of the Labour Party, always tried to fudge the divide between themselves and the Liberals, and between the interests of the working class and those of the middle class.

This was true as much on the question of women as on anything else. ILP women like Selina Cooper saw no contradiction in working with upper and upper middle class ladies to win the vote — despite the fact that their lives and aspirations were diametrically opposed. Nor did they see a contradiction in supporting (and in Selina's case working for) the NUWSS of Millicent Garret Fawcett. Mrs Fawcett was against most strikes and had opposed the match girls' strike of 1888. ILP politics allowed these ideas to co-exist, because they tended to blur the idea of antagonistic class struggle.

So the energies of activists were never directed towards linking the different issues in more than a token way. Selina Cooper stormed the country speaking at suffrage meetings to great effect. But although she was sympathetic to workers' struggles, they were seen as something separate from the struggle for the vote. More than that, she believed that much would be solved by the election of a Labour government. Her attitude was one which predominated among ILP members and others on the left and meant that a strong revolutionary current was not built in the years of crisis leading up to the first world war. It also meant that individuals took all sorts of contradictory positions.

The elitist demands of the Pankhurst WSPU were understandably rejected by Selina and the Lancashire suffragists. But in their place were put constitutional demands — working through lobbies, trades council resolutions and the like. There was little attempt to mobilise the working class women themselves to take action. Selina worked for the 'moderate' NUWSS. Maybe

that didn't matter at first. But she continued to do so almost until the end of the war. This must have forced her to play down her pacifist politics and, at the very best, remain silent in the face of the pro-war line of the organisation generally.

Selina Cooper's life was an odd mix: She was a tough, uncompromising woman who determined to spend her time organising politically. For her pains she was accused of henpecking her husband and neglecting her daughter. She also believed — at least over some issues and at some periods — in revolutionary change. But she was caught in the trap of politics being about acting on behalf of the working class. So at different times she was both a Poor Law Guardian and a magistrate.

### Campaigning limits

The struggle for the vote always contained these contradictions. Although it fired some women to very radical ideas, and a few to questioning the whole of capitalist society, it always led back to electing Labour MPs to improve the workers' lot.

So the energy of the mill workers was channelled into constitutional channels, not into fighting the bosses. This was to do with the limitations of the campaign itself — and the leadership of the campaign by bourgeois feminists.

Jill Liddington's book is interesting because it does something quite unusual — tells the story of a working class woman and working class life in Lancashire.

Like her previous book on the north country suffragists (*One Hand Tied Behind Us*, with Jill Norris) she paints a very different picture from the usual tale of the suffragettes. She has gathered a great deal of information and draws on the oral testimony of Selina's daughter Mary, who died only last year.

But it is also a sad story of lost opportunities. Only occasionally does Jill Liddington show an alternative to this — when she talks of the Burnley weavers' strike or the activity of the Communists in the 1930s.

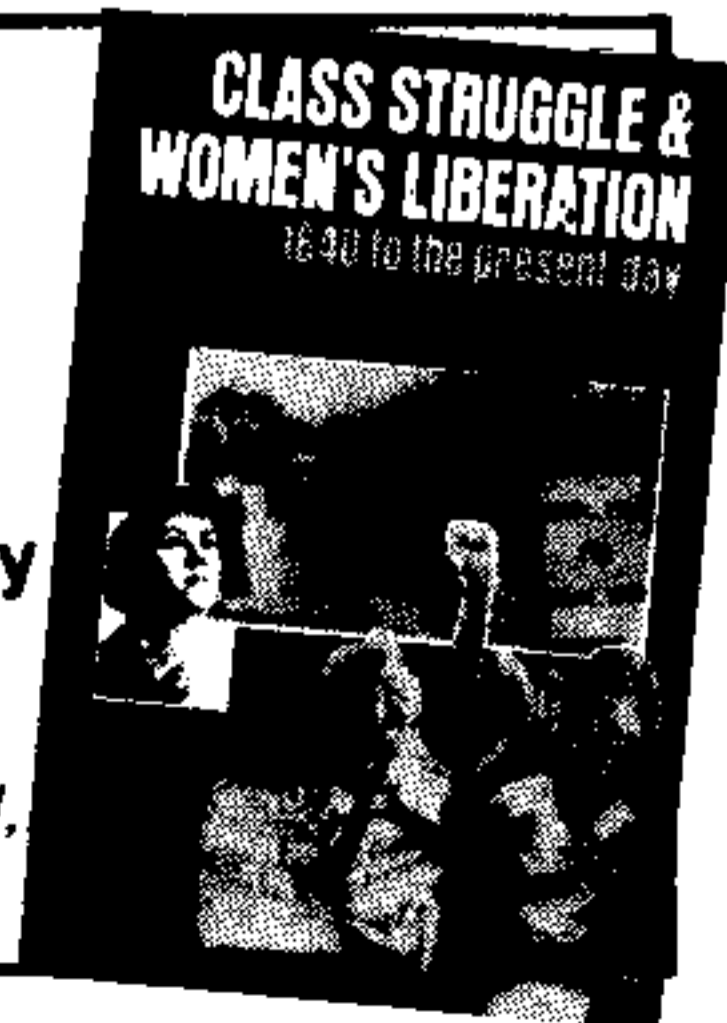
The book shows the resilience and the potential of working class women. It also shows how thousands of working class fighters have got sidetracked in the way that Selina Cooper did for much of her life. ■

Lindsey German

## Women's liberation —two traditions

Class struggle and women's liberation—1640 to the present day  
Tony Cliff

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# A powerful story teller

MENTION the name 'Spartacus', and most socialists will probably have heard of him. Mention Howard Fast, and the chances are they probably won't make the connection. Yet we owe Fast a certain debt for not only rescuing Spartacus, and what he stood for, but for popularising other 'forgotten' moments in history.

Fast was an active member of the American Communist Party (ACP) from 1943 to 1956 and during that period he wrote his best political historical novels. Optimistic and factual, these books always showed the masses fighting against their oppressors. Whether dealing with Italy in 71 BC or with 20th century America, the dominant theme was people's undying, unconquerable struggle for political freedom against corrupt and ruthless ruling classes, who will sacrifice anyone and anything to hold onto their power.

Fast came up through the slums of New York during the 1930s and very early on he became aware of the American left and attended the then popular 'John Reed Club' meetings. He often left them full of 'anger and mistrust'. He bought the CP *Daily Worker* regularly, 'sneered at it, read it hungrily, sneered at it again.' Ironically, years later he became part of the *Daily Worker* editorial staff.

Like many of his generation, Fast joined the CP because 'the truest and most consistent fighters in this Anti-Fascist struggle were the communists'. However, after the Khrushchev 'secret report' of 1956, which attempted to itemise Stalin's crimes, and the invasion of Hungary, he left — again, like many others of that same generation.

Fast also became disillusioned with the leadership of his own party, which had increasingly turned into the shoe shine boys for Russia. Like thousands of other good communists, Fast found himself in a political desert, without a compass. Almost inevitably, he drifted to the right, a fact that is reflected in his later writings.

Three of Fast's best works were written while he was an active communist: *Citizen Tom Paine* (1943), *Freedom Road* (1944) and *Spartacus* (1951), his most popular novel.

The subject of *Citizen Tom Paine* is the American Revolution of 1775 and the French Revolution of 1789. In the first half, Fast charts Paine's progress from being an insignificant scribbler on his arrival in America to one whose words were eagerly bought by all those who made up the backbone of the revolution.

Paine's essay, *Common Sense*, which at the time sold a quarter of a million copies, attempted to define the aims of the revolution. It was round this document that all classes among the American colonists, from the men of the benches and the ploughs to the leaders of the revolution, the aristocrats, Washington, Jefferson and their fellow pirates, rallied. They defeated the British



Kirk Douglas playing the title role in the 1960 film version of 'Spartacus'

Army, thus ending English economic rule and domination.

But Paine wasn't just a man of the pen. He marched and fought with the soldiers, refusing commissions. And when the men were war-weary, Paine spoke to them: 'We are embarked on a deed of small men. We are going to find it hard and grumble and complain, and some of us will go home. I think that's how a revolution starts ...'

Back in England, Paine wrote a defence of the French Revolution entitled *The Rights of Man*. Persecuted by the authorities, he was outlawed in 1792 and forced to remain in France.

## A missing period

But there, despite the republican and democratic credentials that had branded him as an extremist in England, the course of the French Revolution led him to side with the right. 'You are committed to your friends, the Girondists, to the bankers and the merchants,' he is accused, 'and all the apostles of the halfway, the liberalism of the people.' It was an accusation that Paine's words and deeds in France could not deny.

Fast presents Paine as longing that the Girondins and Jacobins 'might forget their hatred for each other, long enough to permit France and the Republic to survive'. On his way to prison in Paris for 'conspiring against

the Republic', Paine is summed up by a fellow prisoner: 'You believe in the democratic method through representation and I believe in the same method through the will of the masses.'

There are weaknesses in the book — Fast seldom gets to grips with Paine's politics — but it rescued Paine from his right-wing biographers. Such was the power of Fast's story-telling that the New York City Schools chose to ban it, in the witch-hunting days of the 1950s, for being subversive.

*Freedom Road*, Fast's next novel, is about slavery. It gives a generally accurate historical picture of the eight year period after the American civil war (1861-65), when the northern industrialists and the ex-plantation owners of the south combined to return over four million blacks to slavery. In the process the Ku Klux Klan was formed. 'The business of white night-shirts and burning crosses is tomfoolery, but it has its uses,' says one of the leaders of the south.

After the Civil War, black and poor white men not only got the vote and often worked their land together, but also saw the beginnings of land sub-division, free public schools and laws drawn up in their favour. By 1876 all that they had achieved had been forcibly taken away and the great rice, cotton, sugar and tobacco empires rose again on their backs. It was also erased from the history books.

Fast's motives in this best-seller were to recover a 'missing' period of American history for as wide an audience as possible, and to show black and white working, fighting and dying together, trying to create a new world.

Fast ran into trouble from the CP for using the word 'nigger' in the book. This, and other taboo phrases like 'Negro girl' and 'black night', somehow indicated that a person 'had deep wells of racism within him'. But the CP lacked the confidence to expel him because of the possible reactions within the party. According to surveys, the book 'was taken to the hearts of the Negro people as no other novel of our time.'

Marx once wrote: 'Spartacus appears as the most capital fellow to be found in the whole of ancient history, a true representative of the ancient proletariat.' Howard Fast's novel certainly does the character justice. His most popular novel, he conceived it while imprisoned in 1950 by the House Committee for Un-American Activities for refusing to disclose the names of those connected with the anti-fascist movement.

The novel is not just about an individual slave gladiator. It is the tale of the great slave rebellion in Italy in 71 BC, when some 60,000 slaves, men and women, led by Spartacus, rose up and fought for their freedom.

Fast introduces us to Spartacus, a third-

generation slave, when he is taken from the gold mines to be trained as a gladiator for Roman amusement. It is there the revolt begins.

'We will make an end of Rome, and we will make a world where there are no slaves and no masters,' they decide. 'Our law is simple. Whatever we take, we hold in common.'

There seemed to be no stopping the slave army. For four years they smashed every Roman army sent against them. No one came as close to destroying Rome — that symbol of total power, wealth and corruption — as the slave army. Eventually, though, they were outmanoeuvred and outnumbered. The result of their defeat was that over 6,000 captives were taken and crucified as an example to 'those who would not be slaves'.

### A faded vision

No doubt Marx would have thoroughly recommended the book. Not so the ACP leadership. A study in 'brutalism and sadism' said *The Daily Worker*. Yet, as Fast says, 'it turned out in the end that they could not destroy Spartacus. Power, the commissars had, but it was limited to the structure of the party, and that structure was already beginning to shake.'

Fast had to publish the book himself. No publisher would touch a communist's work for fear of government reprisals. It still sells in its millions.

He went on to write other books of interest, such as *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1954), *The Naked God* (1958) and *Power* (1962). But he was on a downward hill politically. The working class was no longer the instrument for socialism (this is clearly revealed in *Power*).

*The Naked God* is a limited account of his experience as a writer in the ACP. It should have been called 'Up against the Stalinists'. Throughout the 150 pages or so, Fast, unable to stomach the American or Russian leaderships, knives his way through them politically. Though there is much to be criticised in the book, Fast makes it quite clear that 'to speak of these things and condemn socialism is to be short of sight and shorter of understanding.'

Up to now, Fast has written some 70 novels. The three reviewed are undoubtedly his best politically, written at a time when he was an active revolutionary. In these books, he does not disguise his sympathies, yet he does not preach either. For a time, Fast's writings reflected his socialist vision, but judging by his present output, that vision has long since faded. ■

Owen Gallagher

## Riots in the dream factory

WHEN people today talk about the McCarthy era in Hollywood they usually refer to the doings or misdoings of the stars or script writers. Edward G Robinson on a picket line, Humphrey Bogart protesting in front of the red-baiting Committee, Joan Crawford walking off set in protest at Mussolini's nephew's visit in the 30s, and the blacklists. But they rarely talk of its effects on the mass of ordinary workers in Hollywood, the tens of thousands of technicians, carpenters, electricians, whose struggles formed the basis of the better known events.

One reason why Hollywood became the home of the movie studios was the open shop, non-union policy of the city of Los Angeles. Before the Second World War the only union of any importance in films was IATSE (the International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees). Its base was the stage hands and the projectionists and its policies, co-operation with management.

Many workers in Hollywood were unhappy about this situation and hoped for real change when a new union federation, the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU), appeared on the scene in 1941. The CSU was founded by Herbert Sorrell, a business agent of the Picture Painters' Union, and came out of the experience of a successful strike he had helped organise against the Walt Disney Studios.

From the onset the policy of the founders of the CSU was militant trade unionism. They aimed to unite all non-IATSE unions



Warner Brothers strikers hit back

in Hollywood as well as establish unions among the many who were unorganised.

By 1945 the CSU had enrolled nearly 10,000 workers and was fast becoming a serious rival to the IATSE which had 16,000 members. It was only a matter of time before the rivalry between the two unions came to a head and in October 1944 it did. The immediate cause of the conflict was an inter-union dispute.

A local bunch of set decorators had voted to join the CSU and Sorrell had undertaken to negotiate with the producers on their

behalf. The producers refused, on the grounds that since some 10 percent of the set decorators were still in the IATSE they were not prepared to recognise Sorrell's authority over the other 90 percent.

It was a strike that among other things was to see Sorrell and the Communists part company for the first time. The strike was taking place while America was still at war, a war that the Communist Party was totally committed to.

Sorrell's action in calling a strike in war time was viewed virtually as treason by the

CP, which urged a back-to-work movement.

The CSU strike continued until October 1945, ending in something like victory for Sorrell when the National Labour Relations Board ruled that the set decorators should belong to the CSU. But it had been a very expensive victory. The strike, particularly at the Warner Brothers studios, had witnessed picket line scenes reminiscent of labour/management confrontations in the 30s. Warner Brothers security guards had used tear gas and water hoses to attack the pickets, and the strikers had retaliated by overturning cars and igniting buildings. It was a strike that polarised a Hollywood supposedly united by the war effort.

The battle of Warner Brothers was to prove to be the Hollywood left's last victory and to be a short-lived one. Less than a year later the CSU was provoked into another strike.

This management-provoked dispute was the brainchild of Roy Brewer, the new head of IATSE in Hollywood.

Brewer arrived in Hollywood to take over the running of the IATSE the very day the first CSU strike broke out. He found the IATSE in poor shape. Not only had it been losing members to the more militant CSU, but had suffered the indignity of having both its president and leading Hollywood organiser imprisoned for extortion.

Brewer saw that if the IATSE was to survive, the CSU had to go. He quickly started to make friends with those in Hollywood who thought the same, namely the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. With this ragbag of

maverick producers and professional anti-communists Roy Brewer set to work. Throughout the first CSU strike Brewer saw to it that all the strikers were leafleted with a steady stream of anti-communist material.

Even though the CP had not supported the strike until it was practically over, Brewer red-baited Sorrell over all his past association with the CP. The leaflets may not have prevented Sorrell from winning the strike but they certainly helped to isolate the CSU when the second strike broke out in September 1946.

### Scab branches

Once again the issue of the strike was union demarcation. Sets had always been erected by carpenters organised in the CSU not by workers in the IATSE. Now Brewer claimed that 'set erecting' was different from 'set building' and claimed jurisdiction over the latter for a scab carpenters' branch he had established during the '45 strike. CSU painters refused to paint sets built by the scabs. The producers promptly reacted by locking out all CSU members. The pattern of the '45 strike was repeated. The studios' private police backed up by IATSE scabs and the Los Angeles police stormed the CSU picket lines with their truncheons, tear gas and firehoses. In other words, the CSU faced the same opponents they had faced in the first strike. What was different was now support for the CSU in the Hollywood community was noticeably less. Only the CP offered its full support and in 1946 that wasn't worth much.

Against the combined producers, police and IATSE onslaught, not surprisingly the CSU went down to defeat. Roy Brewer, working directly with studio management, established scab branches to take the jobs of former strikers. Gradually more and more CSU members were forced to desert Sorrell for Brewer. By 1949 the CSU had ceased to exist.

It was the violence of these strikes that caught the attention of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. If the Hollywood unions had been anything like united, an effective resistance to the red-baiting might have been possible. But by 1949, if you wanted to keep your job in Hollywood, you had to go to the Rehabilitation Committee and pray that they would look favourably upon you.

Roy Brewer more or less set up the Rehabilitation Committee and served on it, as did Ronald Reagan, as president of the Screen Actors' Guild. Roy Brewer was the most powerful man in Hollywood—he could, and did, break thousands of careers and made many not only unemployed but unemployable.

We all know what has become of the young red-baiter Ronald Reagan, but you may be wondering what has become of Roy Brewer. A few months ago Reagan appointed him to the Federal Service Impasses Panel, the prestigious government agency that arbitrates contract disputes between unions and federal agencies. Brewer is now older even than Reagan, so it's not a post he may hold for too long. ■

Peter Court

## Letters

IN HIS review of my book on Reagan's foreign policy (*Socialist Worker Review*) Charlie Hore quotes the 'impression' of your Reviews editor, who had apparently not read the book, that the book contains useful information 'surrounded by centrist filth'. Hore remarks that this underestimates just how right-wing the book is.

It is true that my politics are not those of the SWP, but they bear even less resemblance to those attributed to me in the review. Indeed, Hore's characterisation of my views is, to my surprise, considerably more distorted than that of another outraged editor who returned the book to the publisher with the message that he wasn't interested in receiving 'thinly disguised Marxist propaganda' dressed up as 'putative review material'.

Hore has three basic criticisms, all based on misrepresentations of the book's claims. He argues, first, that the book is simply a 'series of essays' on single issues 'which are seen in isolation from each other'. In fact, the central theme of the book, which is explicit in every chapter, is that one can provide at least a partial explanation of the Reagan Administration's nuclear weapons' policies, as well as its policies on arms' control, arms' sales, human rights, nuclear non-proliferation, and third world inter-

### Right left and centre

vention in terms of the aim of expanding and consolidating American control over the third world, an aim which is itself explained in the first chapter primarily in terms of the US's economic concerns.

Hore's second charge is that the burden of my argument is 'simply ... that in terms of *their own needs* the Reagan administration is mistaken in particular moves it makes.' He gives two pieces of evidence for this claim. One is that I outline 'in some detail how the same increase in warheads (which the MX will provide) could be achieved at far less cost!' — the implication being that I support such an increase in warheads.

I have been unable to locate the passage in which I supposedly make this point. Perhaps Hore has in mind a sentence on p32 which notes that 'it is doubtful whether anyone considered whether an alternative and less vulnerable basing mode for the *Minuteman* missiles would be economically feasible if no money were to be spent on the MX'. This

occurs in a lengthy section devoted to refuting the arguments which have been advanced in support of the MX — a section which provides the necessary background for my later critique of the MX project. This hardly amounts to advocating an increase in warheads.

In fact in this section I'm not advocating anything at all — I'm simply criticising other people's arguments. If Hore is not averse to further sully himself by exposure to my 'rotten' right wing views, I would refer him to a paper which will soon appear in a book in the US entitled *Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Humanity* in which I argue on moral grounds that unilateral nuclear disarmament by the US would be superior to its present policy of nuclear deterrence.

The second piece of evidence for the claim that I criticise the Reagan Administration on instrumental grounds only, and would secretly welcome a 'humane imperialism' (whatever that might be), consists in citing a passage in which I assert that American policy in El Salvador is self-defeating. Later in the book I argue that, even though arguments of this sort 'entirely miss the point, which is that the US simply has no right' to act in the ways that it does, it is nevertheless of the utmost tactical importance to press these arguments, since they are the ones which

are most likely to be taken seriously in the US — as is shown by the fact that they are the arguments which the Administration is most anxious to suppress.

As I point out in the book, the arguments which undermined support in the US for the Vietnam war were not the principled arguments of the sort which I explicitly endorse in the book, but were instead instrumentalist arguments which convinced the American people (*not* the ruling elites, to whom Hore imagines that my book is addressed) that the costs of the war outweighed its supposed benefits.

Hore's third criticism is that the book fails to offer a detailed programme for changing the world. That is, he condemns me for not writing another book. I never pretended to be presenting a blueprint for a better world, or a campaign manual for activists. What I claimed was that the book was intended as a contribution to understanding the Reagan Administration's policies, and that such an understanding was necessary to combatting those policies effectively. Now that he has read my book, perhaps Hore would like to write for us the book that he thinks I should have written.

Jeff McMahan,  
Cambridge

## Understanding the state

Political trials in Britain  
Peter Hain  
Allen Lane £12.95

MUCH of this book is interesting and useful as a source of information about the way in which the British state machine works. Other parts have little more than an anecdotal significance.

One possible explanation for the unevenness is given in the preface. There the acknowledged author of the book thanks 'Phil Kelly for his research assistance and for drafting Chapters 1 to 6'.

It looks very much as though some smart publishers' editor thought that a book written by the notorious Peter Hain would sell much better than one by the talented but unknown Phil Kelly and got them to cobble together this book. It might have been better for Hain to have stood out for a bit more credit for someone who has obviously done a lot of spade work, and drafted half of the book.

The meat of the book is in a detailed account of the operations of various sections of the state: police, lawyers, judges, magistrates, official secrets act and all. There is little here that is new theoretically, but the mass of detail is a useful addition to the sources that can be dragged out in propaganda and agitation.

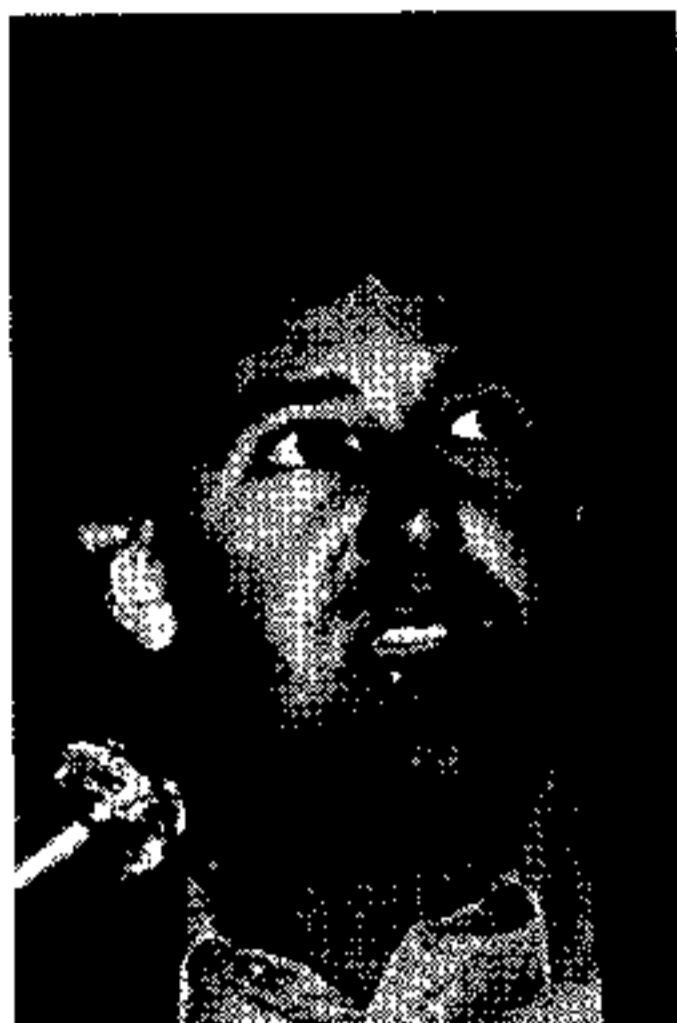
What the authors show is that the state machine in Britain is a closed and secretive order concerned to protect property and its own interests. It is designed to exclude and intimidate working class people.

They show further that this process has been going on for some time and that it has continued unabated under both Tory and Labour governments. Indeed, they provide evidence to show that in some respects it has been Labour governments that have been the most ready to use the state machine against political opponents of the left.

So far, so good. Indeed, very good. The argument they advance about the nature of the state machine is one that will be familiar to most marxists.

But two central questions are not satisfactorily answered by the book. We need to know why this state of affairs exists and what can be done about it.

The authors are not clear as to the answer of the first question. At one point they seem to be arguing that all the elaborate apparatus of packed juries and secret policemen exist to maintain private property in its power and privileges. At another point they seem to imply that there is a curious British phenomenon at stake: a product of the exclusive



Peter Hain

nature of the British ruling class, the state pursues its own interests, separate from those of capital.

Of course, it is true that there are sometimes conflicts between the state bureaucracy (leading civil servants and the like) and sections of capitalism — sections of industry, individual capitalists and so on. But the interaction between the two is even more important for it is the case that the British state is organised and staffed to keep that same capitalist class in power. This protection for the British ruling class is the central and most important aspect of the state.

The fact that the authors confuse this role is a rather more serious matter than simple intellectual confusion, since theory always has implications for practice.

### Hain's reformism

In the interests of fairness, I have to say that these implications are not clearly articulated in this book. Since it is lacking in concrete political perspectives anyway it is not itself guilty of the sins of commission. For all we know, Kelly may be a determined proponent of the need for soviet power and the smashing of the state machine.

But Hain we do know about. We know he has become one of the most influential 'leftists' in the Kinnock camp. We know he stands for reform and opposes the very idea of revolution.

We also know he is not stupid, and the book confirms that judgement. He knows and says that previous Labour governments have done nothing to destroy even the most archaic laws that are so often used against the working class.

What Hain stands for is not simply 'reformism'. He stands for a rather more radical, rather more democratic, rather more popular, reformism than that of, say James Callaghan or Denis Healy.

Not a difficult task, you might say. True. Almost any reformism would be more radical than that of the last Labour government. But it does fit in very nicely with the theoretical confusions we explored above. If the gothic decoration of the British state is on the same level as its central class essence, then stripping away that grime of the centuries is a genuine and serious reform, quite as genuine and serious as any attack on the class nature of the state.

To the extent that Hain is en-

gaged in a theoretical project, this is it: to provide the justification for some limited modernisation of the British state while not challenging its class nature.

Despite that, the book has strengths as a popular account of just how nasty the state machine is. You will also find some useful material for the leaflet or the speech. But don't buy it yet. Allen Lane is the hardback part of Penguin. It is sure to be a cheap paperback soon. ■

Colin Sparks

## Families on the Dole

The Forsaken families  
Leonard Fagin and Martin Little  
Penguin Books £3.95

THIS book investigates the effect on his family of the unemployment of the male breadwinner when it is prolonged over months. The authors, a psychiatrist and a social worker, first discuss the meaning of work. The neatest summary is given in the following quote:

'...work was man's strongest tie to reality ...No other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work; for his work at least gives him a secure place in a portion of reality, in the human community.' (This is not Karl Marx but Sigmund Freud!)

Against this the unemployed men describe their feelings: 'I'm surplus to requirements'; 'I'm marginal, a nobody, and nobody gives a bugger'; 'I'm on the scrapheap at fifty-five, with a lot of working life in me yet.'

The authors describe alienation as powerlessness, self-estrangement (or devaluing of personal identity), isolation, meaninglessness. Interestingly they state that these components of alienation, so relevant to the unemployed, applied also to a group of employed manual workers. Obviously therefore, there are degrees of alienation, with the unemployed top of the list.

The impact on the male breadwinner affects the whole family. In three of the families, for instance, the marriage broke down and the husband left. The stress on others gets near to breaking point. 'Many's the time,' says a wife, 'I've thought I'd go back to my Mum's and Mike (the husband) to someone else and leave it at that.' In another the plan to have a child was indefinitely deferred. In another a working son remarked: 'Just seeing him there, not going to work, still there when I come back from work, looked like he hadn't moved all day.' His school-age brother added: 'when I came from school at 5pm, he'd be sprawled on the sofa asleep ... He was like a dosser.'

A wife implied she could endure the threat of widowhood better than that of long-standing unemployment. Two schoolgirls in a more middle-class family resented their father's inflicting such a 'social curse' on them. 'People thought we were weird because Daddy didn't have a car,' said one; the other added, 'For one week nobody spoke to me.'

This stress on families is partly due to physical changes brought on by unemployment. These include the drastic reorganisation in how the day is spent; the approach to the household chores particularly if a dependent wife and mother needs to earn; and the stigma attached to unemployment.

### Marriage and health

The severity of the symptoms depends on the stability of the marriage and its consequent capacity to ride crises. In an isolated case or two a short period of unemployment even stabilised a marriage that had reached a critical condition: a wife could not cope with three small children and the house, and the unemployed husband shared the burden. In another family the husband entirely took over the housewifery while the wife worked. This mitigated the pain of unemployment. But this role reversal was exceptional.

The most interesting part of the book is that dealing with unemployment and health. Surveys in the 1930s showed enormous differences — over 50 percent in illness and death rates between employed and unemployed. The main cause was poverty and malnutrition. The illnesses of the unemployed today are different. Just before and after closure of a factory workers reported more headaches, gastric upsets, feelings of fatigue and suffocation, vague aches and pains, dizziness, insomnia and other evidence of distress. This led to the first rise for many years in the suicide rate in 1978 (when only 1,500,000 were unemployed) and further rises in 1979 and 1980.

It was found in a number of cases



## Poverty, depression and anxiety

that illness of the unemployed breadwinner masked the painful stigma attached to unemployment, and the 'sick role' allowed him to be cared for and seen as not responsible for his misfortunes. The two schoolgirls mentioned above who were so ashamed of their father's joblessness, showed obvious relief at finding an explanation for it as his Parkinson's disease worsened and he became totally dependent on his family.

For the wives the need for a rapid role change often brought a sense of independence and control over their lives they had not experienced when dependent mainly on the male breadwinner. Many wives, previous to the husband's illness and unemployment listed a number of health complaints — mostly depression and anxiety symptoms — for which they were treated with mild tranquillisers and anti-depressants.

The authors state:

'...all the wives of men who had lost their jobs through illness had fewer health complaints once they realised that their husband's unemployment was likely to be permanent.'

Various studies have shown the incidence of clinical depression among married working class women to be many times that of their husbands.

'... only after unemployment do males report significantly more health problems than females, and that in turn, more females mention no health problems as compared to males.'

The palliatives suggested by the authors are pitiable, but by no means central to this very interesting study.

The book exposes one of the prevailing ideas in our society: that unemployment has a stigma attached to it, illness less so.

It also gives support to the Marxist analysis of the roots of women's oppression: that it has nothing to do with gender differences, but in the fact that in the over-

whelming majority of cases, women are in a weaker economic position than men. When the roles are reversed, the women grow to equality. ■

Chanie Rosenberg

## Class war diary

**Socialist Worker Diary**  
Bookmarks £2.75

FOLLOWING the success of the first Socialist Worker Diary this year, the 1985 diary is ready in plenty of time for you to start planning your new year activities.

The theme of the new diary is 'socialism and war'. It opens with a few brief facts about war and weaponry in the world today. In the financial year 1984-85, the Tories plan to spend 17 billion on 'defence' — more than on health and more than on education. Yet the government claims it can't afford to keep miners at work in so-called uneconomic pits!

And, of course, it isn't just the British government which spends billions on the means of destruction; it's happening all over the world.

However, the Socialist Worker Diary isn't just concerned with describing the horrors of the world we live in, but also explaining how we can change things.

The diary describes the three broad traditions that stand out in the long struggle for peace: pacifism, reformism and socialism. Each is explained and the first two are rejected as a means for winning this struggle.

The third, the tradition of revolutionary socialism, goes back to the run-up to the first world war when, in 1907, a congress of the Second International declared:

'...The fight against militarism cannot be separated from the socialist class war as a whole. Wars between capitalist states are as a rule the result of their rivalry for world markets ... Wars are therefore inherent in the nature of capitalism. They will only cease when the capitalist economy is abolished.' That statement still stands today.

As well as the introduction on socialism and war, the diary is packed with dates commemorating landmarks in working class history. And, of course, there's plenty of space for all your meetings and activities! ■

Harriet Sherwood

**Marx's Critique of Political Economy: Intellectual Sources and Evolution, Vol I: 1844 to 1860**

Allen Oakley

Routledge & Kegan Paul, £14.95

**Karl Marx**

Allen Wood

Routledge & Kegan Paul £7.95

THE GREATER part of Marx's intellectual life-work was focussed on his critique of political economy. Out of that work came the three volumes we know today as *Capital*, plus the *Theories of Surplus Value*.

*Capital*, as even its wiser enemies acknowledge, is a work of genius. There is nothing quite like it in world literature. It is simultaneously a work of critical philosophy, a call to revolutionary arms, an analytical history of the past several centuries, and a critical review of two hundred years' effort by some of humanity's greatest thinkers to understand the workings of the modern world. It is grandly structured and organised, yet full of strange turnings and delightful corners, pedestrian in places but crammed with the most astonishingly powerful insights and marvellous passages. It is by turns coolly analytic, pleasantly comic and sternly denunciatory.

Marx's masterpiece did not simply burst from his brain. It was the product of what, in another context, he described as 'damned hard work'. On and off, with all manner of highly fruitful interruptions like the 1848 revolutions, it evolved over a period of two decades during which Marx wrestled with his materials. His problems were enormous. He had to master an immense quantity of theoretical and empirical material, assimilate it critically, test out the available conceptual apparatuses and — where they were utterly wanting — develop new ones, find ways of presenting his ideas in a form that would satisfy the standards of the best available philosophy of science, and somehow determine what should be the scope of the

## Socialist Worker 1985 DIARY

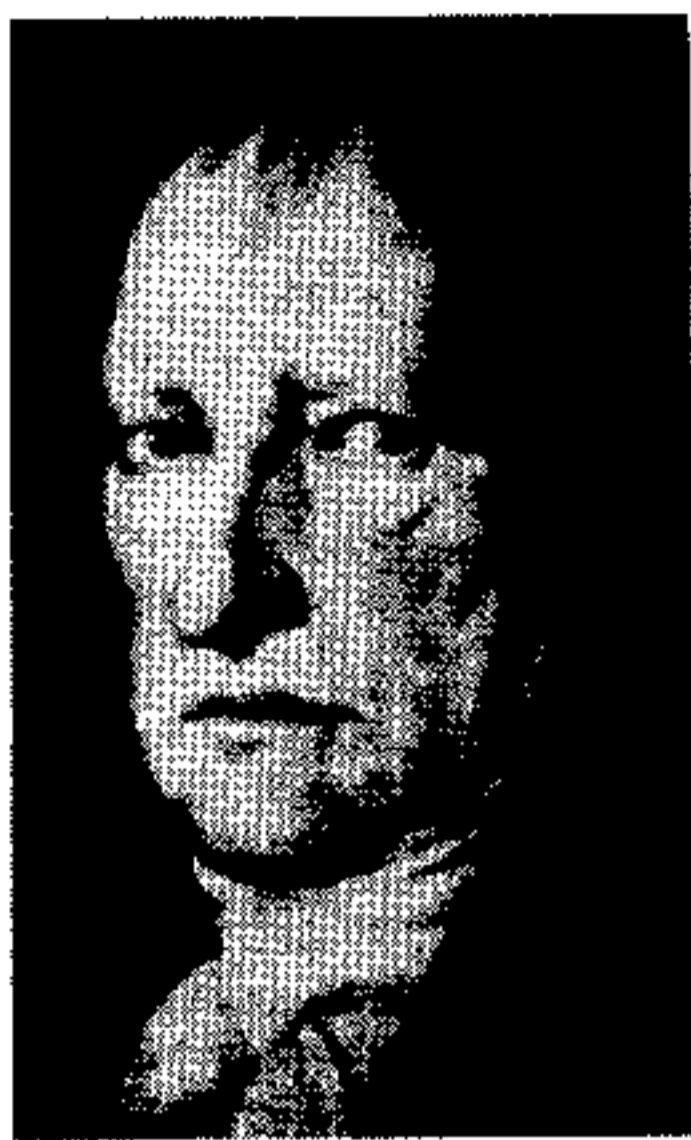
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## Tracing Marx's thought



Hegel

complete work he was aiming at.

At the end of two decades, he had drafted out — depending on your standpoint on a number of contested issues — only about a third or a half of his overall planned work. He never came anywhere near to completing more than this.

Through the two decades of his struggle with political economy, Marx's ideas underwent a constant process of inner development. The starting point was Marx's growing realisation, in the period 1843-44, that human emancipation could not find a rational solution in the forms in which previous thinkers had posed it up to then. The great dialectician Hegel, disappointed at the outcome of the French Revolution, had concluded that there was no point in seeking to change the world; the 'point' was so to interpret the world that humanity would feel at home in it more or less as it was.

The political economists, likewise, interpreted the modern epoch as the terminus of history, the highest possible point of human civilisation. The main tendency on the left was to seek solutions to human misery in the transformation of *politics*, the state and law. Marx, with Engels, concluded three things. The existing world of humanity was anything but 'home', and was riven with internal contradictions. Secondly, the key to understanding the problems of the modern world lay in its existing 'economic' anatomy, and thirdly, the practical solution to the problems of the modern world lay with the new class produced by that world — the proletariat. Marx therefore turned his attention to the critique of *capitalism*.

He sought the key to that critique in 'political economy', the science of society that had grown up in

western Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. From 1844 to the early 1860s, his appreciation of his own problems changed. At first, he simply drew on the existing writings of the political economists, arguing that they had already proved the immensely contradictory character of capitalism.

But as his view of his own forebears became both more intimate and more critical, so his subject-matter shifted from a criticism simply of capitalist society to a complex, parallel critique of the way in which these thinkers themselves understood it. His criticism of capitalism became a criticism of its ruling ideas, and a criticism in an entirely novel form: his aim was not simply to show the errors of Smith, Ricardo and the like, but to show how those errors were *necessary*, as themselves products of the actual character of social relations in capitalism. Thus the critique of ruling ideas became the critique of the social circumstances of their production. Through his criticism of ideas, Marx produced an immensely enriched critique of capitalist society.

### Understanding capitalism

The detail of that critique cannot be discussed here. But two general points may be mentioned. The first is that Marx drew from Hegel the notion that an adequate explanation must not attempt simply to describe and link together the immediate 'appearances' of human relations, but must show how these appearances are necessary, by getting behind them to their 'essence'.

Capitalism, he argued, is a system of social relations whose real character is systematically concealed from its own participants. The problem is to show both what is concealed and how it is concealed. Thus, for example, what *seems* to be a fair and free exchange between capitalist and worker turns out, on closer analysis to be a process of exploitation with the necessary appearance of fairness and equality. Or again, capital *appears* to be 'accumulated labour in the form of means of production': but this formulation makes capital appear a permanent necessity of all production, since it abstracts capital from the social relations of which it is part. Second, the core mistake of the previous political economists was their overall tendency to interpret capitalist society so that it appears to be rooted in 'nature', and hence to be eternal.

None of this came easily. Allen Oakley sets out to trace, in some detail, the process of development of

Marx's thinking from 1844 to the manuscripts of the 1860s. His book, which still bears the marks of its origins as a doctoral dissertation, is a work of exposition rather than of criticism.

How well is it done? Judging by this first volume, which takes the story of Marx's development up to his (rather dull) *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859, the answer is, very well. The book is clearly written, well organised, and comprehensive. It includes, quite properly, a good exposition of Marx's development of his 'historical materialist' (or 'naturalist') standpoint, and of his critical development of Hegel's method. A second volume, on the works of the 1860s, is promised: when the two volumes are available together we should have a useful addition to the literature on Marx's economic thought.

Oakley remains (disappointingly) very orthodox. He is uncurious about the direction that Marx's work — which is famously unfinished — might have taken had he not apparently abandoned it after the 1860s. Marx's various plans for the whole work show that he planned to include additional books on wage labour, the state, foreign trade and the world market: nothing significant is known to survive of any of these.

Yet, it is clear that Marx did not expect to be able to produce an adequate account of capitalism's crises until the *whole* work was complete. This suggests that what we have on this notoriously troublesome subject, in the existing volumes of *Capital*, is indeed only partial and provisional. Marx, throughout his development, linked the question of crisis with the question of the overthrow of

capitalism. But the agency of that overthrow, the activity of the proletariat, does not receive any full treatment in the existing volumes of *Capital*.

Part of Marx's breakthrough as a socialist thinker involved his recognition that the proletariat does not simply suffer but is a *struggling* class, with the potential to found an entirely new form of society. Yet in most of his 'economics' it is simply the 'degradation of the labourer' that is developed, not the labourer's own self-development and organisation.

The book by Allen Wood is one of a series, *The Arguments of the Philosophers*. It represents an exposition and defence of Marx, using some of the tools and materials of more recent philosophy. Some of it is relatively well done.

In part, Wood's exposition of Marx is weakened by his relative disinterest in the theorists with whom Marx struggled in forming his own ideas — thus taking Marx out of historical context and failing to explain his emphasis and absences. The effect is to 'depoliticise' Marx's various philosophical comments. It was usually Marx's concern, when attacking some philosophical position, to point to the political conclusions flowing from his target.

Allen Wood's Marx tends to appear as 'a philosopher', which in the modern sense of the term he predominantly wasn't. At the end of his defence of Marx against a number of familiar charges (determinism, sophistry, metaphysical dogmatism, etc), Wood suggests the real question is whether Marx adequately *describes* the world. Given Marx's own famous criterion, it is astonishing that the question whether Marx's ideas are helpful in *changing* the world should not even be posed. It seems the philosophers are *still* interpreting the world... ■

Colin Barker

## Cast into deeper darkness

### Delightful murder

Ernest Mandel  
Pluto £3.95

ONE of the few pleasures in reading this book lies in correcting some of the crasser errors that Mandel has made. For example, he confidently asserts (page 4) that Shelley wrote for an exclusively bourgeois audience: false. Again, he claims (p77) that a film called *Cheyenne* deals favourably with Red Indians: false. (He actually means John Ford's famous *Cheyenne Autumn*).

These, of course, are quibbles, even if they do tend to shake your faith in Mandel's grasp of his subject. There are, however, much

more serious problems with this book.

Mandel's central argument is hardly contentious — indeed you might say it is crushingly banal. As he puts it:

'Thus the evolution of the crime does indeed reflect, as if in a mirror, the evolution of bourgeois society, perhaps even of the capitalist mode of production itself.' (p134)

Quite. The problem, however, is to trace that relationship in sufficient detail as to illuminate either or both terms in the equation. This Mandel does not do.

The reason for this failure is essentially the method Mandel

chooses to employ, which might best be called 'superficial eclecticism'. What he has done is to read a lot of crime novels, read a lot of books about crime novels, stir the lot together and string together the result as connected. Thus the book jumps from acknowledged borrowings from other writers, to unacknowledged borrowings (eg Adorno and Horkheimer, p69), to one-line reviews of different writers. The result is an extraordinary confusion which casts occasional gleams of light on aspects of the subject but overall only casts the whole landscape into deeper darkness.

So, for example, Mandel claims that it is a 'golden rule' of the crime story that crime does not pay (eg p129). On this observation he builds an account of the essentially bourgeois nature of the genre.

Unfortunately, the observation is not true. To take just one example from what Mandel, following almost everybody, calls the 'classic' period; consider the case of John Dickson Carr's hero Dr Gideon Fall (whom Mandel cites in the work). In, for example, *The Case of the Constant Suicides* Fall allows the murderer to escape in order that he can defraud an insurance company to the benefit of a suicide's religiously crazed mistress and drunken brother.

The mistake Mandel has made is the obvious and vulgar one; he has taken the surface ideological inflection of many novels for the essentially underlying principle.

### Mandel's sloppiness

The 'classical' of the 'classic' detective novel does not lie in any alleged ideology manifested in the plot but in the form itself: the solution of a mystery by means of reason. The case I have cited above is thus classic (indeed, doubly so, since it involves two 'locked room mystery' puzzles) despite the refusal of Mandel's ideological straight-jacket.

This failure also leads Mandel to come a cropper over distinctions between variations of the crime novel. He wants, for example, to assimilate Chandler and Hammett to the classic, or at least 'neo-classic' cannon. It seems to me, as it seemed to Chandler in *The Simple Art of Murder* (another work that Mandel quotes), that there is a gulf between the two forms, in that the latter has little time for the mechanics of plotting, and uses mystery as a mechanism for other ends.

This same sloppiness reemerges in his historical periodisation. He identifies a 'new sub genre, the "true" political thriller. Here the central theme is conspiracy.' This he locates in the 1970s. Perhaps I misunderstand his terms, but there do seem to be many earlier examples; certainly *The Riddle of*

*the Sands* (1903) would seem to fit.

Overall then; pretty worthless and a book that cured my lingering belief that Mandel might be a serious writer.

But this book does exist, and there are no better marxist works that I know of. Having been so harsh on Mandel, perhaps the outline of a better book could be offered.

It would start by considering the crime story in relation to other kinds of writing. Mandel dismisses the efforts of thirty years of left-wing writers, who have tried to modify the bourgeois critics' certainty of a division, between 'real literature' and 'mechanical' writing, without discussion. Perhaps he is unaware of it. It seems to me, at the very least, that there is an important sense in which some kinds of detective novel can only properly be understood as the successors of the

## A pale imitation

A history of jazz in Britain 1919-1950

Jim Godbolt

Quartet £14.95 (hardback)

JAZZ in Britain has always been a poor cousin of American jazz, enthusiastically listened to and played by generations of dedicated fans, yet rarely producing any new developments in the art or (until the 60s) very much music that will stand repeated listening. The book is not explicitly written to explain this state of affairs but is of most interest when it does so.

One reason stands out above all others — the sustained and vicious racism of the music business, music press, and even the earliest jazz critics. For jazz was brought to this country not by the black musicians who developed it, but by white imitators. Not all were as consciously out to racially purify the music as the aptly-named Paul Whiteman, who aimed to 'remove the stigma of barbaric strains and jungle cacophony from jazz'. But the overall effect of these two groups was to ensure that live jazz of any quality was hardly heard here until Louis Armstrong's visit in 1932 (and quite rarely after that.)

From 1935 until 1955 the Musicians' Union persuaded the government to impose a 'British jobs for British workers' ban which meant that all but a handful of jazz musicians were denied permits to play here. The only access to proper jazz musicians was via records, scratchy 78s mostly, issued by record companies who knew nothing about the music. (One of them used to release records by a variety of bands under Louis Armstrong's name, simply because it sold well!)

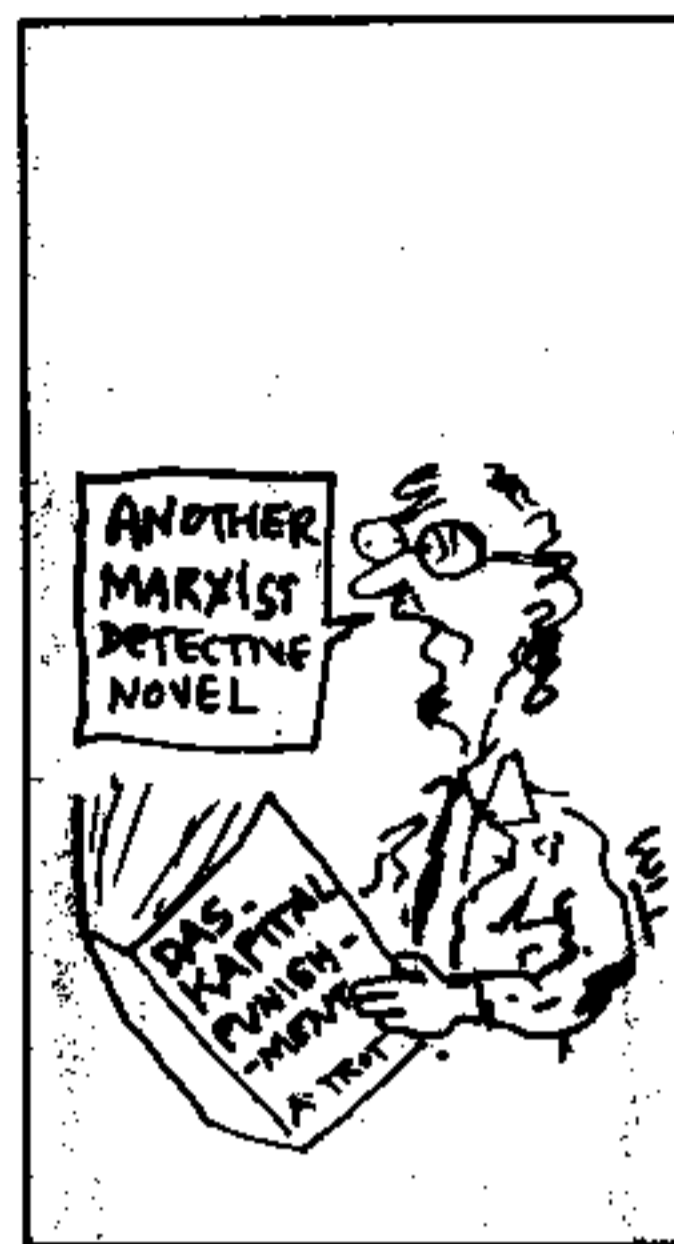
Yet it was these records which

'serious' novels of the past century.

Secondly, the book would be a little more sensitive to differentiations both between broader categories of say, 'detective' novel and 'spy' novel, and to differentiations within categories. It would notice, for example, the growing misogyny of Ed McBain and contrast it to the growing radicalism of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, rather than sticking it all in a box labelled 'police procedural'.

Lastly, it would try to show that, yes, the 'crime story' is a product of bourgeois society, and its development is part of the history of that society, and its inner structure can be shown to be dependent on those social reactions. But, showing all that, advancing marxist science, needs a lot more rigour and reflection than are manifest here. ■

Henry Brandler



introduced here entirely through records, mostly those of Charlie Parker. Bebop was denounced by the traditionalists in terms uncomfortably similar to those used to attack jazz as a whole in the early 20s. It seems a curious paradox that one of the most open and rapidly-changing art forms of this century should attract round it such dogmatists.

All that changed in the fifties and the sixties, as the numbers of working jazz musicians in the country steadily increased, and as the ban on American musicians was lifted. The past thirty years have seen jazz in Britain evolve from the exclusive preserve of a small clique to a genuinely popular music — still a minority interest, but largely free of the elitism that stunted its growth in the earlier years.

Unfortunately, the book stops just on the threshold of that change. Jim Godbolt says that he left it out because it would require a separate volume (which is true), but he also gives the impression that he preferred the times when jazz was the property of the few enthusiasts.

Given all the above, it's not surprising that this is much more a history of jazz appreciation than playing, a book that concentrates on the enthusiasts and the effect of visiting American musicians rather than on British musicians. It's an affectionate, warts-and-all portrait written from inside that small world, and I found it fascinating. But it's really a pre-history of British jazz, and as such (especially at £14.50) a book for the jazz fanatic only.

Probably the best available introduction to jazz remains James Lincoln Collier's *The Making of Jazz*, though it's worth scouring libraries for Ross Russell's *Bird Lives* and Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues*, all of which will give you some of the flavour of jazz history and hopefully a taste for listening. ■

Charlie Hore