WORKERS' LIBERTY

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Kowalewski on Solidarnosc

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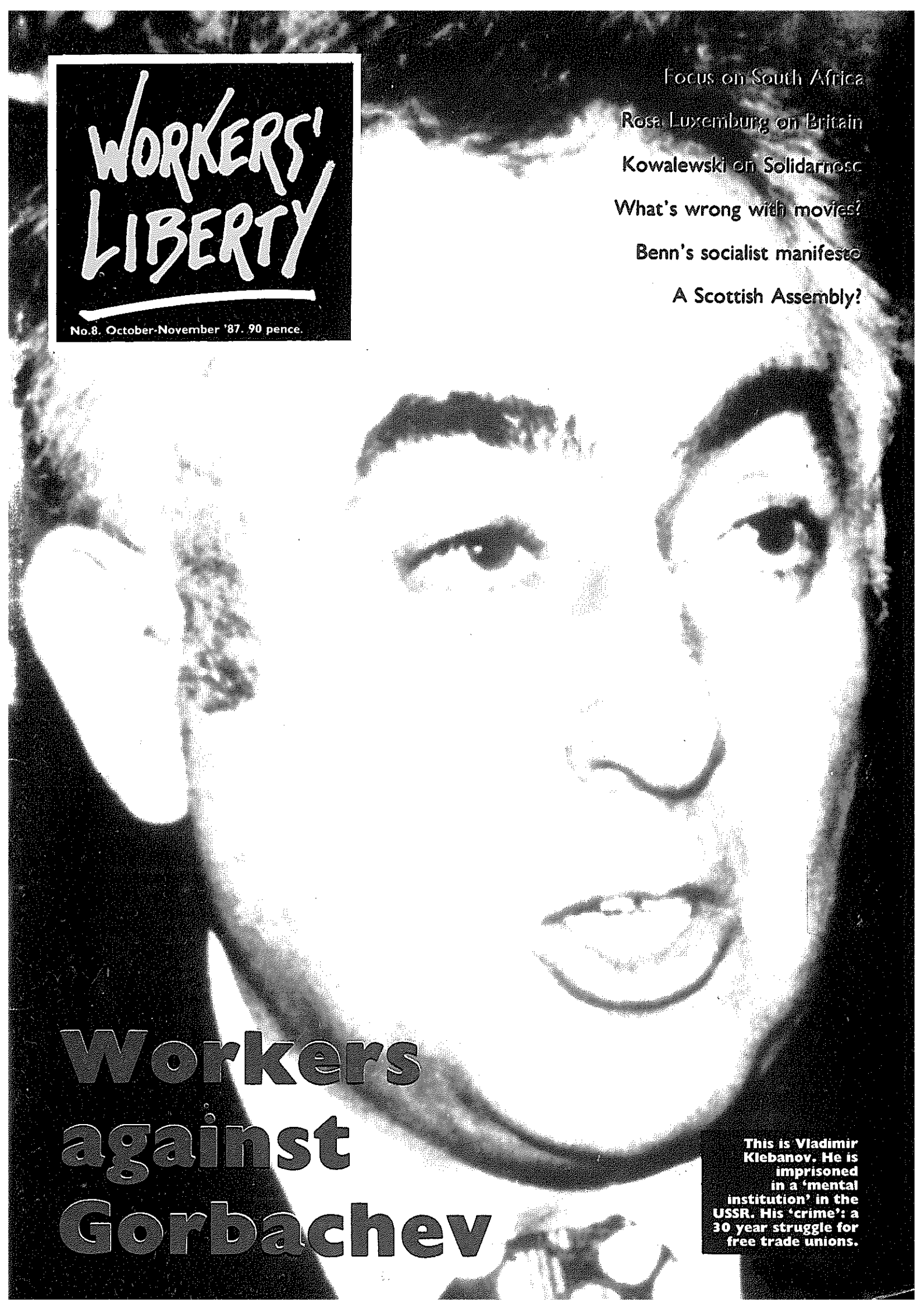

Workers against Gorbachev

This is Vladimir Klebanov. He is imprisoned in a 'mental institution' in the USSR. His 'crime': a 30 year struggle for free trade unions.

Letter to readers

The growth of the workers' movement in South Africa, and its development into a major force in the struggle against apartheid, is one of the most inspiring events of recent decades.

The possibility exists that South Africa's revolution against the racist system will be, or can quickly become, a working-class revolution against South African capitalism, white and black. But the South African workers' movement faces grave dangers.

A large part of this issue of *Workers' Liberty* is given over to South Africa. Anne Mack and Mark Dupont discuss the strategic problems of the left in South Africa. Bob Fine contributes a three-part article on the history of the South African miners. We interview a South African socialist who chooses to remain anonymous. And we have the magnificent poem by Mi D'Dumo Hlatshwayo and Alfred Temba Qabula celebrating the formation of the trade union federation COSATU and powerfully expressing the class feeling of South Africa's militant workers.

Mikhail Gorbachev has had a great public relations success in the West, and not only as a peacemaker. Even a tiny lessening of police-state pressure on the USSR's people is to be welcomed. But socialists must identify with the Soviet and East European working class, and with a working-class alternative to both the USSR's existing system and Gorbachev's pragmatic modification of it.

Unfortunately large parts of the British left don't identify with the working class in the Stalinist states. That is one reason why *Workers' Liberty* is helping to organise a conference on 'Workers in the Eastern bloc' on 7 November.

Zbigniew Kowalewski, who is now in exile, was a leader of the socialist left wing of Solidarnosc. We print an excerpt from his book 'Rendez-nous nos usines' ('Give us back our factories') about how Polish workers fought for workers' control in 1980-1.

An important article of Rosa Luxemburg's appears here for the first time in English. In it, she clinically analyses the nature of the British labour movement on the eve of the formation of the Labour Party. Across almost nine decades, Rosa Luxemburg has much of importance to say to the present generation of British socialists who grapple with the deep crisis of reformism.

The conference which the Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the Socialist Society, and the Conference of Socialist Economists are calling in Chesterfield on 24-25 October could mark an important step in the serious left getting its act together. According to Tony Benn, the idea is to go on from Chesterfield to call local conferences and forums. It is a long overdue initiative.

We print the manifesto Tony Benn has put to Labour's National Executive. It is in effect an attempt to present a new socialist manifesto for Britain. Though *Workers' Liberty*'s editors would demur at this or that point, we welcome the manifesto. We invite readers to discuss it, criticise it, and debate it in coming issues of *Workers' Liberty*.

There is a majority in Scotland for a Scottish home-rule Assembly. No democrat would deny the Scottish majority the right to such an Assembly when they say they want it. Whether socialists should ourselves campaign for such an Assembly is a different question. Most of us think not; but Ian McCalman opens a discussion on this issue, which will continue in the next *Workers' Liberty*.

One important article which we have had to hold over is a detailed account by Stan Crooke of the fate of the Crimean Tatars, a small nation deported in its entirety by Stalin in 1944. It will appear in the next *WL*. We will also have a further instalment of Zbigniew Kowalewski's account of Solidarnosc, and a reply to Geoff Bell and Rayner Lysaght on Ireland.

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Workers against Gorbachev

The provisional agreement between the US and the USSR to get rid of short-range nuclear weapons — about 3 per cent of the nuclear arsenal which threatens the future of humanity! — will enhance the reputation Mikhail Gorbachev already has in the West as the representative of a new approach outside as well as within the USSR.

But the truth is that so far Gorbachev has had more success in the West than in the USSR. His reputation is cheaply won, if you consider how little he has delivered in the way of real liberalisation.

The problem is that many socialists exaggerate ridiculously what Gorbachev has done and what he aims for. They do not seem to know what Gorbachev stands for, whom he represents, or, for that matter, where the interests of the workers in the USSR lie.

Of course it is understandable that the first stirrings of open political life in the USSR, after two decades of immersion in the icy sludge of the Brezhnev era, should be greeted with enthusiasm. But enthusiasm should be tempered by experience.

A precedent — Khrushchev's thaw

It is a full third of a century since the post-Stalin 'thaw' identified with Stalin's reforming successor Khrushchev. Khrushchev's 'thaw', following the Stalinist ice-age, lasted a decade. The police-state terror slackened. Prisoners were released. Some writers had their gags removed or loosened. The experience of the tens of millions in Stalin's camps could be depicted and discussed in novels such as 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich', by former labour-camp inmate Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The blood-drenched tyrant himself, now that he was safely dead, could be publicly denounced for some of his crimes. Some of his victims were posthumously cleared of the charges for which they had been shot.

There were even some stirrings of official recognition that great crimes had been committed against the smaller nationalities in the USSR. Workers' living standards were raised substantially, and the gross social inequality between workers and bureaucrats was reduced a little. Towards the end of the Khrushchev era, and even after Khrushchev's downfall in October 1964, efforts were made to introduce elements of market economics.

But the basic system did not shift or change. The ruling bureaucracy, like a thick coat of hardened cement, continued to encrust society. It reached down into all the social organisms which in the West are autonomous, welding them to the central state bureaucracy. General censorship continued. The monopoly of the official 'trade unions' — modelled on fascism's 'labour fronts' — was maintained, and any stirrings of independent working-class action to create free trade unions were repressed. Strikes continued to be put down in blood. The legitimacy of Stalin's destruction of the working-class movement in the USSR was implacably maintained. The bureaucracy kept its grip.

In the middle of the thaw Khrushchev savagely repressed the Hungarian Revolution. And after a decade of the rule of the first liberal Stalinist tsar came the bureaucratic backlash of the Brezhnev era.

It did not go back to the Stalinist terror, though Stalin was partially rehabilitated; yet it went back a long way. Such limited artistic liberty as Khrushchev had allowed was curtailed. Savage national oppression was resumed — in the Ukraine, for example, which was subjected to a systematic campaign of Russification in the '70s. Brezhnev's USSR — like Khrushchev's and Gorbachev's — remained the biggest prison-house of nations in the world, as well as having a cluster of dependent satellites. In 1968, when Alexander Dubcek tried liberal policies in Czechoslovakia, the Russian army and its Warsaw Pact allies sent in the tanks to flatten the experiment. They enunciated the 'Brezhnev doctrine', proclaiming the right of the USSR to intervene in any state within its sphere of influence — something the USA would now not dare to assert, even in its Central American backyard, let alone in the whole of Latin America covered by its 150-year old Monroe Doctrine. Taking advantage of the defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam and the collapse of the Shah in Iran, the USSR expanded its area of international operations, most importantly in Africa and in Afghanistan, which it invaded at Christmas 1979.

So Khrushchev's thaw never came anywhere near creating socialist democracy in the USSR. It was never even headed in that direction. It was always an attempt at reform strictly within the limits of maintaining the rule of the bureaucracy over the working class.

The same is true of Gorbachev now. If Gorbachev's reforms lead to workers' liberty in the USSR, it will not be because of anything Gorbachev intends, but because, by shaking up the system, he creates openings for the workers to move — against the system and against Gorbachev himself.

The USSR's economic problems

A prolonged crisis of underproductivity and relative stagnation in the USSR's economy is at the root of Gorbachev's 'liberalisation'. The USSR has a bureaucratically centralised 'command economy'. It was created by Stalin at the end of the '20s and in the early '30s. The fused state-'Communist Party' bureaucracy had first defeated the working-class movement and its socialist leaders, like Leon Trotsky. Then, having done that in alliance with the remnants of the Russian bourgeoisie, it beat down the bourgeoisie at the end of the '20s. The state-party bureaucracy became sole controller of the economy and society.

With methods of vast coercion and unexampled brutality, Stalin industrialised the USSR and forcibly collectivised agriculture. Russia had vast amounts of unused raw materials and land, and great reserves of underused labour. Stalin's state was willing and able to destroy millions of lives. Sometimes, as in the Ukraine at the beginning of the '30s, famine, artificially created or deliberately used to break the people's resistance, took millions of lives. When it was felt economically useful, people could be picked up by the police and used as slave labour. For over two decades as many as 10 million may have been in the labour camps at any one time.

At a time when world capitalism was mostly stagnant, and much of it seemed to be economically regressing, the USSR was the great economic success story. This was presented as a success for 'socialism' — but it had nothing to do with socialism.

As Trotsky pointed out in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1935-6), the crude methods of the bureaucrats were suitable only for a phase of importing and applying techniques from advanced capitalism. But this system could not efficiently run an advanced economy or create an advanced technology of its own. Today the USSR's exports to the West consist chiefly of raw materials — oil and gas. The USSR is heavily dependent on the West for the most advanced technology.

The existing USSR system is in many key respects an unknown economy. Precisely how and why it functions as it does is still largely unknown to social scientists in the USSR itself. What it is said to be officially has little bearing on the reality.

Central to the system is the predominance in society and in the economy of the vast and sprawling police-state bureaucracy. The system lacks both the human rationality of a democratically-planned socialist economy controlled by its workers, and the 'economic rationality' of market capitalism. So long as it keeps control, the bureaucracy can use different economic systems, or parts of systems. It can experiment with the lives of millions, with society as its laboratory.

But the basic contradiction in the USSR is between the bureaucracy and the working class. A socialist nationalised economy would need planning and conscious control by those who do the work: real planning demands

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freedom of discussion, of information, of collective choice of goals. Working-class democracy is as necessary for economic efficiency as is oxygen to a person's bodily functions: lack of it produces convulsions, waste, contradictions. But in the Stalinist nationalised economies the ruling bureaucracy is a parasitic social formation which ensures its own material well-being and privileges by tightly controlling society. It fears democracy because it fears the working class. Thus it cannot plan or organise the nationalised economy rationally. It plans and organises the economy in *its own* way, from on high — administering people as things. The workers are even more alienated and excluded from control than they are under capitalism.

From the 1960s the USSR ceased to grow spectacularly. Its performance now is discreditable compared to the Western economies in recent decades, despite their slumps. Industrial productivity in the USSR is estimated to be about 40% that of the USA, and agricultural productivity 20 to 25% that of the USA. The backwardness of agriculture is a legacy of Stalin's forced collectivisation in the early '30s.

It is over 20 years since the ruling bureaucracy first started to try to modify the system, under the whip of capitalist competition. They decided as long ago as the '60s to bring in a limited market mechanism, controlled by the central political bureaucracy, to regulate the system. In 1965 sales replaced gross output as a planning indicator. Profit became the major success indicator. Capital charges were added to prices. Enterprises could keep a sizeable part of their profits to invest.

In fact there was little change in the way the system worked. It remained too bureaucratic, too politically-controlled, for the market mechanisms to do anything decisive. For two decades, the 'Brezhnev era', the system marked time. More consumer goods were made available. But the economy remained inert and sluggish.

Brezhnev died in 1982, to be succeeded by Yuri Andropov, widely believed to be a reforming tsar. But Andropov soon died. He was followed by the brief caretaker regime of Konstantin Chernenko. Gorbachev took over in March 1985. He had been in charge of agriculture from 1978, and Andropov's man in charge of economic renovation from January 1984.

Gorbachev's programme

Gorbachev started with a drive for economic discipline and against corruption. One measure of the backwardness of the Soviet economy and society is the fact that economic crimes still carry the death penalty. Gorbachev uses it. For example, an accountant in Kiev named Dubchak was shot for falsifying records of dairy supplies to shops. The director of one of Moscow's leading food shops, Yuri Sokolov, was shot for corruption.

Gorbachev found himself in the same position as the reformers of the 1960s. The inert resistance of the system threatened to stifle even limited renovation. As an example of the all-stifling inertia, Gorbachev cited three years of economic experiments in the crucial Ministry of Heavy Machine Building — at the end of which nothing had changed. In September 1986 Gorbachev said that restructuring of the economy could not succeed unless there was "a democratisation of our society at all levels. We must not have individuals who cannot be touched, we must not have circles beyond our control". So, a year ago, Gorbachev switched to talk of 'democratisation'. Political shake-up was necessary before there could be an economic shake-up.

The Central Committee made the following decisions at its January meeting.

- Party secretaries at district, town, provincial and Republic levels will be elected in secret ballots by party committees, with more than one candidate. They will no longer, as now, be nominated from above.
- Factory and farm foremen and directors will be elected.
- More than one candidate in elections to the Supreme Soviet.
- More non-party people will hold in responsible posts.
- A law to help citizens pursue court cases against officials is in preparation.

The party retains overall control and the right to vet candidates: there is no question of allowing explicit political opposition to the ruling elite. Gorbachev warned: "Of course, it must remain a sacrosanct principle within the party that decisions of superior organs are binding on all subordinate party committees, including decisions on jobs and postings".

Further new economic laws have been introduced this year. In seven ministries there will be strict cost-accounting, and they are expected to be self-financing. By 1990 this will apply to all industry. Later this year, individuals will be able to work on their own account, or in cooperatives, in services and small-scale manufacturing.

Our programme

Any lessening of state repression is to be welcomed. Even wasteful and anti-socialist market experiments may be a necessary detour, weakening the central state's power to stifle society, and thus 'progressive' in that they allow the forces of working-class socialism space to gather. In Murdoch-style hyperbole the *Sunday Times* has called Gorbachev "the most determined Russian revolutionary since Lenin". He may prove to be, despite his intention to renovate and preserve the existing bureaucratic system.

The bureaucracy's natural enemy is the working class. The bureaucracy can allow some autonomy to priests and intellectuals and even to some capitalists. They cannot tolerate independent working-class activity without risking their own bureaucratic rule. Together with the struggles against national oppression, working-class action has provided the main challenge to bureaucratic rule. Look at the record. In 1953 workers rose in revolt in East Germany. In June 1956 workers struck and rose in revolt in Poznan, Poland. In late 1956 workers spearheaded the Hungarian national revolt against Russia and its Hungarian satraps, and used the sit-in general strike in last-ditch resistance once the Russian army had reconquered Hungary.

In 1968 workers began to move in Czechoslovakia, first in response to the conservatives' agitation against the liberalising bureaucrats (whose programme, like Gorbachev's, threatened them with shake-up) and then in sympathy with them and against the Russian invasion. Workers rebelled in Gdansk, in Poland, in 1970; and at the beginning of August 1980 Poland was engulfed by a wave of illegal strikes. Spreading slowly outwards from the Gdansk shipyards, the strikes had brought most of Poland to a standstill by the end of that glorious August.

Today Gorbachev is embarking on a drive to shake up the USSR's economy. Like Alexander Dubcek in Czechoslovakia 20 years ago, he encounters entrenched bureaucratic opposition. Like Dubcek he turns to liberalisation, of a very limited sort, to clear the way for economic rejuvenation.

Immediately the working class stands to suffer economically from Gorbachev's revitalisation programme, as their jobs become less secure, pressure is put on to speed up work in the factories, and pay differentials increase. As many as 15 million jobs are likely to be 'shaken out' over the next decade. But Gorbachev's moves to loosen the clamps on Soviet society may well set free working-class energies of the sort seen in action in East Germany, Hungary and Poland.

The mass strike has time and again, in many countries and over a number of decades, shown itself to be the elemental form of the first working-class mobilisation against Stalinist bureaucratism. If the workers of the USSR are shaken up by the reforming bureaucrats, and if at the same time even limited political liberations offers a more favourable climate for independent working-class action, then the mass strike will appear in the USSR too.

What Gorbachev's stirring-up may unleash has already been indicated by the official USSR media reporting a strike for the first time in decades. There have been riots in the Baltic states which were annexed by Stalin with Hitler's agreement in 1939-40. There have also been riots in Alma Ata, capital of the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan, when an allegedly corrupt local leader was purged and replaced by a Gorbachev man, a Great Russian. Crimean Tatars, the remnants of a small nation deported in its entirety by Stalin in 1944, have demonstrated in Moscow.

Even if Gorbachev's measures produce no explosion in the USSR, they may stir up rebellions elsewhere. One of the key facts about the Stalinist states is their unevenness. Controllable developments in one can trigger uncontrollable events in another. Thus in 1956 a limited anti-bureaucratic upsurge in Poland was kept under control by reforming Stalinists under Gomulka. But those events in Poland triggered the Hungarian revolution. What will the effects of Gorbachev's talk of liberalisation be today in Poland? In Czechoslovakia? In East Germany? In Hungary?

And where will the British labour movement stand if the workers of the USSR or Eastern Europe start moving, and begin to organise independent trade unions? Where will the left stand? To someone who did not know how things are in the labour movement and on the left, that would seem a stupid and superfluous question. Where else can the British labour movement stand but with the nascent labour movements in the Stalinist states? Where else but with the working class and those suffering state oppression? Surely nobody on the left in 1987 can seriously believe that a statified economy under a tyrannical state is socialism? Or deny that nationalisation is only a means to an end — working-class liberation — and not something more important than the workers who can alone achieve that end?

But in fact many people on the left, like Arthur Scargill, consider that the bureaucrats represent 'socialism', and they look at movements like Solidarnosc with jaundiced and suspicious eyes.

The left has a duty to put itself straight on this issue. We have a duty, as elementary as not crossing a picket line, to side with, champion, and defend the workers in the Stalinist states. And rather than hoping for reform from the bureaucrats, we need to have a clear programme for workers' liberty.

- **Disbandment of the police and armed forces, replacement by a workers' militia.**
- **Breaking-up of the bureaucratic hierarchy of administration, and its replacement by a democratic regime of councils of elected and recallable workers' delegates, with freedom to form many workers' political parties.**
- **Workers' control in industry. Free trade unions.**
- **Abolition of bureaucratic privileges; reorganisation of the economy according to a democratically-decided plan.**
- **Abolition of the bureaucracy's monopoly over information: freedom for working-class newspapers, meetings, radio and TV stations, etc.**
- **Self-determination for the nations oppressed by the Kremlin.**

Le Pen with NF MPs

Fascism in France

As Workers' Liberty goes to press, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the French National Front, has just cancelled his plans to speak at a fringe meeting at Tory Party conference in October.

Len Pen was invited by Alfred Sherman, a former adviser to Margaret Thatcher. But an ad hoc committee, 'Picket Le Pen', immediately made plans to demonstrate in protest. Worried Tories complained, and Le Pen withdrew.

In France, the National Front's 10 per cent of the vote has won it a lot of collaboration from the mainstream right.

This summer a formal coalition of the Gaullist and Radical parties with the National Front won a local election in Grasse. And the mainstream right-wing parties on a regional council voted through a National Front proposal that jobs at a new Disneyland should be reserved for people of French nationality.

In recent years the National Front has tried to present itself as a normal right-wing party, not fascist or violent. For the French parliamentary elections in May 1986 it pulled in a lot of traditional right-wing politicians with no fascist past to stand as NF candidates.

Le Pen's recent comment that the Nazis' mass murder of six million Jews was a matter of debate, and anyway "a detail in the history of the Second World War", was a lapse. But Le Pen himself has spent most of his political history in fascist fringe politics.

As a student he joined Action Francaise, the fascist movement of the time. In 1956 he was elected to parliament on the ticket of the semi-fascist Poujadist movement. During the Algerian war of independence, there is evidence that he took part in torturing Algerian prisoners. In 1968 he got a court conviction for publishing a record of Nazi songs.

His associates in the NF are of the same stripe. Pierre Sergent was the head of the French section of the OAS, the terrorist organisation set up by European settlers in Algeria to fight against the French government's decision to give Algeria independence. He was sentenced to death for his OAS activities, and is able to take part in politics today only because of a general amnesty granted by De Gaulle in 1968.

Roger Holleindre is another former OAS man and veteran fascist. Pierre Ceyrac is a Moonie.

The National Front was founded in 1972. Its main forces came from an openly fascist group, Ordre Nouveau, which in its turn was a successor to the Nazi group Occident. But the NF broke decisively out of the world of Hitler-nostalgia fringe politics when it got a big vote in the municipal elections of 1983.

In the Euro-elections of 1984 it did even better: 11% of the vote. The NF's score in France's parliamentary elections of May 1986 was slightly lower, at 9.8%, but the significant thing was that the 1984 result had been shown not to be a one-off. Today, 24% of those questioned will tell an opinion poll that they agree with much of what Le Pen says.

The NF won 35 MPs in 1986. Across France, it had only 20,000 votes fewer than the once-mighty French Communist Party. It scored heavily in run-down working-class areas. It got 14½% of the vote in Seine-St. Denis, the Paris suburbs which were once the stronghold of the CP.

The NF's biggest successes were in the south, where large numbers of former Algerian settlers provide a base for far-right politics. It scored 24% in Marseilles.

The NF's main pitch is anti-immigrant. 2½ million unemployed equals 2½ million immigrants, it says. It claims not to be violent, but a Socialist Party activist was killed by a NF member during the May 1986 election campaign. Many NF members have attacked Arabs, Jews and worker militants — sometimes fatally. The electoral rise of the NF has gone together with a rise in street violence against Arabs.

SOS-Racisme was founded in 1985 to oppose Le Pen, and had a big success in that year with a badge saying 'Touche pas à mon pote' (Don't touch my pal), defending blacks and Arabs against the NF's racism. Socialist Party members have played a big role in SOS-Racisme.

However, the weaknesses of the Left helped lay the basis for Le Pen's rise. In

SURVEY

no other metropolitan country is the Left so nationalist as in France. The French Communist Party displays posters with messages like 'No to a German Europe' or 'I love my country — I'm joining the French Communist Party'. Both the Communist Party and the Socialist Party favour a complete ban on further immigration. The Socialist Party sings the national anthem, the Marseillaise, as its own song. A CP mayor, some years ago, even led a violent attack on a Malian workers' hostel in his municipality, complaining that the municipality had 'too many' immigrants and they should be sent to right-wing municipalities instead. Both the CP and the SP also support France's 'independent' nuclear arsenal.

This background of nationalism helped Le Pen gain ground after 1983, when the Socialist/Communist government elected in 1981 gave up on its reforming promises and went for a full-scale austerity policy, disillusioning and disgusting its working-class supporters. ●

Michele Carlisle

TUC congress

Fudging the issues

'Building for the future' was the official slogan of this year's British TUC congress. The official optimism was in sharp contrast to the pessimism — verging, in some quarters, on panic — that reigned behind the scenes at Congress House and that permeated the debates at Blackpool.

TUC membership dropped by 342,000 last year, bringing the total down to 9.2 million. The 1979 peak was 12 million. It is, according to Paul Routledge writing in New Society, widely accepted in Congress House that membership will drop to 5.5 million on present trends.

The problem is that the 'mainstream' union leaders (from Todd on the left to Edmonds on the right) have no very coherent ideas about how to halt the decline. The maverick EETPU leaders, of course, do have an answer — business unionism. The failure of the mainstreamers to offer a clear alternative to the EETPU approach was the underlying reason for the fudge at Blackpool on union organisation, whereby a showdown over no-strike deals was avoided. All such contentious issues are to be referred to a 'review body' intended to chart the way forward for the movement.

Meanwhile the EETPU has a free hand to go on signing no-strike deals.

EETPU leader Eric Hammond was able to point to the fact that while other union leaders may denounce the EETPU, many of them have been surreptitiously adopting the electricians' own practices. Ron Todd was visibly embarrassed by Hammond's reference to the TGWU's single-union deals (Norsk-Hydro on Tyneside, for instance), which amount to no-strike deals in all but name.

All the TUC mainstreamers could offer as an alternative to business unionism was (in the contemptuous words of Arthur Scargill) 'Saatchi and Saatchi trade unionism': credit cards, slick advertising, and glossy brochures. Scargill and CPSA deputy general secretary John Macreadie were just about the only voices raised for class struggle and solidarity.

In fairness to Edmonds and Todd, it should be noted that they have both, belatedly, come to realise the importance of recruiting and organising 'new' sections of workers — part-timers, workers on government schemes, women and black people. But many of these workers are in the low-paid service industries that are notoriously difficult to organise, and neither the TGWU's 'Link-Up' campaign nor the GMB's 'Flame' has seriously addressed the practicalities of the task.

In practice, it will be left up to the rank and file in the regions to do the donkey work of organising these 'new' sections. And for this task, no amount of glossy publicity or credit cards can substitute for 'old-fashioned' solidarity and struggle.

This year's TUC gave precious little leadership for rank and file activists and — at best — put off the most pressing problems to another day. ●

Jim Denham

Australia

No break from Labor

Labor got back with an increased majority in Australia's July general election.

Many workers were disillusioned with the Labor government's right-wing record, but that disillusion did not turn them to the left. Left-of-Labor candidates did badly, and the main gains went to the Democrats, who are something like Britain's Liberals (while Australia's Liberals correspond to Britain's Tories).

The results reinforce the need to build a political alternative to Hawke and Keating within the Australian Labor Party. Many on the left say that this is hopeless. Many ALP members have left the Party in disgust. But the fight for a socialist alternative in the ALP has not been seriously tested. The 'official' left has not fought at all.

Socialism cannot be won except by the struggle of the working class. The ALP still has the affiliation of the major unions. The problem of the lack of a socialist party cannot be solved unless socialists conduct a fight in the labour movement — the unions and the ALP — for their politics and programme. ●

Tony Brown

Child abuse

Who helps the victims?

IF YOUR child's friend comes to you tomorrow and says that her dad is doing bad things to her and playing with parts she doesn't like when Mum goes out, how do you respond?

Rush to the police station? Your local social services office? A solicitor?

Or do you ignore the child and hope that it will all go away. After all, you know what children are, they always make up stories — probably from something they have seen on the telly!

Never make that mistake. If a child tells you that she has been sexually abused, believe her. She will be telling the truth.

You may decide to go to the police. If the child has had full sexual intercourse within the last 48 hours and she can be subjected to full internal medical examination, usually by a grumpy male police doctor and often in a police station (where the child will be terrified, because only naughty children go to police stations), then perhaps she might stand a chance.

But UK law is very narrow in its definition of incest. There must be a blood tie between abuser and victim. Sexual intercourse must take place, and it must be between male and female.

In my experience of working with young children, sexual intercourse of fathers with daughters or mothers with sons are among the less likely types of abuse. The abusers are more often step-parents or 'uncles', i.e. Mum's or Dad's friends. Full intercourse is less common than genital fingering, masturbation, or oral sex — which legally count as indecent assault, with a maximum sentence of five years rather than life (as for incest).

Sentences for sexual abuse of girls also become much shorter when the victim reaches the magic age of 13 years. Why?

With parole, a father who has constantly sexually abused his daughter for five years could be out of prison in nine months.

The rules on sentencing are extremely inconsistent. I would not argue for longer sentences, which usually only reinforce the perpetrator in his feelings of correctness and rightness about what he has done. There is virtually no treatment offered to the men who perpetrate these acts.

The system responds by breaking up families. It puts children into care, it puts Dad into prison, and it leaves Mum feeling bitter, lost and angry.

So the law doesn't do much good. You might decide to go to social services. They will often be sympathetic, but their resources are stretched to the limit. Staff are often carrying large and difficult case-loads, and there are few or no places in local authority children's homes.

They may be able to find a foster family if you are willing to wait for some weeks or months. They may have one worker who specialises in this area, but there will be a six week wait to see her.

Children can be removed for their own safety and protection. This usually means that they have to leave home, or social services departments try to get the perpetrators to leave home. This often reinforces the child's misery and unhappiness, because in many cases the child does have a special relationship with the perpetrator. She was after all special, and didn't he tell her that all these awful things would happen if she ever told anyone about their 'little secret'?

There are no short cliché-type answers to these dilemmas. We live in a society that publicly condemns but privately condones sexual abuse of children.

There are statistics which indicate that it is more common in poorer households, but I doubt that there is any class distinction. We live in a system that reinforces men's sexual power over women with every picture of a naked woman and every lurid tabloid story.

We need to change the system which promotes the superiority of one sex over another. We need to push ideas of deferred prosecution and deferred sentencing so that families and children can be worked with therapeutically. The victims should be able to stay with the people they love most so that they and the perpetrator can get the help they desperately need.

We also need to educate children from a very early age that they have the right to say no. We need more nursery places, so that young children come into contact with adults who are trained to deal with sexual abuse.

We need a large-scale education programme to make people aware that children do have rights. One of the reasons that an adult abuser has so much power over a child is total secrecy. We need a communal awareness that the perpetrator is sick and needs help, but the child should not have to say in her adult life "I needed to talk, I needed help, but there was no-one to go to. There was no help".

This subject is enormous. There is a lot of research taking place both here and in America, and I've attempted to give only the briefest outline of the subject. I hope I have offered food for thought and a basis for discussion. ●

Liz Williams

South Korea

Workers step in

Since the end of July a massive strike wave has swept South Korea. Taking their cue from the great movement for democratic reform earlier in the year, thousands of workers have taken to the streets, confronted their bosses and the police, and forced concessions out of both the employers and the government.

This dramatic rise of working class struggle has centred around two kinds of demands — for economic improvements, higher wages and so on, and for democratic, free trade unions.

Lee Sung Chol is one of 2,000 workers at a car-parts plant. He earns £169 a month — for a *seventy-four* hour week. He told the Christian Science Monitor: "Two years ago we tried to form a union. Management got wind of it, and locked us all in for the night. If forty workers go to the Labour Ministry and register their desire to form a union, the demand will be accepted. So the management forcibly kept us from registering." Workers were afraid of losing their jobs, and so such intimidation was successful.

Now the frustrations created by the union-busting policies of the big South Korean companies have exploded in a powerful surge of working class anger. Coal miners, shipyard workers, car workers, precision electronics assemblers — all sections of industry have been involved in strikes.

According to the South Korean Economic Planning Board, in the two months July-August, there were 1,040 disputes. By the end of August there were 500 still unresolved. All the major centres of Korean industry were hit, including the 'big three' corporations — Daewoo, Samsung and Hyundai.

The strike movement spread out principally from the coal industry in late July. 24,000 miners at 18 mines, including the country's largest, clashed with police. On August 10, hundreds of miners halted trains heading east from the capital Seoul for 15 hours. A bus strike in Kwanju — site of a huge insurrectionary rebellion in 1980 — led to government intervention. Two leading shipbuilders and the three big car manufacturers were hit. By 15 August, according to Labour Minister Lee Heun-Ki, $180 million of production had been lost.

At Hyundai's plant in the city of Ulsan, workers were locked out by their bosses. But a march of 40,000 into the city centre lead to confrontations with the police and forced the government to try to find a settlement. According to one account, "Workers wearing gas masks were armed with staves and were led by a line of heavy equipment."

High degrees of organisation, and in particular readiness to face both the police and scabs, have characterised the strike movement.

The government has played a double-handed game. As at Hyundai, it has been prepared to intervene to force belligerent managements to retreat; the strikes have helped spur on the government to negotiate constitutional changes with opposition leaders — and to make significant concessions.

At the same time, repression has been heavy. In late August a worker was killed at one of the shipyards and angry workers rioted. Hundreds of strikers have been arrested, and the South Korean police have attempted brutally to crush strikes.

But presidential elections — promised after the student revolt in the Spring — are looming in December. And the ruling Democratic Justice Party can no more be seen to be anti-worker than the opposition Reunification Democratic Party: everyone needs working class votes. As one astute western diplomat put it: "No political party in their right mind would be anti-labour right now." Even South Korea's miserable counterfeit of bourgeois democracy counts for something, sometimes!

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This wave of working class action was partly prompted by government promises to change the labour law under which, for the past 20 years, strikes have been illegal. And now, for example at Hyundai, the government has promised to push the company to grant higher wages, allow free trade unions and compensate workers for any injuries incurred during the strike.

On the overtly political plane, ruling party candidate Roh Tae Woo, after negotiations with the opposition leader Kim Young Sam, agreed to a weaker presidency than he initially advocated in the new constitution. Undoubtedly, this was in response to the strike wave and the threat of more to come, and beyond that the danger that South Korea would become ungovernable.

So the working class has finally imposed its stamp on the struggle in South Korea. Many commentators have noted that the demands of the workers have been limited and economic in scope, compared to the democratic objectives of the student movement. Yet no one can deny the relationship between the two. And the striking feature of the strikes is the centrality of the demand for free trade unions — a democratic demand that is also at the very heart of working class interest. This is much more than just a militant strike wave: it marks the emergence of a working class *movement* in the model country of the new Third World capitalism. This will raise as many questions and provide as many lessons for workers internationally as the independent unions in South Africa have done.

What lies behind this is the extraordinary development of South Korean capitalism — and therefore of the working class — coupled with the frustrations engendered in the middle classes as a result of this growth. The student movement, supported by wide layers of society, was and is essentially the product of a relatively affluent, well-educated class highly conscious of its exclusion from power in an extremely authoritarian state.

Nevertheless, the militant and *successful* student movement gave inspiration to the workers. A similar thing also happened in Spain this year, although as in Spain the actual links between students' and workers' organisations are virtually, if not completely, non-existent.

Another parallel — very obvious to Koreans — is with the Philippines. The Korean liberal opposition has often borrowed the Philippines slogan of 'people's power'. There is, for sure, a trigger-happy army in South Korea, too — although for the moment the need to maintain a good international image and so not endanger the Seoul Olympics is helping to restrain them.

Politically, despite the marvellous intervention of the workers, the broad movement — or movements — in South Korea are not very well developed. The 'two Kims' — Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung — are straightforward liberals, who have urged striking workers to be calm and not overdo it. Kim Dae Jung commented that "violence and radical behaviour should be avoided and maturity should be displayed with dialogue and compromise." Although some of the students are much more radical, there is not much of an organised left alternative to the two Kims.

But the workers' movement poses the possibility of a real, powerful socialist alternative — one that would have immense ramifications in North Korea, blighted by a regime that is austere and repressive even by the standards of such 'communist' countries. Such an alternative has yet to emerge, but its potential is clear.

What is also clear is that the political direction such a movement must take will be completely different from the nationalist-populist 'Third Worldism' still so prevalent on the left. South Korea is a long way from being an impoverished pre-industrial society. Far from it. South Korean capitalism has been extremely dynamic — at the expense of its working class (in 1986, the rise in labour productivity was more than double the rise in wage levels). Narrow nationalist solutions are no solution at all. An independent working class movement, reaching out to the workers of North Korea, China, Japan — and elsewhere — to destroy their respective oppression and develop international, democratic workers' rule is what is needed. The seeds of that socialist future have now been planted. ●

Clive Bradley

The campaigning days: 1983. Photo: John Harris.

Rail union

Knapp loses the knack

JIMMY Knapp, general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), was elected as the left candidate in March 1983 with 63 per cent of the vote.

He took over from the disgraced Sid Weighell, a harsh right-winger. Knapp retains his left image today, even if it is a bit tarnished. But what has his record been?

Sid Weighell is remembered as the general secretary who sold jobs for (small) pay rises. Jimmy Knapp has rejected linking pay and productivity, but we have had low pay increases and productivity changes nonetheless.

Sid Weighell fought his members — unsuccessfully — to get Driver Only Operation (DOO) introduced. Jimmy Knapp didn't fight his members, but now presides over implementation of DOO.

Sid Weighell accepted flexible rostering on behalf of guards who rejected it through a democratic vote, and publicly spoke out against drivers who struck against it. Flexible rostering was never fully implemented under Weighell because of resistance on the ground. But Knapp has presided over the complete erosion of the guaranteed eight-hour working day and the full introduction of flexible rostering.

Weighell was a scab who worked with British Rail management to control the union. He would brook no opposition. He allowed no space for alternative views. You could not even get a letter printed in the union journal. In the era of the closed shop, he tried to expel leading members of the Broad Left from the union, and thus from their jobs.

Weighell was finally caught with his fingers in the ballot box at Labour Party conference in 1982. The NUR's decision to vote for the NUM candidate for the Labour Party national executive was not carried out. Arthur Scargill did a lasting service to the members of the NUR by exposing the fact. Weighell had no choice but to resign.

At the Special General Meeting in late 1982, Weighell had his resignation accepted in the morning, but in the afternoon was allowed to argue for acceptance of Rail Staff National Tribunal Award no.78. The SGM accepted this deal — a six per cent wage rise, and

agreement to follow through flexible rostering, Driver Only Operation of freight trains, DOO of passenger trains, Open Stations, the Trainmen concept (guards progressing up through promotion to drivers' grades), and Easement of Single Manning (restrictions on which trains can have only one driver).

What Weighell could not get through as general secretary of the union, he was finally able to hand on to Knapp; and this explains much of what has followed.

BR had made these productivity proposals in March 1980, and Weighell had worked hard for 2½ years to get them accepted. The Open Station concept meant doing away with staff who inspect tickets and help passengers on stations.

This affects ill-organised sections of the union, and there has been little resistance. The Trainmen concept is not opposed by most of the unions. The only barrier is craft prejudice among some drivers who believe that guards cannot and should not move up to do their jobs. The worry for the rank and file is BR's desire to promote on the basis of 'suitability' rather than seniority (a method which prevents management discriminating against union activists).

The other four items — flexible rostering, DOO of passenger and freight trains, and Easement of Single Manning — aimed to get more work from fewer people for less money from train crews. Resistance has been strongest here. Guards are one of the best organised sections of the NUR.

Activists gained hope from Knapp's overwhelming election as the left candidate in March 1983. However, much of Weighell's machine remained intact — from branch secretaries through Sectional Council Officers and some Divisional Officers up to the three Assistant General Secretaries.

The 21 members of the NUR's National Executive Committee serve for a three year period, but then have to stand down for three years. This ensures a high turnover on the NEC. It is formally democratic, but it weakens the NEC's control over the full-timers — the General Secretary, the Assistant General Secretaries, and the Divisional Officers, who are elected for life. They are backed up by clerks and officers appointed to run the various departments of the union.

Scargill, on election to the presidency of the NUM, smashed the old Gormley machine by moving the headquarters from London to Sheffield. Knapp has not attempted any similar challenge to Weighell's machine, nor attempted to change the rules so that full-time officials are elected for limited periods.

Knapp made a good start by restoring peace with the drivers' union ASLEF. BR were using ASLEF's refusal to operate the DOO trains on the Bedford-St.Pancras line without any extra payment as a reason for withholding the six per cent increase due from September 1982 from everyone. They eventually paid it in March 1983. Weighell would have publicly denounced ASLEF. Knapp didn't.

In October 1983 the Rail Federation was announced — loosely joining ASLEF and the NUR and ensuring as far as possible joint policy and wage claims, with a long-term view to merger.

Meanwhile NEC members were visiting branches and District Councils, letting it be known that if they took action to resist closures, redundancies or whatever, they would automatically receive the support of the union. This was a vast improvement on what had gone before, when we were fighting the union leadership to resist closures.

However, it soon became apparent that the NEC had been sufficiently bruised in battle with Weighell, and particularly by his getting the AGM to call off the 1982 strike only 18 hours after it had started, that they had no intention of leading.

The policy was: you, the rank and file, lead, and we'll follow. You organise what needs to be done, and if you're successful we will support you. Even that didn't last long. Before long possible disputes were having cold water poured on them.

The first wage claim Knapp handled, in 1983, was for a 'substantial' pay increase, extra holidays, and a shorter working week. We settled for 4.25% and nothing else. But Knapp was still in his honeymoon period.

At the end of 1982, BR chair Peter Parker had boasted in his Annual Report that "We are still running the same size network, but since mid-1981 we have cut our costs by £250 million. We have fewer locomotives, fewer coaches, fewer wagons, fewer marshalling yards, and fewer people — 27,000 off the payroll in two years". The feeling was that Knapp should be given a chance to do something about this.

There was a common view among miners before their 1984-5 strike that with Scargill elected they wouldn't need to have any strikes, as Scargill could do it all with his mouth. Scargill, of course, knew otherwise. But Knapp seemed to think he could talk his way out of the union's problems.

In July 1983 Sectional Councils were told not to enter discussions about closures and route rationalisations. Nonetheless, BR's new chair Bob Reid could boast in the Annual Report for 1983 that a loss of £175 million in 1982 had become a profit of £8 million in 1983. This had been achieved by a further reduction of 5,979 staff in 1983. Reid planned a further 14,500 job cuts in the following three years.

In 1984-5 Knapp missed several chances to link the railworkers' fight with the miners'. On 29 March he agreed with the other transport unions and the steel union ISTC to boycott all coal movements and to instruct all members not to cross picket lines. This was ratified by the NEC on 2 April. In practice it had already been done by the majority of NUR members right from the start.

The NUR, like ASLEF, stuck to this commitment a lot better than other unions. But that says more about the low level of official solidarity than about the virtues of the NUR leaders.

The NUR leaders made some effort to make the instruction stick, but not nearly enough to sew up the Notts coalfield. That job was left to the local officials. At the peak we had reduced coal movements by rail to eight trains a week, but we are still living with the consequences of the divisions that

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created.

The worst thing the NUR leaders did, however, was to abandon our 1984 wage claim within a month of the beginning of the miners' strike, and our 1985 claim just a few weeks after the miners went back, while power station stocks of coal were very low.

The 1984 claim, formulated as the miners' strike started, was for a 'substantial' increase (generally thought to be about 15%), an extra five days' holiday, and a 35 hour week. In early May BR offered four per cent and one extra day's holiday as long as the unions agreed to DOO. They also announced that 4,000 jobs would go from British Rail Engineering Limited (BREL), starting in June. There could hardly have been a better opportunity to fight for the full claim.

The response from Knapp and ASLEF leader Ray Buckton was first of all to rule out strike action. A week later, an overtime ban was called from 30 May. An overtime ban would have been pretty effective on the rail, as the average week worked is 54 hours. However, not even that was to be.

BR made the offer 4.9% and suggested that the union accept that DOO and the other issues be discussed in the established machinery of negotiation. And that was it. The claim was abandoned.

The 1985 claim was an extra five days' holiday, a 35 hour week, and £100 minimum wage (effectively 30% for the lowest grades). In February BR said that there was no money whatsoever for pay, mostly because we were refusing to carry coal traffic. Four weeks later BR offered 3.5%. The unions snatched their hands off.

During the miners' strike itself, an overtime ban and work-to-rule was scheduled to begin from 10 September 1984, to demand an end to the rundown of the railways and the beginning of expansion. The action was called off when BR conceded a new stage in the machinery of negotiation — for six months only!

In October 1984, pressure from below pushed the NUR and ASLEF into calling a one-day regional day of action in the East Midlands in protest against BR intimidation of railworkers boycotting coal. It was called off at the last minute. Apparently the Eastern Region General Manager had promised to investigate if the union called the action off.

Of course he didn't investigate, and of course the intimidation didn't stop. Pressure for action continued, and the strike eventually happened on 17 January 1985. Its potential immediately showed itself. At Shirebrook, for example, some guards and drivers who all the way along had refused the union instruction not to handle coal came out on strike and joined the picket line. It was a magnificent display of solidarity, but proved to be too little, too late, in too small an area.

Immediately after the strike BR began to talk about recouping its losses from the unions under the 1984 Trade Union Act, as it had been called without a ballot. Nothing came of that, but a Sheffield businessman went to court to claim the price of an overnight stay in London because the strike had stopped him getting home. He won his £50, and this provided the excuse for Knapp's argument at the 1985 AGM, where he rammed through compliance with the first part of the 1984 Trade Union Act, about ballots. We could not afford to fight each small claim in the courts, he said.

Since then there has been at least one case where the NUR leaders have used a ballot to get out of a fight, during the battle over DOO. 270 guards were sacked at Glasgow, Margam, Immingham, Llanelli and Kings Cross, for refusing to cooperate with DOO. Instead of responding immediately, the NUR leaders went for a ballot. There was no campaign, no meetings, one leaflet of which only three copies went to each area, and just a few weeks to organise.

In the circumstances the vote for action was surprisingly high. But it wasn't a majority. So the NEC could say that the rank and file didn't want to fight. Knapp called a Special General Meeting and got the policy against DOO reversed. That, he said, was the only way to get the sacked guards reinstated.

While the guards were still sacked, a ballot was lost in Signals and Telecoms. That created a bad precedent for the next one, over BR's rundown of the engineering workshops. That one was lost overwhelmingly — 66% said no.

Since then the management offensive has speeded up. British Rail Engineering Limited has been split, with the light maintenance part being incorporated into BR and the 'new build' part put out for sale. Doncaster has been drastically run down and a National Stores located there. The contract for distribution from the stores was awarded to a private road haulage company, Swifts, supposedly a small family firm. An instruction to boycott this firm was carried out at Tinsley in Sheffield, but when support was requested from Head Office the Tinsley workers were told to drop it.

The most blatant example of the NUR leaders not being prepared to fight was the ballot on London Regional Transport in June 1985. Staff were to have their pay and conditions cut by up to 30% in preparation for privatisation. They voted 80% for action. It was called off at the last minute when the chair of LRT expressed surprise that the cuts were happening and promised to investigate. Heard that one before?

Both the 1986 and 1987 pay claims were abandoned for a fraction of what was claimed. Kinnock's office contacted the NUR and asked that we should not pursue our pay claim too vigorously, as 1987 was election year and unions taking action might scupper Labour's chances. We got 4.5% and another five years of Tory government.

Knapp complains of the apathy of the members. The membership is not apathetic, but cynical. Superficially, it can look the same. Knapp would prefer to call it apathy, as then all he can do is complain. If it is recognised as cynicism, then that means a much harder job of convincing the members that things have really changed since Weighell, that the leadership is serious, and that a battle will be fought to win. That will be a hard job, as the membership has experienced too much evidence to the contrary.

What does the future hold? Sectorisation is going on apace. The fruits of this will be shown when the inter-city sector becomes private from April 1988. Sectorisation means preparing bits of BR for privatisation so that only a small administrative change is needed to hand them over when the time comes.

From April 1988, support from the government's Public Service Obligation (PSO) will be stopped for inter-city services, and they will be 'allowed' to seek private capital to cover their losses until they start to make profits expected for two years later. That will be it. No public fanfare, no big advertising campaign. It won't be necessary.

The freight sector and parcels already make a profit. But not yet enough. There will be further attacks on train crews' rostering. BR sees shifts of between seven and nine hours as not flexible enough. They will probably go for shifts of between four and 12 hours.

There will be a drive for more DOO and more Easement of Single Manning (less restriction on when only one driver is needed, rather than having an assistant). When BR get this, they will be ready to privatise.

The PSO grant has been reduced by 25% to £720 million in three years. The government wants another 25% off in the next three. This is to be achieved in part by cutting 10,000 jobs in the next five years.

No union leadership has a right to a comfortable job while this goes on. The right wing is showing signs of reviving in the NUR. A reinvigorated Broad Left is needed to get the union back on course and in a position to resist what BR have in store for us.

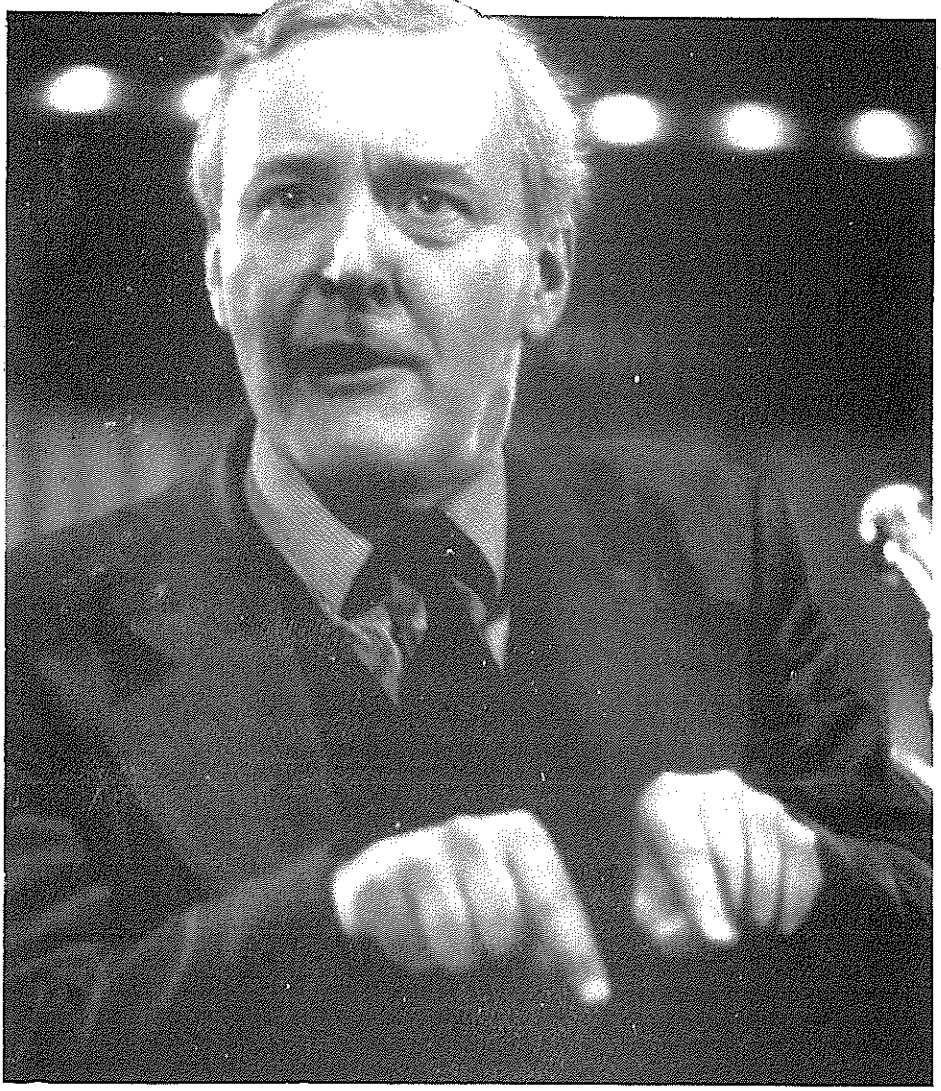
If we don't, then we can forget wage rises, negotiating rights, job security and conditions.

Some acceptance of the Tory anti-union laws on balloting has been urged by Knapp to make his job easier. Maybe something else ought to be accepted — something which we were pushing for long before the Tories thought of ballots, and which Knapp himself promised in his election campaign — that he (and all other officials) should stand for re-election every five years.

Maybe then some pressure from the rank and file will get through. ●

Rob Dawber

Benn's socialist manifesto



Tony Benn has submitted this draft socialist manifesto to the Labour Party National Executive Committee. On 24-25 October these and other ideas will be discussed at a broad Socialist Conference, convened in Benn's Chesterfield constituency by the Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the Socialist Society and the Conference of Socialist Economists.

At the 1987 Conference it must be our aim to lay the foundation for a Labour victory at the next General Election, and to begin the development of objectives for the Party that will form the basis of our appeal to the electorate, to be followed by detailed policies for presentation to later conferences, upon which our next manifesto will be based.

But the problem that confronts us is a deeper one than can be solved by specific commitments, however good in themselves.

For we are up against a coherent set of ideas and values, which run counter to everything in which we believe, but which have been so consistently advocated by the present government, that they have become accepted very widely and now constitute something of a consensus.

Unless we challenge these ideas and values, and the institutions which now reflect them and administer them we could remain on the margins of politics for a long time to come.

Any future manifesto must take account of the many changes which have occurred in our society over the years including radical changes in technology, the emergence of a new and different pattern of work, and of need, and international developments which may offer better prospects for peace.

All these factors will need to be studied most carefully, but none of them really alter the underlying faith which brought the labour movement into existence, and many of them actually underline the relevance of what we have always deeply believed.

There is a real risk that if we are seen to be abandoning our faith in the search for media approval we could come to be seen as a purely opportunistic party that is prepared to say anything to get into office and is ready to sacrifice good policies when the opinion polls swing against us — which could destroy our basic credibility and also fatally damage our electoral chances.

If we are to avoid these dangers the Labour Party should try to make clear — now — the essential aims and objectives which unite it, and publish these at once for discussion in the movement and more generally, well ahead of our new policy statements or our next manifesto.

I attach a draft of possible Aims and Objectives of the Labour Party and recommend that it be discussed, if necessary amended, and published by the NEC at this year's conference for the consideration of the Party and then adopted, in its final form, in 1988.

TONY BENN

The Labour Party is a democratic, socialist and internationalist party, with a membership made up of men and women, young and old, who are widely representative of all aspects of life; closely linked to the trade unions, and other affiliated organisations, in pursuit of the historic role of Labour as a non-doctrinaire party of class struggle.

We work for the election of Labour candidates, in all local and national elections, on the basis of the political programmes put before the electors.

We believe that the party has a duty to defend working people and their families, and to campaign actively for policies that will help them.

This statement of our aims and objectives has been prepared to provide a focus for political discussion and education within the party; to allow those who join the party to understand the policies for which we stand; and to be the basis of our long-term political work.

LABOUR PARTY

WE BELIEVE:

—That there should be certain rights which must be won and maintained:

*The right to life, free from fear, oppression, ignorance, preventable ill-health or poverty.

*The right to useful and satisfying work, balanced with leisure, to meet the needs of society.

*The right of everyone to receive an income sufficient to maintain a decent standard of living.

*The right to a good home for all in which to live, bring up children and care for all dependents.

*The right to receive the best possible medical care, free, and at the moment of need.

*The right of access, throughout life, to the full range of human knowledge, through education at school, in college and afterwards.

*The right to mass media which provide accurate news, free from bias or distortion, and a diversity of views.

*The right to enjoy dignity, and a full life, in retirement in suitable accommodation, free from financial anxieties, with proper medical, and other facilities, including personal care, necessary to make that possible.

*The right to expect that any government in power will work for peace and justice, and will not provoke international conflict or hostility or divert resources from essential purposes to build up the weapons of mass destruction.

*The right to equality of treatment under just laws, free from all distrimination based upon class, sex, race, life-style or beliefs.

*The right of free speech and assembly, the entrenchment of civil liberties and human rights and the right to organise voluntary associations and free trade unions for the purpose of protecting and improving the prospects for those who belong to them, and in particular, the right to withdraw labour as a means of securing justice.

*The right of elected local and national authorities to provide those jobs and services needed by the community.

—in democracy

We are deeply committed to the democratic process in the political, economic, social and administrative spheres, and believe that no person should have power over others unless they are accountable to, and removable by, those over whom they exercise that power or by elected representatives of the people.

—in socialism

We are socialists because we believe that these rights cannot be fully realised in any society under capitalism, which, as in Britain now, has entrenched by law, the power of Capital over Labour, and subordinated human values to the demand for profit, at the expense of social justice and peace.

in internationalism

We are an internationalist party believing that all people, everywhere are entitled to demand the same rights.

in the rights of self-determination

We believe that the people of every nation have the right to govern themselves and to be free from any form of colonial or imperial domination.

—in solidarity

We believe that we have a moral responsibility to defend all those who are attacked for protecting their own democratically gained rights, and with this in mind we are establishing workplace branches so that each can help others more effectively.

—that conscience must be above the law.

We assert the right of all people to follow their own conscientious beliefs even if it involves them in breaking the law; and that while there may be a legal obligation to obey the law there is no moral obligation to obey unjust laws; but we also know that those who break the law on moral grounds may face punishment for their beliefs, and the final verdict on their actions will rest with the public and with history.

—in the rights of all to their beliefs

We believe that socialist ideas which have been evolved in this country and abroad over the centuries have given us a rich inheritance; but we do not believe that truth can be captured in any one creed to which all must subscribe under threat of expulsion or exclusion; and we respect the rights of all members of the party to hold their own views, and to organise within the party to promote them, being convinced that diversity of opinion adds strength to our cause.

—in progress through collective action.

We believe, in the light of our own experience, that the only secure basis for social progress must lie in collective action; and that those who have the privilege of representing us, at all levels, must remain accountable for what they say and do, and that no-one can demand blind obedience from us in the name of loyalty or unity.

—that we are servants of the community.

We see the Labour Party, and all its representatives, as servants of all those who live and work in Britain.

THE POLICIES WE WANT:

—for Britain

*The return to full employment and the adoption of the means necessary for that purpose by, among other things, the common ownership, under democratic control and management, of the commanding heights of the economy, including the banks and finance houses, the land and all the companies which dominate our industrial system, and the development of new forms of social ownership.

*A shorter working week and earlier retirement.

*The establishment, as of right, of a comprehensive welfare system which will safeguard the living standards of our people.

*The elimination of all discrimination and injustice.

*The introduction of a system of taxation which will radically reduce the present gross inequalities of wealth and income.

*The provision of good housing, health and education for all, by absorbing those private facilities that might be necessary to achieve a fully comprehensive system giving real choice to all.

The introduction of a major programme for the democratic reform of the apparatus of the state including the abolition of the House of Lords; the ending of all patronage in making major public appointments; the democratisation of the magistracy, and lay supervision of the judiciary by the introduction of assessors from all walks of life into the High Court; and the democratic control of the police by elected local authorities.

*The ending of all nuclear weapons and bases in Britain; and the phasing out of civil nuclear power in favour of coal, conservation and alternative benign sources of energy.

*The provision of cheap and safe public transport for the use of the public, to protect us from the chaos that would follow from leaving key decisions to unrestricted competition.

*The protection of the environment so that this, and future generations may enjoy it, free from pollution and exploitation for profit.

*The proper provision for a leisure and multi-cultural society.

*The protection of the animal kingdom so that this, and future generations, may enjoy the natural wild life of Britain.

*The upholding and enforcement of existing legislation relating to animal abuse, and efforts to secure the introduction of further legislation making all blood-sports illegal.

—IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

*The adoption by Britain of a non-aligned foreign policy, committed to the United Nations but free of all military alliances, so that this country, with others, could help ease international tensions, reduce arms expenditure and assist the development of the Third World.

*The development of closer economic, industrial, social and political links between working people here and in other countries, free from the control of the Treaty of Rome or NATO.

AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE

We appeal to all those who share these aims, to work with us to help to realise them, and we invite all those who would like to do so, to join as individual members so as to assist, in a practical way, to make this possible.

Funeral of Andreas Raditsela, a trade unionist murdered by the security forces. Photo: Morris Zwi, Reflex.

The way to a workers' party

There are many political strands in the movement against apartheid. Although the ANC claims to represent the whole movement, it is challenged by Black Consciousness militants, socialists, and 'workerist' trade unionists. Anne Mack and Mark Dupont argue that the ANC has increased its influence in recent years because of failures by the left, which can still be remedied.

IT IS now some three years since the 'Vaal Uprising' signalled the start of the most momentous explosion of working-class militancy South Africa has ever seen.

In the three years since the residents of Sebokeng marched on the local administration offices to demand lower rents, much has changed in South African politics.

The African National Congress and its symbols — Nelson Mandela and the Freedom Charter — are more powerful and influential inside the country than ever before.

The vast, sprawling township revolt has switched from the millennarian rebellion of 1985, when thousands of school students really did believe that the regime was about to fall and so took to the streets under the slogan of 'No education before liberation'. The sober reality of 1987 is lawless vigilantes, treason trials, hangings and urban 'upgrading' under the eye of the military.

The independent unions have grown to create the strongest labour movement that Africa has ever known. The ANC tradition has moved from the wings to the centre-stage of that movement. The forces of Black Consciousness have declined, and the 'workerists' have, in the main, kept silent. Populism is in the ascendant.

How did this come about? Part of the answer is to be found in looking at the way the debate between the so-called 'populists' and 'workerists' in the unions has evolved.

The 'populists' can be roughly defined as identifying with the nationalist political tradition of the ANC, which is today represented in South Africa by the United Democratic Front. The 'populists' tend to favour a 'high profile' political style of trade unionism. Arguing that the workers must participate in wider community struggles, they try to build alliances with all progressive groups committed to fighting apartheid.

The 'workerists', on the other hand, though committed to the wider struggle against apartheid, are wary of alliances with non-worker-controlled organisations in which the distinct voice of the working class may be submerged. They stress the need for patient organising, educating and building on the shop floor.

Five years ago the 'populists' were a weak and isolated faction in the workers' movement. Today they are dominant. But populist ideas alone should not be given too much credit. The ANC has a large apparatus. It has funds. It has managed to portray itself as the symbol of a whole history of black resistance.

Even those factors are not enough to explain the rise to dominance of 'populism'. **The left has allowed itself to lose out. The weaknesses of the left have given the populists their advantage.**

The trade union left — who were strongest in the old FOSATU federation — tended to reduce all political questions to questions of organisation. In the FOSATU framework, once the working class was well enough organised and a strong enough base created, then working-class politics would dominate

almost automatically.

The FOSATU left had a political agenda, and functioned in part like a political tendency. But they had one crucial weakness. They had a two-stage theory of *first* building a strong trade union movement and *then* moving into politics. This meant in practice that the building of political organisation and the development of socialist ideas outside the immediate process of production were postponed to a later period. In the early 1980s there was a political vacuum in the country, but FOSATU let slip a favourable opportunity to prepare workers politically for the tumultuous times to come.

The ideas of the FOSATU left took root in a relatively small but crucial cadre of union activists and shop stewards. The populists, however, were able both to appeal directly to the rank and file over the heads of the FOSATU left, and to exploit the lack of a wider political perspective on the state within the FOSATU left.

So, when the townships exploded in 1984, it was the populists, basing themselves on the ANC, who appeared to have all the answers to the big political questions of power.

The unions didn't know how to respond to the massive uprising. In part they were held back by a sectarian attitude to community organisations which were not 'proper' working-class organisations like unions. They were influenced by syndicalism — a philosophy which reduces the whole of working-class politics to trade union action. In the absence of a clear lead from the left in the union, the working-class struggles in the black townships — and they were *working-class* struggles, over issues like rents — were quickly subsumed and generalised into a vague and unspecified populist protest against apartheid in general.

Right from the start of the township revolt, the workerists allowed the populists to define the political issues. Very quickly this powerful, spontaneous revolt in the townships was fastened into the populist mould. There was no real living link between the issues around which workers and youth were mobilising — rents, fares, racist schooling — and the maximum goals attached to them, 'Free our leaders!', 'End apartheid!', 'Ungovernability!', 'People's power', etc.

The seeds of defeat and demoralisation had already been sown.

In part this happened because the trade union left had missed an earlier opportunity. The FOSATU left made political gains in 1980, when alone in the movement they recognised the importance of state 'registration' or recognition of the unions, and exploited to the full the new legal rights associated with recognition. They broke from the perspective long dominant in the ANC and, for different reasons, in the syndicalist wing of the trade union movement — that all dealings with the state should be boycotted on principle. But those gains were not followed through politically.

There was no attempt to make further political demands on the state vital to the interests of the unions — for example, for the right to strike — or to extend such demands to non-trade-union issues like rent, local government and education. Lawyers were used — effectively in many cases — to widen the scope for legal action in the courts. Sometimes pressure was put on employers so that they in turn would put pressure on the state. But direct political demands on the state were not posed.

Even state recognition of the unions had come from the top down, as a state strategy for incorporation rather than as a demand from below. The FOSATU left had a golden opportunity in the early 1980s to break decisively from the ANC's idea that because the state was so rotten and could not be reformed, therefore no demands for reform could or should come from below. They had an opportunity to transfer to the political realm the lessons learned in the economic, to extend the method of patient organisation through pressing winnable demands on the enemy and linking ultimate goals with immediate 'small' reforms.

The FOSATU left missed this opportunity — partly because of the social weight of the populist view of the state, and partly because the syndicalism which informed the FOSATU left did not give it the political equipment to develop a working-class alternative.

In 1982 the general secretary of FOSATU, Joe Foster, made a speech about the need for a working-class political movement. He did not clarify what this meant programmatically or organisationally, and in any event his ideas were not followed through. The trade union left chose the road of 'union unity' and 'disciplined alliances' with the popular movement *instead of* building its own political wing.

The populists were against a workers' party. They were committed to broad national movements organised in Congresses rather than party politics; and the ANC saw the South African Communist Party as the sole representative of working-class interests. They could not be confronted sufficiently by a trade union left which was influenced by its own anti-party ideas stemming from syndicalism.

A workers' party — even a small and weak one — launched out of FOSATU in the early '80s, and armed with a creative approach to the township struggles, could have radically altered the course of events. It was not to be.

COSATU, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, was formed in late 1985 by the unification of FOSATU with some populist-led and other unions. This was a massive step forward. But it gave the populists a weight and influence within the unions that they did not deserve.

In its first year, COSATU was held back by submerged political disagreements and infighting. While the populists organised, mobilised and conspired, the workerists retreated to the shop floor. They kept their heads down.

The left hoped that their stronger industrial unions would allow them to absorb the populists. That didn't happen. COSATU was formed in the midst of the fire and fury of the township revolt. That propelled it into a political tumult for which the trade union left was ill-prepared.

What was the trade union left's view on disinvestment? On sanctions? The ANC? Buthelezi? The 'homelands'? Black councils? For better or worse, the populists had a position, while the trade union left was groping in the dark.

Even as COSATU was formed, the township revolt was showing the first signs of decline. Confusion and demoralisation began to set in as the vigilantes — the murderous Black Hundreds of the South African counter-revolution — started to gain ground.

The ANC's slogan of 1985 had been 'Make the townships ungovernable'. This was plainly failing. Anarchy, not working-class power, had replaced the collaborators of the state, but there was little alternative on offer from COSATU.

Some trade unionists did try to deal with these problems. Alec Erwin, the national education officer of FOSATU and then COSATU, posed theoretically the need for a 'transformational' politics to build in the townships the kind of democratic structures built in the unions. Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of MAWU (and now of NUMSA), set out to build democratic and accountable structures in practice, in Alexandra township, near Johannesburg. There were other instances of trade union involvement in community organisation, though Alexandra was arguably a model.

The ANC also responded to the decline in the township revolt by raising the slogans of 'people's power' and 'people's education' in place of 'ungovernability'. It presented this as a further step on a triumphant road to liberation, rather than as a response to the problems of 'ungovernability'.

Some activists from the trade union left were able to play a very important role as the working-class wing of 'people's power', attempting to ensure that 'people's power' was democratically grounded in the people and not a cover under which one or another factor served its own interests or pursued its own ends. 'Popular justice', for instance, was made both more just and more popular than the ad hoc courts which had fingered collaborators and sentenced them to 'the necklace'.

Organisations like the Alexandra Action Committee represented wonderful ex-

amples of working-class power which will provide an inspiration for the struggles to follow. But major problems were looming.

First, state repression in the townships grew far worse. In May 1986 the Crossroads squatter camp was razed to the ground. The next month a new, national, state of emergency was declared.

On the surface, at least, most township organisations collapsed under the pressure, including the finest examples of 'people's power' like the Alexandra Action Committee. Militants like Moses Mayekiso were arrested or detained, while the state set up its own Joint Management Committees under the military to govern and push new resources into the impoverished communities.

The trade union left made the most of 'people's power' — except perhaps in areas like the Eastern Cape where its isolation from township protest left its fingers badly burned — but did not confront the limits of the approach as a whole. The idea of 'liberated zones' was a myth born out of initial gains by the popular movement and the initial slowness of the state to react. It was not backed by military force. The ANC's armed forces remained for the most part far from the clutches of the South African Defence Force.

Dual power in this context is necessarily a temporary state of affairs. It must either secure a new accommodation with the state, or overthrow the state, or fall. In the absence of forces to overthrow the state, and in the absence of a national organ capable of winning a new accommodation with the state — for example, democratically-based local authorities and education authorities, the freezing of rents, adequate financing of local authorities by the state, etc — it was a matter of time before dual power fell.

Second, the trade union movement, which had been partially insulated from the full brunt of state repression, was under increasing pressure in the face of unemployment, inflation, vigilante attacks and foreign disinvestment at the workers' expense. As the township revolt declined in 1986, strikes reached record levels which were then exceeded in 1987.

Newly-organised workers in the mines, railways and municipal services flexed their muscles. Older-organised workers fought for a 'living wage'. Often, however, the unions have had to retreat. The miners' strike was defeated. The July 1986 stay-away against the state of emergency was a flop.

Any defeat for the trade unions hits the trade union left hardest, and it would be totally wrong for the left to take any heart from the difficulties which the more populist union leaders, like Cyril Ramaphosa of the NUM, got into.

As the township revolt declined, the ANC started to put more and more resources and energy into strengthening its position in the unions. One expression of this was its campaign to get union after union to adopt the ANC's Freedom Charter.

Those people, like the left in the shopworkers' union CCAWUSA, who obstructed the populists, found themselves on the receiving end of a classic Stalinist stitch-up. Critics of the ANC received dark threats and strong hints that they had been given 'a friendly warning...'

Some forces on the left tried to respond sensibly to this populist offensive. The 130,000 strong metal and car workers' union NUMSA refused to reject the Freedom Charter point blank. They backed the document as a minimum democratic programme, but also raised the question of a workers' programme and of the need for working-class leadership.

However, there were weaknesses in NUMSA's approach. Talk of the Charter being realisable only under socialism was confusing, especially as the mainstream ANC interpretation is that the Charter is *not* a socialist document and a broad multi-class alliance is needed for its implementation.

Further, many in NUMSA tended to confuse working-class leadership with leadership by the trade unions. That doesn't go far enough. A working-class political organisation — a party — is needed to ensure working-class leadership over the liberation movement, especially when the populists who are not committed to working-class socialism are so well organised.

> The trade union left chose the road of 'union unity' and 'disciplined alliances' with the popular movement *instead* of building its own political wing.

A choice faces the left in the unions now. Either they will follow through and develop everything that is positive in the FOSATU experience and in COSATU. They will develop that 'independent working-class politics' that has been so much talked about but more rarely defined. Or they will let the populist politics of the ANC dominate completely.

The liberal capitalists whom the ANC would like to draw into an anti-apartheid alliance are bitter enemies of the working class. And the South African Communist Party's 'second', 'socialist' stage of the revolution would be a Stalinist hell, nothing to do with democratic socialism.

So how can the left face up to this challenge?

First, there appears to be a problem of organisation within the trade union left itself. At the recent COSATU congress, the populists were well organised and well prepared. They arrived with their speeches already typed up. The left, in contrast, was in disarray. NUMSA failed to get a seconder for its resolution on political policy. This disarray obviously needs to be remedied.

Secondly, the left in the unions has had to look to and mobilise its allies outside the unions. This is a very positive development, since the battle inside COSATU against populism is a matter of central importance to the Marxist left as a whole.

Third, there has been a lot of talk of the need to 'build the revolutionary party', but no attempt really to build in practice a party for workers, by workers, and of workers which would link up with broad forces on the left of the unions to create a working-class pole of attraction in the liberation movement. The absence of a broad working-class political forum, in which Marxists would operate and seek to gain influence and leadership, has severely weakened the working-class movement, but can be remedied.

Finally, the limitations of 'people's power' make it urgent for the left to address strategic questions critically, in order to consolidate and defend the workers' movement.

For example, we believe that COSATU's living wage campaign could be strengthened by combining realistic and winnable demands on management for a real living wage for the best organised with a campaign aimed at the state for a legally enforceable *minimum* wage for the less well organised workers.

In the wake of attacks on trade unionists already waged by vigilantes, state police, mine police and homelands police, and the bosses' attempt to drive home their advantage after the miners' defeat, COSATU's calls for self-defence squads and solidarity action have become all the more urgent to translate into practice.

In the townships, some very hard rethinking is required if the extraordinary breadth and persistence of the rent boycott is to be translated into lasting gains beyond the material benefit of not paying rent in the current period.

Neville Alexander, writing in *Azania Worker*, has pointed to the direction which some of that re-thinking should take.

"Today the policy and ethos of non-collaboration is so integral to our struggle for national liberation and emancipation that any hint even of talks with the present government raises the political temperature particularly of the youth and of organised black workers. I hope you will not see this last statement of mine as an easy cop-out if I ask: does this mean that the entire liberation movement is heading for the same cul-de-sac as the Non-European Unity Movement did, or is there another way?"

Whatever may be the appropriate strategies for the left to develop, it needs a democratic forum and a spirit of open critical debate to develop them in. ●

Black gold, white profits

The recently ended strike was not the first great struggle on the South African mines. Indeed, mining has been central to the development of South African capitalism, and of apartheid.

The past has vital lessons for today. But often the past has to be rescued from mythology and "official history".

In this three-part article, Bob Fine, co-author of a forthcoming book on the workers' and popular movement in South Africa, looks at the history of the miners' struggle, and explodes some of the myths.

The mine owners: divide, rule and profit

The new democratic order has to address itself to the transfer of ownership, control and direction of the economy as a whole...This (could be done...) hand in hand with true business patriots of this land... It is in this area that the importance of NUM, of COSATU, of all relevant labour movements in joint consultation with the business sector cannot be over-emphasised...The government has gone out of its way to discourage business and labour solidarity, as seen in its hysterical reaction to big business's attempt to communicate with Lusaka. *(Winnie Mandela, keynote speech to the NUM Congress, March 1987, five months before the start of the largest miners' strike in South African history.)*

"Nationalise the mines under workers' control!" *NUM poster produced after the Kinross disaster in which 177 miners died..*

Those who believe that the great mining houses of South Africa might serve as liberal allies in the fight against apartheid may be right in part, but they should not forget the role played by the mine owners in brutally exploiting workers from the inception of the gold mines in 1886 to this day, in the repression of all expression of worker grievance, and in building the state system of racism in South Africa which culminated in apartheid. As many commentators have rightly observed, racism and the exploitation of labour in the mines have been intimately connected in the history of South Africa. If it is true these days — a big 'if' — that racism is less useful for the exploitation of labour in the mines, we should not forget the multiple threads which link the mine owners to apartheid willy nilly; nor should we forget that if the mine owners wish to lessen the effect of racism in the mines and in the wider society, then it is only to perfect their system of exploitation in other ways. The mine owners will make concessions, but only if they are forced to by the 'black gold', the workers who labour for others to profit.

The divisions between black and white miners had their origins not just in the colonial relations between black and white introduced by the Portugese, Dutch and British, but also in their respective relations to the productive process. The mine owners did not simply inherit racism, they reproduced and intensified it on a far larger and more systematic scale. With the discovery of diamonds and then gold in 1886, vast numbers of black men were forced into the mines to perform the unskilled work of digging the ore (or 'lashing'), taking the ore to the surface ('tramming') and then moving the ore to the processing plant. White miners were brought into the mines as skilled workers — imported from Cornwall, Wales, Australia, etc. — to sink the deep shafts, fit the pipes and pumps, instal the lifts, operate the drilling machines, perform the blasting, extract the gold from the ore and manage the labour process as a whole. The mine owners did not create the racial division of labour, but they developed it to new depths. The idea that capital was merely the innocent party as far as racism was concerned, adapting to the imperatives of a racist state, is complete nonsense.

Before the First World War, conditions even for white miners were very bad. The great killer underground was a disease of the lungs called silicosis, caused by breathing in the dust from the drilling. The average white rock driller could hope to live only five years. He died at an average age of 37 years. When skilled miners returned home to Britain in the First World War, most were to cough themselves to death in agony. Whites were privileged over Africans, but suffered brutally as workers at the hands of the owners. The owners were simply not prepared to pay the price of installing safety equipment. Working life was no bed of roses for white miners.

For African miners, conditions were still worse. The mines needed vast numbers of unskilled workers and its hunger for labour could never be satisfied in a country where the colonial conquest of Africans had only just been completed, where the resistance of Africans was such that in one form or another most still held onto some land, and where the incipient agricultural working class was tied to the land of the white farmers as labour-tenants and prevented by law from moving away. The mineowners used their resources to the full. At first they sent out their own recruiting agents to bribe and coerce chiefs and headmen to send their young men to the mines. They made deals with the colonial powers to the North, especially the Portuguese, to send men down. They used their own troops to force Africans off the land — by taxation, expulsion and restriction of access. They impelled the British government to invade the independent Boer Republics, where the gold was found, to impose a modern state capable of supporting the mine owners' hunger for black labour and pretended they did so as a civilising mission, even as they instituted the first concentration camps for Afrikaner farmers and their families.

Today, the mine owners express their willingness to phase out slowly the migrant labour system and declare that it no longer suits their purposes. In reality the mine owners from the earliest years were unenthusiastic about migrant labour: transport, the loss of experienced workers, the unpredictability of finding new labour, were all costly. Migrant

Photo: IDAF Report

labour was forced on the mineowners by the workers. The resistance of Africans to working in the mines was such that the mineowners were compelled against their will to grant fixed contracts — at first of about 7 months, then 10 months, then 12 months, as the owners got the upper hand — at the end of which the African could return to his land. The owners' preference was for a permanent workforce, but it could not be achieved on account of what Hobsbawm has called the 'primitive rebellion' of Africans against the slavery of wage labour on the mines. The idea that migrant labour was introduced as the ultimately rational form of securing cheap and docile labour was an ex post facto rationalisation of some Marxists. It is by no means obvious, for example, that the migrant labour system was any cheaper for the owners that the employment of men, women and children on the mines, as occured in Britain.

It was not so much migrant labour that the owners wanted — though they turned it to their own advantage as best they could — but rather rightless, unfree labour. To impose discipline on African workers and prevent them from leaving, the owners locked them into compounds, sowed tribal divisions between them, imposed private policemen and 'boss-boys' (or 'indunas') over them, built prisons within the compounds, held back their wages till the end of their contract, fined them for not fulfilling their quotas, forced them to buy at the company store, starved them of nutritional food, used the Pass Laws — originally intended to tie labour tenants to the land — to prevent their movement and the Masters and Servants Laws to back their discipline within the labour process. As black workers died in droves — from pneumonia, meningitis, intestinal infections, scurvy, silicosis, TB and accidents — so the hunger of the mineowners for more black labour and for more control over black labour was compounded and met by the state. The wages of black miners were miniscule, in absolute terms and in relation to whites (particularly after, for example, the 'loafer ticket' system of depriving black miners of their day's wage when a quota of work was not performed had taken its toll). When the mines re-opened after the Boer War and Africans fiercely rebelled against returning to the mines, the owners indentured some 100,000 Chinese workers to satisfy their craving for unfree labour, who were paid even lower than the Africans. After resistance by the Chinese workers and an outcry in Britain against slave labour, the Chinese were sent home to the last living man.

The 'Randlords' who owned the gold mines came from the monopoly which had won control of the diamond mines, De Beers. Under the control of Cecil Rhodes, who became Prime Minister of the Cape in 1890, it personified the link between mining capital and the state in South Africa. The Randlords also came directly from British capital based in London. The small firms were soon pushed out, the remaining monopolies formed a cartel in 1887 called the Chamber of Mines, and the pickings were enormous. Rhodes' personal income at the time was £400,000 a year. The City of London's streets were paved with the gold of black and white labour, thanks to the repatriation of profits.

As the workers dug for money and the bosses in both Britain and South Africa expropriated what they dug out of the ground, the whole massive affair — which revolutionised the face of South Africa in its every aspect — appeared as the civilising mission of the great entrepreneur. As the President of the Chamber of Mines put it in 1912:

"A course of six to twelve months on the mines is the best education for natives. Here they can learn the value of discipline, regularity and the ways of the white man....Outside of the special reserves, the ownership of the land must be in the hands of the white race. The surplus of young men must earn their living by working for a wage...Thorough and general eviction of natives from private property through the country would effectually dispose of labour troubles as it would force upon the market the excess population and thus create a floating population of native labourers dependent upon it for its support...That the native is grossly overpaid is undeniable."

Well, the businessmen were less mystified by their own civilising mission than the politicians whose job it was in part to mystify.

To this day the mineowners like Anglo-American disclaim responsibility for racism in South Africa. It is true they did not invent it, did not create it. But they did perfect it into a weapon of modern capital and a source of great wealth for the few and of terrible slavery for the many. The miners have been the direct victims of this system, though its victims are to be found much further afield, not least among the women left on the reserves to eke out a living dependent on their absent man's pitiful wage. But the miners have not only been victims, but also fighters●

White and black divide and lose: the defeat of the miners 1920-22

1987 is certainly not the first time that African mineworkers have taken concerted strike action. We have to go back almost 70 years to 1920 to see the first major strike of African miners. Two years later in 1922 there was the huge strike of white mineworkers, known as the Rand Revolt. Even these were not the first strikes of white and black miners. The strikes of 1920 and 1922 were all heroically fought by workers against the might of mining capital and the state. They were all lost with terrible consequences not only for black miners but for the working class movement as a whole. In this historical sketch I wish to draw what seems to me to be the most important lesson from these class struggles: the absolutely disastrous effect of racism and chauvinism within the labour movement.

Rapidly in the years before the First World War black miners learnt the skills originally possessed by whites alone. At the same time, the demand for skilled labour declined as the construction of mines was completed and as the introduction of new technology — particularly the jackhammer drill in the First World War — undermined traditional crafts. White miners took on an increasingly supervisory and managerial role, as black miners performed most of the dirty and dangerous work underground. When skilled white miners went on strike in 1907, the bosses used unskilled Afrikaners to keep the mines running. By 1917 there were as many Afrikaners as English-speaking miners, proof of the artificiality of the racial division of labour as far as skills were concerned. More and more the whites were skilled in name alone but not in fact; more and more the blacks were skilled in fact but never in name.

The skilled white immigrants had brought with them their traditions of craft unionism, based on control of access to skills. Organised as carpenters, engineers, etc. they used their power as skilled workers to raise their wages, secure paid holidays, win compensation for accidents and disease, etc. Skill rather than race was the basis of their exclusivity. As the old skills waned and black miners learnt the skills of deep-level mining, the bosses began to attack the white unions. They tried to reduce their wages (this led to a successful strike in 1897), they replaced them with semi-skilled Afrikaner workers at lower rates of pay, they substituted black labour at rock-bottom black wages.

The response of the skilled workers was to move toward industrial unionism, embracing all workers in the industry — so long as they were white. At one level this was a positive move, from craft exclusivity to an industrial base of organisation. At another level, it was a move from reliance on skill as a basis of negotiation with employers to race. This embrace of racism within the trade union movement was reinforced by the unions' turn to political parties to support them against the bosses, parties committed to white supremacy and the protection of white workers. The English-speaking miners turned to the thoroughly segregationist Labour Party (committed to sending Blacks back to the reserves and 'Asiatics' back to India) and

the Afrikaans-speaking miners to the Afrikaner National Party. The white unions turned to negotiating job reservation based on a job colour bar to protect them against undercutting by the bosses.

In 1907 the bosses instructed white miners to supervise three black drillers instead of two. This meant a shift in the ratio of black to white miners and an increase in the death-giving dust in the shafts. 4000 white miners went on strike. The bosses introduced scab unskilled Afrikaner labour (who were taught the job by Blacks and Chinese). The government called out the army and beat the miners back to work. The bosses made it clear that they did not need the costly white miners as they did before. The Smuts government, to assuage the danger of white working class discontent, introduced statutory job reservation on the mines to exclude Black and Coloured workers from skilled labour. The bosses still substituted Black for white, but not at skilled levels of pay.

In 1913 some 19,000 white miners went on strike again demanding the recognition of their union and the right of their union to negotiate. The mines were aggressively picketed and scabs beaten up. The government sent in the troops but also promised the workers that they would get their jobs back, with an eight hour day and union recognition. When the miners went back to work, the government reneged on its promises. It banned picketing and outdoor meetings, arrested trade union leaders and sent some back to England. During the First World War, however, when profits were high (war brought death to millions and super-profits to the Randlords), skilled labour was scarce, the trade union leaders declared their support for the war and desire to collaborate with the bosses in a common war effort, and black miners were rumbling with discontent, the Chamber of Mines recognised the white industrial union (the SAIF) and agreed to a so-called 'status quo agreement', guaranteeing that for every 17 black miners they would employ at least two whites at skilled wages.

Before the war, black miners did not usually have the power to strike, but they did fight back 'informally' — through refusing to return to the mines after their period back home, through desertion (at one mine in 1908, 1236 men out of 2000 deserted), sabotage, go-slows, playing dumb, etc. But there were strikes of black miners recorded between 1896 and 1902, then a period of quiescence when their bargaining power was weakened by the import of Chinese labour, and then a major strike in 1913. 13,000 black miners struck for three days, demanding to know 'what are our laws about our pay', until they were forced back to work by the army. The signs were growing, however, that black miners were organising and fighting as workers.

After the war, the price of gold went down, the price of machinery went up, and the mineowners attacked the workers. In 1918 black miners boycotted the compound stores in protest against rising prices. Real wages were reduced. The same year in Johannesburg white municipal workers went on strike for a 25% pay rise and won. Black municipal workers, the 'bucket boys', followed suit for sixpence a day rise and lost. They were sentenced to two months hard labour. The same year, too, the first African trade union in South Africa was formed, the Industrial Workers of Africa. It was set up by the largely white International Socialist League, which had split from the Labour Party during the war in opposition to its chauvinism, and was to form the nucleus for the formation of the South African Communist Party. In Sotho and Zulu the IWS declared: 'There is only one way to freedom, black workers. Unite as workers, unite. Forget the things that divide you. Let there be no talk of Basuto, Zulu or Shangaan. You are all labourers.

The strikes of 1920 and 1922 shook the confidence of the mine owners but they were decisively beaten, because white racism within the labour movement divided white from black.

Let labour be your common bond'. The Transvaal Native Congress and the African People's Organisation called at one point for a general strike, though they backed off.

Unrest in the mines continued. A boycott here, a strike there, a protest march against inadequate food. The Chamber raised black wages marginally. The IWA continued to organise. In 1920, when two Zulu miners were arrested for organising a strike, this was the trigger that led to the strike of some 71,000 black miners on 21 mines for 12 days. It paralysed the industry. The army was rushed in and beat and shot the workers down the shafts. The Chamber, however, was worried at the spectre of organisation and politicisation among the black miners. It tightened discipline. It introduced small reforms in the conditions of life. It decided to give more of the semi-skilled jobs to a relatively elite group of black miners and so loosen the colour bar. It was this move in part that led to the white miners strike of 1922.

In 1921 the Chamber dropped the wages of many white miners and laid off many more. It abandoned the status quo agreement. It also withdrew recognition from the SAIF. This was particularly threatening in the context of a growing 'poor white' problem as Afrikaner immigrants poured from the country to the town. In January 1922 the union declared a general strike among white miners. The strike was bitterly fought for two months. The army was brought in, workers were shot, aeroplanes dropped bombs upon them. Leadership of the strike moved away from SAIF to a rank and file 'Action Committee'. Socialist ideas were rife; the Red Flag flew; the strikers armed themselves and formed 'strike commandos' (reminiscent of the Boer war); they held 50 policemen captive for three days; they physically pulled scabs out of the mines. Communist Party members were on the strike committee.

The strike had a revolutionary edge to it. But it was also imbricated with racist ideas. The goal of the strike was to preserve the racist status quo agreement. The organisation of the strike was limited to whites. Even among revolutionaries, the confusion of racist and socialist ideas was marked by the slogan: 'Workers of the world unite for a white South Africa'. As the strike progressed, the racist element grew stronger. Many of the 'commandos' were Afrikaner nationalists, not subject to the discipline of the Action Committee, and directed their violence against black miners. As the industrial muscle of white miners proved inadequate to stop the mines, instead of turning to their black fellow-workers, the white miners turned to the white racist political parties for support against the bosses. They turned to a Pact between the Labour Party and the Afrikaner Nationalists on a 'civilised' (ie. white) labour programme.

The strike was lost. The wages of white miners were cut 25-50%. Many lost their jobs. Apart from black workers, white workers were industrially weak. Politically, however, they were strong enough to use their vote to oust Smuts and bring in the Pact Government. The Afrikaner Nationalists preached 'anti-imperialism' in opposition to the power of 'foreign' capital. The Labour Party preached protection of white workers against the bosses. The Pact government was thoroughly bourgeois. Its law and order programme promised to rid the country of communists and agitators. It introduced statutory job reservation for whites on the mines. It introduced the 'civilised labour' policy giving job preference to whites. It created a corporatist relation with bureaucratic white unions and hammered black unions. It was to prove a government which gave preference to white workers over black but which fiercely suppressed any working class activism, white or black.

The strikes of 1920 and 1922 shook the confidence of the mineowners but they were decisively beaten, because white racism within the labour movement divided white from black. In the newly-formed Communist Party there were marvellous revolutionaries (like Bunting and Jones) committed to the fight against racism and the organisation of black workers. But even the CP had not broken from its White Labour origins. On the one hand, it called for black-white unity on the mines but it also called for support of the racist

Status Quo Agreement. It asked black workers to support job reservation excluding them. It failed to combat the racism of the commandos. Until it actually came to power, it characterised the racist Pact of Labour and Nationalists as an 'anti-imperialist united front'. It failed to support moves in the SAIF to open its ranks to blacks.

The CP made terrible mistakes in pandering to racism. It might not have been able to change the course of the strike — who knows? — but it could have offered a beacon of enlightenment for black and white workers to guide themselves by. The CP at the time, however, was an essentially youthful party, in the process of breaking from its parent body. It was honest, capable of learning from its mistakes, finding its feet in a difficult world in which the black working class was itself in its infancy. Its mistakes were the mistakes of youth. Regrettably, its later mistakes, when the black miners once again struck in force in 1946, were no longer the mistakes of youth but of a cynical maturity under the watchful eye of Moscow●

"We on the mines are dead men already": the 1946 strike

The mining industry is one of South Africa's biggest and most important industries. The value of its production was £66 million in 1939. It employed 480,139 workers; 55,008 European, 850 Indians and 424,281 Africans...In 1939 348,000 African workers helped to produce gold valued over £54 million which gave the shareholders a proft of more than £19 million. But they received an average wage of £2.17.1 per month, 685 died of accidents and 1498 died of disease during 1939. Every year thousands more die of miners' pthisis contracted on the mines....*Moses Kotane, 1941***

The African Mineworkers Union (AMWU) was established in 1941 as part of a wider upturn in working class organisation and consciousness which had taken off in the mid-1930s and reached its peak in the course of the Second World War. There had been an attempt to organise black miners in 1930 by a veteran Communist, T W Thibedi; when he was expelled from the Party during one of its Third Period purges, he appears to have carried on organising without help until at least 1936. In the late 1930s the Trotskyist trade unionist, Max Gordon, attempted to organise black miners until his internment for anti-war activities in 1940. In 1940 the Communist Party addressed itself finally to the organisation of the miners, urged on by veteran trade unionist Ray Alexander: "It is not impossible. It can be done. It must be done", she implored.

The failure of the CP to address the organisation of black miners between 1936 and 1939 was related to its Popular Front policy of seeking an anti-fascist alliance with three groups: the officialdom of the white labour movement, the Non-European nationalist movements and so called Progressive Capital. None of these potential 'allies' was well disposed to the independent organisation of black workers. In 1939, however, the Hitler-Stalin Pact led to an immediate reorientation of the South African CP to an anti-war stance and freed the Party from the shackles of popular frontism. It denounced its erstwhile allies and was now open to organising black workers. A committee of 15 was set up to build the AMWU, which was dominated by CPSA members, but included two Trotskyists (also anti-war), Gordon and Koza. Most of the original members of the union were clerical workers, while the number of miners who joined was very small.

With the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the CP reverted to support for the Smuts government's war effort. In the field of trade unionism the Party took the view that strike action should be employed only as a last resort. Its analysis was based on a celebration of the Soviet Union: 'It stands for the freedom of workers and oppressed peoples of the world' and on the self-conscious subordination of class struggle to the Soviet Union's war effort. The Party called for 'all-out production for victory', lobbying the government for reform to 'strengthen the government in its war effort'. It was in this period that the CP forged an alliance with the ANC on the basis of support for the war, collaboration with the government and opposition to industrial action. Thus the CP took over the AMWU in alliance with the ANC; the Trotskyists were expunged and damned.

For the black miners — white miners, though by no means all white industrial workers, were by then a lost cause — the result of this externally dictated political approach was that, in spite of frequent wildcat strikes from at least 1942 and rank and file calls for a national strike from 1944, the union witheld official action until after the war was over. Even then the reluctance of the union leadership was only overcome as a result of irresistible pressure from below.

In 1942-3 there were a series of local stoppages on the mines, serious enough to lead to the appointment of the Mines Native Wages Commission, better known as the Lansdowne Commission. The African Mineworkers Union welcomed the appointment of the Commission 'as a token of earnestness on the part of the government' and put the miners' grievances to the Commission. It was a long list, concerning starvation wages, the contract labour system, the compounds described as 'sleeping coffins', long hours, accidents, assaults by white supervisors, and centrally, the lack and poor quality of food. The union also complained about the refusal of the Chamber of Mines to recognise its existence. Its policy was to desist from any action, pending the Commission's report, but it energetically built up the membership of the union from 1827 members in 1943 to around 25,000 in 1944 (this was still only 8% of the total force of 300,000).

Calls for strike action at the 1944 conference of the AMWU — made urgent by cuts in rations and severe food shortages — were met by the leadership under Marks with a further plea for patience, while it sought to have the findings of the Lansdowne Commission accepted by the government. Basner recalled two years later that:

"...over 1000 delegates...were present. They wanted...to strike there and then and on the other hand you had officials who wanted to know whether we had exhausted all channels of negotiation for coming to an amicable settlement."

After an exhaustive examination of the determinants of wage scales in the mines lasting more than a year — which was highly revealing about the dire conditions suffered by migrant workers — the Lansdowne Commission recommended a small cost of living increase, a boot allowance, 150% overtime rates and a minimum wage for surface workers. It did not meet the wage demands of the workers and left the compound system, the pass laws, the colour bar, white domination in the workplace and the illegality of black trade unionism unscathed. 'Ordinary mine natives', the Report read, 'coming as they did from the reserves and the tribal areas...had not reached the development necessary for trade unionism'.

In 1945 *Inkululeko* announced that 'the African Mineworkers Union is shortly to meet the Prime Minister in Pretoria. The union leaders will put forward the demands of African workers on the mines for more pay in accordance with the Mine Native Wages Commission, and for the right of the union to hold meetings of the workers — at present prevented by regulation 1425'. The Chamber refused to negotiate with the AMWU, ignored all correspondence with the union and was victimising its organisers. The union also met with total rejection from the Acting Prime Minster, Hofmeyr. With further swingeing cuts in rations (30% in 1944) there were demonstrations, hunger strikes, work stoppages and seizure of stores, organised by ad hoc Workers Committees, demanding more and better food. The union, however, continued in its efforts to negotiate a settlement without official industrial action. J B Marks commented on the union's ability to temper its members' anger when he told

a mass Emergency Conference of the AMWU that 'the mine officials and compound managers admit that our meetings encouraged discipline amongst the workers. Far fewer cases of such actions as the stoning of compound managers' houses have occurred since these meetings were in progress'.

In January 1946, the AMWU warned that 'the African miners are saturated with grievances and unless something is done immediately to ameliorate their conditions, there is sure to be a series of sporadic and spontaneous revolts'. Food shortages caused situations of grave immediate discontent. On one mine 'the mine manager told the workers that there was not enough food owing to the draft', to which the miners replied by 'raiding the compound kitchen and (ate) all the food'. The government put up posters in the mine compounds, 'explaining to the Natives the reasons for the shortages of meat, milie meal and kaffir beer, and pointing out that such deficiencies arose through no fault on the part of the Mining Industry'. (ICM Annual Report, 1945). But the workers were not assuaged. Majoro and Marks warned that 'a most serious situation is emerging' and 'not only on the crown mines. At Spring mines, for example, dissatisfaction has been aggravated by the recent interference of the police against the workers, when they expressed their resentment at ration cuts'.

> "The problem was that class politics were subordinated to constitutional protest until it was too late".

In April of 1946, the AMWU demanded a R1 minimum per shift for black workers. The union addressed four letters to the Chamber of Mines stating its demands. The letters went unanswered except for one declaring that 'the matter was receiving attention'. As spontaneous strikes broke out, the union issued a statement declaring that the strikers were 'not acting on the advice of the leadership' and that 'despite the difficulties placed in our way by both employers and government, our organiser succeeded in contacting those workers and impressing upon them the need for discipline and restraint'. Even the Native Representative Council was unanimous in its resolve to press upon the government the urgent need to recognise black trade unions under the Industrial Conciliation Act.

Finally, it was the spontaneous action of the workers which forced the union to support them. On Sunday 4 August 1946 some 1000 delegates attended a meeting at which the decision to call a strike was taken. According to Diamond, the unknown miner from the floor who demanded the strike said: 'It is better to die here than to go home empty-handed', to which an old miner shouted: 'We on the mines are dead men already'. Simons and Simons write that 'the proceedings were widely published but mine owners and government refused to credit Africans with the capacity to organise concerted action on a large scale in defiance of the elaborate system of surveillance, intimidation and espionage that operated in the compounds'. But it was apparently not only the government and the mine owners who doubted the efficacy of the strike call. In evidence at his trial, charged with sedition for, among other things, engineering the strike, Communist Party member Bram Fisher told of how he had decided to go on holiday during August 1946 believing that no major crisis would occur. He conceded — though we should be cautious of evidence drawn from a state trial — that the Communist Party had been caught off guard and had not expected the strike to occur.

The union took a cautious approach to the strike. As J B Marks put it when discussing his role:

"I explained to them what a strike would involve, sacrifices would have to be made, to refrain from falling for any provocation, to be non-violent. To do nothing on the day of the strike but to remain in their rooms."

The strike began on 12 August with some 70,000 workers participating. Support from CNETU did not come quickly. Only on the afternoon of the second day of the strike did the Council of Non-European Trade Unions meet to pass a resolution that if the Chamber of Mines was not prepared to open negotiations with the African Mine Workers Union by 15 August — the fourth day of the strike — they would call a sympathy strike. By the fourth day more than half the mineworkers had already returned to work. Nabuth Mokgatle, a member of CNETU's executive, provides an insight into the lack of planned support for the strike when he writes that 'the day before the strike I was summoned to be in Johannesburg to plan what was to be done to see the strike through...The meeting had to find ways of contacting the workers and providing them with money and food; and found that none of this had been planned'.

With limited general support and a hesitant leadership, the miners were exposed to ruthless state action. The union offices were raided and its leaders arrested. An attempt by workers to stage a sit-down strike at the rockface was stopped by the police with considerable brutality — the miners were baton-charged and driven up stope by stope to the surface. Similarly, a march by workers to the office of the Chief Native Commissioner in Johannesburg was dispersed by the police with great force. At least 12 Africans were killed and some 1200 injured.

The strike was defeated. The miners failed to win their demands. The miners' union collapsed and was not to reappear in any force until the formation of the NUM in 1982, 36 years later. The defeat of the miners also represented the final and major blow to the workers' movement as a whole in the 1940s. What went wrong?

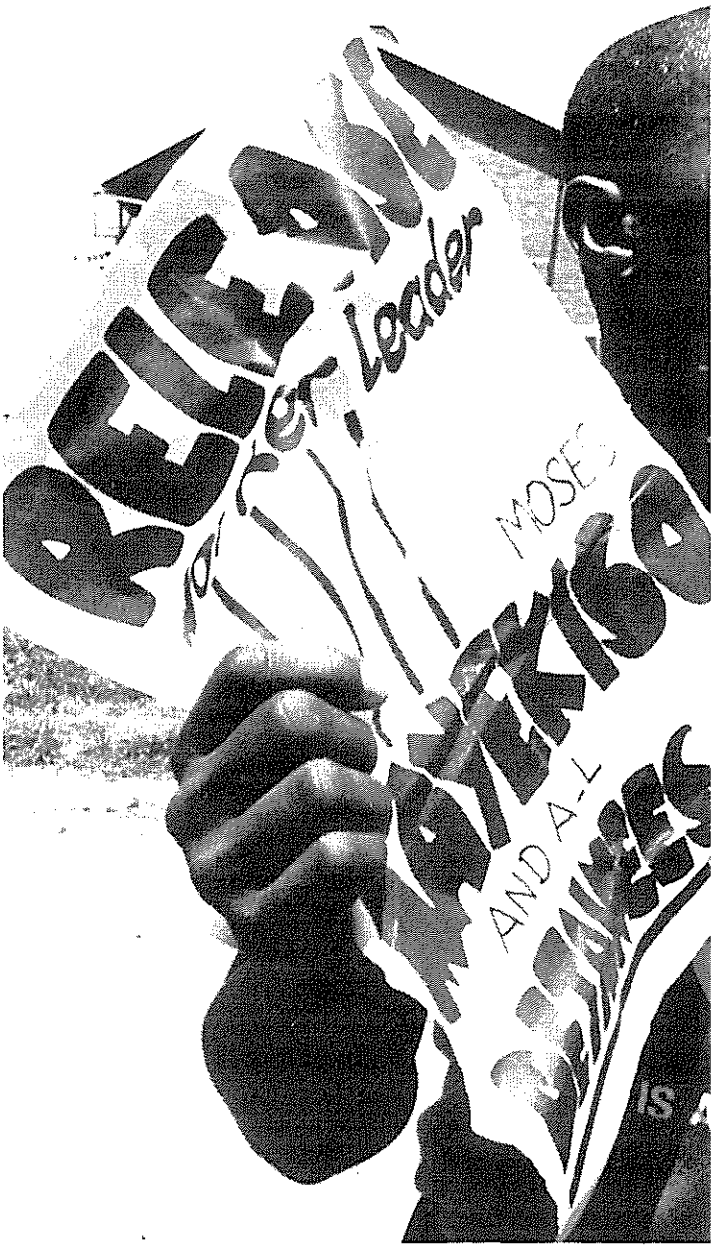
There can never be a guarantee that with a different leadership or strategy victory could have been won. We can only guess at what might have been. If the strike had been called during the war, when the state was relatively weak and the workers relatively strong; if it had linked up with the industrial and community struggles waged by black and sometimes white workers during the war; if the union had not been hemmed in by the policy of legalism and support for the war at the expense of industrial action pursued by its political masters; if the union had actively prepared for strike action and not waited for the state to prepare itself for the onslaught; if CNETU had not fallen apart as a result of the anti-strike policy it too pursued under CP-ANC leadership; how might the history of South Africa have been different.

As it was, not only were the miners defeated. It was worse than that. The idea of an independent workers' movement waging a socialist struggle against the state suffered with them. The name of socialism was discredited by the CP. The radicals turned to one or other form of nationalism. The Communist Party itself adopted the banner of African nationalism. The 'unmaking' of the working class movement has subsequently been idealised by CP historians. Witness the words of Dan O'Meara:

"Despite its apparent failure, the strike was a milestone in South Africa's social and political development....It profoundly affected the direction and thrust of African opposition.... The strike and the state's response illustrated the futility of constitutional protest pursued so long by the ANC....The purely class organisation of the African proletariat began to decline as proletarian discontent was channelled increasingly into political opposition in the ANC.... The aftermath of the strike saw the merging of most elements of African opposition into a class alliance articulating a radical nationalist ideology.'

The 'problem' with the 1946 mineworkers' strike, however, lay not in the fact that it was organised along 'purely class' lines. The problem was that class politics were subordinated to constitutional protest until it was too late, in the name of socialism, by the CP under external imperatives that had nothing to do with the needs of the trade union movement in South Africa. The instinctive class politics pursued by the miners themselves was made of sterner stuff. This is the tradition of revolt from which miners today should take heart●

A poem composed for the launch of COSATU, South Africa's 750,000-strong trade union federation, by Mi D'Dumo Hlatshwayo and Alfred Temba Qabula



Tears of

O'maker of all things
grief
assails you from all sides
each step forward you take
Brings emnity nearer
What is the nature of your sin?

In the factories
your enemy suffocates you
on this side; the bosses
on that the boss-boys[1]

Attackers and assailants
stalk you
from all chambers
and channels...
Permits and money
become the slogans
through which
they pounce on you
What is the nature of your sin?

Your labour power
has turned you
into prize-game
for the hunters of surplus
What is the nature of your sin?

In the buses
in the trains and taxis
you are the raw-meat,
the prey
for vultures
Are you not the backbone
of trade?
What is the nature of your sin?

Worker
your rulers
have dumped you
away from the cities,
Now all the misfits and orphans
of other nations
can suck you dry

Now
you are a nameless breed of animals
a stock of many numbers
and your suppressor's lust
to suck you dry
recognises neither day
nor night
What is the nature of your sin?

Your hand
has developed
a drunkard's tremble
it can no longer draw
straight lines
to steer you clear
between the law enforcers
and the bandits

Worker
are you not the economy's foundation?
are you not the engine
of development and progress?

Worker
remember
what you are:
you are the country's
foundation base and block

Oh maker of all things
the world over
worker
your capacity to continue loving
surprises me, its enormity
touches the Drakensberg mountains
What is then
the nature of your sin?

Your sin:
Can it be your power?
Can it be your blood?
Can it be your sweat?

They scatter you about
with their hippos
with their vans
and kwela-kwelas
with their teargas
you are butchered
by the products of your labour
the labour of your hands
these are the cries of the creator of all this
Cosatu
Woza msebenzi, woza
Cosatu, woza freedom[2]

Oh Cosatu
we workers
have travelled a long way here

Yes: we have
declared wars
on all fronts
for better wages

Yet,
victory eludes us.

We
have dared to fight back
even from the bottom of the earth
where we pull wagons-full of gold
through our blood.

We have come from the
sparkling kitchens
of our bosses.

We have arrived from the exhausting
tumult of factory machines.

Victory eludes us still!

Cosatu
here we are!
Heed our cry —
we have emerged
from all corners of this land
we have emerged
from all organisations.
We have emerged
from all
the country's nooks and crannies!

We say today
that
our hope is in your hands
We are ready.

We say:
Let your hands deliver us
from exploitation
Let our freedom be borne
Let our democracy be borne
Let our new nation be borne.

Cosatu
Stand up now with dignity
March forward
We are raising our clenched fists behind you

Behind us
we call into line
our ancestors in struggle
Maduna and Thomas Mbeki
Ray Alexander and Gana Makhabeni
JB Marks and hundreds more[3].

Where are you ancestors?
Lalelani and witness:
Here is the mammoth creature
you dreamed of

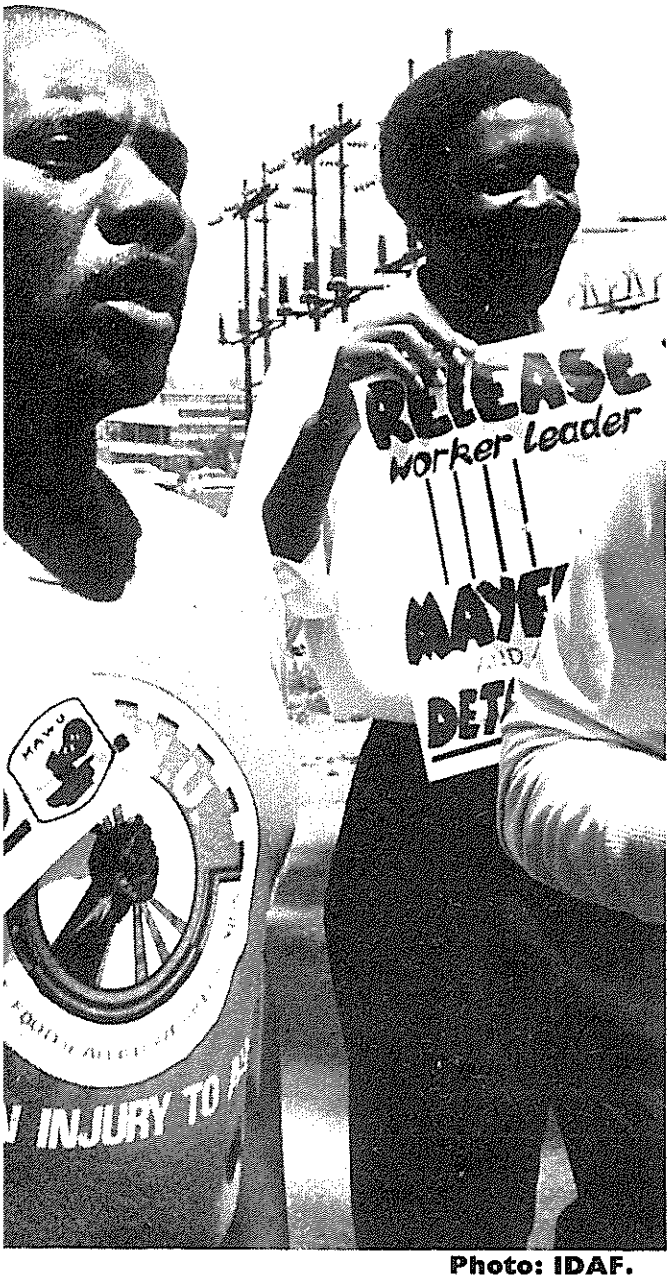


Photo: IDAF.

a creator

you wanted to create
the one you hoped for
Here is the workers'
freedom train!

t is made up of old wagons
epaired and patched up ox-
arts
olling on the road again
ack again
evived!
Once capsized by Champion
he wagon — once derailed
by Kadalie![4]

Here it rolls ahead
to settle accounts with the
oppressors
to settle accounts with the
exploiters.

Here it is:
the tornadosnake —
Kanyamba with
its floods!
its slippery torso!
Here it is: Cosatu
The spears of men
shall be deflected!

Here it is:
the tornadosnake of change!
Kanyamba,
the cataclysm
clamped for decades and
decades
by a mountain of rules.
the tornadosnake
poisoned throughout the
years
by ethnicity
and tribalisms.

Here is this mammoth
creature
which they mocked!
That it had no head
and certainly no teeth!

Woe unto you oppressor
Woe unto you exploiter
We have rebuilt its head
we lathed its teeth on our
machines.
The day this head rises
beware of the day these
teeth shall bite.

On that day:
mountains of lies shall be
torn to shreds
the gates of apartheid shall
burst asunder
the history books of
deception shall be thrown
out

Woza Ianga
Usuku
Woza Federation
Woza Freedom

Cosatu
Stop now
listen to our sound

You'll hear us sing
that the rulers
and employers
are sorcerers!

Do not smile
Do not dare disagree

If that was devoid of truth
Where is the ICU of the
1920s to be found?
Where is the FNETU of the
'30s to be found?
Where is the CNETU of the
'40s to be found?
and the others[5].

They emerged
they were poisoned
then
they faded!

Cosatu
Today be wise!

In the desert
only the fruit-trees
with long and sturdy roots
survive!

Learn that
and you shall settle accounts
with the oppressor
you shall settle accounts
with the exploiter
you shall settle accounts
with the racists.

Here is Cosatu
who knows no colour
Here then is our
tornadosnakeKanyamba

Helele[6]
Cosatu

Helele
workers of South Africa

Helele,
transport workers
Helele,
miners of wealth
Helele,
cleaners of the bosses'
kitchens
Helele,
builders of the concrete
jungle
Helele,
workers of South Africa.
Helele,
makers of all things.

Woza msebenzi! woza
Cosatu! woza freedom!

From SALB.

The authors of this piece are members of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (now called NUMSA) and the Durban Workers Cultural Local, a cultural group of workers who produce songs, plays and poems for, by and about the workers, their lives and their struggles.

1. Boss boys is a nickname for 'tribal' representatives or indunas who help control the miners in the migrant labour system.

2. 'Woza' — 'come'.

3. Maduna, Mbeki, Alexander, Makhabeni and J B Marks were all trade union activists in the '50s or earlier. J B Marks was secretary of the African mineworkers' union during the 1946 strike.

4. Kadalie and Champion were both leaders of the ICU, a trade union organisation of the 1920s which was actually in the main a rural movement. They fell out in obscure circumstances and the organisation collapsed.

5. The Federation of Non-European Trade Unions (FNETU) was a small body which managed to gain some foothold, particularly in the laundry industry, where some unity was established between black and white workers. This was done in the difficult conditions of depression during the '30s.

CNETU, the Council of Non-European Trade Unions, was founded in 1941. It grew against a backdrop of working-class militancy fuelled by the economical revival and the war. The federation became polarised between left and right. The Communist Party opposed strikes for most of the war, whereas the left, which included Trotskyists like Dan Khoza, Max Gordon, and the Workers International League, formed a left opposition called the Progressive Trade Union group in CNETU. The PTU was built out of a series of strikes by black workers which the SACP opposed.

6. 'Helele' — 'hail'.

Socialists face violence from state and Stalinists

A South African socialist active in the trade unions talked to Workers' Liberty about the obstacles in the way of building a workers' party to give direction to the struggle for liberation.

Why did the township revolt decline? For any revolutionary struggle to be sustained, there must be a programme. Otherwise you have just pure anarchy, chaos, mindless violence, in which anyone could be a victim. Anti-social elements that are bred by the system — the tsotsis, the local villains, the rogues, the rapists, the robbers — will take the opportunity to plunder, to completely distort the ideas of the struggle, and turn many people against us. We've seen that happening.

People were murdered. Workers were robbed. During the consumer boycott, for instance, it didn't matter whether you had bought your food at the local shop rather than the white-owned supermarket. Some of these thugs would just come along and say you bought it at the white shop and confiscate it.

If there is no clear programme, and no clear organisation which is creating events and in control of events, then the chances of sustaining a struggle in the townships are small.

The whole concept of ungovernability — making the townships ungovernable — was to a fair extent absurd. If you don't have the organisational mechanisms and resources to control events, the energy and militancy of workers will be dissipated. The energy of the oppressed in the townships will be useless. The killings in the townships will serve no purpose. The only victims will be the people in the townships themselves. The might of the state has not diminished. The military has not been weakened. They have come out of this much stronger. And the propaganda that they have been able to use is to show the complete aimlessness and loss of direction, with one group within a township killing another group. Black-on-black violence was a consequence of the misdirected strategy of ungovernability.

The trade union movement in its embryonic stages has been called on to perform tasks which are at this stage way beyond its ability. More than 80 per cent of the workers are still not in trade unions. And the 20% who are in trade unions are divided among right-wing trade unions, traditional conservative trade unions, and different shades within left-wing trade unionism. There is no homogeneity, there is no single line. The trade unions were not able to give a different direction to the township revolt. They were not formed to confront the state. The trade unions' first objective was to deal with issues in the factory for workers. The trade union is not a revolutionary organisation. It is essentially a reformist organisation. It is there to deal with issues of wages and conditions within the framework of capitalism. Its terms of reference are narrow. That is the trade unions' first priority: to get their act together, to build up their organisation.

The trade unions are the training ground and the school for working-class revolutionaries. But they are not directly the working class's instrument for revolution. If they were to confront a state as powerful as South Africa's they would be destroyed.

There has to be a double strategy. You have to give priority to the interests of workers in the factories, but not limit the understanding of workers. Otherwise you will be taking an economistic or syndicalist narrow view. In workers' education the links must be made to community struggles, and the workers in the trade union should be within the community struggles.

Workers are in the organisations of the community. They will take up campaigns which will be supported by the trade unions. The trade unions cannot physically lead that struggle, but the experience of organisation, and skills of leadership, of workers within a trade union, should be transferred to within the community so that the lead can be taken by working-class organisations.

We do not yet have a working-class party. We do not have a vanguard political party that has a clear, open commitment to socialism and a workers' charter.

The conditions are not conducive to the creation of a workers' party. For a workers' party to emerge on the scene, the leadership of that party would have to be very courageous. They would be eliminated by the Stalinists as soon as they showed themselves. They would be regarded as a third force in the political situation, and the ANC strives and attempts to claim for itself that it is the *only* organisation that represents the interests of the oppressed in South Africa. They strive for dominance, they strive for total monopoly and control over whatever happens in the country.

Any new emergent workers' party would be a threat to their power base. The Stalinists would eliminate the leadership of a workers' party. Already that sort of thing is taking place. Socialists are attacked and hounded and threatened and assaulted by the Stalinists.

Any attempt by workers and socialists to form a workers' party now would be suicidal.

The priority now is to build up a non-Stalinist left. There are non-Stalinist left groupings already in the country. We have to strengthen the base of the non-Stalinist left in the trade unions and in the community organisations, until the stage is reached where it is possible to form a workers' party and it is possible for socialists to openly declare their views rather than being in organisations which espouse socialist views but constantly back down because they are a threatened, scared minority.

A campaign is on at the moment to eliminate socialists. The Stalinists want to pave their way to take control, and they are not going to tolerate any opposition to their claims to monopoly control to the leadership of the oppressed and exploited.

The growth of the non-Stalinist left is dependent on the way they cooperate with each other. At the moment it is very difficult for the left in COSATU to move at all, because of the dominance of the Stalinists within COSATU. Anything that is not within the framework of the two-stage theory of revolution is regarded as counter-revolutionary, so some socialists in those unions just say nothing. They are just biding their time and waiting for the conditions to ripen when they can show themselves.

The COSATU left are a minority and paralyzed and incapable of leading a socialist struggle. The onus is now on the left outside COSATU to provide direction and to pave the way for the formation of a powerful socialist base. NACTU remains the only hope for the growth of the non-Stalinists to place socialism firmly on the agenda as a means to transform South African society under the control of the oppressed and exploited working class.

The latest big hype: 'The Untouchables' with Sean Connery

Big screen blues

What's wrong with movies? Why are so many of the big studios' major films so shoddy and artificial, compared with what the same studios turned out 40 years ago? Belinda Weaver condemns the megabuck blockbuster system.

If most films made in the West today are bad, it's because they are made to a formula. The formula is simple — big name stars, exotic locations, a hit song to promote the film, simple stories, directors who have already clocked up a number of hits, and massive advertising campaigns. These days the stories don't even have to be new, we're in the age of sequelitis. This summer, we've had Police Academy 4, a sequel to Jaws, a new Bond film. And that won't be the end of the sequels.

If that formula leaves you cold, bad luck. Because more and more, film makers are sticking to it, in the hope of making money. And making money is what it's all about. More than ever before, movies are dominated by crass, commercial considerations. The phenomenal success of films like Steven Spielberg's 'Star Wars' and 'E.T.' has changed the rules. Instead of financing a number of films and getting a modest return on each, film producers want to bankroll the blockbusters and mega hits alone. Smaller films are getting squeezed out.

There is nothing wrong with 'Star Wars' or 'E.T.', but sometimes they're not what you want to see. It's nice to have a choice. But increasingly, film producers want to be sure of their profits, so they go with the safest ideas, rather than take risks on something new. This explains the rash of remakes, sequels, or pale imitations of the latest blockbuster. The thinking behind it is — what could be safer than copying what's already made money?

This is why films come in waves. We've had teen movies (Breakfast Club, Pretty in Pink, St Elmo's Fire), sword and sorcery epics (Highlander, Excalibur), horror films (Aliens, which not only cashed in on sci-fi, but was also a sequel, Halloween, Jaws, (which is up to its 3rd sequel), then horror-films-with-tongue-in-cheek (Nightmare on Elm Street, Part 3, also a sequel).

We've been through fifties nostalgia with 'Back to the Future', 'Peggy Sue Got Married' and 'Absolute Beginners'. We've also had adventure flicks like 'Romancing the Stone' and 'Raiders of the Lost Ark'. And of course, we mustn't forget the innumerable movies that tried to cash in on the success of 'Star Wars'.

Spielberg has had a huge effect on film making.The megabucks generated by his successful films, 'Star Wars', 'ET' and 'Raiders' have changed Hollywood, which is still the place that puts up money for movies. When the potential profits for a big hit are as high as $100 million, producers scramble to get in on the action. Apart from income from movie theatres, successful films can earn a lot from video sales, foreign sales and product spin-offs — 'Star Wars' dolls, T- shirts, caps, books, games, ice creams, video games, toys, toothbrushes and toiletries were

everywhere for a while. That all adds profit to the movie. The wisdom now is go for the big one and let the rest 'find their audience'.

Movies have always been commercial, but this is something new. Because superprofits can be made, producers want to make them every time. They think lowest common denominator films are the key to success.

In the old days, the bulk of films in the West were made by Hollywood film studios. The studio heads were in movies for a buck alright, but they also wanted to make movies. They loved the world of movie making. Studio heads tried to hire good writers for scripts, they bought the classics and created stars for their roles. Directors, cameramen, all the enormous support staff necessary to make a motion picture, were kept under studio contract. Hollywood films then were commercial. They were expected to make money. Some of them were terrible, but by and large they were designed to please an audience. They had to try and please, because the public could make or break a film. People could afford to be more choosey back in the forties. There were more cinemas to go to, and programmes changed each week. People weren't dependent on just one nearby cinema as can happen nowadays.

If a film was bad, it failed. Word of mouth could kill it off, and there wasn't the vast spending on advertising that can pull people into a cinema for a film that doesn't really appeal to them, but which they feel they have to see because it's the one on everyone's lips. The audience then was huge. Most people went to the cinema once a week if not more often.

But that mass audience has declined dramatically. The movie going audience in Britain is less than 4% what it was at the end of 1945. That's a pretty serious drop. It isn't just TV or video, though these have had some effect of course. Lots of people have just got browned off with movies and have picked other ways to spend their time.

There still is a habit audience today, but it is tiny in comparison, and it's largely made up of the young. They don't go primarily for the picture, though what they see is heavily influenced by advertising. The cinema is a place to go to get away from home, to meet friends, to socialise. Kids sit in rows, eat a lot and talk all the way through. They don't need to concentrate on what is happening. The music tells them what to expect and when.

Because young people are the only constant audience, film producers have made big efforts to please them. The rash of teen movies proves that. Kids got bored with that after a while, but the search for the right formula goes on.

Of course, not all films are bad. Good films are still made. Even some of the formula pictures aren't all that bad, and some, like last year's 'Salvador', are very good indeed. But the majority of Hollywood films are pretty terrible.

Lots of them don't hang together. Important characters disappear for no reason. Loose ends never get tied up. There's no consistency in characters. Shug in 'The Colour Purple' was a drunk one minute; the next she's sweet and motherly. You'd never understand it from the story — she just changed all of a sudden.

All too often, mindless action or gore takes the place of a plot. Special effects, buckets of blood, or broad, noisy comedy shock us into reacting, though there is no story to feel for.

Film producers don't trust the audience to feel for itself, so many films try to orchestrate emotion. Tragic, throbbing music cues us to cry, while spine tingling noises and discordant music set our teeth on edge with fright. Comedy is so strident and busy that we feel mean if we don't laugh — they're trying so hard. Much of American TV comedy isn't funny, so a laugh soundtrack is added to the shows to convince people they're hilarious. How long before we get that in the cinema?

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And the actors! The latest teen heartthrobs are in everything, because the marketing people think that will entice young people into the cinema. But no one said they could act!

But because they are stars, they don't have to act. Plays have actors and actresses, but films and TV have stars. Robert Redford has been a star for a long time, but can he act? He managed to snuff out poor Meryl Streep in 'Out of Africa', who was at least trying.

Redford was wrong for the role of the British, balding Finch Hatton, but he was a star, so his casting made sound commercial sense. Too bad if you liked the book!

If you're fed up with the big movies, there is always the art house circuit. Art houses show everything from uncommercial documentaries, political films, independent films made on a shoestring, to the bigger budget foreign films with subtitles. Not every film in the art houses is good, but there is more individuality, more hope in them.

These cinemas can't afford to promote their movies the way the big film distribution chains can, so they cater for only small audiences, but the audiences are loyal and growing. The art houses are the last hope for film-as-art, because the marketplace, which is full of the big movies, isn't even concerned with entertainment any more, much less art.

Big film producers sneer at the art house films, and some of them are pretty bad. A lot of the work is self-indulgent. One film by one art house darling, Chantal Akerman, used 'real time' in the movie, so that it would be more like life. A woman was shown at a sink, washing dishes. After fifteen minutes of this, she walked over to pick up a tea towel. One audience member, goaded beyond endurance, cried out: 'For Christ's sake, let them drain!' .

But the art houses have also shown some wonderful films. Those of Bunuel, Fellini, Truffaut, Bergman, Kurosawa and many others all got their start in art houses, and many graduated to a wider audience through critical acclaim and word of mouth. 'Zina', 'My Life as a Dog' and 'Le Cop' are just three films that restore your faith in movies, all shown at art houses over the last year.

The art houses also show revivals of the work of various directors and actors, so they keep movie history alive. By showing films from Japan, Latin America, or China, they break down the US monopoly.

Some of the big movies today try to have an 'arty' side. Films like 'The Mission' and 'The Colour Purple' or the more recent 'Chronicle of a Death Foretold' are big budget films trying to reach a more sophisticated audience than the West End circuit.

But these movies are padded with so much wasted footage! They may look beautiful, but that alone can't make them art. Scenes go on long after the life has drained out of them. They are full of scenery shots to justify the huge expense of location shooting.'The Mission' should have flogged off half its footage of South American jungles to 'National Geographic' where that sort of thing belongs.

Movies were better in the thirties and forties. They were fast paced, with clear plots and messages, and the dialogue was often crisp and witty. 'Casablanca', the Marx Brothers films, the film noir movies can still draw big audiences. The recent RKO season on TV was very successful. Watching such films today is often breathtaking. They seem to whirl by, and are over too quickly. Those films were made by Hollywood.It's Hollywood that

has changed. How has it changed and why?

In the forties, anti-trust laws forced the studios to sell off their cinema chains. Not having a guaranteed distribution outlet for their films made the studios re-think. In the new climate, it seemed better to finance other people to make movies, rather than make movies themselves — movies that might sit on a shelf for want of a cinema. This era of 'independent production' ushered in the package, often put together by lawyers. The package might include a script, a director, stars, and a distribution deal. The package would be touted around in the hope of being snapped up by a studio.This way the studio could pick and choose the projects most likely to succeed commercially. Potential saleability became the only important part of a package. The quality of the film was a side issue.

After losing their cinema chains, the studios got rid of their expensive overheads — sets, equipment and staff, including all the actors under contract. Increasingly, films were made on location, with crew, cast and equipment coming together for the project, then dispersing again.

Films cost a lot of money to make. Even the low budget black and white film 'She's Gotta Have It' cost over $60,000. For new filmmakers, it's getting harder and harder, as costs rise, to raise enough money to begin. The studios are only interested in the safe bets by people with proven track records. They aren't interested in fostering new talents or taking risks. It doesn't bring them an instant return.

If a newcomer does get the money from somewhere and makes a hit, then they'll talk. 'Star Wars' was turned down by every studio in Hollywood, but once Spielberg had a hit with it, the studios fell over themselves offering him a blank cheque in future.

Often the only way for a newcomer to get a toehold is to consent to make rubbish, in the hope that, one day, she/he will be able to make the films they want. But so often it doesn't work that way. People get seduced by the big money, the easy life, and it's hard to break away. The studio head holding the purse has a lot of clout. He can kill off or stall projects. Money can be used as a lever to force changes. Money is power.

Film executives don't necessarily know much or care much about movies. All the major Hollywood studios are owned by huge multinational business conglomerates, like Coca-Cola. Film executives today aren't movie moguls like Alexander Korda, Louis Mayer or Sam Goldwyn: they're just businessmen, like Rupert Murdoch owning 20th Century Fox. They rely heavily on marketing people for advice, and commercial considerations rule.

The movie world is very volatile, with executives lasting only two or three years in the job. Funding what turns into a huge flop is the way to get fired, so executives play safe. No one wants to be stuck with a 'Heaven's Gate', the $40million movie that finished United Artists as a company a few years ago.

The break up of the old studio system has meant that fewer films are made. When the studios were producing for their own theatres, they had to churn out films regularly, since cinema programmes changed so frequently. But that has all gone now. Some projects take a year or two years to complete. This means fewer chances for film people to learn and practice their skills. The projects being made go to big name directors and actors. The old continuity has been lost.

With films costing more all the time, and with fewer films being made, it's inevitable that the formula film will come to dominate cinemas more and more. Cinema is already polarised enough into the nakedly commercial and the 'art' film. Further polarisation is simply undesirable. If it happens, the big pictures will become even more soulless and senseless, and some 'art' films may become even more obcure to avoid the 'commercial' taint. Movies can't be saved if the smaller pictures don't get a chance, if actors, directors and film crew can't learn and practice their skills, if every artistic aspiration is ground down by the hustle for funds.

I'm not against films being entertainment. Films can be art and they can be entertainment. A very small number are both. What I object to are the kind of big films we see today which aren't even entertainment, much less art. They are empty vessels.

What has happened to movies is a shame. What started out as cheap entertainment has turned into exploitation, with us, the audience, the losers. I'm not saying that anyone who goes to see a blockbuster is a fool, nor that people don't know good movies from bad. Most of the public do, that's why they stay away. The ones who do go — largely the young — go to what they've heard of. And you can be sure that what they've heard of are the biggies. These films have been flogged to death by advertising, they have a hit song as well, that's played everywhere, the paperback will soon be out. Everywhere people go they get faced with the big movies, and since the young audiences aren't going primarily for the picture, then it doesn't matter too much if it's a dog.

The good films around don't get much promotion. They have to be sought out. They aren't as predictable or as easily categorised. People often don't know what to expect from a film they haven't heard of, with no big stars, and maybe in a foreign language. It may be more rewarding than the latest Bond flick, but it might not. You know what you're getting with Bond.

It always seems that films like 'Top Gun' are really popular because they have huge attendances. But this is because they play at 50 or 60 cinemas simultaneously, so they have to beat the art house movies which might be playing at one or two. Art house audiences might be having a better time, but the attendence figures seem to deny it.

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As former United Artists executive Steven Bach says, Spielberg is great at warming up old genres. But is a rehash of the past all we can expect from movies? Directors used to get respect for making good movies. The most respected director now is the one whose movie makes the most money.

Spielberg recently got a special Academy Award for his work. There was much talk of his great achievements. But what people were rewarding was not his vision, his art, but his ability to make not just one, but a whole string of runaway hits.

Film critics aren't trying to argue for better movies. Half of them don't know the first thing about movies, and they are pretty uncritical, by and large. After all, they depend on the big distibutors for their screenings and freebies. They act like extentions of the film studios' own advertising departments.

Ultimately, though, it's the system that's to blame. In a world where everything is for sale, is it any wonder actors, directors and writers rush to work for studio executives who'll pay them huge salaries to churn out remakes and sequels. Who is going to stand out for better films, better scripts, when they can get very well paid for turning out rubbish?

Until all art, including film, stops being a commodity, we'll always have this drive for mediocrity, for the lowest common denominator. But to put an end to commodities would mean the end of the capitalist system itself. Now what a movie that would make! ●

A Polish Petrograd

Zbigniew Kowalewski, a former leader of the left-wing in Solidarnosc, describes how Solidarnosc fought for workers' control in Lodz in 1980-1. This is an abridged translation of a chapter from his book, 'Rendez-nous nos usines'.

Lodz, the second conurbation in the country by number of inhabitants and one of the main industrial centres of Poland, is a town where the textile industry, going back to the era of 'wildcat capitalism', remains the most important sector, although more modern sectors like electrical engineering come close behind.

"Lodz is a city of women who are exhausted, jaded, ill, and prematurely aged, a city of people crippled socially and economically", declared an organiser of the Committee of Social Self-Defence (KSS-KOR) in the summer of 1980. "The percentage of still births in Lodz is the highest in Europe", he said in relation to one of the worst effects of the super-exploitation imposed on the mass of working women by the system of piecework...

In June and July 1981, you could see on the streets that the city was literally collapsing under the economic crisis. Each day Lodz was more like the dramatic image which John Reed has left us of Petrograd in the months and weeks before the October revolution. All over the place there were huge queues in front of the shops, not only in daytime but also at night, and especially at the butchers'. Sometimes you had to queue for three days and two nights to get meat with your ration tickets. Different members of the family would take turns in the queue, but mostly you saw women, most of whom worked. After spending the night and the morning in a queue, they went to the factory, completely exhausted, without having the time to eat anything, and they were unable to keep up with the machines. Many fainted right on the shop floor, and the risk of work accidents went up. The regional leadership of Solidarnosc reported that 20 to 30% of the ration tickets for meat were unusable because of the shortage of supplies...

During the first half of July, the regional leadership never stopped playing the firefighter. Almost every day, and sometimes five or six times in one day, Solidarnosc factory councils — especially in the textile sector — announced that the workers would strike the following day. No-one could buy the goods in short supply, everyone was exhausted from spending their time in the queues, there was no point continuing work to earn money which was good for nothing but to paper the walls: such were the arguments put forward. It was necessary to intervene, to convince people that strikes would not improve supplies, to explain that we should not protest piecemeal, that it would do no good, that decisions about protest actions against the shortages should not be taken at the level of the factories but only by the general assembly of the trade union delegates of the region.

The situation was visibly explosive and Solidarnosc risked losing control of it. Social tension also began to mount in other industrial centres. However, the national leadership of Solidarnosc gave the impression of being completely passive in face of this rising tide.

On 10 July, the regional leadership decided to take the initiative and to give it, if possible, national scope. An appeal to all trade unionists in the region said:

"The situation developing at the na-

Poland August 1980

tional level since June is more than disturbing. On the one hand there is the increasing inflexibility of the authorities in face of the demands of society and, on the other, the lack of real perspectives for a way out from the economic crisis which is constantly deepening and bringing about a growing radicalisation of the masses' thinking. The 200,000 representatives of the top circles of the bureaucracy and of the pressure groups which defend their positions and their privileges have managed effectively to block the real process of reconstruction of the republic. The last ten months have been wasted. We are on the brink of economic catastrophe and we cannot go on any longer like this. Instead of the measures which have been decided, the authorities give us only empty speeches and pseudo-decisions. That is why it is time to say to the PUWP (the ruling party) and to the authorities which it has put in place that we do not want to shed blood, to overthrow the socialist regime or violate international treaties, but we are determined to carry through the reconstruction of the republic of which our trade union is the guarantor. We have prepared and available projects offering a solution to all the essential questions — social, economic and political — which our state confronts today. Society is willing to undertake this task and to follow it through to the end".

It was the first time that a Solidarnosc leadership body warned the bureaucratic authorities that the union was willing to assume its responsibilities and take on the destiny of the nation. At the same time, the Lodz leadership asked the National Coordinating Committee (KKP) of Solidarnosc and representatives of all the regional leaderships to meet urgently on 17 July in Lodz... (There was no such meeting, but on Monday 27 July action started in Lodz).

At 3.00 p.m., a procession of 19 buses from the city transport service drove slowly down Piotrkowska Street — the main street of Lodz — headlights shining and horns blaring. The buses were decorated with national flags and, in huge letters, the word 'hunger'.

They were covered with a multitude of posters which, so the local press claimed, contained aggressive slogans insulting the government and the PUWP — in a word, 'anti-socialist' slogans.

The following day, at the same hour and in the same street, there was a procession of 46 lorries, trucks and buses from the PKS factory. And on the third day it was the turn of 56 trailers, tankers, huge cranes and special vehicles from the construction enterprise Transbud to defile in the same place. Each day these processions attracted large crowds which expressed their support for the action. The representatives of the regional leadership of Solidarnosc accompanying the procession explained by loudspeaker to the masses present what the aim of this demonstration was and stressed that it was a form of protest implying a minimum of material cost and allowing us to avoid stopping productive work. The columns of vehicles always stopped for two minutes in front of the town hall to sound their horns. The use of the means of transport had an important symbolic value, for it was an expression of the workers' demand to control the means of production.

The fourth day, 30 July, marked the climax of this initiative, with the 'hunger march'. For the first time, Solidarnosc called on the workers to take to the streets. Until then, most protest actions — following the model of the August 1980 strikes in this respect — had taken place inside the workplaces. In the popular consciousness, street demonstrations were identified with the workers' revolts of December 1970 and June 1976 which had ended in violence and blood. This time, in Lodz, we were breaking with a taboo: it was a way to show the workers that they could control their own struggle elsewhere than just behind the walls of the factories.

There was great anxiety in the regional leadership about the risk that the most aggressive sectors of the authorities would try to take advantage of the demonstration to stage a provocation, and seize this opportunity to launch a vast operation of repression in the streets. This fear was evident in the initial proposal to limit participation in the march to 5,000 women; the decision finally taken was to go up to 8,000. Every possible security measure was taken, down to the last detail.

Authorisation for the march was sought and obtained from the mayor. The conditions on which the police would be present and under which they might intervene were agreed with him. The procession was to be strictly demarcated with huge lorries at the front and at the back, with the sides marked off by a thick rope carried by the stewards. The chief stewards would have walkie-talkies bought in Western Europe. The women workers were to come from their factories in organised groups, and in the numbers agreed for each workplace.

All this was outflanked, but only in the sense that instead of the planned 8,000 women there were 50,000 women workers on the march. There were women of all ages, including many pensioners. Many of them came with their children or babies in their arms or in push-chairs.

One of the most impressive aspects of this demonstration was the content of hundreds of placards and banners. All had been made in the factories themselves, the Solidarnosc regional leadership having abstained from indicating their contents so as to give free rein to the spontaneous expression of the women workers.

At the head of the procession was a big banner with the central slogan: 'Hungry of all countries, unite!' Others stood out: 'Arise, ye prisoners of starvation!', 'Peace and liberty', 'Three shifts, the same hunger', 'Our children are hungry and dirty', 'We have nothing to lose but our hunger', 'No to the new ration norms'.

Numerous placards attacked the regime and its 'leading force' with such slogans as: 'After 36 years with the PUWP in power, we are hungry and tomorrow we will be naked', 'People's power or the power of hunger?'. 'Marxist-Leninist' ideology was ridiculed: 'Is socialism the doctrine of hunger, poverty, and filth?', 'We are proceeding towards communism — please do not eat during the journey'. Proposals were put to the bureaucracy: 'If you have nothing left to sell, sell us the power'. Or warnings: 'Hunger deprives people of reason. It can deprive you of power'.

After being blessed by the bishop, the procession set off from the cathedral square. There was a first meeting in front of the town hall, but noone appeared at the windows: they were all closed. Then there was a second meeting at Liberty Square, where the march ended.

Janina Konczak, the initiator of the march, and Andrzej Slowik both spoke, presenting Solidarnosc's demands on the local authorities and on the government concerning the provision of food for the population and accusing the authorities of incompetence and irresponsibility. The only thing the authorities 'guaranteed' women was that they worked eight hours a day and spent 12 in queues, said Konczak. Slowik declared:

"The time has come to render accounts. We are giving three weeks to the local authorities for them to put an end to the chaos which reigns in the provision of food, and to get rid of the people responsible for this scandalous situation. We do not want to take power, but we are capable of keeping a check.

We undertake as of now to keep a check on the institutions which are supposed to look after the distribution of food. We will check what happens to meat from production through to sale in the shops.

When we announced this protest action, the stocks in the shops improved as if by chance. Who was hiding the food that appeared so suddenly, and why? What are those who were hoarding this food trying to do?

Three weeks from now, we will make a balance sheet of this protest action and the results we have got".

The slogan for the struggle was launched: social control over distribution.

The women workers of the textile industry, the most explosive sector of the working class in Lodz, were the backbone of this protest against poverty. But they did not participate much in daily trade-union activity. They had neither the time nor the strength.

Super-exploited in their work, they were also overburdened with domestic tasks. The traditional division of household tasks between the sexes was still alive in working-class families, and there was no feminist consciousness proper. One little symbol: the stewards of the march were all male.

In the textile industry, the workers, mostly women, almost exclusively elected men to the Solidarnosc commissions. On the other hand, in the more modern industries which employed more skilled workers, the women were much more active in the union. It was there that the struggle for social control and self-management got the biggest response and was carried on with most determination. In those factories, the workers of both sexes were less inclined to one-off actions of revolt and more conscious of the need to seek fundamental solutions to the problems posed to their class and to work for them. It was among them that it became possible to recruit the trade-union activists who would have to look after the tasks of control over distribution.

In parallel to the action at Lodz, there were similar demonstrations in several towns of the region and of neighbouring regions: Zelow, Zdunska Wola, Lask, Pabiance, Tomaszow, Belchatow, Piotrkow...

It was in that context, where Solidarnosc had retaken the initiative in mass struggle throughout the country, that the members of the presidium of the regional leadership met the mayor of Lodz... After a devastating balance-sheet of the inertia of the local authorities and of his own incapacity had been presented to the mayor, it was demanded of him that he grant Solidarnosc the authority to control the provision of food in the town.

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In principle, this was impossible. On 8 August, for the first time and unilaterally, the government had broken off negotiations with the national leadership of Solidarnosc, who were demanding, among other things, precisely this right to control the production, the circulation and the distribution of food. It was then that deputy prime minister Rakowski uttered the famous words: **"He who controls the production of food in fact holds power, for the question of food supplies is a political question. Your demand about control constitutes a programme for the seizure of power".**

The government was inflexible: if Solidarnosc wanted to make checks, it could do so, but exclusively within the framework of the law on social control. This law was one of the numerous 'democratic' figleaves of the totalitarian regime. The possibilities of social control that it gave to social organisations were almost non-existent. But if the resistance of the regime was very strong at the national level, in Lodz there was a different relation of forces, which Solidarnosc had built up bit by bit, systematically, during the 'hot summer'.

The mayor was made to understand in the meeting that if he did not agree to deal with the problem in a radical way, and at once, the masses would certainly not hesitate this time to make heads roll in the local authority. The trade-union leaders of Lodz had always believed that changing personalities inside the regime would solve nothing, so long as the social movement was unable to put forward new leaders. The very system of power had to be changed, and the question of individuals was only a secondary aspect. But it was clear that the masses, driven to desperation, were likely to want somebody's head, and this was an argument to use in negotiation, as a means of pressure on an individual who obviously wanted to keep his position.

The mayor knew that this time he could not get out of the situation safe and sound without making some concessions. He informed the Solidarnosc leaders that there was another legal basis than the law on social control for exercising some real control. He explained that in fact there was a law on the powers of mayors and provincial officials not only giving them wide powers of control, but permitting them to transfer this right to representatives of any social organisation in the country, on condition that they be duly mandated for this purpose. I will give you twenty or so authorisations so that control can be exercised in my name, he said...

The mayor had given an inch: we had to take an ell. Solidarnosc needed 150 authorisations straight away, a number corresponding to the number of trade-unionists already prepared for tasks of control, and 1500 a bit later for those who would be trained without delay. We had to put the mayor up against it, using the argument of 'heads rolling', beginning with his (until then, we had never threatened him personally, preferring to go for his subordinates so as not to close off any possibility of negotiation), so that he would end up by accepting all our demands. It was a great victory.

We had to begin right away by taking a census of the precise needs of the town's population and of the resources available, especially as regards meat and related products. We had to make sure that the whole of production, without except, should go towards the people's consumption, that the distribution of meat and of all scarce items should be exclusively by the general network of commerce, and thus that any privileged distribution should be stopped by tracking down hoards and putting them on the market.

The teams of trade-unionists, equipped with the authorisations signed by the mayor, got to work immediately in the wholesale centres in the countryside, in the abattoirs, the depots, the wholesale and retail establishments. They checked on where foodstuffs came from, how they were transported, and where they went to.

It was soon discovered that large amounts of meat left the central town abattoir for unknown destinations, on the basis of secret orders transmitted by no-one knew whom in the form of coded messages. As soon as this business became known, the authorities were forced to stop it.

From doing this work, the regional leadership began to have a precise picture of production and of the state of stocks in the food industry, not just from the teams of checkers but also from the trade-union militants working there. The union had not been authorised to keep a check on the depots where the secret reserves of the state were kept, but that did not stop us from knowing exactly what type of commodity was there, and in what quantity. Thus it was possible to present to the mayor data that, as he said himself, he was unaware of, and to force him to make representations to the central state authorities about those stocks being directed to consumption. Solidarnosc was everywhere, and the authorities had more and more difficulty stopping the union getting information on production and the state of food stocks.

Meanwhile, relations between town and country continued to get worse. Partly the peasants were hoarding their food products, but they were also using them to speculate on the free market. The representatives of the rich peasants in the Solidarnosc leaderships pressed for big increases in the prices of their products.

The checking on the free markets by the Solidarnosc regional leadership's teams did not allow speculation to be combatted effectively. The workers of some factories wanted Solidarnosc to organise workers' brigades to go into the countryside and confiscate the peasants' reserves by force. But that was an unacceptable position which would have broken the alliance between peasants and workers, thus weakening the social front of the opposition against the bureaucratic authorities.

For its part, the authorities were doing all they could to break that alliance by instigating worker Solidarnosc and peasant Solidarnosc against each other. Relations had deteriorated so much between town and countryside above all because for a very long time industry had not concerned itself at all with the needs of agriculture. Not only tractors and machines were in short supply in the countryside, but also tools, forks, nails, everything made of iron.

On 15 October, the regional leadership of Solidarnosc adopted a very important resolution on the measures to be taken to combat the food shortage in the town, measures complemented by the social control over distribution which had already been started. This resolution demanded that artisans producing agricultural machines and tools be authorised to buy the materials they needed from the factories which had stocks, and that a number of factories modify their pattern of production so as to produce tools for agriculture on the basis of their production capacities. **"If the authorities reject this, the union will conduct an active strike [work-in] in the workplaces so as to guarantee such production. The distribution of the goods thus produced will be organised in association with the Solidarnosc union of individual farmers and the Solidarnosc union of artisans".**

The reestablishment of economic links between the town of Lodz and the countryside was difficult, given the existing administrative demarcations. The old macro-region, covering five present-day provinces, was in fact capable of making the population self-sufficient, given the potential equilibrium between the industrial sector and the agricultural sector. But Solidarnosc's gains in the domain of control over food production were limited to the territory administered by the Lodz municipality, stopping almost at the gates of the city.

Faced with Solidarnosc's threat to call an active strike [work-in] in some factories in the town, and to take over control there so as to reorient production to respond to the needs of the peasantry, the mayor of Lodz called meetings with the representatives of the union and of the administrations of the neighbouring agricultural provinces to set up an overall plan for food supplies to the city and supplies of industrial products for the countryside.

> Solidarnosc had established a double control — over the distribution of foodstuffs and over the system of rationing

The most important decision taken by the regional leadership on 15 October was **"to get control over the issuing, distribution, and accounting for ration tickets".** The issuing of ration tickets was the exclusive monopoly of the central state power. Consequently this demand appeared as audacious as it was preposterous: it implied demanding of the bureaucracy — this time at the central level — that it cede to Solidarnosc a bit of the power that it guarded so jealously.

For all that, the central authorities conceded. The mayor of Lodz informed the presidium by telephone that the state, in conformity with the request transmitted to it, was authorising Solidarnosc to print the ration cards, starting with those for the month of November.

Now we were within a week of 1 November, the date on which the new ration tickets had to be distributed to the population. The presidium understood immediately that the government was setting a trap. To print ration tickets for a city of over a million inhabitants and distribute them within a week represented a giant task for a union which had no experience in this field and did not have the means of the state to do it.

Obviously the government hoped that the Solidarnosc regional leadership would abandon its demands, or that it would accept the task without being able to carry it out. In either case it would discredit itself, and at the same time discredit the masses' aspiration to self-organisation and self-management. But the presidium took up the challenge. A rapid survey of the means available and the measures to be taken allowed us to establish that the job could be done in the time set by the government.

Thanks to the efforts of a team of printers who were trade union militants, the ration cards were printed in three days; not on newsprint, as the government printshops did them, but for the first time on watermarked paper which made fraud impossible. The printing was done under the control of a joint committee composed, on Solidarnosc's insistence, of representatives of the union and of the town hall.

This committee accounted for the tickets and signed a protocol which constituted a guarantee against any later attempt by the bureaucracy to accuse the leaders of Solidarnosc of having printed too many tickets or having diverted some. The number of tickets distributed at last corresponded to needs, established in a precise way. A system of checking on their distribution in the workplaces and institutions allowed not only the elimination of the surplus, but an end to injustices.

There were eight different types of ticket corresponding to different needs: manual workers with particularly hard jobs who needed more meat, children needing a particular quantity of milk and sugar, etc. Solidarnosc thus saw to it that the distribution of the ration tickets corresponded properly to the criteria established and, at the same time, verified the real number of members of each family who should have tickets. The exact number was now known of those who had a right to privileged status because of the work they did or their social situation, including the invalids and pensioners who had to be saved from having to queue interminably.

Solidarnosc decided that henceforth each Wednesday the shops would serve old people, disabled people, and pregnant women first. It goes without saying that food distribution in Lodz improved correspondingly, and that the queues dwindled very rapidly.

The fact that Solidarnosc had established a double control — over the distribution of foodstuffs and over the system of rationing — was an important step in the establishment of a democratic counter-power of the workers and of civil society. This strengthened and extended the struggle for workers' self-management which was developing in the workplaces, opening the way to territorial self-management...

Rosa Luxemburg on Britain

'Reform and Revolution' is one of Rosa Luxemburg's best-known works, her major contribution to the debate between Marxists and 'revisionists' at the turn of the century in Germany. In this previously untranslated article, which is in effect an appendix to 'Reform and Revolution', she takes issue with the praise of old-style British trade unionism by the leading German revisionist Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein had lived in Britain for some years, and based many of his ideas on the experience of the British labour movement at the end of the 19th century.

Luxemburg's article is a brilliant examination of the relationship between socialism and trade unionism at a formative stage of the British labour movement's history. Soon after she wrote it the British working-class movement created its own independent political organisation, the Labour Party. Unfortunately, the Labour Party, like the trade union movement Rosa Luxemburg analyses here, remained, even in its best days, entirely on the ground of bourgeois politics. Even after it became formally socialist, in 1918, its essential business was that of bargaining with the capitalist system for concessions and reforms. Since the Wilson government of the mid-'60s, Labour Party reformism has been in a blind alley; since the late '70s it has been in deep crisis.

The translation is by Stan Crooke.

Before we cast a general glance back at the discussion about Bernstein's book (1) in the party press, we still wish to treat individually some questions of detail which were particularly stressed in that discussion. This time, let us turn to the English trade union movement.

The catchphrase of the 'economic power' of the 'economic organisation' of the working class plays a great role amongst the supporters of Bernstein. "It is the task of the working class to create economic power for itself" writes Dr Woltmann in issue 93 of the Elberfelde "Freie Presse". In the same way, E. David (2) concludes his series of articles about Bernstein's book with the slogan "emancipation through economic organisation" ('Mainzer Volkszeitung', issue 96).

According to this conception — in line with Bernstein's theory — the trade union movement, allied with consumer associations, is to gradually transform the capitalist mode of production into the socialist mode. We have already pointed out (see the pamphlet 'Social Reform or Revolution' (3))that such a notion is based on a total failure to recognise the economic nature and economic functions of both the trade unions and the co-operatives. This, however, can also be proven in a less abstract form by way of a tangible example.

Arrests, trials with draconian sentences, deportations, mass use of spies, police and the military on workers demonstrations, class justice, police arbitrariness. In a word — the first half century of the English labour movement offers us all the forms of brutally beating down the rising working class and its most modest demands for social reforms. The same state which already at that time, like today, had no militarism, no bureaucracy, no peasantry, nonetheless found abundant means to meet the working class with violent repression. If we can therefore see other methods of treating the working class in England from the middle of the century onwards, then this is not connected with these peculiarities of its political life, but with other circumstances which had emerged only in the course of time.

Around the fifties two important changes had indeed taken place in England's conditions, and in two respects. Above all, English industry achieved unshared rule in the world market around this time. Until the end of the forties English production very often had to suffer very frequent and violent stagnation; from the fifties onwards there begins a constant and strong upturn. This placed the entire English class of industrialists in the position in which an individual industrialist finds himself when business is flourishing: conflicts with the workers, permanent industrial warfare as had been the case formerly, became extremely inconvenient for them, and the interest in orderly relationships, in stability and 'social peace' became a pressing one.

Correspondingly, we see on the side of the industrialists an immediate about-turn in their methods of warfare. The conflicts with the workers change from questions of power into matters of negotiations, of agreement, of concessions. The golden era of industry makes the concessions to the workers as necessary in the interest of the undisturbed conduct of business as it renders them materially imperceptible. If in the first epoch the English bourgeoisie was represented by the most brutal quick-buck- merchants a la Stumm (5), their correct spokesperson in this epoch is that entrepreneur who says in 1860: "In strikes I see both the means of action and also the inevitable result of commercial negotiations about the purchase of labour".

On the other side and doubtlessly extremely closely connected with the above, an important transformation takes place as well in the labour movement itself. In the twenties, thirties and the beginning of the forties we see it enthusiastic about political and social reforms, about comprehensive plans, about socialist ideas. "On the Council they (the workers) are idealists who dream of a new heaven and a new earth, humanitarians, friends of education, socialists, moralists". Under the influence of Owen's doctrines (6), writes Francis Place (7), the trade unionists came to believe that it was possible to raise wages and reduce working hours through a general non-political federation of all wage-earners "to such a degree that in the not too distant future the entire products of their labour would belong to them". The class movement in England at that time found palpable expression in the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, which proved itself to be a thoroughly clumsy organisation in trades union struggle and also soon collapsed (8), but expresssed the idea of *class* and its general unity for the common goal. In the Chartist movement we likewise see the English proletariat — here, through *political* action — strive after socialist goals (9).

This all changes with the beginning of the fifties. After the failure of Chartism and of the Owenite movement, the workers turn away from socialist goals and towards exclusively everyday demands. The class which was brought together — even if very incompletely — in the Grand Trade Union of Owen crumbles completely into individual trade unions, each of which take action on their own. In place of the emancipation of the working class there appears as the guiding star the most favourable shaping possible of the "leasing-business", in place of struggle with the existing order, the striving to establish oneself comfortably on the ground of this order, in a word: in place of socialist class struggle, bourgeois struggle for a bourgeois existence.

The trade unions have achieved their success in two ways: through direct struggle with the industrialists and through pressure on the legislature. In both cases, however, they owe their success to the very *bourgeois ground* upon which they had placed themselves. As far as the strug-

gle with the industrialists was concerned, already in 1845 "a new method of trade union activity — the politics of *mediation and arbitration*" had been proclaimed by the general conference of the trade unions (10). But mediation and arbitration are only possible if a common ground exists in advance. And such common ground soon found palpable expression in the very widespread system of the sliding scales of wages, which, for its part, is economically based on the harmony of interests between the industrialist and the worker. Only because industrialists and workers alike stood on this common ground was it possible for there to occur the great extension of collective agreements, of conciliation offices, of arbitration tribunals, which we see until into the eighties. Thereby, however, the clashes and friction between labour and capital changed from class struggle into arguments between buyers and sellers, as occur with any commodity. If on the one hand the industrialists had come to the point of view that strikes were "inevitable in commercial negotiations about the purchase of labour", then on the other hand labour resigned itself to regarding itself as a mere object of "commercial negotiations". The trade unions accepted as the basis of the entire trade union struggle the doctrine of bourgeois economy of supply and demand being the only regulator of wages, and "it seemed a natural conclusion that the only means lying in their power to secure or improve their conditions was that of *reducing the supply*" *(11).*

Correspondingly, we see at that time as means of struggle of the trade unions the abolition of overtime, the limitation of the number of apprentices, and emigration (in industrial branches until into the eighties). That is to say, with the exception of the first point, purely guild methods.

The political side of the trade union movement adopted the same character. Two points of view in particular are characteristic of this. Above all, the English trade unionists' own attitude: until the middle of the eighties they were — and still are so today — by and large, thoroughgoing petty bourgeois, liberal or conservative in outlook. Furthermore, however, the methods and the means which they applied in their struggle for protective labour legislation were guildist. There was not anything like popular agitation, as was the case in Germany and other countries on the continent, but a completely peculiar and complicated system of working upon and influencing bourgeois parliamentarians without distinction of party affiliations, of horse-trading, of corridor conversations and back-room deals, completely lacking any principled or class character and which reached its fullest development in the case of the cotton spinners and weavers (12). The trade unions owe their greatest legislative successes to these very means. On the other hand, how much of an obstacle a more class-conscious behaviour was for practical successes is shown by the difficulties with which the Miners' Federation had to fight.

In connection with the thus directed activity we see the structure and the entire character of the English trade unions change in the second half of this century. The leadership of the movement passes from the "irresponsible enthusiasts and agitators" to "a class of permanent, paid officials", who were even employed on occasion on the basis of a proper school-examination (13). From being a school of class solidarity and socialist morality the trade union movement becomes a business, the trade union becomes an extremely complicated work of art, a residence comfortably furnished for lasting existence, and in the entire world of labour of that epoch there reigns *"a spirit of careful,* even if somewhat *limited* diplomacy".

Part Two

As we saw in the first article, economically, politically and also morally the workers and the bourgeoisie had been standing on the same ground in England since the fifties. "They (the leaders of the trade unions) accepted in totally good faith the economic individualism of their bourgeois opponents and claimed only that freedom of combining, which the enlightened members of the latter class were ready to grant them... Their understanding for the mode of thought of the bourgeoisie and their appreciation of the actual difficulties of the situation protected them from being mere demagogues... The possession of good manners, although it may appear a minor triviality, was not the least of their merits. With an accomplished self-esteem and integrity they joined correctness of expression, completely irreproachable behaviour in private life, and a remarkable absence of everything which recalls the public bar".

It is only a logical consequence of these statesman-like, individualistic politics that just like the purely economic struggle, so too the struggle of the trade unions for protective labour legislation was not conducted in a unified manner through the totality of the trade unions and to the benefit of the working class, as was the case in Germany, in France and everywhere else, but in fragmented groups, by every trade union on their own, and sometimes in direct contradiction to one another (compare the conduct of the Durham and Northumberland representatives in Parliament (14) against the efforts of the Miners' Federation). The lack of common economic and political ground, of the *class point-of-view*, the contradictions between great and small, skilled and unskilled, old and new trade unions, also condemned to fruitlessness and decay their common action, their general congresses and their Parliamentary Committee. (Evidence of this from recent times is the method of voting introduced at the Cardiff Trades Union Congress, which "quite clearly amounts to placing all power into the hands of the officials, and furthermore the officials of the few old and large trade unions."). Those who are of this opinion see only one side of the effect of public opinion on the workers: the material *support* provided by it. But they overlook the other side: the moral pressure exercised on the workers by it. English public opinion is not benevolent towards the labour movement in general, but towards the particular given labour movement which has taken shape in England: the movement which both economically and politically stands on the ground of bourgeois society. It does not support class struggle, for example; on the contrary, it pre-empts it. As is well known, during strikes and wage conflicts public opinion imperiously presses for arbitration tribunals and mediation proceedures, it does not allow the struggle to become a test of strength, even if it would be advantageous precisely to the workers, and woe to the workers should they not wish to bow to the voice of the public. The English worker who is supported by English bourgeois society in the struggle with his employer is supported in his capacity as a member of bourgeois society, as a bourgeois politician, as a bourgeois *voter* and the support also makes him for his part into a more loyal member of this society.

The reasonable industrialist and the equally reasonable trade unionist, the correct capitalist and the correct worker, the generous bourgeois who is friendly to the workers and the narrow-minded proletarian who wears bourgeois blinkers have each other as their precondition, are merely correlates of one and the same relationship, the common ground of which was formed by the peculiar economic position of England since the middle of the century — the *stability* and the undivided rule of English industry in the world market.

The previously outlined conditions lasted in England until into the eighties. Since then, however, a far-reaching transformation has been occurring in all relationships, and furthermore in the basis of trade union development hitherto above all. The position of England in the world market was fundamentally shaken by the capitalist development of Russia, Germany and the United States. The rapid decline of England expresses itself not only in the loss of one market after another, but also in a very characteristic and important symptom of capitalist development: the decline of its *methods of production and trade.* The latter in particular always show the rise or decline of a

capitalist industry earlier and more certainly than the export and import statistics themselves. Just as the capitalist class of a rising country is above all characterised by versatility and flexibility in techniques of production and trade (see England until into the sixties and seventies, and Germany at present), so too in an industrially declining country backwardness and crudity in production and trade always emerge as the first unmistakeable symptom.

The latter is now the case in England and for some years complaints in British consular reports about the apathy and rigidity of English traders have been a constant theme (15). As far as the methods of production are concerned, England is now forced — until recently an unheard-of-fact — by foreign competition and for the protection of its own native market to introduce modern production techniques. See, for example, the current transformation underway in the English tin-plate industry under the pressure of North American competition.

The shaky ground, the variability of the commercial situation, and the often bad state of business lead for their part to a change of fronts in both the behaviour of the English bourgeoisie and also of the English workers. The general depression in English industry is temporarily still compensated for and concealed by the demand for shipbuilding (16) created by international militarism and trade, which in turn supports a series of important branches, such as the metal industry. But in this too the competition of Germany soon threatens England.

If, in times of prosperity, the concessions to the workers were at no great cost for capital, now it is currently becoming ever more sensitive and touchy. The conciliation process becomes a source of discomfort for it, and it uses the arbitration of the conciliation tribunals for the purpose of "rejecting the higher demands of the workers", whereas at other times it makes "use of its strategic position in order to force workers to accept more unfavourable conditions than they are due according to the arbitration of the conciliation tribunals". On the other hand, the system of the sliding scales of wages, which previously ensured for workers a share of the industrial boom, now, with the decline of business affairs, results more and more frequently only in one body-blow after another for them. The trade unions decisively turn away from this wages system. With the dismissal of the sliding system of wages on the part of the workers, and with the systematic breaking of arbitration on the part of the industrialists, the basis disappears for the entire conciliation and arbitration proceedure which accompanied the heyday of English trade unionism, and with it — the 'social peace'. This transformation was *officially* recognised some years ago by the abolition of the laws of 1867 and 1872, according to which all conflicts between capital and labour were to be settled by a process of conciliation (17). At the same time as the constantly prospering business affairs and the stability in the situation of the worker disappeared, so too did the possibility of so ingeniously constructing the trade unions and of so regularly and smoothly making their complicated mechanism function as had been the case previously. This ingenious mechanism and specialised bureaucratism of the trade unions also becomes largely pointless with the collapse of the sliding scales of wages and the standing conciliation procedure.

All trade unions founded in the last decade and a half are distinguished from the older unions by a great simplicity of their organisation and functioning, and are thereby comparable to the trade unions of the continent (18). But as the amicable arbitration procedure becomes ever more ineffective, the conflicts between capital and labour become ever more *questions of power*, as we witnessed in the engineers' strike and the Welsh

Rosa Luxemburg

miners' strike. In England too the "social peace" falls back before the social war — *the class struggle.* The trade unions gradually change from being organisations for ensuring social peace into organisations of struggle in the pattern of the German, French and Austrian trade unions.

Two important symptoms from the most recent period show that both the English bourgeoisie and the English proletariat are conscious of the change and arming for serious conflict. In the case of the industrialists this is the league for combatting the parliamentary action of the trade unions (19), in the case of the workers, the re-emergence of the idea of a general workers' league (20), which is equally hated by the capitalists and trade unionists of the old school, the supporters of the "social peace", but which clearly betrays amongst the masses of the English proletariat the need for banding together, the awakening of *class consciousness* in the true sense of the word.

For the arguments with Bernstein and his supporters, three kinds of conclusions can be drawn from the history of English trade unionism which we have outlined in its general features.

Above all, the idea of the direct *importance of the trade unions for socialism* appears as completely wrong. It is exactly the English trade union movement, to which one turns for support for this argument, which largely owes the successes it has achieved in the past to its purely bourgeois character and its opposition to socialist "utopianism". The historians of trade unionism, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, themselves repeatedly and explicitly affirm that the trade union movement in England failed every time to the extent that it was permeated with socialist ideas, and, vice versa, achieved successes to the extent it narrowed its horizons, became shallow, and freed itself of socialism.

It is exactly English trade unionism, the classical representative of which appears as the sated, correct, narrow-minded and blinkered worker-gentleman who thinks and feels like a bourgeois, which therefore proves that the trade union movement in and of itself is still nothing at all socialist, indeed that under certain circumstances it can be a direct obstacle to the spread of socialist consciousness, just as, vice versa, under certain circumstances socialist consciousness can be an obstacle to purely trade union successes.

In Germany, as on the continent as a whole, trade unions arose from the outset on the ground of class struggle, and, furthermore, of socialist struggle, often directly as a creation, a child of social democracy (see Belgium and Austria). Here they are subordinate to the socialist movement in advance and can reckon on success — completely the opposite to England — only to the extent that they base themselves on the socialist class struggle and are sheltered by it (see the current social-democratic action in Germany to protect the right of coalition (21)). The trade unions of Germany (and of the continent in general) are, from this standpoint, from the standpoint of the emancipatory strivings of the proletariat, *more progressive* than the English ones, in spite of their weakness and partly in connection with this weakness. To point to the English example is tantamount to advising the German trade unions to leave the ground of socialist class struggle and to place themselves on bourgeois ground. In order to serve the cause of socialism, it is not the German trade unions who must follow in the footsteps of the English, but on the contrary, the English in the footsteps of the German trade unions. "English spectacles", therefore, do not fit Germany, not because the English conditions are *more progressive* but because — from the standpoint of class struggle — they are *more backward* than the German ones.

Moreover, when we turn away from the subjective importance of the trade unions for socialism, from their effect on *class consciousness*, to the "economic power" which the opportunist theory claims they place into the hands of the workers and

with which they are to break the power of capital, then this too turns out to be a fairy tale, and, what is more, "a fairy tale from olden times". In England itself the unshakeable economic power of the trade unions, quite apart from noting with what it was bought, largely belongs to the past. As we have seen, it is connected with a quite definite and indeed exceptional period of English capitalism, with its undivided rule in the world market. This period, which only through its stability and prosperity formed the basis of trade unionism in its actual heyday, will not repeat itself, however, either in England or in any other country.

Even if the German labour movement, following the advice of the opportunists, could and would desire to drop the "Fresslegende (22), i.e. its socialist character, for the sake of "economic power", and follow in the footsteps of English trade unionism, it would never be able to achieve the latter's former economic power. For one simple reason: because the economic basis of the old trade unionism cannot be artificially conjured up by any opportunism.

Taking everything together, what then do the "English spectacles" of Bernstein turn out to be? A concave mirror of his mode of perception in which all phenomena are turned on their heads. What he takes for the most powerful means of socialist struggle was, in truth, a straightforward obstacle to socialism, and what he regards as the future of German social-democracy is the constantly shrinking past of the English movement in the course of its development on the road to social democracy. ●

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All quotations in the text are taken from German translations of the works of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: Geschichte der Gewerkvereine and Theorie und Praxis der Englischen Gewerkschaften and Geschichte der Britischen Trade Unions.

1. See "Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie", Stutgart 1899.

2. David was one of Bernstein's leading supporters in the revisionism debate and, in later years, a resolute supporter of German imperialism and opponent of the Spartakusbund led by Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

3. Social Reform or Revolution. Leipzig 1899.

4. August Bebel, an intimate friend of Luxemburg and one of the SPD's "elder statesmen", in particular attributed Bernstein's views to his stay in England.

5. Karl Freiherr von Stumm, a leading German industrialist who enjoyed the confidence of Wilhelm II, and co-founder with Arthur Graf von Posadowsky-Wehner of the Deutsche Reichspartie. Violently opposed to trade unionism and social democracy, he advocated the use of the most brutal methods to crush the working class. Hence Luxemburg's reference to "the era of Stumm-Posadowsky" in the opening paragraph of "Reform or Revolution?"

6. A pre-Marxist Utopian Socialist. One of the founding members of the co-operative movement and the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. He believed in the possibility of a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism through the transformation of trade unions into co-operative productive societies.

7. A middle-class reformer who worked in Parliament to the benefit of the trade unions but never lost sight of his own class-interests. He worked for the repeal of the Combination Acts, but also believed that legal trade unionism would be ineffective due to the "Iron Law of Wages" of which he was an adherent.

8. The GNCTU was set up in 1833 and wound up in August of the following year. Owen's goal was that it should unite the working classes for a short and peaceful struggle for socialism, which was to be achieved within a matter of months. But the four main unions of the period did not agree to join. At the time of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, many of the GNCTU's statements took on an increasingly militant tone, to the alarm of Owen, who consequently took the initiative to dissolve it.

9. See introduction

10. From 1845 onwards the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour, set up in March of that year, pressed for legislation to establish "Boards of Trade" for the purposes of arbitration and conciliation. By the end of the 1850s a number of employers were prepared to accept such methods, though the majority remained hostile to any interference in their "freedom" to fix wages as they chose. The "new model unions", given their general aversion to strikes, added further weight to the call for the use of arbitration and conciliation.

11. Cf bookbinders' leader TJ Dunning in "Trade Unions and Strikes" (1860): "It is superfluous to say that the price of labour, like that of everything else, is determined by the quantity or supply of it permanently in the market; when the supply of it permanently much exceeds its demand, nothing can prevent the reduction of wages...In all bargains, the buyer wishes to buy as cheap, and the seller to sell as dear, as he can...all things being equal, their interest is not one of opposition, but of mutual interest."

12. The cotton operatives received substantial legislative concessions from the Tories in the period referred to by Luxemburg. Divided fairly evenly in their political sympathies between Liberals and Conservatives, the operatives received such concessions by way of pressure from Tory MPs anxious to hold on to the constituencies in which the operatives lived. But the tactic of lobbying bourgeois parliamentarians for legislative reform remained a feature of the TUC's Political Committee through to the end of the century.

13. This was especially the case in the cotton industry, where the highly complicated piece price-lists led to a premium being placed on arithmetical skills, assessed by examinations for aspiring union officials.

14. It was members of the Durham and Northumberland district organisations who, as Members of Parliament, spoke up in Parliament in opposition to a bill for an eight-hour working day for miners. Such opposition was based on a fear that the eight-hour working-day would lead to labour shortages in the pits (the hewers worked a seven-hour shift "bank to bank", while transit hands had to work ten-hour shifts, even as late as 1908) and that the rising costs entailed by a shorter working-day would undermine competition in the export market. Opposition to the eight-hour working day, along with support for the sliding scale of wages, was central to the post-1889 divisions between the Miners' Federation and the National Miners' Union, controlled by the Durham and Northumberland districts. Not until the passing of the Eight Hour Act in 1908 did this cease to be an issue. Moreover it was miner MPs who were the most committed to Lib-Lab politics (at the height of Lib-Lab politics, half of the Lib-Lab MPs returned were miners) and consequently the most opposed to the creation of a party of labour based on the trade union movement.

15. The inferiority of British methods of trading was a cause of particular concern to economists and the government alike in this period.

16. Cf Luxemburg's article "Changes in Shipbuilding", in which she wrote: "The upturn (in shipbuilding) reveals itself most strikingly, of course, in the feverish activity of the English yards, which are the suppliers of the entire world."

17. It is not clear what Luxemburg is referring to here. In the aftermath of the so-called "Sheffield Outrages" (1866) and the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1871) the focal point of debate in labour legislation had not been the question of arbitration but the rights and immunities of trade unions, subsequently confirmed by the Employers and Workmen Act (1875) and a brief amending Act (1876) to the 1871 Act. The 1890s, in fact, saw an extension of legislation concerning arbitration and conciliation. The 1896 Conciliation Act authorised the Board of Trade to intervene in disputes for the purpose of arbitration and conciliation, but subsequent attempts by Ritchie, President of the Board of Trade, to establish a system of conciliation boards found little favour amongst employers.

18. Cf. Engels: "These unskilled are very different chaps from the fossilised brothers of the old trade unions; not a trace of the old formalist spirit, of the craft exclusiveness of the engineers, for instance; on the contrary, a general cry for the organisation of all trade unions in one fraternity and for a direct struggle against capital."

19. Presumably a reference to the Employers' Parliamentary Council.

20. Presumably a reference to the General Federation of Trade Unions, set up in 1899. It was conceived of, and functioned, as a mutual insurance society, rather than a "general workers' league".

21. In December of 1897 Posadowsky-Wehner, in his capacity of Secretary of State of the Imperial Office of the Interior, had written to the governments of the individual German states asking for suggestions for legal measures against the right of coalition and the right to strike. The document sent by Posadowsky was published in the SPD's "Vorwarts" in January of 1898. Speaking in Oeynhausen in September of the same year Wilhelm II announced that a new bill would be introduced into the Reichstag the following year providing for heavy prison penalties for organsing and carrying out strikes. The bill was subsequently defeated.

22. Literally, "legend of gobbling up".

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A Scottish Assembly?

Renewed interest in the issue of a Scottish Assembly should be placed within the perspective of the desirability or otherwise of a federal framework for the UK.

Support for such a constitutional system has good antecedents. Writing in 1891, Engels, reflecting on federal structures in different countries, and their desirability or otherwise, opined that, "It would have been a great step forward in Britain where four nations inhabit the two islands and three legislative systems exist side by side despite the joint parliament".

Lenin in 'State and Revolution' spoke approvingly of Engels' view when he wrote, "Even in regard to Britain, where geographical conditions, a common language and the history of many centuries would seem to have 'put an end' to the national question in the various small divisions of that country — even in regard to that country, Engels reckoned with the plain fact that the national question was not just a thing of the past, and recognised in consequence that the establishment of a federal republic would be a 'step forward'."

Lenin went on, however, to note, "Of course, there is not the slightest hint here of Engels abandoning the criticisms of the shortcomings of a federal republic or announcing the most determined advocacy of, and struggle for, a unified and centralised democratic republic."

In counterbalancing the two propositions, Lenin was giving voice to the perennial concern of Marxists as to how to reconcile the defence of the interests of minorities, national or otherwise, with the desirability of ensuring the maximum unity of the working class and securing the conditions for working class seizure of state power and transformation of the economy in a socialist direction over the widest possible area.

He recognised, however, that a genuine integration of the interests of a minority with a majority people could only be on the basis of mutual trust and respect. Any forced or unwelcome assimilation, such as evinced by Russian chauvinism, could only foster future dissension and bitterness which would undermine progress in a socialist direction.

Accepting that the world has changed dramatically since the day of Engels and Lenin, their views on the feasibility of a federal solution to the UK constitutional framework requires serious consideration. Nor can Socialist Organiser and Workers Liberty feel ill-equipped to openly debate this issue as our tendency has a proud record in terms of discussing issues of state power and its distribution and the defence of the interests of minorities. Our advocacy of a federal solution for Ireland, our concern that the people of the Falkland Islands should not be the victim of the ambitions of the Argentinian junta and our discussions as to how best to secure the interests of both Palestinian and Jewish peoples in the Middle East, all testify to our serious engagement with these issues.

There are many socialists who, whilst not opposed to advocacy of a federal solution for the UK, regard the demand for a Scottish Assembly as diversionary in that, rather than beginning from the interests of all workers in the UK, it advances the interests of one particular section and is therefore potentially divisive.

Whilst these concerns are understandable, they tend to be rather abstract in that they do not take into account the reality that there is a deeply felt demand within one part of the UK, Scotland, for a greater degree of self-government. No one now disputes that that demand exists; the question is whether we advise Scottish workers to restrain their claims on that score until we have constructed a viable federal framework for the UK as a whole or whether we proceed from the actual unfolding of events rather than the imposition of cut and dried schema.

Our views on this question will be to some extent conditioned by the degree to which we accept that there is a genuine Scottish identity.

Note that we did not say a 'genuine Scottish nation'. That remains a larger issue which we can only touch upon here.

Certainly we do not feel as confident to adjudicate as those, presumably more deeply read in the subject than the present author, who can confidently state that no such entity exists.

The subject is a complex one and readers who are interested and have not done so, may care to read some of the essays in Tom Nairn's 'The Break up of Britain'. Whatever the limitations of Nairn's politics, his analysis of Scotland as being one of Engels' 'stateless nations' is worthy of study.

Essentially, his proposition is that, following the Union of Parliaments in 1707, a Scottish identity, as articulated by a galaxy of intellectuals, such as Burns, Smith, Hume and Fergusson, flourished in the 18th century but was eclipsed in the following century as the Scottish bourgeoisie immersed itself in the scramble for material rewards that characterised the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath.

The benefits of a share in the British Empire and joint industrialisation were more substantial than the pursuit of a national cultural tradition and identity. Thus, in the 19th century, the age of effloresence of nationalism throughout Europe, when countries as diverse as Greece and Belgium, in response to the uneven development of capitalism as a system, consciously created a national identity out of literature, historical and mythological sources, Scotland submerged its identity in the pursuit of a share in the proceeds of imperialism and industrialisation.

A Scottish identity only begins to revive in the 20th century, especially from the 1960s onwards. Previous efforts to recreate that national identity by writers such as McDiarmid were of limited success.

It required changes in material circumstances, the discovery of North Sea Oil and the reaction to increased centralisation of power and wealth in the South East of England, to foster modern 'neo-nationalism', a phenomenon not peculiar to the UK.

At present that assertion of identity is bound up with a massive Scottish working class (and substantial middle class) rejection of Tory Government policies in terms of their decimation of social services and de-industrialisation. That finds expression in a reinforcement of loyalty to a form of Labourism which is essentially defensive.

Increasing evidence of a failure to be able to defend conditions, jobs and services, which seems likely, may well lead to a move towards support for the nationalists in the form of the SNP.

It could be argued that the ingredients of a distinct national identity exist — geographical demarcation, the continuance of seperate legal, educational and local government systems, the existence of the STUC and a separate teachers' union in the EIS, are some of the elements. All of which are overlaid by a subculture of resistance to Anglicisation and the flourishing over recent decades of a school of creative writers who are distinctly Scottish — Jenkins, Gray, McIlvaney etc.

Whether these elements fuse into a resurgent Scottish nationalism with an articulated ideology and a mass popular base depends upon the response of the labour movement to the present juncture.

Here we reach the second ground for regarding support for an Assembly as diversionary — the view, expressed by one of the precursors of the present *Workers' Liberty*, *Workers' Action*, that its effect would be "much more to put wind in the sails of the nationalists than to enhance a general democratic idea." It is a finely balanced point and I have no doubt that in coming to that decision there were prolonged discussions as to whether support for an Assembly could encourage or discourage the nationalists.

Glasgow, September 1987. Photo: John Harris, IFL

No one can be absolutely sure of the answer to that. The vagaries of SNP fortunes at the polls over the years can only give some indications. My own opinion is that the long-term effect of refusal to support the Assembly demand will be to encourage the growth of nationalism although I can understand the views of those who are inclined to the contrary opinion.

What we should all be agreed upon is the need to resist the growth of nationalism. On the theoretical aspect of this Lenin was clear: "It is the Marxist's duty to stand for the most resolute and consistent democratism on all aspects of the national question, but this is the limit the proletariat can go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the 'positive activity of the bourgeoisie to fortify nationalism'."

He added, "to go beyond these strictly limited and definite historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie".

No doubt Lenin's view on this issue would extend to the attitudes socialists should have to defending distinct communities who are not necessarily national minorities. In practice however, Lenin recognised that this was a delicate issue as when he wrote, "There is a border line here, which is often very slight".

The danger was then, and remains now, of slipping over into defence of one's own ruling class.

That is why there can be no question, in supporting the Assembly demand, of becoming identified with cross-party, cross-class alliances. That is the position of the STUC and of several major unions, partly due to the malignant influence of Stalinism, either of the *Morning Star* or Eurocommunist varieties.

Socialists who support the demand for an Assembly can only do so from a Labour-trade union basis, independently organised and campaigning for an Assembly on its own terms.

Does that guarantee that the outcome will be an Assembly with a Labour majority? Not necessarily so. If the Assembly demand is a valid democratic one then it should be supported on that basis.

Moreover, we should argue that it be elected on the basis of proportional representation which may well mean that it is even less likely to be Labour-controlled. What will determine the nature of the assembly in terms of its constitutional powers and political make-up will be how socialists fight for it. Those who oppose it on the ground that it will be an 'expensive talking shop', 'a replica of Strathclyde Regional Council' etc, may well be engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy, a pastime at which British socialists are adept. By maintaining an abstentionist stance they may well help to ensure an unsatisfactory outcome.

In conclusion, we are aware of the limitations of this article. It does not address itself to the possible powers of an assembly or to the tactical issues related to securing it. What we have tried to do is to raise some general questions relating to federalism, nationalism and the interests of minorities which will perhaps encourage further debate on these matters in the context of the demand for a Scottish Assembly.

Ian McCalman

Ban the Orange Order?

Geoff Bell (WL7) makes two points about Socialist Organiser's contribution to the Labour Committee on Ireland AGM. One is either a misunderstanding or deliberately misleading, the other is a genuine and very deep difference of opinion.

SO supporters did *not* argue against a conference motion calling for the disbandment of the UDR. What we did do, Jim Denham and myself, was to point out that this demand would entail a massive increase in the British presence in Ireland in order to carry out the disbandment. It is in effect a demand on the British government to send troops in!

This, we went on, is a bit of a contradiction with our overall policy of Troops Out. We proposed that we should have a full discussion on that contradiction. We don't think that the argument for withdrawal can be won if the LCI does not move beyond the simplistic and lightminded approach to Troops Out which it currently has.

We disagree on banning the Orange Order. We think it is Geoff's position which is reactionary nonsense.

Even though Geoff makes no attempt to explain the reasons for banning the Orange Order, or to substantiate his criticism of us, I will say something about the issue. At the conference very few reasons were put forward for the ban. It was assumed that all right-thinking people would agree with it.

The underlying arguments, I think, are as follows: the Orange Order is sectarian and bigoted, Order members have physically attacked or threatened other Labour Party members, some Order members have links with fascists.

The most important point to be made is that we do not believe that the way to deal with our opponents in the labour movement is to ban them. The exception to this rule is fascists and organised racists. This approach to bans sets us apart from Geoff, not just on Ireland. And it means that our opposition to a ban is not a token of any kind of solidarity with or support for the Orange Order!

Yes, the Orange Order is sectarian. So is the Catholic Church. Geoff should read some of Connolly's comments on the sectarianism of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Catholic Orange Order.

But expulsion from the labour movement is prescribed as a penalty only for Orangeists.

If Orange Order members physically attack opponents in the Labour Party, then they should be dealt with for that, just as anyone else should. We are against physical violence within the movement. If Orange Order members are fascists or have close links with fascists, they should be expelled for that.

All this is beside the point of the LCI's crazy decision that *every* member of the Orange Order should be expelled from the Labour Party.

One SO supporter said that for many workers brought up in the Protestant community in Scotland the Orange Order was just a social club. Geoff Bell deliberately takes this comment out of context to make it look as if that is the top and bottom of our analysis of the Orange Order. The same speaker also made the point that a ban on Orange Order members would drive thousands of the best militants in the Scottish coalfields out of the Labour Party.

The LCI motion is not important to Orangeists because fortunately it has no chance of ever being adopted by the Labour Party. It is important to socialists, however, because it is yet another sign of the lapse into Catholic sectarianism on much of the left.

I don't expect Geoff to agree with any of this, but it would be harder for him to misrepresent it if he actually understood it.

Patrick Murphy

The 'Perdition' debate

I would be the last person to complain that the reply to my letter in *Workers' Liberty* 7 was more than four times the length of the original.

However, it might have been helpful, to say nothing of honest, if John O'Mahony had explained that the chunks of *Perdition* quoted were early drafts that were, as with most plays, articles, etc, discarded, amended, deleted and added to.

For example, the phrase 'Zionist knife in the Nazi fist' does not appear in the play, having been deleted at an early stage. Whatever its dramatic effect, politically it would not have been justified and Allen accordingly cut it.

To quote something that is not in the play itself but in a draft, and this was a common feature of attacks on *Perdition*, suggests an inability to come to terms with the thesis of the play, still less to prove the horrendous charge of 'anti-semitism'.

It is for the above reasons that I will refrain from commenting point by point on O'Mahony's critique of the draft and will confine myself to one instance. For making a connection between the Jewish religion and Zionism, Allen is guilty of a *"Stalinist-type amalgam between Zionism and religion. In fact most of the Zionists in that period were atheists or not especially religious"*.

The relevant quote in the play is as follows:

Scott: Would you agree that most of those early Zionists were atheists and non-believers?
Yaron: Yes.
Scott: They rejected all religious concepts?
Yaron: Yes.
Scott: Would you say that they were nationalists who directed all their efforts to the settlement of Jews in Palestine?
Yaron: Yes.
Scott: Well, how did the rabbis take it? This sudden rupture with the Jewish religious tradition?
Yaron: There was conflict... but over the years agreement was reached.
Scott: A sort of pact?
Yaron: Their aims became complementary.
Scott: Was this because without the stamp of biblical approval, Zionism could never have legitimised its claims to Palestine?... Zionism annexed the Jewish religious tradition.

As this passage demonstrates, Allen's handling of the complex interrelationship between religion and Zionism is far more subtle than O'Mahony's caricature of it, viz. an attack on "Jews in general, or his idea of Jews".

It is even more interesting that the most persistent Zionist critic of the play, David Cesarani, in an article in the *Jewish Quarterly*, makes the exact opposite point. *"Zionism is perceived here as an entirely modern movement without roots in Jewish religion or culture... Such an analysis is simplistic and ignores the role of rabbinical figures like Mohilever and Kook who were ardent Zionists, not to mention the whole stream of Mizrachi, the religious Zionists"*.

Whilst arguing a diametrically opposite case from O'Mahony, Cesarani still draws the same conclusion, i.e. *Perdition* is anti-semitic! Whatever Allen says is anti-semitic. Why?

Because his play looks at the Holocaust from an explicitly anti-Zionist perspective. On this Cesarani and O'Mahony agree. The difference between Cesarani and O'Mahony is that the former at least has a basic understanding and knowledge of Zionism, albeit

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from a non-socialist perspective, whereas the latter operates through the filter of the left-Zionist Mapam.

There are however more general points that O'Mahony makes. The central one is the question, how did the massacre of Hungary's Jews serve Zionism?

Not surprisingly, it is the wrong question. Only a few Zionists were calculating enough to assert that without mass genocide there would be no state and therefore the Zionist movement should act accordingly. To assert that this was the defined policy, acted upon and agreed in tandem, would be to tread dangerously close to a conspiracy theory (albeit of the mechanical left, not the fascist right).

What actually happened was that Zionism, a movement founded on the belief that anti-semitism could not be fought, a movement that sought to influence the powerful and privileged in the time-honoured ways of Jewish leaders, by pleading and interceding, was incapable of doing other than writing off resistance.

Further, given the Zionist goal of statehood above everything else, rescue that wasn't seen to be of benefit to Jewish Palestine ('refugeeism') was opposed because it would render Zionism irrelevant. It was this indifference to, if not outright hostility to, rescue from the outside, coupled with acquiescence and yes collaboration inside Europe, e.g. serving on the Nazi-appointed Judenrate and police, that provide the backcloth to *Perdition*.

One can find all sorts of justifications for collaboration, and of course it was not between equals, but collaboration is nonetheless a class question (and this perhaps is the weakness of *Perdition*).

O'Mahony may defend the Kastners, but the survivors of Hungarian Jewry whose families were deceived by his 'rescue committee' were not so easily persuaded when they testified in Jerusalem in 1954. Such was the attitude to collaboration throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Nor was it merely Kastner as an individual, but his role as representative of the Jewish Agency.

Nor was resistance in Hungary merely a question of hindsight. Those without this gift, like the Swedish diplomat Wallenberg, rescued up to 100,000 Jews. Outside pressure from the United States saved the remaining 500,000 despite Zionist silence.

The saving of the 1,684 leaders was indeed an example of "the cruel criteria of Zionism". Or, as the Attorney General in the real Kastner trial noted, "It has always been our Zionist tradition to select the few out of many in arranging immigration to Palestine".

Maybe, though, O'Mahony can explain away the betrayal of the Haganah parachuters to the Gestapo by Kastner, whose entrance threatened to disrupt the agreement to pacify and deceive Hungary's Jews prior to deportation to Auschwitz? And what of Kastner's appearance *after* the war at Nuremburg in order to help free, on behalf of the Jewish Agency, Kurt Becher, Lieutenant-General in the Waffen-SS?

O'Mahony speaks of the "loathing and hatred" of Allen for not merely Zionists but Jews. *Perdition* is an anti-semitic play.

Those who, like Erich Fried, lost friends and relatives in the Holocaust and have fought anti-semitism before and since, can write of *Perdition*: "I am envious that I have not written it myself... (it) is not anti-semitic... but it correctly quotes and unmasks the terrible attitude of some leading Zionists... To accuse the play of faking history or of anti-Jewish bias is monstrous".

Maxime Rodinson writes: "I have not the least doubt that there is not the slightest sign of anti-semitism in the play. I do not know Jim Allen personally and I cannot say if he is an anti-semite in his heart. But if so, he has, in a masterly way, hidden this trend in his writing".

Even Dr Levenburg, veteran Zionist and author of the original Institute of Jewish Affairs Report on the same script that O'Mahony quotes from, states: "The author avoids using anti-semitic arguments but some viewers of the play will not be able to avoid forming a negative attitude about Jews".

How is it that O'Mahony is able, with such certainty, to brand *Perdition* as anti-semitic when Jews with a proven record of having fought anti-semitism and racism take the opposite viewpoint. Indeed, how is it that an avowed Trotskyist can become not merely an ardent apologist for Zionism today, but for its past too, even if it does mean lining up with the most reactionary sections of bourgeois opinion?

Finally, if going against a bourgeois tide of opinion places on in the 'two-camps left in world politics', so be it. Certainly it is preferable to providing a socialist coat, *Militant*-style, for imperialism. To O'Mahony it may appear as a third way, to revolutionaries it is merely the old reformist path.

Tony Greenstein

A reply

As always, Tony Greenstein doesn't debate the issue in dispute. He worries around the edges of it, quibbling over secondary details and evading the questions he is supposed to be dealing with.

The chunks of *Perdition* I quoted were not from 'early drafts' (where would I have got them?) Apparently, the version just published in book form was the fourth. The one I quoted from was the second. This was the one scheduled for production at the Royal Court Theatre, and it got some circulation, initially when the Royal Court sent out copies to theatre critics.

The third draft was, I understand, a modified version of the second after Allen made cuts under pressure of his critics. In the fourth, printed, version there are massive changes. Most of what I quoted from the second, or Royal Court, version, has been cut.

Ah! says Greenstein. In the middle of a raging public controversy you quote the available text, the one due for production, but that is impermissible and scandalous because six months later the author will publish an expurgated edition.

Allen massively changes his arguments under pressure, in such a way that he concedes a great deal of the political and historical criticism of his opponents and all their moral case. Yet he maintains his thesis. I would say that that is a scandal.

Allen and Brenner both have a picture of Zionism as some outside force, allying with anti-semites and Nazis, hi-jacking the Jews. At the same time Allen sometimes conflates secular Zionism and the Jewish religious communities. I thought that was important because it leads Allen, whose explicit hatred is directed at the devil-ex-machina Zionists, to claw into his target range vast layers of the Jewish communities who were not Zionists.

Perdition does not "look at the Holocaust from an explicitly anti-Zionist perspective". It uses the Holocaust as raw material for a scapegoating historical forgery whose target is the existing state of Israel.

In the guise of an independent exposure of the alleged role of 'the Zionists' in helping the Nazis kill Jews, it presents a Zionophobic message whose current political implication is to provide justification for those — like Allen and Brenner — who would destroy the Jewish state. It is not history. It is not criticism and polemic of a political trend from the point of view of international socialism. It is part of an Arab-chauvinist propaganda drive to deny the rights of the Israeli Jews by branding the founders of Israel with some responsibility for the Holocaust.

Zionophobia on that level is comprehensively hostile to most Jews — whatever Allen's feelings about Jews. Initially I wrote that I had no doubt that Allen was not anti-semitic personally. Analysing the passages I quoted in *WL* 7, I no longer felt sure about that. If the passages I quoted and commented on don't explain why to the non-Greensteinian reader, then repeating them here will not help, and is anyway impossible.

In his own way Greenstein repeats all the nonsense. Only "a few" Zionists wanted genocide, he says, moderately. *Which* Zionists, Greenstein?

Zionists didn't resist the Nazis? One of the changes in Allen's fourth version is the admission that some Zionists did organise resistance and fight back.

The Zionist movement wasn't responsible for the Judenrate. But it is not a matter of 'defending' either Kastner or the Judenrate. Naturally socialists would be on the other side of the divide from these 'prominents' and bourgeis. The socialists in the ghettoes, including socialist Zionists, were on the other side.

But we have a duty to understand, a responsibility to refrain from glib and facile denunciations of people living in conditions and within choices that we have to strain our imagination even to begin to comprehend.

You can't equate Israel with 'imperialism'. The existence of the Jewish nation is a fact separable from any links it has with US imperialism

Finally, on the new version of *Perdition*. It is a much better play for the pruning and the additions. Its poisonous theme is the same, but now it is hidden.

The basic dramatic weakness — that the case against the author's 'anti-Zionist' thesis was not really put — has now been resolved by Allen abandoning even the pretence that he is mounting a serious debate on the issues. Now the trial is just a charade. The defendant and his accuser are in collusion. Old Yaron wants to confess and have himself judged and scourged in public. His accuser, Ruth, is being helpful.

Thus Allen turns the play into a silly melodrama. Worse than that, though. In the play Yaron is guilty, and he knows it, of helping kill hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews. Could someone admit that guilt and stay alive (helped by a little public scourging)? Could a play deal with such a subject and avoid all the dramatic demands for catharsis or expiation? Allen's does!

Even in melodramas the villain usually comes to a bad end. In *Perdition* mark 4 Yaron, the organiser of mass murder, and Ruth, his accuser, comfort each other. He forgives himself, she forgives him. The last cosy scene — after the issues raised in the play, and after Yaron has been branded a mass murderer — is schmaltzy enough to make you retch.

With the new ending Allen brands himself as not taking his own case seriously.

It is not just bad non-drama. It is also a give-away. For Yaron in the play is just a stalking horse for Zionism. The anger of the author is not really focused on historical figures like Kastner-Yaron but on Israel now. Otherwise the camp schmaltz-fest at the end would not be psychologically possible.

John O'Mahony

REVIEWS

The future Lord Red Ken

John O'Mahony reviews 'If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It', by Ken Livingstone. Collins, £2.00.

You can tell a lot about a party or movement by the people it chooses for its heroes or leaders — and even by the people it tolerates in prominent positions.

I don't known if anyone in the labour movement still considers Ken Livingstone a hero, but he remains popular on the left even after the fiasco to which he led the local government left.

That in itself might not be surprising. Defeats are part of the struggle, and even if the local government left had been better and more courageously led it might still have lost. What is surprising, and indicative of the state of the labour movement, is that Livingstone has not discredited himself utterly by the running commentaries he has given about his own motives for various discreditable retreats.

When he bottled out of confronting Thatcher, he did it after years during which he had led the London left into assuming responsibility for local government cuts and rate rises, while all the time justifying himself with promises that he was laying the ground for big battles in the future. Not yet, but soon, was his message.

Some of us didn't believe him, and we pointed out that you don't mobilise workers to confront the government by passing on government cuts. But the vast bulk of the London left did believe him.

And when he bottled out, how did he explain himself? "I'm for manipulative politics", he said — "the cynical soft-sell". His future career and his personal interest came before anything else. The future Lord Red Ken uber alles!

About the same time he clowned it up for the magazine *Time Out* in a cardboard crown and lordly robes.

Many reviewers have pounced on the passage in his book in which Ken Livingstone identifies his own philosophy with that of a character in the novel and movie 'The Godfather'. One of the gangsters tries to set a trap for the Godfather Michael Corleone. He is thwarted, and is led away to be shot. He says to an old associate: 'Tell Michael it was just business. I always liked him!'

Of course, Livingstone means such comments to be disarming, and quite often they seem to succeed. Does he mean what he writes? Literally? Probably he does.

In pursuit of principled socialist politics, such an approach might even be admirable — pursue your political goals, if necessary in opposition to people you like or love and in alliance with people you don't care for, and try to keep down the personal friction, hatred and malice.

But such an approach used in pursuit of a grubby personal career? It differs from the fictional gangsters whom Livingstone so colourfully invokes only in its details!

Right now Ken Livingstone hovers somewhere between the soft left and the hard left, no doubt calculating that with Labour in opposition for four or five years it makes career sense to backtrack a bit from the sharp rightward move he made after the collapse of the GLC.

Socialist Organiser — and the present writer — figure strongly in Ken Livingstone's book, as the opposite pole to him on the left. Though his accounts of SO and the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory are inaccurate and sometimes silly, that is how it should be.

We did advocate the policies which would have avoided the collapse of the local government left. We did part company with those who founded *Briefing* because they were in Ken Livingstone's breast-pocket while they kidded themselves 'ideologically' that they were 'taking power' locally.

This is a self-apologist's book. Livingstone evades any account of how he came to found *Labour Herald* together with Gerry Healy's WRP. He lies blatantly when he says it was not subsidised by the WRP — the WRP even had a Central Committee member, Steven Miller, as executive editor of the paper.

Another measure of the state of the left is this: that after all that, Livingstone is now back in the fold and a candidate of the left for Labour's National Executive — someone for whom those who want to oppose the right will have to vote.

Under two flags

Paddy Dollard reviews 'Terrible Beauty: a life of Constance Markievicz', by Diana Norman. Hodder and Stoughton, £4.95, and 'Prison Letters of Constance Markievicz', edited by Esther Roper. Virago 4.95.

The well-known author Tim Pat Coogan once made the cynical but true comment that Irish history has the only example of Communists and bourgeois nationalists joining together against imperialism in which it was the Communists who were gobbled up.

He was referring to the 1916 Rising and to what happened afterwards to the hundreds of socialist workers — members of the trade union militia, the Irish Citizen Army — who took part in it together with the secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, James Connolly, the military leader of the rising.

The Irish labour movement was absorbed in the general nationalist movement as an important but politically subordinate part. So were the socialists.

'Strike together but march separately', 'Don't mix up the class banners' — these were the slogans raised by Lenin and Trotsky to guide socialists involved in national struggles. Ireland between 1916 and 1923 is one of the classic examples of the truth in Lenin's and Trotsky's position.

Unfortunately it is a negative example. In Ireland all the banners were crossed, and the red flag was trampled in the mud. A new and unexpected meaning was given to the old Irish nationalist rallying cry expressing the fervent desire to put 'the green flag above the (English) red'. Now it was the Irish bourgeois green above the Irish working-class red.

Nobody symbolised the confusion and crossed banners which wrecked the brilliant prospects Irish labour seemed to have in the second decade of the 20th century better than Constance Markievicz.

She was a member of the Irish Citizen Army and fought in Citizen Army uniform during the Easter Rising of 1916. She was sentenced to death when the British Army recaptured Dublin. Unlike 15 of the other prisoners of war — including James Connolly — who surrendered to the gallant British General Maxwell and were then shot after summary court martial, Markievicz was reprieved 'solely because of her sex'.

The Irish Citizen Army had been set up by the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union to defend striking workers. A member of the Anglo-Irish ruling class and the wife of a Polish count, Constance Markievicz took the side of the workers against the Dublin bosses and the murderous policemen during Dublin's bitter labour war of 1913.She organised a soup kitchen at ITGWU headquarters, Liberty Hall.

She became a Connollyite socialist republican. After the strike James Connolly, acting secretary of the ITGWU, kept the Citizen Army going and linked it with the revolutionary nationalists, the Irish Volunteers. Together with the Volunteers, the Citizen Army rose in rebellion against British rule in 1916. It faced insuperable odds, but some 1000 rebels held Dublin for a week against the mighty British Army.

Markievicz was not just a member of the Citizen Army. She was also — with the support of James Connolly — a member of the Irish Volunteers, the petty-bourgeois nationalists. Yet she was an honest socialist who believed in the workers' republic.

She remained a sincere socialist, and was recognised as one of their own by Dublin workers, until her early death at 59 in a hospital for the Dublin poor. Tens of thousands of Dublin workers marched behind her coffin. But she died — still a follower of Connolly, and still a sincerely committed socialist — a member of De Valera's Fianna Fail party, the party which is today organising a savage drive against the Irish workers' living standards!

What happened to the militant Irish labour movement and to Constance Markievicz was that they merged and blurred their own political identity with that of petty-bourgeois and then bourgeois nationalists. They retreated into politics which combined, on one level, the militant pursuit of the national cause together with anybody willing to fight for it; on the other, militant but narrow trade unionism.

Socialism, the workers' republic, was there somewhere — but not yet the stuff of practical politics.

Socialism became indistinguishable from nationalism. It dissolved into a left wing na-

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Constance Markievicz

tionalist current and then, falling under the influence of Stalinism in the 1930s, into a sort of slushy populism. This was all the more unfortunate because what was then the big majority of the Irish proletariat, in the north-east, rejected and resisted nationalism.

After Connolly, the unions tried to avoid politics for mixed reasons, but one central reason was their desire to evade issues on which *any* answer — nationalist or Unionist — would alienate one or another group of organised workers, and maybe split the unions. That is probably the main reason for the astonishing abstention by the labour movement in the 1918 election, when the nationalists appealed for a majority on a programme of secession from the UK, and got it.

The political questions became the property of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, and *their* answers held sway even with the workers. Politically and organisationally, Irish labour never evolved beyond the politics of a tiny reformist Labour Party. Fianna Fail, initially a radical petty bourgeois party, gained the support of most workers and kept it, although it has been the main bourgeois party in independent Ireland.

Constance Markievicz — honest, devoted, and selfless socialist though she was — symbolises the confusion that created this situation. The most important of Connolly's comrades and heirs, if only because of her part in the Rising, she floundered helplessly. Had Connolly lived things might have gone differently, but he died before a British firing squad in May 1916.

Constance Markievicz ended up in Fianna Fail; so, in the '40s and '50s, did Connolly's daughter Nora Connolly O'Brien, though she too was always a socialist.

So today, though they are not in Fianna Fail, many Irish socialists can be heard sometimes muttering — especially at elections — about the latent anti-imperialist potential which still exists in Fianna Fail.

Diana Norman's book is a splendidly sympathetic account of Markievicz. I liked it a lot, though it should be said that it is the work of an uncritical enthusiast, the book of someone English who has newly discovered romantic Irish nationalism and has fallen in love with it. In any case she loves Constance Markievicz — but that is appropriate. Constance Markievicz did what she could, and personally this upper-class woman held nothing back from the labour movement once she 'came over'. Tragic political confusion was not hers alone.

'The Prison Letters' is a treasure-trove, containing not only the letters but also a 130-page biography of Constance and her sister Eva (a socialist and feminist who worked in England) by Eva's life-long companion, Esther Roper.

New utopians

Gareth Kinnell reviews 'The Profit System: The Economics of Capitalism', by Francis Green and Bob Sutcliffe. Penguin, 5.95.

This book sets out to survey concisely how capitalist economies work today, and to show that capitalism is exploitative and oppressive. It concludes by presenting a sketch of a better society — socialism — which should replace capitalism.

It surveys capitalism mostly by presenting the results of orthodox academic economic research — as seen from a viewpoint informed by Marxism. For example, capitalism's tendency to crisis is explained by expounding the crisis theory of the great Liberal economist Maynard Keynes, criticising Keynes's ideas on how government intervention could save capitalism from crises, and (after 43 pages on those themes) summarising with two and a half pages which assert that capitalism inevitably generates crisis through the conflict between production and realisation of profit.

The job is done with great lucidity and directness. Far too often modern Marxists have dealt with orthodox economics just by demonstrating that it has "the wrong method" and leaving it at that. Wrong method or not, modern academic economics is a vast storehouse of empirical investigations and of logical examination of market mechanisms. Even if 99% of it is rubbish, that still leaves a considerable volume of genuinely enlightening material. Far better to work over that material seriously than to produce yet more methodological essays.

However, the range of the book is vast — it combines exposition of academic economic theory (assuming no previous knowledge) *and* criticism of that theory *and* tabulation of how capitalism actually functions today *and* a socialist critique of capitalism. The attempt to cover such a vast range without glibness or facile dogmatism produces a tremendous amount of "on the one hand this, on the other hand that", and a certain blandness.

Perhaps understandably, the book omits any discussion of either Marx's labour theory of value or 'marginalism' (the foundation of modern academic economics). But this compounds the blandness. Readers new to economic theory will find the book readable and informative but they will not get the mental jolt, the perception of issues and problems previously invisible, which can be got from reading 'Capital' or Keynes's 'General Theory'.

More seriously, I think such readers will find the book's arguments for socialism limp

Green and Sutcliffe argue that what they call the 'actually existing socialist' states are not authentically socialist. Indeed, they are "neither better nor worse" than capitalism.
But (if I have understood correctly) Green and Sutcliffe concede that these states arose from genuine socialist revolutions. These revolutions degenerated. To the pro-capitalist argument that such degeneration is an inevitable sequel of socialist revolution, the authors reply: "Our response, which we cannot prove, is that socialism's failure to appear so far is due to a number of contingent historical reasons but not to the intrinsic impossibility of a socialist economy. Those countries that have embarked on a journey to socialism, from the USSR onwards, all have begun from a very low material base..."

They draw no distinction between the workers' revolution in Russia in 1917 and such revolutions as the Chinese of 1949, where the revolutionary forces had no links to the working class and moved against the working class soon after their arrival in power. Lenin's argument for some capitalist management techniques to be used to raise production in the USSR in the 1920s is cited as part of the same picture as the boss/worker relations in factories in the USSR today.

In their concluding section, which sketches how they see socialism, Green and Sutcliffe seem to be a lot less than confident that socialism does not inevitably produce Stalinism. They argue that the economy should be decentralised as much as possible into small units, but concede that a fair degree of centralised planning would be necessary. "Centralisation carries with it the threat of bureaucratisation and the separation of rulers and ruled... This difficulty reflects an inbuilt problem of a socialist economy...".

Now for Marxists all these issues come down to the capacities of the working class: are the workers, mobilised and organised by class struggle, capable of becoming a ruling class, or will we always suffer one or another elite ruling over us? But Green and Sutcliffe discuss socialism without any connection at all to the class struggle. They write that the question of how to get from capitalism to socialism is "too vast for us to tackle here, even if we felt qualified to do so". Their only reference to forces of opposition within capitalism mentions "traditional class struggle" perfunctorily before going on to women's, anti-racist, lesbian and gay, green and peace movements and concluding (without any great show of optimism) that the future depends on these movements somehow uniting.

In the conclusion the authors bluntly call their own approach "utopian". Sadly, it seems to be the utopianism not of the enthusiast convinced that everyone will rally to the vision of a better society once it is explained to them, but the utopianism of socialists who have been beaten down by the problems, setbacks and difficulties of struggle but feel that they must at least keep some hope, however minimal and abstract.

Bourgeois housing

Martin Thomas reviews 'A Social History of Housing 1815-1985', by John Burnett. Methuen.

The Tory Government has made housing the centrepiece of its manifesto. Already the Tories have cut public spending in housing by over half. They have reduced new building by councils to a trickle. Now they plan to cut off even that trickle, to get most of councils' existing stock sold off, and to make the private landlord central again.

On no front is 'socialism' more vulnerable. So the Tories reckon: and from their point of view, with some justice.

The big council estates built in the 1960s and early '70s, with huge blocks of flats, are seedy and bleak. They need a lot of maintenance and repair, which

cash-strapped councils can't afford. In analysing the design faults of this housing, and proposing alternatives and remedies, Thatcherite writers like Alice Coleman have led the way, with left-wingers straggling along behind.

In 1964 Labour was able to win office by denouncing private slum landlords. Now the Tories reckon that they can win support by denouncing councils as landlords.

Socialists need to reorient. And John Burnett's overview of the whole of working class housing in industrial Britain will help us do that.

The British working class has much better housing than 150 years ago. Burnett demonstrates that the improvement owes little to the free operations of the capitalist market, and much more to the political efforts of the labour movement.

Laws on building standards, tenants' rights laws and direct house building and renovation work by public authorities, have pushed up standards notch by notch. The improvement has been made mainly in three surges — in the late 19th century, as the mass labour movement grew up, and after the two world wars, when the ruling class feared that 'if you do not give the people social reform, they will give you social revolution.'

Every surge of improvement has been followed by deterioration in the name of saving money. The fiasco of the 1960s was in large measure part of this pattern. Progress has been neither automatic nor inevitable. John Burnett's dispassionate and richly detailed history indicates beyond doubt that if the Tories get away with it, slums and squalor will boom.

The history also raises issues about what alternatives we should argue for. Burnett demonstrates that "Through momentous social, economic and political changes in the last century and a half the individual house in a garden has survived as the ideal of the majority of English people, more spacious, lighter, warmer, better fitted and equipped than its ancestor, but in essentials unchanged". In the worlds of the horse drawn cart and the aeroplane, of the candle and open fire and of electricity, of wells and of piped water, of word of mouth culture and of television, of before regular mail services and of the telephone, the house is much the same.

In its time the rising bourgeoisie did develop a type of house quite different from previous constructions. The bourgois house is *private* from the outside world, and many of the rooms in it are *private* from the rest of the house. It is *intimate*, designed for a family who live much closer to each other than anyone else outside. It is *comfortable*, designed to be the centre of the inhabitants' lives.

It is separate, often far distant, from their work. It is *individual: something*, even if it is only the layout of the garden or the embellishment of the front door, expresses the dwellers' choices and personality.

All this was different from the past. The huts and cottages of the poor had never allowed for privacy or comfort or anything but scanty shelter. The places of the rich were splendid, but not private, intimate, individual, or even comfortable. The house of the craftsman or merchant was a workplace, and full of servants and apprentices. (The 19th century bourgeois house also had lots of servants; but the house was carefully designed so as to separate their quarters as strictly as possible from the family's).

The historian Fernand Braudel records: "Seventeenth century luxury did not recognise privacy. When Louis XIV himself, in his palace at Versailles, wanted to visit Madame de Montespan, he had to go through the bedroom of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, the previous royal favourite. Similarly, in a Parisian town house of the seventeenth century, on the first floor, which was the storey reserved for the owners of the house, all the rooms opened off each other.

Everyone, including servants on domestic errands, had to go through them to reach the stairs.

"Privacy was an eighteenth century innovation. The pantry became distinct from the kitchen, the dining room from the drawing room; the bedroom was established as a realm apart."

These new trends became established on a grand scale in the 19th century. Since then, the bourgeois house has been modified by the disappearance of domestic servants and the elevation of the kitchen to a more dignified position, and the addition of the bathroom and inside toilet, but its essentials have not been changed. And the working class has sought, with some success, to get bourgeois housing for itself.

From late in the 19th century, flats have repeatedly been proposed as an alternative form of housing for the working class, either because they were thought to be cheaper to build (on the whole, in fact they weren't), or because the theorists of modern architecture thought that they were more socialist than the individualistic house. In the 1960s, councils, prompted by a need to build new housing quickly and by pressure from the big building firms who wanted schemes large enough to make new industrialised building methods profitable, built flats on a mass scale.

It was a fiasco. Burnett comments: "The architects' experiment with multi-storey dwellings, which some saw not only as a new way of living but as a new way of life, has receded into an 'incident', unlikely to be repeated". Over nearly a century, the working class has always preferred houses to flats.

In the early 19th century most working class households lived in one or two rooms. The worst off lived in cellars, which accommodated around one fifth of the population in Liverpool and Manchester in the 1840's. Little better were the common lodging houses and tenements or 'rockeries'. In Church Lane, Westminster, in 1847 1095 people lived in 135 rooms in 27 houses.

The best working class housing was in 'back-to-backs', terrace houses, usually one room downstairs and one upstairs, built back-to-back with each other.

Even in the best dwellings, every drop of water for washing or cooking had to be brought in from a pump in the street outside. The whole household would have to share a bedroom. All cooking and washing would have to be done in the 'living room'.

The dwellings were often damp, houses were commonly built with walls only four and a half inches thick and impossible to keep clean, especially without running water.

Around mid-century, together with the Factory Acts, came the first laws setting minimum building standards.

The capitalist class had to do something about the most unhealthy working class slums, not only because they lowered productivity, but also because disease spread from them into the middle class areas of the cities.

A law of 1875 empowered local authorities to make by-laws about building standards. Many cities outlawed 'back-to-back' and new working class terrace houses were now often 'two up, two down' with their own backyards. The best off workers could get a house with an annexe at the back, allowing for a scullery separate from the kitchen and a third bedroom.

For the first time they had something of the rudiments of a bourgois house.They made the most of it, setting patterns of 'house proud' behaviour which continued till recent times.

The front room would typically be set aside for use only on Sundays, and in this one room working class families would try and reach something like a middle class standard of elegance. "The possession of a parlour, appropriately furnished with ritual objects, was an important part of the struggle for achievement and respectability, and of the search for identity...Whether used or not, the parlour announced to the family, to neighbours and to visitors who first glimpsed it through its Nottingham lace curtains, a triumph over poverty and a challenge to the external environment of dirt, squalor and social disharmony". This parlour, the front door and doorstep, and the pavement outside the house was kept meticulously clean.

In 1890 the first law was passed which empowered councils to build and improve houses. But up to 1914 fewer than 5% of new dwellings were built by local authorities.

"In the closing years of the (First World) war", however, "and in the months immediately following the Armistice, fears of serious social unrest, even of the spread of Bolshevism to Britain, gradually persuaded all political parties of the urgent need for social reforms. A massive housing programme, with standards greatly in excess of those before the war, came to be seen as the most important part of this policy".

After 1918, councils were empowered and assisted to build much more housing, and to subsidise the rents. Rents in private housing had already been controlled by law after the Glasgow rent strike of 1915. The standards set for the new council housing included parlours, bathrooms and inside toilets. At the same time, cheaper and better public transport allowed many workers to move to the suburbs, where most of the new council houses were built.

Still, however, only the best off sections of the working class got this better housing. In the 1930s 30,000 households in London still lived in cellars. 63% of families in London shared a house or a flat with others. Often this meant having one or two rooms in a rundown house, with one toilet and one water tap shared for the whole house.

Burnett summarises,"The housing conditions of the working classes on the eve of World War 2...about one third well housed in new, healthy accommodation, a second third inhabiting older, 'by-law' houses, sanitary but lacking in modern amenities and comforts, and a remaining third in very sub-standard property, much of it slum or rapidly becoming so...Viewed over the whole period of this study, the housing experience of many people showed little major change until the years after World War 2."

After 1945 trade union membership was nearly double what it had been before the war. The Labour Party had gained the solid majority of the working class vote. The ruling class was frightened of revolution, as it had been in World War 1. Local authority housing was expanded to become a dominant form of housing for the working class, including for the worse off. New standards were set: in the 1940s council housing was built to higher standards than ever before or since. Kitchens, in particular, became larger, better laid out and better equipped. The whole house could now be brought up to middle class standards, and instead of the Sundays only parlour there would be a larger living room used every day.

Such has been the struggle of the working class, over more than 150 years, for the 'bourgois' house, a struggle that will certainly continue in coming years, as the Tory government forces more and more people into squalor, overcrowding and homelessness.

Whatever the ideas of socialist thinkers about designing housing

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for larger communities, from the worker-housing projects in Vienna and Germany after World War 1 onwards, workers have overwhelmingly preferred bourgeois type houses.

Has this been a great victory for bourgeois brainwashing? Or what? The desire for a little house of their own has tied many workers to a heavy burden of mortgage payments, making them less willing to move around or to take risks or to go on strike.

It has meant the strengthening of bourgeois family norms in the working class. In the middle of the 19th century Marx and Engels thought that family structures had almost disappeared in the working class. By the end of the century the working class was plainly adopting the norm of the bourgeois family, with the woman's realm in the home and the man's in the world of work and public life.

But what is good about being forced to spend free time in club, pub or street because your home is so overcrowded and uncomfortable? The separation of private and public spheres meant working class people, for the first time, having the possibility of home comfort. No wonder workers did not see it as a bourgeois imposition.

Trotsky once remarked that the working class suffers from not too much but too little individualism. The revolutionary potential of the working class is based as much on its individualism, its assertion of human rights to liberty and enjoyment, as on its collectivism. Working class socialism, which aims to make the best in bourgeois culture and comfort the property of all, and then go beyond it, is different from the barracks socialism which simply says no to bourgois culture and aims to level everyone down to equal pauperism.

In this perspective, there is nothing aberrant or diversionary in workers' struggle for domestic comfort, privacy and individuality. It is doubtful whether the strengthening of bourgeois family norms in the working class was even the defeat for women which socialists have usually seen it as. For most working-class women, to be established as mistresses of houses of their own was an advance over working long hours in factories and living in filthy cellars or tenements. To be sure, it meant that they were unfairly burdened with housework. But that was not new. It did not necessarily mean that men took no responsibility for the housework (Burnett documents this); nor did it mean that women renounced their demands for the right to jobs and an equal say in politics. Though women's participation in waged labour stayed at about the same rate from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th, there was a steady drift — at the same time as bourgeois family norms gained ground in the working class — from women workers being domestic servants to jobs in industry and commerce. And this was also the period of the rise of socialist women's movements and of struggles for women's right to vote.

Socialism may well see more communal forms of housing. But those will surely be established by the working class gaining and then going beyond the standards which the bourgeoisie established as an advance on previous living conditions — not by the working class being stopped short of those standards by decree.

The demand for individualism in housing — and indeed for more individualism than has yet been achieved, for the claim to "a room of one's own" has so far been won by very few working class people — is entirely consistent with public provision. Indeed, as Burnett shows, it can be won only by public provision.

What is dialectics?

Bruce Robinson reviews 'An Introduction to the Philosophy of Marxism, Part One', by R S Bhagavan. Socialist Platform.

Of Lenin's "Three component parts of Marxism", philosophy is the most remote for many Marxists.

While the everyday struggle demands constant reapplication of Marxist politics and economics, Marxist philosophy is only too often left to academics, many of whom ignore one of its basic precepts — the unity of theory and practice.

When political groups have focused on philosophical questions it has often been for bad reasons — in the case of the Communist Parties to use 'dialectics' to justify 180° political turns and in the case of Mr. G. Healy's WRP to provide a mystical yet 'orthodox' explanation for their own virtue and everyone else's 'revisionism'.

Yet this general neglect of philosophy can be dangerous as philosophical methods and political positions are intertwined. Lenin, seeking the roots of the collaspe of the Second International in World War 1, returned to Hegel in order to understand the mechanical reformism of pre-1914 'Marxist orthodoxy'. Trotsky drew out the links between Burnham's rejection of dialectics and his inability to understand the Stalinist USSR on the eve of World War 2.

R.S. Bhagavan's book is therefore welcome in attempting to explain the ideas of dialectics simply. Originally written as a series of articles for the youth magazine of the Sri Lankan LSSP, it looks at the main ideas of dialectics such as the unity of opposites and the transformation of quantity into quality by means of illustrations both from the philosophers, from the ancient Greeks such as Heraclitus, through Hegel to the Marxists, and from the natural world as presented by mathematicians, physicists, etc. This method of presentation makes the book more fragmented than a straightforward exposition, it also makes the subject matter more vivid and less dry.

By examining the dialectic through the natural sciences, the book provides ammunition against those who have tried to make Marxism a method purely for the study of society, and who have tried to divide the revolutionary politician Marx from the 'mechanical Darwinian evolutionist' Engels. This is in any case strange when one considers that Marx wanted to dedicate 'Capital' to Charles Darwin!

This book is not an all-embracing study of Marxist philosophy but is useful for someone starting to read in this area or as a handbook of examples that vindicate the Marxist approach.

Workers in 1917

Chris Reynolds reviews 'Red Petrograd', by Steve Smith. Cambridge University Press.

"Workers' control" was a more important Bolshevik slogan in 1917 than "Bread, land and peace".

Immediately after the February Revolution, when the Tsar was overthrown, workers' committees sprang up in the big factories. The factory committees controlled hiring and firing. To varying degrees they supervised production and kept an eye on stocks; as 1917 progressed, they became more and more concerned to keep production going and to combat what they saw as sabotage by the capitalists.

They organised workers' clubs, schools and entertainments; they ran campaigns against alcohol; they dealt wih thousands of individual workers' complaints and problems; and their work overlapped with that of the trade unions in the struggle for better wages and conditions.

The Mensheviks (the right-wing Marxian socialists) and the majority of the SRs (populists, who believed in a socialism made equally by peasants, workers and intellectuals) were against control of production by the factory committeees. Instead they insisted on "state control of the economy" — by the bourgeois Provisional Government, with which they collaborated.

Even Menshevik members of the factory committees could not accept this. Indeed, some of the factory committees which took the most far-reaching control over production were Menshevik-dominated. The Bolsheviks won a majority in the factory committees, and in the working class by supporting workers' control and making it their own slogan.

However, the Bolsheviks' idea of workers' control differed from an anarchist idea. The Bolsheviks accepted the Menshevik/SR idea of "state control" with one qualification — *whose state?* They were for "state workers' control" or "workers' state control". Any local control by the workers in each factory had to be within that framework. And in the meantime, until workers' state control had been won, control by the factory committees should be limited to checking and vetoing. The factory committees should not take *responsibility* for the running of the factories. In contrast, anarchists argued for the workers of each factory to take over their own workplace and run it themselves.

Smith argues that the majority in the factory committees consciously accepted the Bolshevik arguments against the demagogy of the anarchists. Even before October 1917, maintaining production and labour discipline was a major concern of the factory committees, Bolshevik, Menshevik, SR and non-party alike.

Some critics of the Bolsheviks — anarchists or right-wingers — argue that the Bolsheviks just used the demand for workers' control cynically. The Bolsheviks rode the wave of the disorderly spontaneous workers' rebellion, used it to lift themselves into power, and then once in power cracked down on the workers with a new repressive state.

Smith demolishes this story. During 1917 the Bolsheviks had to fight not only against the Mensheviks and the SRs but also against the anarchists. The anarchists were scattered and disorganised, but had influence in some factories.

Smith even reports that before October 1917 many factory committees and trade unions had accepted piece rates as a device to maintain productivity. In July 1917 the Bolshevik leadership of the Petrograd metalworkers' union fought very hard to get the union members to accept a guaranteed-output clause in their wage agreement. They wanted the

workers to take over a functioning industry, not one in ruins.

Steve Smith also chronicles how the Bolsheviks tried to deal with the social differentiation within the working class, which, he argues, was "probably greater than in the working classes of the West". About half the factory workforce in Petrograd were established workers of long standing; the other half were worker peasants who saw the countryside as their real home. This division more or less coincided with the division between skilled and unskilled workers. About one third of factory workers were women; they mostly had unskilled jobs and were less literate than men.

The factory committees and the trade unions were dominated by skilled male workers. But they made unrelenting efforts to draw unskilled workers and women into activity, and to win greater equality within the working class. Where redundancies could no longer be resisted, they fought against calls to sack women workers first. They also tried to unite white-collar workers with manual workers.

The factory committees were snuffed out relatively soon after the October Revolution. Steve Smith tells some of this story too, though in much less detail than developments between February and October 1917. He makes criticisms of the Bolsheviks (not all of which seem to me well-founded), but also explains the real problems of the period: the near-catastrophic decline of Petrograd industry in 1917, and the absorption of a large proportion of the leading worker activists into the Red Army and the new workers' state machine.

Is PASOK socialist?

Ian Swindale reviews 'Political Change in Greece before and after the Colonels', edited by Kevin Featherstone and Dimitrios Katsoudas. Croom Helm, 27.50.

Greece has undergone considerable economic, social and political change during the last 25 years.

The first hesitant steps towards liberal reform after decades of right wing government came in 1963 with the election of the Centre Union government of George Papandreou. This government of gradual and limited reform nevertheless posed a challenge to the monarchy and the army, both of which had played a major role in "guiding" Greek democracy in the years after the defeat of the Left in the Civil War (1946-9).

When the clash with the King finally came, in 1965, Papandreou resigned and instead of calling fresh elections, the King, determined to keep Papandreou from power, turned to the right-wing.

However, the political mood of the country was beginning to shift and when the Centre Union seemed set to win the next round of elections in the Spring of 1967, a group of army officers seized power.

The Junta remained in power for seven years until, in 1974, totally bereft of any social base within the country it tried to overthrow the government of Archbishop Makarios in Cyprus, brought Greece to the brink of war with Turkey and then collapsed.

The Colonels handed over power to Karamanlis, a former right wing Prime Minister whose hastily formed New Democracy party won the 1974 General Election.

But the political mood in post-Junta Greece was very different from that of the past. Traditional institutions and alliances had been seriously undermined and brought into question. The USA and NATO allies were perceived as having at least tolerated, if not actively encouraged the seizure of power by the Colonels. The army, whose claim to participate in public life was based on its victory over the Left in the Civil War, was now totally discredited by the repressive, inept and corrupt rule of the Junta. The monarchy, too, had been seriously undermined, while disillusionment with pre-junta "parliamentary democracy" had been such that nobody had considered it worth fighting and dying for when the Junta seized power.

This changed perception affected all parties, including the right. Karamanlis formed a liberal-right government which carried out a number of reforms and even took sections of the economy into public ownership.

But the changing mood within Greece was most clearly demonstrated by the dramatic rise of PASOK, led by George Papandreou's son, Andreas.

Andreas Papandreou had launched the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (PAK), committed to armed struggle against the Junta (itself a new departure for modern Greek politics, although PAK made little impact within Greece for most of the dictatorship). With the fall of the Junta, the liberation movement was superseded by the Panhellenic Socialist Movement — PASOK — which won 13% of the vote in the 1974 election.

By 1977 PASOK had become the major opposition party with 25% of the vote and in 1981 it formed the first left wing government ever to hold power in Greece. The old Centre Union party completely disappeared from the political scene.

In order to win power, however, PASOK had needed to broaden its appeal to the widest layers of society. To achieve this much of the populist and Marxist rhetoric of 1974 and many of the policies espoused in the early years — opposition to NATO, the EEC and monopoly capitalism, and support for 'national liberation' and socialism — were watered down or dropped by Papandreou in the election campaigns of 1977 and 1981.

To what extent, then had real fundamental change taken place in Greece? Had the three political groupings of the early 1960s — the right, the liberal centre and the Stalinist left — actually survived intact, with PASOK occupying the centre left ground vacated by the Centre Union, or had the political perceptions of these political tendencies undergone radical transformation as a result of the experiences of 1963-74 and in the process brought into being a qualititatively new political formation?

These are among the many important questions addressed by the contributors to this volume. Essays on the main political parties, analysis of recent election results and a presentation of the findings of recent opinion polls on the social attitudes of Greeks form the core of this book, and all the evidence points to a major shift in attitudes, particularly among the young, since the early 1960s.

In broad terms, three fairly distinct groups of political and social attitudes have been identified. Those under the age of 35, whose political and social views were formed during the rise of the Centre Union and, later, opposition to the Junta, reveal the most radical political and social views, while the over-60s, whose political views took shape during the period of the Civil War tend to be the most conservative in their political and social attitudes, strong in their support of the US, NATO and capitalism.

The 35-60 age group is neither as radical as the younger generation or as conservative as the older, but if anything tends more towards radicalism than conservatism.

So, for example, 37% of Athenians questioned considered Marxism the best ever interpretation of the historical evolution of mankind; 46% blamed the right wing government of the time for the Civil War, against 35% who blamed the Communist Party (and this, despite 30 years of right wing 'official' history); 52% believed Greece's 1951 decision to join NATO had been wrong; 56% believed that Greece's alliance with Britain had been detrimental and 57% that Greece's alliance with the US had been detrimental.

Strong support was indicated in polls conducted in 1981 for further nationalisations of private enterprise and for greater government intervention in the economy.

The basic social reforms carried out by PASOK after 1981 — abolition of the dowry, introduction of civil marriage, decriminalisation of adultery, more flexible divorce laws, etc, — also seem to reflect a change in social values in the country as a whole, and particularly the younger generations.

On social questions, for example, 64% opposed the church's condemnation of pre-marital sex and contraception, 55% opposed the Church's refusal to apply the automatic divorce law and 50% opposed the church's condemnation of abortion.

One of the most hotly debated questions on the far left in Greece since 1974 has been on the class nature of PASOK. Is it a workers' party with its base in the organised working class or is it nothing more than a bourgeois populist party, aiming to win support from all classes in society? The chapter on PASOK concentrates on those aspects which the party has in common with other populist parties — its rhetoric of 'national liberation'; its selective use of Marxist concepts; its deliberately ambiguous stance on many questions in order to broaden its cross-class appeal; the complete dominance of its charismatic leader over the party which, in turn, lacks any internal democracy; its rejection of the capitalist West and 'already-existing socialism' in the East and its espousal of a 'third road'.

Of course it is undeniable that PASOK reveals many populist traits and an analysis of its electoral support shows an incredible degree of consistency in its support from all classes in society, but it is a pity that other interpretations of PASOK, though alluded to, are not dealt with by the author as this is a particularly important, not to say contentious question on the left.

Other chapters look at the various interest groups in Greece — the unions, student unions, farmers', shipowners' and industrialists' organisations; the history of Greek radio and TV, both of which came into existence during periods of dictatorship and which have always been directly controlled by the government; Greek foreign policy — where a continuity of practice from the New Democracy governments of the 1970s to the PASOK governments of the '80s is indicated, with Papandreou asserting his independence of the Western Alliance on smaller questions in order to cover his retreat on the big questions: and Greece and the EEC.

As a general introduction to some of the themes of contemporary Greek society, the book is invaluable to the English-speaking reader as much of the information it contains is hard to come by. The only real drawback is its price.

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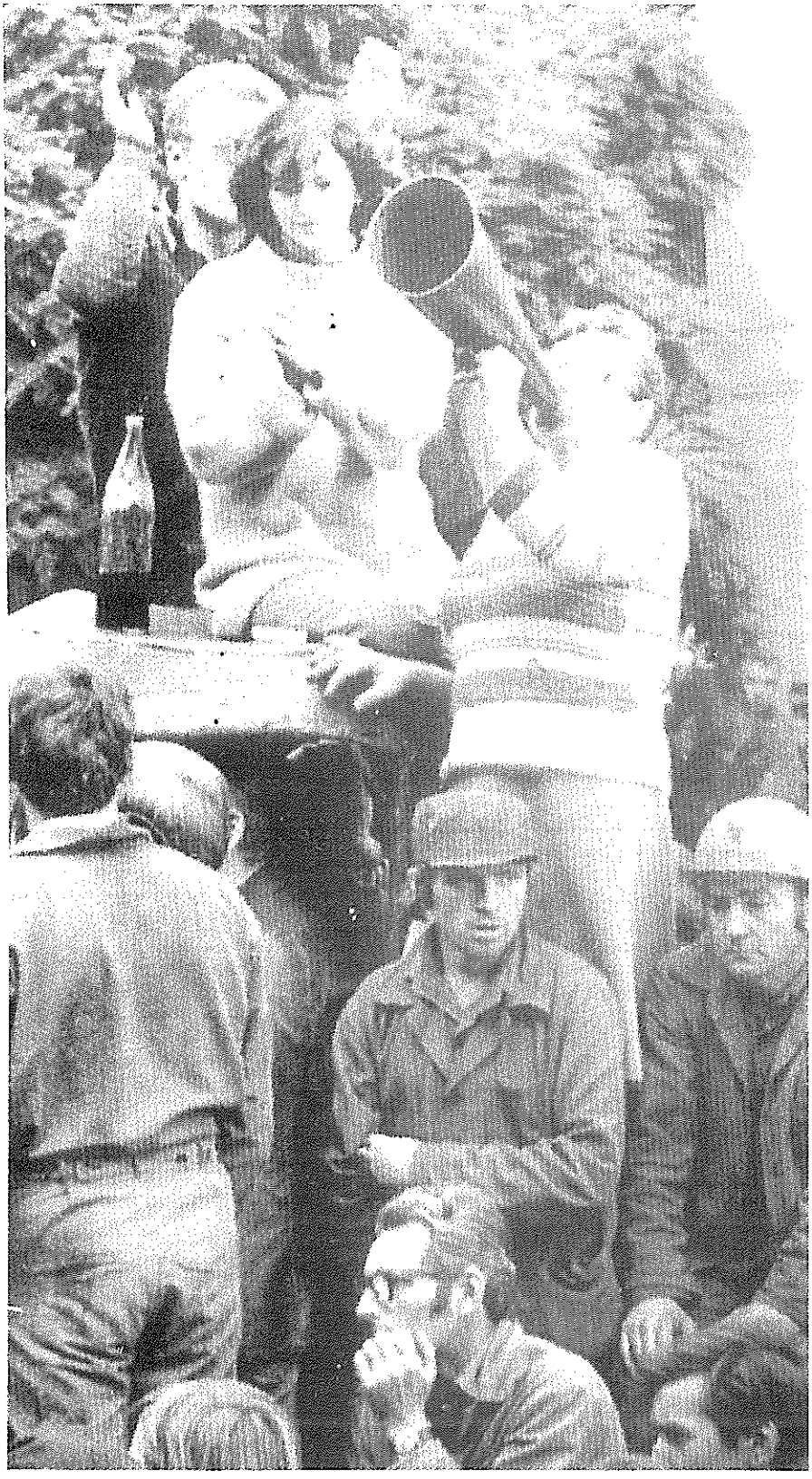

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