

## Salman Rushdie's Nicaragua

Jim Denham reviews "The Jaguar Smile" by Salman Rushdie Published by Picador £2.95

A book about post-revolutionary Nicaragua, written on the basis of a brief visit organised, in effect, by the FSLN government, would not seem to promise a very objective source of information or analysis for socialists attempting to reach an understanding of what's going on in that country.

In their (correct) eagerness to solidarise with Nicaragua against US aggression, many radicals have adopted a completely uncritical attitude towards the Sandinista leadership and all sorts of romantic nonsense about a "new road to socialism" opening up in Nicaragua is now widely peddled on the left.

Salman Rushdie, to his credit, makes no secret of the limitations of his personal experience, and thus of the book itself: "I was in Nicaragua for three weeks in July (1986). What follows, therefore is a portrait of a moment, no more, in the life of that beautiful, volcanic country."

Rushdie was invited over as a guest of the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers, the umbrella organisation of artists and writers organised by the government. Indeed, the Sandinista leadership seems to be made up largely of poets and novelists — something that undoubtedly helped establish a warm rapport between Rushdie and his hosts. The country's most famous poet, Father Ernesto Cardenal is Minister of Culture; Vice-President Sergio Ramirez is a novelist; and President Daniel Ortega is another poet. "In Nicaragua", Ortega tells Rushdie, "everyone is considered a poet until he (sic) proves to the contrary".

Despite all the chumminess, Rushdie retains his critical faculties. He does not like the



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government's policy of censorship (the oppositional La Prensa newspaper had been closed down shortly before his visit) and he cannot go along with the official line that censorship would stop when US aggression stopped.

Rushdie is also unhappy about what he describes as "a kind of innocence abroad in Nicaragua. One of the problems with the romance of the word 'revolution' is that it can carry with it a sort of blanket approval of all self-professed revolutionary movements."

A good point, although without any further explanations, Rushdie goes on to criticise the failure "to make distinctions, for example, between the PLO and the IRA" as an example of this.

More tellingly, Rushdie describes his astonishment when one of his interpreters found it difficult to believe that there are labour camps in the USSR: "But how can it be?" she asked in obvious distress. "The USSR is so helpful to Third World countries. How can it be doing things like this?"

Elsewhere, Rushdie describes trying to raise criticism of Cuba with Minister of Culture Cardenal:

"What about Armando Valladare's book, 'Against All Hope' which speaks of over two decades in Cuban prisons, two decades of being made to eat shit and drink soup containing bits of glass? But it was like hitting a wall...I went away feeling depressed."

But overwhelmingly, Rushdie's impressions are positive. He continually stresses that the threat from the Reagan administration and its Honduras-based Contras overshadows whatever mistakes the Sandinistas have made. A vivid account of a meeting between Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto ("another formidable priest") and a White House emissary, "Rocky", brutally sums up the reality of US foreign policy:

"D'Escoto, an excellent

conteur, performed Rocky's reply. 'These Contras on your frontier, padre. They give you lots of trouble, don't they?' Yes, d'Escoto had replied, but they wouldn't if you stopped funding them. 'There you go again,' Rocky said. 'More philosophy. You're hopeless, Father. The reality is that these people have to be funded. And they give you trouble. Those are facts...'

"So what did he suggest, d'Escoto asked. 'It's easy,' came the reply. 'Just do as we say. Just do as we say, and you'll see how this trouble you've got will disappear. Overnight. As if by magic. It just won't be there anymore. You'll be astonished. Just do as we say.'"

Politically, the most interesting part of the book is the section in which Rushdie describes his visit to Zelaga, on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast. Here, the revolution had never been widely supported, and the inhabitants had been further alienated by a series of disastrous mistakes, including the forcible evacuation of the Miskito Indians from their old territories. Many Miskitos had been driven into the hands of the Contras. The Sandinistas now recognised their mistakes in the region and were setting about convincing Zelayans that their best interests lay with the revolution. Central to this project is "Autonomy": Rushdie describes how it is intended to work:

"The autonomy scheme guaranteed the cultural rights of all minority communities in Zelaya. But it was an attempt to do more than simply compensate for previous blunders. Under the scheme, Zelaya would be given a large measure of self-government. The structure of the nation would be altered into a form of federation between the two wings with Managua retaining responsibility for defence, internal security, foreign policy and overall budgetary and economic strategy. Most other functions would pass to regional executive and regional assembly."

The project had not been without its opponents, who had argued that it would lead to the break up of the country, but, "the counter-argument, which had carried the day was that the project was not dividing the country but recognising the division that actually existed. By giving the Atlantic Coast this degree of independence, the chances were that the bonds between the coasts would actually be strengthened. That paradoxical assessment was borne out by what I saw."

Rushdie makes no pretence of presenting a scientific analysis of the Nicaraguan revolution. This is a book of personal, subjective impressions. At times Rushdie admits to profound doubts and confusion about the FSLN government and their plans for the country. But Rushdie knows which side he is on when it comes to the Sandinistas vs. US aggression: "For the first time in my life, I realised with surprise, I had come across a government I could support, not *faute de mieux*, but because I wanted its efforts (at survival, at building the nation, and at transforming it) to succeed." He is more clear-headed about the Sandinistas' shortcomings than many erstwhile Trotskyists, but in the end his conclusions are positive and generous: "...to oppose a government's policy was not to oppose the government. Not for me, anyway; not this government; not yet."

## The left in Solidarnosc

Martin Thomas reviews 'Rendez-nous nos usines' by Zbigniew Kowalewski, editions La Breche, Paris.

Zbigniew Kowalewski was one of the leaders of the left wing in Solidarnosc in 1980-1, and a member of the regional leadership in Lodz. He was outside Poland when martial law was imposed in December 1981, and has lived in France since.

He is a sympathiser of the Trotskyist current represented by Ernest Mandel and by the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League) in France (and 'International' in Britain), and he is also associated with the new left-wing alliance within Solidarnosc formed last year, the Workers'

Opposition. The majority in the Workers' Opposition regards Poland as state-capitalist. Kowalewski himself subscribes to the orthodox Trotskyist idea that the Stalinist states are a bureaucratically twisted variant of post-capitalist society, but believes that these Stalinist states have a systematic tendency to the super-exploitation of labour and criticises Ernest Mandel and his co-thinkers for failing to grasp this and for suggesting that the Stalinist bureaucracies are somehow part of the labour movement.

You can see what Kowalewski is getting at when you consider the Mandel tendency's reluctance to support Solidarnosc's call for a trade-union boycott of Poland after the imposition of martial law or to demand that the western labour movements break links with the government-controlled 'unions' in Eastern Europe. Kowalewski does, however, fully support the Mandel tendency's Sandinista line on Nicaragua.

In this book, Kowalewski presents a record of and a reflection on the struggle carried out by the Lodz Solidarnosc leadership in 1980-1. Lodz's main idea was the 'active strike' — the mass strike which would develop by workers taking over their own factories and running them under workers' control, and building up from that to wider social control. Kowalewski now believes that Eodz's strategy failed to tackle adequately the question of central political power, but he still reckons that it was on the right path.

He presents a particularly interesting account of how Solidarnosc in Lodz — an industrial city with a working class made up mostly of women textile workers — fought for and briefly won workers' control over food distribution.

Kowalewski refers back to the writings of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci on the struggle of the factory councils in Turin after World War 1, and believes that Solidarnosc's struggle for workers' control sketched out a model for revolutions in all industrially developed countries. "In its future revolutions...before installing workers' and citizens' democracy in the state, the working class will construct solid bases of workers' democracy in work time..."

Kowalewski identifies his argument here with the criticism of the Bolsheviks developed by small groups of semi-anarchist 'council communists' in the 1920s. "The modern workers' revolution will never follow the Bolshevik attempt to bolster workers' democracy in the state at the price of introducing a bureaucratic regime at the very

heart of the process of production."

This seems to me at best anachronistic: in the Bolshevik USSR of 1917-23, schemes for the most perfect workers' democracy in the half-ruined factories were just mockeries unless productivity could be raised to levels sufficient to feed and clothe the people decently and allow workers free time from drudgery. But that is another debate. Kowalewski's is a very important book on the most important workers' revolution of modern times, and the sooner there is an English translation the better.

## Heffer's way forward

Stan Crooke reviews 'Labour's Future — Socialism or SDP Mark II', by Eric Heffer. Verso, £4.95.

Eric Heffer's 'Labour's Future — Socialism or SDP Mark II' has many important things to say. Eric Heffer has been a central figure on the Labour left, and one of the few who has remained firm on many socialist principles.

One of the most sickening things on the Left these days is the regrowth of sympathy with and illusions in the Stalinist states — like the USSR. Respectworthy socialists like Tony Benn and the officers of Chesterfield Labour Party write letters to the dictator Gorbachev as though the labour movement had something in common with him.

Many British trade unions continue to have links with the police-state pseudo-unions of the Stalinist states. Lots of left-wingers half-approve of the suppression of Poland's labour movement, Solidarnosc.

But Eric Heffer is clear and unambiguous in his support for Solidarnosc and opposition to Stalinist tyranny.

But there are contradictions in his view of the world. He is a 'Christian Socialist', attempting to reconcile socialism and religion. And he is convinced, on balance, that socialism can be introduced peacefully in Britain — although he is aware that the rul-



Eric Heffer

ing class is capable of violent resistance.

But even where his views are incoherent, his book is a useful contribution to the discussion on the way forward for Labour.

## History or hindsight?

Bruce Robinson reviews 'War and the International', by Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, published by Socialist Platform at £5.95.

The second volume of Sam Bornstein's and Al Richardson's history of British Trotskyism, 'War and the International', covers the period from 1937 to the collapse of the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1949.

The authors have used the documents of the movement to compile their history, and also drawn on personal interviews with Trotskyist militants of the period. These interviews give a vivid picture of how the British Trotskyists met the challenge of the war and its aftermath.

The small groups of Trotskyists were the only international political grouping to come through the war with an independent working class position. The

Stalinist Communist Parties began with a semi-pacifist position in the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact. After the invasion of Russia in June 1941, after which the USSR switched from its failed alliance with Hitler and entered into partnership with democratic imperialism, they went over to wholesale scabbing and class collaboration in the interests of the war effort. The British Labour Party was part of the war-time coalition from June 1940 onwards. In Britain, this opened up big opportunities for the Trotskyists.

At the outbreak of war there were two main Trotskyist groups in Britain. The Revolutionary Socialist League had been created from a fusion of three previous groups, under pressure from the American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon and the Fourth International, in 1938. Its main field of work was the Labour Party. The Workers' International League had refused to join the fusion because they correctly felt that it was an artificial and unstable 'unity', and that agreement on general principles was not adequate to unite groups with widely divergent tactics and approaches to work in the labour movement.

The WIL was proved correct in practice. The absence of activity in the Labour Party under the coalition, and extravagant factional blood-letting by the RSL leadership led to the organisation's fragmentation and decline.

The WIL, on the other hand, intervened in the wave of industrial struggle unleashed by the full employment and bad working conditions brought about by the war. In a number of important areas the WIL were able to win influence by giving support and a political perspective to trade union disputes. In one factory where Trotskyists were prominent, the Royal Ordnance Factory in Nottingham, workers' control of production was even introduced for a short time.

After the foundation of the RCP from a fusion between the WIL and the pieces of the RSL in 1944, the RCP faced state repression because of its action in support of the Tyneside Apprentices' strike. Four leading members of the RCP were charged under the 1927 Trade Disputes Act — an anti-union measure put through after the 1926 general strike.

The Labour leaders were passing new anti-strike legislation and the CP was calling on workers to "treat Trotskyists as you would an open Nazi", but nevertheless there was solidarity from rank and file trade unionists, the then still sizable ILP and from Labour MPs such as Aneurin Bevan. Though the accused spent some weeks in jail, the sentences were quashed on appeal and govern-

ment use of the 1927 Act was thereafter discredited.

The book also provides fascinating information on the international activity of Trotskyists within the British army in areas as far apart as Egypt, Italy and India, and also accounts of the party's work with German refugees and prisoners of war.

But by 1945 a whole range of new problems had begun to confront the Trotskyists; and ultimately they would engulf the organisation.

Firstly, the analysis bequeathed to the Fourth International by Trotsky — in particular the view that Stalinism would not long survive the war — needed critical reassessment in light of the newly-emerging post-war reality. Secondly, the RCP had to analyse the working class shift back to Labour around the time of the 1945 election and draw conclusions from their own activity. These were life and death questions for the organisation: it never succeeded in answering them.

Throughout the war the WIL and RCP had called for "Break the coalition — Labour to power". But by 1945, this was happening anyway, and the wave of industrial militancy was receding and giving way to working class expectations of radical policies from a Labour government.

At its foundation the RCP had committed itself to a policy of "building the independent party of the working class" and opposing work in the Labour Party, though a minority favoured such work. This policy was disastrously carried over into the post-1945 period.

The RCP's incapacity to solve these problems and its incapacity to reorient itself to the post-war world, were — together with factionalism within the party and the RCP's relationship to the Fourth International — to determine the future of the RCP and leave a legacy which is still a potent force within British Trotskyism to this day.

Comrades Bornstein and Richardson have their own view on these matters, and it colours the way the history of the RCP is presented in the book. It can be summed up — I hope without caricature — as follows. The Fourth International ceased to exist during the war because of the organisational destruction (the Trotskyists in Hitler-occupied Europe were cut off until 1944) and an inability to analyse what was going on and became "a post-box attached to the American SWP". The RCP majority — together for a time with Felix Morrow and Albert Goldman in the USA — provided a fundamentally correct theoretical analysis from 1946 on-

wards.

For example, in 1946 they said Stalinism had emerged stronger from the war, that there would be a post-war boom; in 1947 they analysed the states of Eastern Europe as workers' states, while the Fourth International still described them as capitalist.

The RCP made the mistake of not joining the Labour Party in 1944 and collapsed partly because of an absence of perspective, partly because of a general decline in working class activity and partly because of the unprincipled factionalism of the RCP minority led by Healy and supported by the International Secretariat. (The minority argued for Labour Party work with a perspective of an immediate slump leading to radicalisation of the workers inside the Labour Party).

The authors' view of the virtue of the RCP majority in contrast to the 'worthlessness' of most of the rest of the world Trotskyist movement leads them to an almost demonological view of the events. The villains of the piece are Healy, James P. Cannon and Michel Pablo, the new secretary of the organisationally reconstructed Fourth International.

While their manoeuvrings certainly did not help the RCP, its main problem was the failure of the Party's war-time perspective that "the revolutionary party" could be built outside the Labour Party by a linear building up by way of recruiting individuals from industrial struggle (the line of the SWP today). In this respect the RCP majority proved just as incapable of analysing the post-war world as the other Trotskyists who attract the authors' vituperation. While comrades Bornstein and Richardson agree with what was wrong with the RCP's perspective, the book seems to downplay its importance in the eventual collapse of the RCP.

In the end, in 1949, when the RCP was shrinking and this perspective could no longer be maintained, some of the leaders such as Haston abandoned Trotskyism altogether. Others, such as Grant, abdicated any leadership role and collapsed into the Labour Party to vegetate and degenerate politically for the next 15 or 20 years.

In their description of the theoretical analysis of the RCP, there is a tendency to have the gift of hindsight. While it is certainly true that the rest of the Fourth International was not fully or quickly able to readjust to the failure of Trotsky's perspective after the war, there is a danger in believing that tendencies that now appear — in retrospect — cut and dried historical fact were so at the time.

It is possible now, in retrospect, to deny the revolutionary possibilities that existed in mid-'40s Europe, for, after all, they were not realised. The Trotskyists were defeated but serious people cannot assume their own defeat in advance or admit it prematurely, without losing the capacity to struggle.

One can also telescope events. For example, it was by no means clear prior to 1947-8 that the whole of Eastern Europe would become states on the model of the USSR. Stalin made repeated offers to the US and Britain of a 'neutral' Germany and this type of solution did later, in 1955, occur in Austria. While the Fourth International was slow to adjust to events, their position was not as lunatic as it is presented.

Similarly comrades Bornstein and Richardson fail to draw any link between the positions of the RCP majority and the policies of Militant and the SWP today. In the final chapter, Militant is attacked for its equation of nationalisation with socialism and its theory of "proletarian bonapartism". Yet Grant developed this position in the '40s as part of the RCP's analysis of the USSR — one of the theoretical positions the book mentions favourably. In reply to Cliff's theory of state capitalism (1947) Grant wrote: "...where we have complete statification, quantity changes into quality, capitalism changes into its opposite...complete statification marks the extreme limit of capital...The elements of the new society which were growing up within the old, now to become dominant" (Reply to Tony Cliff: emphasis in the original).

This continuity, which also applies to Cliff's and Healy's organisations, makes a nonsense of the last chapter's claim that there has been a fundamental political break in British Trotskyism and that the solution is somehow a return to the tradition of the 1940s. While nobody can deny that subsequent generations have added some idiocies all their own (e.g. student power, rainbow coalitions, and various new mass vanguards), we have all had to deal also with problems going back through the whole post-war period.

These disagreements with the political line of "War and the International" are not meant to diminish its value as the only history that puts different points of view and lets the participants speak for themselves. The massive amount of work comrades Bornstein and Richardson have put into it will serve as a basis for any discussion of the history of British Trotskyism in the future. Such an open discussion would help define the re-

maintaining unresolved problems and provide a way to develop not only Trotskyist theory but also Trotskyist practice.

## A history of the Condom

Jane Ashworth reviews 'Johnny Come Lately', by Jeanette Parisot. Journeyman, £4.95.

**BEFORE** the Aids panic every one said Durex. Now the word is condom and to promote safer sex condoms in a variety of shapes, colours and sizes are given away at parties (and have even been stapled to the inside of Leeds Student Union newspaper!)

When they were marketed as small, medium and large no-one bought the small size. But changed to medium, large and extra large, medium — small that is — sold well.

Perhaps the Communist Party didn't have the same problem when they marketed the Marxism Today Red Stripe condom but certainly they had a different problem — Red Stripe condoms aren't safe — especially when clipped into other CP paraphernalia — the MT Filofax.

None of these stories are in 'Johnny come lately a short history of the condom'

## Marxists, and Parliament

Jack Cleary reviews 'Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma', by A Y Badayev with an introduction by Tony Cliff, published by Bookmarks.

**Tsarist Russia** did not have parliamentary democracy. One of the basic political demands around which the workers' movement in Russia — perhaps the most consistently revolutionary

**workers' movement that has ever existed — organised was the demand for a democratic parliament on the model of the British or French parliaments.**

After the defeat of the 1905 revolution, a feeble mockery of a bourgeois parliament, the Duma, was set up. It had no real power and was not democratically elected. For example, the workers elected their deputies in a special group (*curia*), and a worker's vote was worth only a fraction of the vote of various other social classes.

This Duma bore all the marks of its origin as a reactionary substitute for the democratic parliament demanded by workers and middle class alike, of something imposed by the vicious Tsarist reaction.

What should the attitude of the Russian workers be to this Duma? When it was first imposed the Bolsheviks boycotted it; there was still a chance to fight for something better, and not to boycott it would be to lend it authority and thus help the Tsar to set it up. But the revolution continued to ebb. Nothing better was likely in the period ahead.

So Lenin concluded that the working class should use the Duma as a platform from which to agitate and make propaganda which would help drum up the forces that could eventually go beyond the Tsar's feeble and hobbled parliament. Most Bolsheviks, however, did not agree. Lenin was virtually isolated in the Bolshevik ranks, and in uncomfortable agreement with the less revolutionary wing of the workers' movement, the Mensheviks.

But events — the continued decline of the workers' movement itself among them — converted most Bolsheviks to Lenin's view. And thus you got the paradox that the most consistently revolutionary party in history participated as fully as it legally could in the Tsar's reactionary and counter-revolutionary counterfeit of a parliament, and put it to good use as a labour movement platform. Lenin later commented that if the Bolsheviks had not known how to do such things there would have been no Russian workers' revolution in 1917.

Six Bolshevik deputies were elected to the Duma in 1912, and Badayev was one of them, and his book is an account of their work until 1915, when they were tried and sentenced to Siberian exile for life. It is a day-by-day account of the parliamentary fraction of the Bolshevik party as it immersed itself in the newly-

revived Russian labour movement. Acting as one of a number of party bodies, subordinate to the party, the parliamentary fraction used the Duma platform to support workers in struggle and to give workers a political lead.

Badayev's account is an inspiring report from one part of the political front of the many-fronted class war waged by the Bolshevik party, on the economic and ideological fronts as well as the political front.

This combination of different fronts of struggle was the essence of the Bolshevik party as a revolutionary workers' party — this, and not any formal organisational rules, for Lenin's organisation changed frequently, in line with changing conditions of legality and illegality, etc. It allowed the party to link flexibly with the spontaneous workers' movement in all its phases, whether of flow or ebb, militancy or exhaustion.

The struggle in the Duma was the main political front at that time and in that place. The Bolsheviks knew that it was necessary to be able to function on every front of the class struggle, and that otherwise the less revolutionary wing of the labour movement, or the bourgeoisie, would occupy the political space. And thus the Bolsheviks went in, worked within, and told the workers to orient politically to, the bloody-handed Tsar's reactionary Duma.

**Almost as arresting as the self-linkage of the Bolsheviks to the reactionary Duma is the incongruous publication of this book by the British Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). The SWP thereby commits a dangerously self-exposing act of piety or commercial calculation (or both). It is as if Alexinsky or Bogdanov, Lenin's leading Bolshevik opponents on using the Duma, had published a pamphlet in favour of it!**

Most of the time the SWP fights shy of propounding basic principles of any sort and of binding itself by them. It makes no dogmatic principle of anti-parliamentarism such as certain syndicalists and ultra-left 'council communists' do. Nevertheless, in what it writes and says about current politics there is a sub-text of dogmatic anti-parliamentarism.

It goes far beyond the necessary revolutionary socialist stress on direct action, on the primacy over parliamentary jousting of activities which involve workers directly in struggle for their own economic and other interests; it *counterposes* such direct action to parliament.

Parliament, concern for parliament, involvement in parliament, wish to win parliamentary elections — these are bad, these are necessarily and properly the terrain of the right wing and the soft left. Left-wing politics cannot win elections, at least in normal times, therefore concern for elections drags you irresistibly to

the right.

Propaganda against parliament is central to the SWP, and even though it is never rigorously codified or even consistently expounded, they are in practical politics unconditionally hostile to parliament. For example, much that they say about the Labour Party, and the condemnation they make of socialists who are in the Labour Party for being there, is grounded on denunciations of the Labour Party for its involvement in parliament. They even explain the dirty dealings of Militant in Liverpool by the Labour Party's involvement in parliament.

If you focus on parliament — so the argument goes — then you must subordinate the class struggle to electoral considerations. So fight parliamentarism!

But in practice this means leaving politics — and effectively, most of current politics — to the Labour Party right wing and the soft left. That point is central and I will have to repeat it again, more than once, as I go through the argument.

The SWP focuses on industrial struggles and socialist propaganda about a desirable future world. But how is the world to get from where it is now to socialism? Revolution? But how will the working class prepare itself, change itself, to be able to make a revolution? What can socialists do to help it change? The SWP's answer is not that of the Bolsheviks, or of Leon Trotsky, at any period of his life.

In the proper place of politics, the place filled for traditional Marxist parties and for the Bolsheviks by **limited political objectives** — including transitional demands — which allow the working class to develop by immediate political struggles and activities — in their place Tony Cliff's SWP puts the demand: 'Build the SWP, Build the Revolutionary Party'. 'The Party' — and socialist propaganda — must be the link between now and socialism. This is what Cliff, in better days, used to dismiss as 'toy-town Bolshevism'. It leaves — to repeat — the right and soft-left with a virtual monopoly of the here-and-now politics which concern the mass of workers, separating their political concerns from the struggle for socialism — and usually even from the industrial struggles.

It seems revolutionary and radical, but it isn't at all. It means abandoning the broad labour movement to others. The workers, perforce, will wind up accepting the answers that 'the others' give to the immediate political questions — like what to do about the Tories and what to replace them by, *now*.

This is a version of 'economism' (one of the one-sided predecessors of the Bolsheviks in the Russian labour movement) superficially 'Leninised' by the focus on 'the

revolutionary party'.

The 'Economists' wanted to organise the workers, make socialist propaganda, organise a socialist party — and leave the political struggle against the Tsar and his system to the rising Russian bourgeoisie. They had the theoretical excuse that they expected the replacement of the Tsar to be not workers' power (because the working-class was too small and industry was too weak) but a bourgeois-democratic regime.

If the SWP would accept the analogy they would say: yes — and we expect the Labourites once more to be the government and each time to expose themselves, until they fall apart.

The problem is that you cannot separate out the Labour Party from the labour movement like that. The labour movement has to be revolutionised from within, and because the 'politics' of the SWP means leaving that movement to the right and soft left it is no politics at all as far as the labour movement is concerned. Throughout the years of bitter struggle by the left in the Labour Party, the SWP sat on the sidelines, sourly commenting. If the Bolsheviks had done the analogous thing in Russia, then there would have been no workers' revolution. There would have been a liberal or socialist-reformist labour movement at one pole, and a small 'maximalist' Marxist sect at the other, impotent and irresponsible, though very self-gratifyingly irreconcilable and *.....* revolutionary.

The SWP's contradictions are shown up in the introduction by Tony Cliff, which takes as its task to square the SWP's practice with the radically different practice which Badayev records. From paragraph one Cliff sets out to show that for the Bolsheviks "Parliament was never the central focus on political activity", and stresses that Badayev "shows the role the Bolshevik deputies played in the industrial struggle of the workers". True as it stands, but the *deflation* of the work of the deputies to that of auxiliary to the industrial struggle is a deflation of politics.

**Industrial struggle alone** could not be a central focus of 'political activity'. Whereas the job of Marxists, of those who want to build a revolutionary party according to Lenin's real model, is to link and combine the different fronts of the class struggle and integrate them into a strategy, Cliff is no less restrictively one-sided than the one-sided parliamentarians of the British labour movement.

Cliff says that the British labour movement, with its parliamentarism, is the pure antithesis of Bolshevism. Not so, or not quite. One-sided, a-political or pretend-political, syndicalism is the real opposite of British parliamentarism, both in logic and in the history of our move-

ment. Bolshevism is distant from both, yet it subsumes both and transforms them into a qualitatively higher unity.

You would never think from Cliff's picture that the central political slogan of the Bolsheviks throughout this period was the demand for a fully governing, freely elected parliament, a slogan that remained central until *after* the October Revolution.

Socialists in the Lenin and Trotsky tradition would quarrel not, of course, with Cliff's positive emphasis on direct action, but with his one-sidedness. And with his a-historical history: for example, he makes much of the class composition of the Bolshevik Duma fraction, who were metal and textile workers, and then neglects to mention that the leader of the Bolshevik deputies, "the metalworker Malinovsky", was a police spy (shot by the Bolsheviks in 1918).

He belabours Eric Heffer for his views on parliament, accusing him of downgrading direct action, especially during the great struggles of the early 1970s, when the general strike was on the order of the day. He attacks Heffer for not advocating a general strike.

Well, though IS (the predecessor of the SWP) did advocate the general strike on and off after 1970, the record shows that in July 1972, when a quarter of a million workers struck spontaneously against the jailing of five dockers under the Tory Industrial Relations Act, and the TUC declared a one-day general strike, forcing the government to release the five, IS *didn't* dare call for a general strike at the point when it mattered.

The depths of nonsense are reached when Cliff endorses (from the left) the ultra-right-wing claim that working-class industrial defeat can be electorally good for Labour, citing the steady growth of the Labour vote after 1926, which culminated in Labour being the biggest party in the House of Commons after the October 1929 general election.

The fact, of course, is that there is often a zig-zag pattern. Blocked in industry, the class turns to politics. Blocked in politics by a Tory government, as in the '50s, or frustrated by a right-wing Labour government, as in the '60s, the class turns, if employment and other conditions are favourable, to industrial struggle.

To say that one of these things is 'bad', to condemn the turn to politics because it isn't the 'pure' industrial class struggle, and implicitly to identify it as necessarily right wing — as Cliff does — is both stupid and defeatist.

Defeatist, because it is a central fact of working-class life that we experience industrial defeats, and that there is a limit to what can be achieved by industrial gains unless the workers 'go political'. Short of generalised industrial action — a general strike — leading

to revolution, no amount of pure industrial militancy can generate a socialist solution. The great merit of Bolshevism was that it linked up the industrial militancy of the Russian working class with revolutionary politics.

That being so, to 'insist' on the movement remaining on one, industrial, plane, and snobbishly to reject and disdain the other, political, plane — which is what Cliff does in the guise of rejecting Parliament — is to rule out real development of the real working class in the world as it is.

**You might say that Cliff's formula is 'boom-time Trotskyism'. When the workers are on the up and up then we have a role — when they are down we have no political role, except to help to rebuild on the small, local issues and to make general socialist propaganda, and the right and soft left come into their own.**

**But even this is incoherent. For the workers were very much on the up and up in 1973-4. We took on the Tory government, challenged its authority, and panicked Heath into a general election which he lost. It was *then* that the right and soft left came into their own.**

For they had the political wing of the movement; and the workers needed politics. The workers, however militant, had no governmental alternative to the Labour Party — and thus the great and successful industrial push against the Tory government resulted in a Labour government... which soon demobilised the industrial militancy.

That experience brings out the real essence of the matter for socialists as it is posed in principle and in British reality: the political struggle and the industrial have to be integrated and for socialists to be able to integrate them they have to do more than build an organisation — though that is irreplaceable — they have to win the ideological battle, against both the straightforward versions of ruling-class ideas and the more subtle versions we get within the labour movement which tie the workers to the bourgeoisie.

One of the central ideas of the latter sort is of course the notion that you can get socialism through parliament. But one of the sources of this false idea is that you can get some things through parliamentary politics. We cannot defeat the idea of socialism through parliament by counterposing to it not different politics *in parliament and everywhere else* but 'pure' industrial struggle. The SWP's a-political, or pretend-political, syndicalism and talk of 'building the revolutionary party now', is no substitute for engaging wholeheartedly in such 'parliamentary politics' as the fight to return a Labour government now.

True to its trimming, hawing and eclectic politics, the SWP will

opportunistically say 'vote Labour' on election day — otherwise it would risk isolation. But that is only the election-time version of its routine abandonment of politics to the right. Indeed, at election time it is more glaring. In 1979 Paul Foot put it like this: 'For the next three weeks I am a very strong Labour supporter'.

The working class needs a revolutionary party. But such a party will not be a small propagandist apparatus, a small machine counterposed to the existing labour movement. A party is a party if it can minimally perform a certain range of activities, including conducting itself in all the affairs of the working class — which means all the political affairs of society, for these concern the working class, and if the working class does not have socialist answers it will — to repeat yet again and finally — accept the answers of the Bourgeoisie and the reformists.

The early Christians lived in daily expectation that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. It would be the end of the world, and the Kingdom of God would come into being instead.

Then as the decades passed they began to lose faith in the imminence of the Second Coming — and of course they never thought that they could do anything except pray to bring it about. So they turned instead to the belief that 'for now' the Church was the visible Kingdom of God on earth.

So too with the socialists who substitute for the Marxist work of political struggle within the labour movement the building-up of their own organisation. 'The party' becomes their Kingdom of socialism on earth.

**Worse than the Christians, they regress from the Marxist belief in struggle on all fronts to a helpless waiting for the 'millennium', which for them is the revival of the industrial militancy of the '70s. (In this way they parallel earlier Marxists who waited paralysed for decades for the Great Slump to come back to radicalise the working class).**

**Hope for a millennium is comforting. It is especially comforting in periods of disappointment, setbacks and defeat, like that we are going through. But it is in its essence a turning away from the root of socialism — the working class in the whole range of phases and concerns of its struggles.**

## Going out of fashion?

From back page

and that is that.

Unfortunately, the caricature

of Marxism is not just a caricature of Marx's ideas. It actually exists as an added version of present-day Marxism, in Militant and (on its off-days) in Socialist Worker. So apparently justified polemics against Militant can give backing to versions of "socialism" divorced from class politics — from the Kinnockites on the right to Socialist Action on the left.

In its most right-wing version, 'anti-economism' leads to ordinary vote-catching electoralism, laced with a snobbish preference for the supposedly idealistic educated classes over workers, who are condemned as seeing no further than immediate material interests. As Ellen Meiksins Wood points out, "To a large extent, it is just another repetition of banal and hoary right-wing social-democratic nostrums."

"The idea that capitalist democracy need only be 'extended' to produce socialism, or that socialism presents a higher ideal of life capable of appealing to all right-minded people irrespective of class, would, for example, be perfectly at home with, say, Ramsay MacDonald, or even, for that matter, John Stuart Mill.

The new reformists are now disillusioned with what they see as revolutionary socialism in China, Cambodia and Vietnam. They opt instead for reformed capitalism. The elitist bias remains. The new sectarians were usually not whole-hearted Maoists, but they too saw the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian Stalinists as leaders of the world socialist revolution. Unlike the new reformists, they have remained revolutionaries — by transferring their faith from Vietnam to Nicaragua, and retreating into moralism.

The bridge for the new reformists between Maoism and their present politics was, so Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, Eurocommunism. She identifies the Greek/French writer Nicos Poulantzas as "the forerunner" of the present retreat from class, and analyses his theories with refreshing briskness. This particular emperor is shown not only to have no clothes, but also to have knobby knees and a sagging paunch.

The prominent 'new reformist' Ernesto Laclau had another channel in his path from being "a defender of what he took to be Marxist orthodoxy and theoretical rigour". He started off with an argument about 'national-popular' ideological themes not necessarily being tied to any one class which was "informed by his attitudes towards the political situation of his native Argentina and by his sympathy for the 'popular interpellations' of the Peronist tradition". From this attitude to Argentine nationalism, the road was straight to a reduction of socialist politics in the metropolitan countries to a manipulation of the 'national-popular' ideologies here.