How not to fight AIDS

George Davey Smith reviews 'The Truth About the AIDS Panic' by Dr Michael Fitzpatrick and Don Milligan (Junius, £1.95), and 'AIDS: The Socialist View' by Duncan Blackie and Ian Taylor (SWP, 90p)

AIDS victim in Africa

BOTH THE right and the left have been thrown into confusion by the advent of AIDS.

Reagan finally advocated public education about safe sex, then stated that this must be purely about how to say no. In the UK, a seemingly explicit information campaign was initiated well ahead of the US, with leaflets through every door. At the same time the government announced that if parents or governors objected to sex education in schools it could be dropped.

Meanwhile, almost every conceivable response has come from the left. The pamphlet from the 'Revolutionary Communist Party' (RCP) illustrates the confusion.

'The Truth About the AIDS Panic' identifies AIDS as being fundamentally a moral panic — yet another stick with which to beat gays.

For this purpose, it has been overplayed as a disease. Unless you are a homosexual man in London or an intravenous drug user in Edinburgh or London, AIDS is *"not at present a serious health problem"*. You have *"a higher chance of being run over by a bus than contracting AIDS"*.

These conclusions stem from arguments that AIDS is very difficult to transmit heterosexually, and anyway has caused a trifling number of deaths in the UK — 350 up to February 1987, compared to 190,000 from heart disease *per year*. Consequently it is not much of a problem and, unless you are in a high-risk group, the practice of safe sex is *"quite unnecessary"*.

This oversimplified reasoning is unfortunately legitimised by the reassuring presence of a GP as an author. Medical knowledge regarding AIDS is still very limited, and the most active researchers are willing to admit their uncertainty as to the future course of the disease. Naturally no such worries trouble the authors of *this* book: they appear to *know* things which people who have spent years investigating the disease can only speculate about.

This book contains the truth about AIDS, after all. But how does the current evidence measure up to the RCP's *'truth'*?

There is definite evidence of two-way transmission of the AIDS virus by vaginal intercourse, although this does not seem to occur as readily as through anal intercourse. The rapid spread of AIDS through Africa is largely through heterosexual contact.

Although malnutrition and co-existing infectious diseases may accelerate it, in some parts of Africa the disease first became established among the relatively affluent sections of the population.

The second cause of confusion concerns the impact of the disease. AIDS seems to pale into insignificance compared to heart disease as a cause of death, but this is very misleading.

AIDS generally affects younger people, whilst heart disease often occurs at the end of a long life. Therefore the total years of life lost because of a particular disease are a more useful measure of its impact on a community.

Calculations based on one District Health Authority in London, Lewisham and North Southwark, suggest that by early next year AIDS will be the second biggest cause of years of life lost, ahead of lung cancer, breast cancer, road traffic accidents and strokes. By 1990, it seems AIDS will be the major cause of lost years of life.

The basis upon which the arguments of this book rest is seriously flawed. The future course of the disease is uncertain. True, it may not become established among heterosexuals, and the number of cases may stop rising. It is also true that the threat of AIDS can be overplayed and manipulated for reactionary political and social ends.

However, simply denying the importance of the disease is an inadequate response to the biological, political and moral repercussions of AIDS.

One way of downplaying the significance of AIDS as a disease (as opposed to a moral panic) is to ignore the horror of its spread through Africa. Therefore this book barely mentions AIDS outside the USA and UK, neglecting the areas where it causes most harm.

The fundamental misunderstanding shown in this book renders it at best useless and at worst dangerous. This is unfortunate since increased mobilisation against repression of gays is rendered vital by the onset of AIDS. AIDS is being used to control and harass gays.

The Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1985 allow local authorities to perform forcible medical examinations on people "believed to be suffering from AIDS" and to have them detained in hospital.

The media feel increasingly free to attack gays in the grossest fashion; Tory politicians have advocated everything from enforced isolation to *"putting 90% of homosexuals in the gas chamber"*, while Labour's paper policy against discrimination has become increasingly muted.

This book suggests that denying that AIDS is a threat to the heterosexual community will stem the increasing homophobia generated by the disease. The logic of this is not clear since when AIDS was seen as an exclusively gay disease there was a widespread belief that this *'gay plague'* was somehow a punishment for deviant sexual behaviour.

The book's train of thought crystallises around the notion that *"for the majority of gay men who are forced to pursue their homosexual encounters furtively, campaigns for safe sex are useless. The clandestine and chancy circumstances in which most gay men conduct their sexual encounters make it difficult for them to follow the government's guidelines"*.

Therefore it is the *"oppression of homosexuals that allows HIV infection to spread among gay men"*. This is entirely consistent with the idealism inherent in the RCP's ultra-leftism.

The material reality — in this case the virus — becomes irrelevant. Once the structures of capitalist society are smashed, AIDS — together with women's oppression, racism, gay oppression, etc — will instantly and automatically disappear.

So long as you vote for your Red Front candidate, you can forget about AIDS and safe sex.

After the entertaining lunacy of the RCP, the pamphlet from the SWP is a duller but more worthy affair.

Unlike the former pamphlet, it correctly devotes space to the devastating epidemic in Africa and discusses the way AIDS will be used to increase racial, as well as anti-gay, discrimination. However, it mirrors 'The Truth...' in having no time for uncertainty.

This time the authors are sure that AIDS is the black angel's death song writ large. It outdoes the government's campaign when outlining the potential devastation of the UK by the disease. One article about AIDS in Socialist Worker was illustrated with a picture of the Grim Reaper, complete with grey cassock and scythe, waiting to take us home: whilst another suggested that all the people carrying HIV in Africa would go on to develop the disease.

There are dangers in presenting AIDS as threateningly as this. Irrational fears are developing — the reports of suicides of people believing themselves infected, and of fire-bombings of houses of

AIDS sufferers, must only reflect the tip of the iceberg in this respect. Furthermore, merely emphasising the threat of a disease is not effective in encouraging health-protective behaviour, especially if the message is based on uncertainty, as in this case, and is liable to be changed.

Naturally this pamphlet ends with a photograph of the main cause of AIDS — Neil Kinnock. Unfortunately excising his malignant presence from the labour movement won't by itself eliminate AIDS. Nor will making abstract propaganda for breaking with reformism and building the revolutionary party. However, this is what is counterposed to searching for a vaccine or treatment, which is dismissed as ultimately unimportant, together with that old scapegoat "attempts at reform by governments".

In fact, rather than being opposed, social change and scientific advance are intimately linked. Implementing a successful vaccination programme in the Third World and western countries is as much a political as a technical activity. The direction and nature of research into disease control is just as political.

Nixon's war against cancer declared in the late 1960s was, together with the space race, a useful cover for the disintegration of Lyndon B Johnson's 'Great Society'. Giving money to the Public Health Services laboratories and for AZT has been used as a pre-election softener in Britain.

On a worldwide scale there is a necessary connection between the struggle for social liberation and measures against all diseases, including AIDS. Safe sex and pharmaceutical companies will not finally control AIDS, but neither will the repetition of abstract slogans or the pretence of certainty where uncertainty exists.

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New new world

Colin Foster reviews 'The End of the Third World' by Nigel Harris. Penguin £3.95.

Nigel Harris starts off from the facts of rapid industrial growth in many formerly colonial or semi-colonial countries, and more especially from two features of that growth: its export orientation, and the growing trend in recent years to privatisation of

Capitalist development

state enterprises.

These developments, he argues, make it no longer tenable to think of a 'Third World' separated from the advanced countries by a Chinese wall. Singapore and South Korea, where further and higher education is more widespread than in Britain, do not have much in common with rural Ethiopia.

The facts also mark the collapse of the *ideology* of 'Third Worldism' — an ideology which said that industrial development in the 'periphery' of the world economy could be achieved either not at all or only through militant nationalist measures, including nationalisations and industrialisation aimed at the *home* market.

There is now, Harris argues, a "global manufacturing system". "If capitalism seemed to be 'the offspring of the state' in the early phases of national accumulation, (by the 1980s) in the great broad ocean of the world system the world's states were clearly the offspring of world capitalism".

It seems to me that he somewhat underestimates the extent to which the national state has been, and continues to be, a motor force in capitalist development. Though he does document the great role of the state even in cases of supposedly 'free-market' development, like South Korea or Taiwan, he sees the decisive factor in the recent rapid expansion of capitalism in the 'Third World' as "companies and buyers in more developed countries (being) impelled by the changing structure of the world market to seek lower-cost purchases (or lower-cost locations for manufacture) in new countries", around the late '50s and early '60s.

I'm not at all sure that I understand Harris's argument here, but I would be inclined to see the late '50s and early '60s as significant above all for something else: the winning of independence by many ex-colonies, and powerful nationalist movements in others, such as Egypt and Iraq.

A great deal of the industrial development of 'Third World' countries has been directed not at markets in the more developed countries, but at their home markets and at other 'Third World' countries. (In 1983, 45% of the exports of what the World Bank calls 'low-income' economies went to other 'Third World' countries, and 37% of exports of the non-oil 'middle income' countries).

Harris reckons that in the modern world each national economy is becoming more *specialised*; but he cites no direct evidence for this idea, and takes no account of such glaring counter-evidence as Saudi Arabia's effort to develop wheat-growing.

Harris's book is, however, useful in many ways. He sets out many of the key facts about recent capitalist development in the 'Third World', and explodes some of the myths of nationalist ideologies which still have a grip on the left even though the writers who first developed those ideologies have mostly retreated from them in confusion.

"To be 'developed' ", he comments, for example, "was confused with economic independence. But were there any such countries? By what criteria could one judge 'independence'?...The concept of a 'self-generating' economy (was) a myth, except for the most backward countries...If 'dependency' indicated the economic relationship between a country and the world, the more developed the country, the more dependent it was..."

In one respect the book is all too typical of the work of the Socialist Workers' Party, with which Harris is associated. Harris tells the reader in his first chapter that a peculiar version of 'Third-Worldism' was argued in the 1960s by one Michael Kidron, to the effect that development in 'Third World' countries was impossible *even if* the most radical measures advocated by the nationalists (or by anyone else) were carried through. Whereas most 'Third Worldists' pointed to China and Cuba as examples of how to break out of backwardness, Kidron argued that China and Cuba, too, could not really develop.

Harris recognises that this theory was wrong. What he does not tell the reader is that Michael Kidron was in the 1960s the leading economic theorist of the SWP (then called IS), and that Kidron's notion of a 'post-imperialism' in which the Third World was left desolate was a central part of a more-or-less integrated body of theory that the SWP/IS then had, along with their doctrines of state capitalism in the USSR and of the permanent arms economy.

That integrated body of theory has simply been abandoned by the SWP over the last ten years or so, without it being replaced and without any attempt to examine, account for, and learn from its errors.

Stalin and the peasants

Rhodri Evans reviews 'The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Inter-War Russia', by Moshe Lewin, Methuen.

Moshe Lewin does not believe that Leninism caused Stalinism.

"With respect to the original Leninism, Stalinism not only changed strategy but also reorientated the system towards quite different objectives. It was no longer a matter of constructing a society in which the classes and the state would disappear...It was now a matter of 'statising', that is, of crowning the whole with an all-powerful, dictatorial state in order to preserve the class system and such privileges as had been put into place during the period of forced industrialisation".

Nor does he believe that Stalinism was the USSR's only road to industrialisation: "while it is agreed that the process of industrialisation was bound to involve sweeping changes in the countryside, it is wrong to suppose that these changes could not have been effected otherwise than by collectivisation as Russia experienced it".

Lewin has also written a book on 'Lenin's Last Struggle' — against emergent Stalinism — and he is fully aware of the struggle by Trotsky and other Bolsheviks to continue that last struggle of Lenin's.

The main new idea he adds to existing accounts of the rise of Stalinism is a study of the way that the Stalinist bureaucracy was moulded by its struggle with the peasantry.

Rural life in Russia in 1917, he stresses, was on about the same level as rural France in the 16th century. Before World War 1, the Tsarist government made some efforts to promote capitalist enterprise in the countryside, but the revolution of 1917 paradoxically led to a regression. Afterwards, some 95% of the land was in the hands of the peasants' traditional communes.

This levelling-down of the peasantry, according to Lewin, substantially continued in effect until the late 1920s. Whatever the justice of the Trotskyist Left Opposition's general programme, says Lewin, and of their fears about the rise of a merchant

class, they grossly exaggerated the strength of the 'kulaks'.

Lewin examines the factual evidence minutely, and concludes that there was no 'kulak' *class*. Some peasants were more prosperous than others, but there were practically *none* who could be classified even as small capitalists.

Official Soviet calculations classified only three or four per cent of the peasantry as 'kulaks' — but even of that three or four per cent, half employed *no* wage-workers.

Thus the Stalinists' war against the 'kulaks' was in fact a war against the whole peasantry. In that war the Stalinist bureaucracy was shaped, with its brutality, its furious terror as the counterpart to sullen peasant resistance, and the great internal tensions which made that bureaucracy itself subject to huge purges.

Simultaneously the Stalinist bureaucracy was establishing itself against the workers. Even in the mid-'20s, although the system was far from the original democracy of workers' councils, the workers "had freedom of movement and of job selection, a quite effective litigation system against management, an opportunity to criticise managers, a labour code that meant something". Within a few years after 1929, that was all gone.

"The cadre problem was not just one of getting enough specialists and managers, but of promoting a powerful class of bosses — the *nachal'stvo*, composed of top managers in the enterprises and top administrators in state agencies". These bosses won despotic power in the factories and great material privileges.

The bureaucracy was more successful in establishing control over the workers than over the peasantry. The workers resisted, as Lewin emphasises, but their relatively organised resistance was easier to deal with than the dumb sullenness of the peasantry. "The breaking in of the peasant was the least successful of the policies of the Soviet state...What followed was a creation of a system that was more oriented to and more successful in squeezing than in producing".

The paradoxical result was that the peasants' private plots, allowed to them beside the collective farms, came to account for an important part of output. "In its Stalinist stage, collectivisation, although aimed at uprooting (concepts of private property), went in fact a long way towards reinforcing and developing them".

As Lewin emphasises in other respects, the bureaucracy, despite its apparatus of terror, was far from having full conscious control of events. It was moulded by the developing Soviet society as much as it moulded that society.

Lewin concludes: after de-Stalinisation, "Russia found itself advancing and powerful, but the grip of the initial social backslide of 1917-21 (in the countryside), strongly conducive and favourable to the authoritarian, ubiquitous state system of the 1930s, has not yet been broken to this day — far from it — and the result has been periodic slowdowns, decline and conservative blockages in the country's development and social relations".

Industry in Africa

Gerry Bates reviews 'The Development of Capitalism in Africa' by John Sender and Sheila Smith. Methuen.

Of all the areas of the Third World, Africa offers most evidence to those who deny the existence or possibility of dynamic capitalist development in the Third World.

Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique, and large areas of West Africa, are still suffering from terrible famines. Apart from Nigeria, Congo (Brazzaville), and Algeria, none of the countries of Africa can show higher than a 3% per year growth of national income from 1965 to 1983, and those three can be dismissed as exceptions because of their oil. Africa has no industrial miracles like South Korea or Brazil. A devastating study by the eminent French agricultural economist Rene Dumont described it a few years ago as "a downtrodden, plundered and polluted continent".

Sender and Smith do not necessarily dissent from Dumont: in fact, despite vastly different slants on the subject, their picture of Africa is not so different from Dumont's. But they define the aim of their study thus: "Rather than re-emphasising the persistence of poverty and suffering, the focus...will be on the identification and analysis of change as opposed to continuity".

They show, carefully and in detail, that capitalism *has* developed in Africa. Indeed, much of the present suffering is caused by capitalist *development*, rather than *absence of* development.

The colonial regimes were brutal, thieving, and racist. Nevertheless they did develop certain conditions for economic development. The argument, often advanced, that the export sectors in colonial Africa had no or very few 'linkages' with the rest of the economy is false. Those export sectors did encourage the development of transport and of small industries.

Sender and Smith also argue, more contentiously but without going into detail on this point, that the extent of destruction of native handicrafts by colonialism and the competition of manufactured goods from the metropolis has been much exaggerated.

After an intermediate stage of forced labour — administered with great cruelty — the colonial regimes also developed a *wage-working class*. And, at least in the period just before independence, there were some beginnings of mass education.

To promote capitalism further, heavy state intervention was necessary. And that was made possible after independence. In the period since independence, development has accelerated a lot.

Sender and Smith look more closely at some of the countries that have developed less, or even gone backwards — Ghana and Tanzania. They argue that the main reason for these countries lagging behind is inappropriate government policies — a nationalist wish to develop the country in isolation from the world market which leads to failure to develop exports.

As well as criticising 'state capitalism in one country', however, Sender and Smith also denounce currently-fasionable theories that the free market is the key to development.

John Sender prepared Bill Warren's book 'Imperialism, Pioneer of Capitalism' for publication after Warren died before finishing it but this book has none of the one-sidedness of Warren's, which often reads like an apologia for capitalism and imperialism.

Sender and Smith conclude with an appeal for socialists to look towards *working class* politics in Africa. Too often, they say, "the political agenda becomes dominated by rhetorical condemnation of the World Bank, the IMF, multinationals, etc., leaving very little space for the more mundane and immediate issues of trade union rights, wages and working conditions."

The lies of Lilian Hellman

Jim Denham reviews 'Lilian Hellman — The Image, the Woman', by William Wright. Sidgwick and Jackson.

Searching for 'Hellman lies' has become something of a sport in recent years, as William Wright notes in this biography.

Many of the attacks on Lilian Hellman's integrity have been motivated by pettiness and jealousy (neither of which have ever been in short supply in New York intellectual circles), and quite a few have come from hard-line right-wingers bent on destroying the reputation of an outspoken radical.

But there is more to it than that: for one thing, Hellman brought a lot of it on herself by her vindictive lawsuit against Mary McCarthy. McCarthy, a fellow writer and near-contemporary of Hellman's, appeared on the Dick Cavett show in 1980 and was encouraged by the host to say controversial things about others of her profession.

What she said about Hellman has since entered the annals of one-liners: "Every word Lilian Hellman writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the'." Hellman's response was to issue a defamation suit for $2,225,000 against McCarthy, who was not rich, coldly calculating that she could easily outspend her foe and ruin her even if (as Wright speculates) the case was never intended to reach court.

No wonder Vanessa Redgrave admires Hellman so much!

In the event Hellman died before her full legal gameplan became evident, and McCarthy was rescued by a defence fund.

Hellman will probably now be remembered as much for her mean-minded spite towards one McCarthy as for her relatively courageous stand against another — Senator Joe McCarthy and his House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (HUAC).

In May 1952 Hellman was subpoenaed to appear before the red-baiting HUAC to answer the question 'Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?' Her account of this experience (written up in 'Scoundrel Time' 25 years later) is a brilliant description of the McCarthyite hysteria of the time, and her famous statement to HUAC ('I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions', etc.) made her something of a hero in left circles.

But here again the question arises, just how truthful was Hellman's account of what actually occurred? For sure, she 'pleaded the Fifth' (invoked the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution, which allows a citizen to refuse to answer any question on grounds of self-incrimination), and probably did so to protect others rather than to cover herself. That, at least, sets her apart from many fair-weather radicals and liberals from Tinsel Town, who betrayed their friends, colleagues and (sometimes) comrades.

But the famous 'statement' was never *said* to HUAC: it was contained in an otherwise evasive and

apologetic letter that was released to the press after the hearing. Her lawyer, Joe Rauh, told Wright: "To me, the truly courageous position was the one Arthur Miller took when I represented him in the same situation. He said to me 'I don't give a shit if they send me to jail, I am not cooperating'."

Rauh thinks Hellman felt guilty about not having given HUAC what he calls, in reference to the film 'The Front', the Woody Allen speech, telling them to go fuck themselves. In fact, Hellman was terrified by the prospect of jail, and this fear was deliberately stoked up by her long-time lover Dashiell Hammett (who *had* been jailed for defying HUAC the previous year). According to Wright, Hammett ensured that Hellman never considered that particular form of martyrdom, with "tales of rats and marauding lesbians".

And yet Hellman allowed the overblown version of her role at HUAC – in particular, the patent falsehood that she was the first to refuse to name names – to go unchallenged, and indeed promoted that picture of herself in 'Scoundrel Time'.

She did not capitulate to HUAC, or rat on her friends — that should have been enough, but it seems that it wasn't good enough for Hellman herself. Why this should have been is, essentially, what Wright's book is all about.

Wright presents a largely psychological explanation: "Perhaps she altered the truth not only to enhance her public image — to leave to posterity a portrait of the woman she would have liked to have been, a life she would have liked to have led but to meet a psychological demand for a less painful reality. There is a significant difference between a person engaged in dishonest public relations and one who is fundamentally delusional. In Hellman's case, she may have worked out a compromise with her psyche: to realise wish-fulfilment fantasies and salve painful truths by revising her history in her memoirs and perhaps thereby forestalling a collapse into psychosis."

Such an explanation of Hellman's character may well be accurate as far as it goes. Certainly the death of Hammett in 1961 gave Hellman free rein to rewrite her own history, free from the restraints of her brutally honest companion.

But Wright has not explored in such depth the corrupting influence of Hellman's chosen political allegiance — Stalinism.

Whether or not Hellman was ever a card-carrying Party member has never been established. She always denied it, writing her memoirs "I did not join the Party, although mild overtures were made by Earl Browder and the Party theorist C J Jerome".

Wright produces some evidence to suggest that she probably was a secret member between 1937 and the late '40s. What is beyond question is that throughout her adult life she glorified Stalin's regime, claimed to be unaware of the purge trials during her visit to Russia in 1937, turned a blind eye to the CP's murderous onslaught against socialists and anarchists in Spain, applauded the US government's jailing of Trotskyists during World War 2, and bitterly attacked several intellectuals who remained on the left but broken with Stalin.

When, in the early '70s (20 years after Khrushchev's speech attacking his predecessor), Hellman brought herself to admit she had been perhaps a little wrong about Stalin, she wrote about his "many sins" in such a nonchalant, off-hand way, not offering any explanation for her change of heart, that the criticism itself was almost an affront to the reader (and, as Wright notes, "her use of the word 'sins' is in itself interesting, since, to a free spirit like Hellman, a sin is something forbidden by wrong-headed authority, something harmless and pleasurable like overeating or sleeping with your neighbour; to have it also encompass the murder of several million Russians would seem to be over-taxing three letters".)

Here, I think, lies the root of Hellman's lying and self-deception: she was an intelligent person, motivated (initially) by the highest ideals, horrified by the poverty and racism she saw in the US and by the Nazi menace internationally. It is impossible to believe that she simply was not aware of the Moscow Trials, or that she did not understand what the disputes on the anti-Franco side in Spain were about.

So she wilfully blinded herself to such unpleasant realities, in her desire for the security of (in her words) faith in the 'Motherland' as the only real, existing alternative to the degradations of everyday capitalism and the horrors of Nazism.

Against this romantic ideal, her own role as either fellow-traveller or secret member, and a very rich and privileged one at that, seemed completely inadequate. Lilian Hellman did nothing in the Spanish Civil War, nothing for the Resistance to the Nazis, and was never even jailed for standing up to McCarthy. So she had to reinvent her brief visit to Spain in 'An Unfinished Woman', assume for herself the heroic role in the Julia story in 'Pentrimento', and improve upon the true facts of her brush with HUAC.

Like so many Stalinist intellectuals of her generation, she lived a lie because she could not face the reality of the cause she had espoused, and because she lacked the courage to become a real class fighter, with all the sacrifices that would have involved. To bridge the gap between her awareness of what was required, and the inadequacy of her political and personal response, she took basically true stories about real people, and invented her own role in events.

The immense skill with which she constructed her fabrications fooled not only the critics and public, but — finally — herself. She ended at least half-believing her own vicarious fantasies, just as politically her wilful ignorance turned into the inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood. A sad but fitting end for a true disciple of Earl Browder and Joe Stalin.

Peron's legacy

Clive Bradley reviews "Argentina — From Anarchism to Peronism" by Ronaldo Munck with Ricardo Falcon and Bernardo Galitelli. Zed Press.

The Argentinian labour movement, as Ronaldo Munck comments in the introduction to this book, is "foreign" to workers elsewhere "in more than the obvious sense". A movement and an ideology, Peronism, dominates the working class to an extraordinary extent.

Peronism, the movement created by General Juan Peron, who was president of Argentina from 1946 to 1955, is not exactly unique. Many working class movements have fallen under the leadership of radical — or not-so-radical — bourgeois nationalist forces similar to Peronism in some respects. But Peronism is still peculiar. The Argentinian working class, as this book graphically shows, has had an immensely militant history, and is extremely powerful, with a high degree of class consciousness in a limited sense.

Yet Peronism is not merely the *political* domination of this movement by nationalism. It is the subordination of the movement in effect to a particular individual (in the past), and to the nominees or successors of this individual in later years. A powerful workers' movement became terribly stunted politically.

How this came to pass is an interesting and vital question. Munck's book, informative and useful as it is, doesn't really get to grips with it, however.

The book shows how the early labour movement was heavily dominated by anarchists and syndicalists, and covers its history up to the rise of Peron. It does not examine precisely how the transition to Peronism took place. Of course Peron's role in meeting working class demands in the post-war period, and the relationship he established between the state and the powerful trade union bureaucracy, are described and explained. But why such a *profound* ideological prostration before Peron?

The most interesting part of the book is its discussion of the 1969 'Cordobazo' — a semi-revolution in the industrial centre of Cordoba — and the radical 'classist' tendencies in the workers' movement that emerged from the experience. It traces the development of the class struggle to crisis point in 1976, when the military seized power once again, to impose a horrendous dictatorship even by Latin American standards.

Munck argues that we are witnessing the end of Peronism, and that a new period is opening up for the Argentine workers. This concise survey of the history of the workers' movement will help us understand those developments when they occur.

Ice in the thaw

Frank Higgins reviews 'Hungarian Tragedy' by Peter Fryer (New Park, £2.95)

One of the saddest and most disappointing things on the left in recent years has been the growth of faith and illusion in mythical socialist fatherlands far away.

Nowadays you can run into people you have known for a long time, people with ten, fifteen and more years in the Mandelite 'Fourth International', and they will tell you with stars in their eyes about the workers' democracy which they know exists in Castro's Cuba — where there is freedom neither of speech, nor of writing, nor of self-organisation (least of all for the working class), nor of sexuality.

Five or ten years ago they would have scoffed at such notions and talked rationally and knowledgeably about the bureaucracy which had crystallised some time in the 1960s.

Stranger still is the growth of illusions in the USSR — which for the last 7½ years has waged, and still wages, a Vietnam-style war of colonial conquest by way of napalm and helicopter gunships against the peoples of Afghanistan.

19 years ago Russian tanks crushed Alexander Dubcek's liberalising 'Prague Spring' in Czechoslovakia and thereby educated a whole new generation of socialists about the nature of the totalitarian Stalinist regime in the USSR. Now many who once knew better, Tony Benn for example, laud the rulers of the USSR — and they didn't wait for Gorbachev to start talking (so far it is mostly just talking) about reforms.

And of course the soft-on-Stalinism noises made by Benn and others will miseducate many who have not had a chance to know better.

Just as people tend to turn to religion and Mother Church in times of trouble and perplexity, it seems socialists turn to the 'socialist fatherlands' in times, like our own, of setbacks and political depression. It is unlikely, however, that anything like the Stalinist ice-age of the '30s, '40s, and early '50s will return, the years when millions of the best would-be revolutionary socialist workers throughout Europe believed in the USSR with the fervour and commitment of religious fanatics.

That period came to an end 30 years ago with the Hungarian Revolution and the denunciation of Josef Stalin — who died in March 1953 — by his liberalising successor Nikita Khrushchev.

Early in 1956 Khrushchev told a congress of the so-called Communist Party of the Soviet Union — the first such congress since 1939 — that Stalin had been a bloodthirsty tyrant and mass murderer. Then in November 1956 Khrushchev's own tanks went crashing into Budapest to overwhelm the heroic resistance of the Hungarian workers, and thereby proved to thinking and honest Communists throughout the world that Stalinism was still alive. It was a symptom of totalitarian bureaucratic rule, and not just the personal failing of one half-demented tyrant.

Hungary had been an ally of Germany in World War 2, a tepid and reluctant one which Germany occupied in 1944. Soon the Russians drove the Germans out and took over. By 1948 Hungary had been turned into a replica of the USSR.

The small Hungarian CP grew rapidly, swollen by careerists after the Russian occupation. Yet the Hungarian party had some tradition of its own. In the chaos after World War 1 the Hungarian CP had been able to seize state power for a few weeks in 1919. After being overthrown, it was heavily dependent on Moscow. Its leader, Bela Kun, became an ally of Stalin in the Communist International, but he was shot in 1937, after refusing despite torture to 'confess' in one of the show trials.

Parties like the one which ruled Hungary for Stalin were contradictory things. The dedicated careerists, of course, would do anything. But there were also many people who had started out as honest communists and who, despite the political corruption of Stalinism, were still honest communists according to their own lights.

Such 'honest Stalinists', led by Josip Tito, had taken power in Yugoslavia without any help from the Russian army. Still Stalinists, they broke with Stalin in 1948.

Stalin did not like or trust the 'honest Stalinists'. He suspected them all of being potential Titos. So between 1949 and 1952 Eastern Europe got its own version of Stalin's mid-'30s Moscow trials. The victims were the most loyal Stalinists, courageous people who had run the underground CPs before the Russian occupation. In Hungary, CP secretary Lazlo Rajk was the chief victim. He was hanged, shouting 'Long live the Party!' on the scaffold.

After Stalin's death, and before Khrushchev denounced him, came the 'thaw', a slackening of Stalin's extreme terror within the ruling parties. Some of the victims of the purges were rehabilitated, some of the jails opened. Formerly condemned leaders became the focus of alternative *Stalinist* centres against the ruling groups. A strange and transitory sort of pluralism existed within or around the ruling parties.

Some of these dissidents had been accused of 'nationalism', that is, of having reservations (or more) about Russian overlordship. National independence became an issue. In Poland it was only 17 years since Stalin and Hitler had jointly invaded and divided the country. A workers' revolt in Poland in June 1956 brought Eastern Europe to the boil. The Russians were on the verge of invading Poland when the alternative Stalinist team around Gomulka (just out of jail) took control, and Gomulka convinced the Russians that he could keep control.

The Hungarians responded to the Polish revolt eagerly. A vast funeral procession in Budapest followed the bones of Lazlo Rajk to reinterment. An alternative Stalinist team led by Imre Nagy, who had also been in jail, took power.

When they decided to leave the Warsaw Pact, Russia invaded. The Hungarians fought back. They built barricades in Budapest, contesting every street with the invaders, fighting tanks with bottles of petrol and captured guns.

Disaffection appeared in the ranks of the Russian army, and then a miracle seemed to happen — the Russians withdrew from Budapest. But they came back almost immediately, with fresh troops. They crushed the uprising.

Workers struck in the factories, and the Stalinists had literally to take the means of production out of their hands. Tens of thousands of refugees streamed across the Austrian border, to disperse in the West. The new regime installed by Moscow was still hanging insurgents five years later. Imre Nagy and three others were hanged in Moscow in 1958.

Peter Fryer was a reporter on the Daily Worker (now, in reduced circumstances and outside the CP's control, called the Morning Star). He had reported on the Rajk trial and was sent to Budapest in 1956.

What he saw horrified him and opened his eyes. He wrote the truth as he saw it, and the Daily Worker refused to print his articles. Soon he was expelled from the CP. He wrote this book and it was published by a small group of Trotskyists, led by Gerry Healy, in December 1956. It is now reprinted in a new edition.

Fryer became a Trotskyist and helped win many ex-CPers to Trotskyism after 1957. His book is a vivid first-hand account of the Hungarian Revolution. No wonder it had such an impact 30 years ago: read it! It is still an antidote against illusions in Stalinism because what it deals with is an event which happened not at the high point of Stalinist terror, but in the middle of the 'thaw' initiated by Gorbachev's direct predecessor as a reform dictator, Nikita Khrushchev.

A sour joke of that period is worth remembering. When Stalin died he left a big box labelled 'To my successor: to be opened in time of trouble'. In trouble Khrushchev opened the box and found inside it another box and a message.

The message said 'Blame it all on me', and the box was labelled, 'Open when things get worse'.

When Hungary boiled over, Khrushchev opened the second box. Inside he found a message: 'If things are really bad, do as I did'.

Never the same again

from back page

"When you go in you have to strip off entirely and are taken into a room with three or four women prison warders. They run their hands over your body, look into your mouth, under your feet, under your arms, everywhere. They are continually worried about drugs being smuggled in and out.

Then you go into another room where there is a nurse or matron type, and they have a big iron chair. The seat of the chair is on a level with this woman's face, and you have to get up on it. There were two bars going out from this chair with two loops on the end, and you had to put your legs on that.

You can imagine what the search was. When you don't know what to expect, it's so degrading... and so unnecessary".

Women in miners' support groups have since taken up the campaign against strip searching, particularly in Armagh jail in Northern Ireland.

During the strike, the women didn't just picket the pits, but also offered solidarity to other struggles. For example, the women from Yorkshire went and picketed Cammell Lairds shipyard, where workers were occupying against closure.

"We just read about Cammell Lairds in the papers and saw it on television, and decided to help them. We got in touch with somebody there and told them we'd like to join the picket line, and they said, 'Yes, great, when are you coming?'."

Travelling round the country to raise funds and support, the women encountered many different struggles going on that until then had been nothing more than a remote idea from a TV screen or the newspaper.

"Before, they had always seen themselves as a working-class elite, and at first it was a shock to find that in police eyes they rated as blacks, teenagers with drugs, or gays. It was a healthy awakening".

The women came to identify with groups they had previously ignored or been critical of, one of the strongest links being with the women of the peace camp protesting against Cruise missiles at Greenham Common.

Many women in the mining villages have continued to be active since the miners' strike was lost — in Women Against Pit Closures, demanding a voice in the NUM; in the Labour Party, demanding the right of women to equal representation; demanding the release and reinstatement of all the miners imprisoned and sacked as a result of the dispute; or supporting whichever strike or struggle keeps alive the fighting spirit of the working class.

The women of the miners' strike will never be the same again, and because of them the women's movement will never be the same again either.

"The women's movement which evolved during the strike regenerated pride among all working-class women. Their feminism was based not on a doctrine of individual opportunity, but on the strength of the solidarity of women to achieve a better and fairer society".

The experience of the women in the miners' strike is the nearest this country has come to seeing the birth of a working-class women's movement. As the strike of 1984-5 showed, such a movement would benefit not just women, but the working class as a whole.

Mary Hallam from Edwinstowe near Workshop in North Notts. Photo Brenda Price/Format.

Never the same again

Jean Lane reviews 'Never the Same Again: Women and the Miners' Strike', by Jean Stead (The Women's Press, £5.95)

"They wanted to keep their solidarity. They wanted to remain sisters and not compete with each other like successful middle-class career women in a rat-race copied from middle-class male society.

"In fact, they wanted to do no less than dig up the roots of society, shake them, clean them, and plant them again in a better soil".

Such is Jean Stead's assessment of the women in the miners' strike. In her book she allows us to relive the courage, the excitement, the solidarity, the sorrow and the fear — and, most of all, the comradeship — that existed among working-class people during the miners' strike of 1984-5.

The demands of the women's movement, which up to then had been mostly the concern of middle-class, relatively well-off, articulate women, were taken up in the most active way possible by working-class women. The demands for peace, against nuclear weaponry and nuclear power, for education for working class women, for better health services, for an equal right to jobs, and for a more equal share-out of the burden of domestic labour, were all part of the struggle taken up by the women of the coalfields.

And, because those demands were being raised as a result of a class struggle that was questioning the very basis of capitalist philosophy (profit before people), and was therefore coming up directly and violently against the forces of the state, the women of the coalfields were thrown headlong into politics.

Women who had never done anything like it before had to learn very quickly how to organise meetings, how to speak, and how the labour movement works (what do all those initials stand for?)

They were also learning the best ways to picket. They were organising rallies, and they were travelling, not just all over the country but internationally, collecting money and support for the striking miners.

The most immediate effect of the women's involvement was of course on family life. Many marriages broke up under the strain. But many others were strengthened by the new comradeship between miners and their wives.

As one striking miner from Maerdy put it: *"Before, you felt you were just the person who went home on a Friday night with the pay packet. There was nothing to look forward to, nothing to talk about. You just thought about how you could manage to pay the bills.*

Now we read the newspapers, think a lot about world affairs we see on television, and think maybe we can change things".

Roles had to change — and just as the women were learning new skills in speaking, fighting, travelling, many of the men were learning to keep house and look after the bills.

Not all the stories in the book are light-hearted or humorous. Some men found it difficult to accept the women's new independence, and the ensuing arguments caused pain, illness and hardship. But the majority of the women's lives were changed completely and irrevocably by the strike.

"Some men found it very difficult to get used to the fact that it was not them but their wives who would be rolling merrily through the door after midnight, the better for a few drinks after the evening meeting and full of stories about their successes".

Another area where women's involvement brought the women into conflict with their allies — their husbands and the men in the NUM — was the picket line. Many men did not like to see women there and felt it particularly hard to see the police hitting out at the women. But picket the women did nevertheless, and proved themselves courageous and fearless fighters, despite the violence, imprisonment and harassment they faced.

120 women picketed Calverton pit in Nottinghamshire, where scabs were working a night shift.

"We went onto the side of the road leading to the pit. But they didn't want us there, so they forced us all over to a piece of grass on the other side. They penned us in there by encircling us. Then more and more police started to arrive and forced us over the road.

They were hitting women. There were no holds barred; there were 13 women taken to hospital. It was terrifying".

Brenda Greenwood was arrested at Ollerton colliery for shouting at the scabs, and was jailed for seven days at Risley remand centre.

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