

The real history of US labour

Dianne Finger and Barry Finger review *An Injury to All* by Kim Moody, Verso, London.

"This book," as Moody correctly forewarns, "is about the demise of the labour movement that was born in the 1930s and 1940s." While chronicling its social decline in contemporary American life, this book concerns itself with the "abandonment of the early social unionism of the CIO in favour of a modern version of business unionism". It is written from the singular perspective of the rank and file militant. Moody therefore suffers no pretensions of having offered anything resembling an "official" history, nor one which anyone would aspire to such ends.

Moody himself is uniquely equipped in providing this anti-concessionist, "alternative guide" to modern unionism. He is one of the founders and leading forces behind the rank and file newsletter, *Labor Notes*. This journal, founded in 1979, picks up from where the International Socialists of the 1960s and '70s left off. The IS group(let), probably never numbering more than a few hundred, was unique among the so-called New Left. It traced its roots back to the non-orthodox wing of the 1930s' Trotskyist movement which in its day played a memorable, if minor role in the early period of the CIO.

Unlike their more blinkered cohorts of the "official" Trotskyist party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Workers Party, later the Independent Socialist League, developed a Third Camp socialist position. It refused to support, critically or otherwise, the Soviet Union as a workers' state, and championed instead a socialism from below. This perspective, at once revolutionary and democratic, firmly committed the group to participation in the



Pittston miners' strike, 1990

mass movements of its day with pride of place naturally reserved for labour struggles. But such participation never entailed the subordination of its activities to the interests of any existing social system. This tradition was faithfully replicated in the IS which, unlike the New Left in general, never wound up as claquers in the authoritarian of the month club for Mao or Hoxha or Castro or Ho or Tito.

The IS itself no longer exists. Its membership dissolved into the insurgency movements of organised and semi-organised labour, while its political apparatus merged with other distantly similar groups on the American left. But it did not vanish from the political scene before playing a leading part in the 1976 founding of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, nor before bequeathing in *Labor Notes* an ongoing project of linking the anti-bureaucratic chorus in the labour movement to new voices within the Black, feminist and anti-interventionary movements. The critical assumption that informs *Labor Notes* as it does *An Injury to All* is that "the working class remains the central agency of progressive politics and social change".

The heyday of American trade unionism was the later 1930s and early 1940s when, as Moody evokes, "millions of workers

flowed into new organisations, stamping them with their own democratic aspirations and shaping a new generation of leaders from the shop floor to the international union headquarters". Concomitant with this organisational challenge to the accommodationist AFL's business unionism was a new vision of social unionism.

In this modern version of social unionism the values of the old Knights of Labour were to find new expression. The democratic, collectivist thrust of the new industrial unions envisioned organised labour as a "force that would lead to the raising of the living standards of the entire nation... (and pointed to) an egalitarian future for all..." This egalitarianism and its broader social vision provided the "only real potential springboards toward the development of an aggressive, class-based movement in post World War Two America."

Though not socialist, the new unionism of the 1930s was aggressively participatory, organisationally iconoclastic and if not built completely from the ground up was at least a "hybrid of rank and file democracy and bureaucracy". It provided a hospitable environment for radicals not only due to the free-wheeling structure of the organisations which were conducive to new initiatives, but

because workers began to see themselves as a class. As the CIO's Phillip Murray was to admit in 1944, "It is a new departure for American labour to lead... a national movement devoted to the general welfare just as much as to the particular interests of labour groups."

But with the resurgence and ultimate triumph of business unionism this all came to an end. For Moody the wartime institutional accords between the CIO, management and the federal government provided the immediate backdrop to the decline of social unionism. "Basically," according to Moody, "the leadership of the CIO offered the Roosevelt administration a no-strike pledge and a wage freeze in return for government pressure on the employers to allow the growth and stabilisation of union membership". Shopfloor initiative was too unwieldy to be compatible with the routinisation of industrial relations needed to prosecute the war effort. The transference of ever more issues from the local level summoned forth a standing, self-perpetuating union bureaucracy required to implement and enforce these trilateral agreements.

This bureaucratic mechanism bore fruit in the form of industry-wide wage patterns and standardised grievance procedures, while at the same time choking off union democracy and suppressing internal dissent. As mediator rather than immediate participant in the shopfloor struggle, the union bureaucracy eventually began to identify the well-being of the worker with the wealth and profitability of the company.

Ever more remote were the days when labour could be counted to rally to any social cause. Nothing perhaps more illustrative of this than the decline in the level of the union participation in the civil rights movement. When in the 1930s at least some of the CIO unions worked in a cooperative relationship with the Black community, by the 1960s active participation gave way to interested bystanding. The civil rights movement was to find its principal allies and organisational support outside the union establishment.

Sidney Lens aptly described this transformation. "In both its moral overtone and its intrinsic philosophy it has tended to blend with the very forces of Big Business which it fights so steadily on the narrow economic front. Instead of remaining a maverick force with the social stream, as it has grown older, it has become 'responsible', sluggish towards new ideas, practical rather than idealistic, legalistic rather than militant, more conformist than anti-conformist." The unions were, in other words, willing to utterly concede to the bosses the right to manage in exchange for

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the expansion of wages and benefits.

Eventually with the throttling of internal political ferment, labour's role as "a pressure group within the Democratic Party — rather than as the leader of a broad movement — was unchallenged policy." Labour's agenda was pared down to a narrow compass of legislative goals that directly affected the unions themselves. National health care, federal public housing, economic planning all retreated to the background to be dusted off only for ceremonial display. With the eventual decline in the worldwide competitiveness of American business, the post-war accord between labour and management was to erode. And when the time came, the descent into narrow, business unionism had already disarmed labour and stripped it of its ability to challenge capital.

For Moody argues explicitly that the decline of labour in the 1970s and '80s was not due to the structural shift in employment patterns from manufacturing to services. Indeed, the level of unionisation has declined in both sectors. Rather the cause resides in the lack of adaptability on the part of a mummified labour movement. This retreat reached its climax during the 1979-80 Chrysler bailout, when the UAW overrode recalcitrant locals and forced workers to accept a wage freeze and other massive concessions. Despite these givebacks, almost half the workforce eventually lost their jobs.

Concessionary bargaining is not seen by employers as an aberration, to be invoked only under extreme financial circumstances. Moody points out that profitable firms such as GM, Kroger, Iowa Beef, Gulf Oil, Texaco, Caterpillar Tractor and UPS demanded and received concessions. Moreover, some of the industries such as trucking, meatpacking and the airlines were not declining but prosperous sectors. And in any case, labour costs most often do not account for even 50% of the current costs of production where concessions have been common.

The acceptance of quality of work-life schemes, team concepts and other contrivances of management have further eroded labour's adversarial edge. Moody effectively reveals these "power-sharing" tools as utter failures in terms of altering the real power relationships between labour and management. More ominously, "the popularity of non-adversarial labour relations reflects the conversion of a large number of union leaders to the competitive logic of the business enterprise". Unions became a mechanism whereby work life is adapted to the needs of intensified global competition.

This slide in the quality of shop-floor and union life is not

inevitable or irreversible. Drawing on a masterful discussion of the P-9 and Watsonville Canning strikes as well as a detailed history of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Moody presents what he calls "A new vision for US Labour". This vision draws on the "positive traditions" of past labour organisations. "In the US these traditions include the social inclusiveness, the rank and file democracy, the nascent egalitarianism, and the quest for universal justice that characterised, to one degree or another, the Knights of Labour, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the early CIO."

Compared to the present, Moody's project would be more culturally diverse, bringing to bear feminist and multi-ethnic concerns; it would "return to industrial structure"; and would "include cross- or multiunion formations such as stewards' councils, rank and file based coordinated bargaining, the use of corporate campaigns; and the... regularisation of active solidarity through the recognition of picket lines and through various forms of mass action." As Moody argues, "The restructuring of the unions must include the most thorough rank and file democracy possible. This is not simply because democracy is a nice thing or even because the rank and file are presumed to be more militant than the bureaucrats, but because the working class cannot remake its own institutions unless it controls them."

Finally, Moody would crown this movement with the creation of a union-based labour party. Business unionism, and the Democratic Party to which it is wed, have exhausted their abilities to defend the living standards of working people. Moody sees the catalyst for a new party in the possible break-away by any major social constituency of the Democratic Party, such as the Rainbow Coalition or unions at the state or local levels, and the activation of a significant number of working class non-voters.

Only this new labour movement could give resonance to solving the problems of the Black underclass, of joblessness, of environmental and community decay, and of ageism, racism and sexism. But it could do so only by challenging the business/individualist values of American culture. Moody concludes that "embodied in the slogan 'An Injury to One is an Injury to All' is an ethic in which labour takes social responsibility for all working people...It is the opposite of the irresponsible business ethic in which the competitive struggle of each against all is imagined to advance the common welfare...Labour's rebirth requires even more than new tactics or new forms of organisation: it requires a vision that allows the

millions facing downward mobility to see labour as the carrier of justice."

It is in keeping this vision alive that Moody's work above all else stands out as a contribution to American labour history.

It takes all sorts?

Liz Millward reviews Reg and Ron Kray, 'Our Story'

A fictional detective once said that the trouble with most criminals was their inability to reason from B to C. The Kray twins could only make it to B, if the path of reason ran along a well-worked cliché.

Ronnie and Reggie Kray were imprisoned on 8 March 1969, with a recommendation that they serve at least 30 years. Ronnie is in Broadmoor and unlikely ever to be released. Technically, the twins were sentenced for the murders of Jack McVitie and George Cornell, but they were also suspected of having a hand in at least three other murders. They ran several protection rackets and frauds, and acted as an information service for London criminals. The Krays are probably the best-known criminals of post-war Britain.

Their 'autobiography' is based on a series of interviews conducted in prison. Thus the book consists of Ron and Reg's 'own' words. In fact, the words, and the sentiments they express, come from the pre-printed messages inside birthday and Christmas cards.

During their reign as 'Kings of the Underworld' the Krays — like the gentlemanly man-eating shark in the children's song "who ate neither woman nor child" — never hurt women, children or old folks. They loved their mum, were shattered when they 'lost' loved ones, kept the code of silence, believed in god, and honour among thieves, etc, etc.

There was no view so hackneyed that the Krays did not subscribe to it, from 'no place like home' to 'blood is thicker than water'. Ronnie and Reggie have held on to their beliefs despite having them contradicted by reality over and over again. The sheer banality of the autobiography is overwhelming. The book consists of clichés strung together one after another. The following extract was obtain-

ed by opening the book at random.

...the extermination of a man no better than a sewer rat has cost me my freedom for the best part of my life. I have paid the greatest price of all. Hanging would have been preferable to the hell I've been living through for the past 20 years. Every day, even now, is a living nightmare... (Reg Kray [my emphasis]).

The twins believed that they were 'good' for the East End, that they kept crime off the streets. They think that they compare well with the criminals of today in that they were less violent and didn't deal drugs. This is said in all seriousness, in the same book which describes Ronnie shooting a man in the leg for owing money for 'poppers'! The brothers helped hide a man who had stabbed someone to death. For this they were persecuted by the police. 'For trying to help someone in trouble!' they cry in injured tones.

Ronnie (now certified insane) had/had the most developed double standards. He admits to getting 'nasty', but only when 'provoked'. It was this provocation which led to the killing of George Cornell. Cornell called Ronnie a 'fat poof'. In Ronnie's immortal words: 'he signed his own death warrant'. No one could call Ronnie Kray a fat poof and live!

In the whole autobiography there is only one touch of genuine feeling from Reg (there is none from Ronnie — or if he means what he says he is a lot madder than people think). Reggie's comments concern his stabbing to death Jack McVitie. From all accounts this was a brutal, bloody and pointless affair. McVitie was lured to a flat in Stoke Newington where Reggie tried to shoot him. But the gun jammed. McVitie pleaded for his life and tried to jump through a window, but got stuck. As a scene in a comedy film it would have been a wild success — until, that is, two men held McVitie so that Reggie could stab him in the face, neck and stomach. Reggie hated the killing.

'I felt bad afterwards though. Not because I'd killed McVitie — one of the nastiest villains I've ever met — but because sticking a knife into anyone is not a pleasant thing to do unless you are a psychopath, which I'm not. It's a bloody awful feeling.'

Reggie was not obsessed with killing like Ronnie was. During periods of inactivity Ronnie's favourite pastime was assembling lists of people to be killed. Reggie was happy to injure, but didn't want to kill. Moreover, Reggie didn't have to kill anyone. His excuses for 'having' to kill Jack McVitie are lame to say the least, on a par with George Cornell's provocation. At best McVitie was killed 'pour encourager les autres', at worst to assuage Ron-

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nie's need for blood.

Equally there was no excuse for the racketeering, the maimings, or the gang fights which the twins indulged in. None of the Krays' activities appeared to have given them any lasting pleasure — the money was quickly spent, and the 'high' brought on by violence soon dissipated. The brothers were incapable of making their (self-defined) successes last longer than a few months. In his full-scale study of the Krays, 'The Profession of Violence', John Pearson says that Reggie might have 'made it' on his own, but that he was dragged down by Ronnie's psychotic need for power through violence.

Having gained criminal prominence together, argues Pearson, Reggie could have dumped Ronnie and consolidated his gains. While Ronnie was in prison in 1959, 'the firm' moved into legal and semi-legal West End gambling clubs and protection rackets. They made vast sums of money and could have gone on doing so, remaining untouched by the police. Good publicity was assured by various charitable activities in the East End.

But then Ronnie reappeared, and so did organised gang violence. Profits started to fall away at the same time.

Ronnie was not interested in simply accumulating wealth — he needed terror and violence to control his paranoid fantasies. According to Pearson, Reggie went along with this because he could not stand up to his brother. Reggie may have known Ronnie was a psychopath (his comments about how only a psychopath would enjoy killing McVitie are clearly a comment on his brother), but he could not bring himself to have his brother certified, and put out of circulation, although he did consult a psychiatrist more than once about Ron.

Ron is now certified insane, and not for the first time. He was certified for the first time in 1957 whilst in prison. He should have been under a psychiatrist's care from then onwards. That he wasn't was the failure of the whole Kray family who refused to face up to his madness and helped him escape from prison. So for Ronnie perhaps there was no choice about his violent behaviour.

Reggie, however, insists that he is and always has been quite sane, except for a short spell in prison when he became paranoid. John Pearson makes a case for Reg being so heavily influenced by his twin that he could not help himself — he had to try to 'keep up' with Ronnie.

Ronnie, on the other hand, seemed to remain relatively 'sane' if his murder fantasies were occasionally realised. To that extent Ronnie was indulged by Reggie in preference to losing his brother's

love, or losing the limited control he had over his behaviour.

The recent film, 'The Krays', propounds the idea that both the twins were influenced by their mother, and the other female family members, into having their weirdly lopsided relationship with reality. The twins' mother, Violet, refused to see that there was anything unusual in her son's behaviour, and to that extent encouraged them in it.

It has been suggested by more than one critic (including John Pearson) that the twins were simply acting out their fantasies of American gangster movies. In having a film made about their lives, those fantasies have now reached the final fulfilment.

But despite the explanations, sociological and psychological, the question of personal choice and responsibility remains. The East End of London after the war was no easy place to grow up, and the twins had no education to speak of. Apart from their boxing ability (which was considerable) the Kray twins had no 'advantage' to help them make their way in the world. Yet the same was true of thousands of other people, very few of whom turned to crime. The twins' philosophy can be summed up in Ron's own words: 'Only idiots work'. Fine. Such is the choice the twins made.

For the people in similar circumstances who made a different choice, life was (and is) a life of grinding poverty with few possibilities of escape. Socialism is all about changing that. But Ron and Reg Kray did not help their own people by terrorising them and stealing from them.

Ronnie and Reggie now think they should be released from prison. Reggie in particular says he will not return to crime and considers that he has spent long enough behind bars. He wants to spend his 'retirement' in the country, living on money made from both crime and publicity, never troubling the rest of us again.

Lots of people agree with him and think Reggie should be released. I don't. I would quote the one hackneyed cliché the twins have always avoided: 'You made your bed — now you must lie on it.'

As modest as Stalin

Jim Denham reviews 'The Artful Albanian

— the Memoirs of Enver Hoxha' edited by Jon Halliday, Chatto, £6.95

Back in the late '70s a Maoist who had just transferred his allegiance from China to Albania, told me a joke.

During one of their many heated disputes, Krushchev turned in exasperation to Enver Hoxha and declared "We have nothing in common — even our backgrounds are completely different. I come from the proletariat, while you're from the bourgeoisie!" At this, Comrade Enver calmly replied, "But we do have something in common, Comrade Krushchev: We're both class traitors."

Not exactly side-splittingly funny, I agree. But after reading the memoirs of the man who ruled Albania with a rod of iron for over forty years, I can almost believe that he really did say that. Certainly he is on record as describing Krushchev as "the greatest counter-revolutionary buffoon and charlatan the world has ever known."

Unusually (one suspects) for a Stalinist dictator, Enver Hoxha appears to have possessed a certain sense of humour, albeit one that manifested itself mainly in the course of vitriolic mockery of the pretensions, stupidity and cowardice of his political opponents and rivals within the "family" of Stalinism.

Editor Jon Halliday has painstakingly selected extracts from Hoxha's voluminous memoirs, covering World War Two and its aftermath (including the break with Tito's Yugoslavia in 1948), the 1950s (in the course of which Albania's warm relationship with Russia deteriorated to the point when Hoxha broke altogether with the "Krushchevite revisionists"), and the period of close alignment with China throughout the 1960s and into the '70s until Hoxha broke with them as well.

The memoirs are in diary form, which Halliday reckons is on the whole a frank account of events as Hoxha saw them, although some self-justifying re-writing of history with the benefit of hindsight is pointed out by the editor. Halliday also provides some most useful historical background and commentary for those of us not entirely 'au fait' with the finer points of post-war Balkan politics.

So well does Halliday present the witty, gossipy style of his subject's diaries, that it is easy to be seduced into regarding Hoxha as a rather jolly fellow — at worst a likeable, erudite rogue. One memorable scene is of Hoxha and the Brigadier who headed the British mission in Albania

towards the end of World War Two, discussing the merits of Swift, Byron, Shelley, Kipling (!) and Jerome K Jerome (!!).

But we are brought back down to earth with a bump by the accounts of Hoxha's ruthless purges of political opponents (real and imagined) including many old comrades from the early days, like Koci Xoxe (strangled to death on Hoxha's orders as a suspected Titoite agent) and Mehmet Shehu, prime minister from 1954 until his supposed "suicide" in 1981. How many other less prominent "spies", "agents", "enemies of the people", "counter-revolutionaries", etc. also perished on Hoxha's orders can only be guessed at.

When Hoxha comes to discuss Stalin, his tone becomes suddenly stilted and reverential: "Stalin was no tyrant, no despot. He was a man of principle, he was just, modest and very kindly and considerate towards people, the cadres and his colleagues... No mistake of principle can be found in the works of this outstanding Marxist-Leninist," intones Hoxha. Stalin's open and benign regime is contrasted with the "Mafia-like methods" of his revisionist successors.

Halliday points out that Hoxha's account of a discussion with Stalin on the Greek Civil War simply does not tally with the known facts. According to Hoxha, his hero expressed full support for the Greek Communists as late as March 1949: in fact, Stalin had abandoned them at least a year earlier. Whether Stalin was lying to Hoxha about this, or Hoxha re-wrote the account to fit in with his picture of the great man as the embodiment of revolutionary principle, is not clear.

Even more chilling, perhaps, is Hoxha's account of a meeting in 1948 with Andrei Vyshinsky, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, who had been chief prosecutor in the 1936-8 Moscow Trials, and who demonstrated that he had not lost his touch by holding an impromptu "trial" of the "Yugoslav Titoites" especially for his host Hoxha.

"With his penetrating style, with arguments and the amazing clarity characteristic of him, Vyshinsky, as the true Bolshevik prosecutor that he was, made their content even clearer to us. This time we did not have the accused before us in the dock, but the fact is that their trial was being held and it was a fair trial, based on sound arguments, an historic trial, the justice of which was to be completely confirmed by the passage of time..."

Apart from a total contempt for the laws of natural justice and for democracy in any shape or form, one other constant theme runs through these memoirs: an absolute commitment to Albanian

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nationalism. Every situation, every alliance and every dispute is viewed from the standpoint of Albania's immediate political and economic interests. This is what really lies behind Hoxha's disputes with Tito and Krushchev. Such fierce nationalism, combined with a keen instinct for the maintenance of personal and political survival, plus a total unfamiliarity with the working class, made Enver Hoxha the consummate post-Stalin Stalinist.

These memoirs provide us with a disturbing glimpse of the kind of society that such people would put into effect given the chance. Jon Halliday's book should be made compulsory reading for all supporters of Socialist Action, Briefing and Socialist Outlook.

Helter skelter and stage by stage

Martin Thomas reviews

"Livingstone's Labour: A Programme for the Nineties", by Ken Livingstone, Unwin Hyman £12.95; and "Beyond the Casino Economy", by Nicholas Costello, Jonathan Michie and Seumas Milne, Verso.

When I was about nine years old, I spent some weeks ill in bed, reading through a vast heap of old boys' annuals, Readers' Digest, and similar literature contributed by my godfather.

"Livingstone's Labour", with its helter-skelter-would-you-believe-it style, reminds me strongly of that reading matter. When I interviewed Ken Livingstone for *Socialist Organiser* shortly before he became leader of the Greater London Council in 1981, he assured me that he had never read any Marx; indeed, he said, he had no time to read

anything but council papers. Judging from his bibliography, he has still read no Marx, but he has read a few other books, and this is a sort of scrapbook of the ideas he had picked up from those books and from his associates.

Hopping around from the pre-historic origins of women's oppression through the glories of Irish Gaelic culture in the first century BC to the "confidence and enthusiasm for the future" that Livingstone found "in almost every conversation with an ordinary Soviet citizen", in political conclusions the book shows the influence especially of John Ross and Gerry Healy.

One chapter claims that all post-war British politics has been governed by the machinations of MI5 and MI6. There are a few qualifying phrases — "irrespective of these reasonable activities [by MI5 and MI6] Callaghan would have succeeded Wilson and the Tories would have won the 1979 election" — but the drift of the chapter is in line with Healy's characteristic spy-mania and Livingstone's recent allegation that the break-up of Healy's "Workers' Revolutionary Party" in 1985 (when Healy was expelled for sexual abuses) was engineered by MI5.

Healy's influence is also visible in the chapter lauding Gorbachev — "a new moral leadership for the world".

John Ross of *Socialist Action* is credited for the "economic data base" and "much of the material for the chapters dealing with international relations". His influence shows in the book's economic programme.

The book explains Britain's economic problems as shaped by "key decisions", "between 1841 and 1846", which led to an exceptionally large proportion of British capitalists' investments being overseas. The remedy? Bring back the Corn Laws? No, a drive to force capitalists to bring their money back to Britain; a cut in arms spending; increased taxes on the rich; and a trade pact with the USSR.

This programme is proposed in radical language, both by Livingstone and by *Socialist Action*. However, it is neither workable nor necessarily anti-capitalist.

Livingstone does not propose any new public ownership beyond the renationalisation of utilities sold off by the Tories. He certainly does not propose public ownership of the banks and financial institutions, only remarking vaguely that "If the City refused to cooperate then the public anger that such economic sabotage would arouse would allow Labour to take further powers (what?) to ensure that the mandate of the voters prevailed".

Without public ownership — and effective workers' control at all levels — the programme is

nothing more than a proposal to put more cash in the hands of the capitalists and of the capitalist state, and to hope that they will invest it in bright new industries bringing prosperity to all. The programme is wishful thinking today; tomorrow, after a severe world slump and lurch towards protectionism, a version of it might be sober capitalist policy.

Like so much of Livingstone's self-publicity, it's two-faced: the top side is radical, socialist, quasi-revolutionary; the flip-side of the same coin, "an achievable package" (as he calls it) "of modernising reforms capable of being carried out in the lifetime of one Parliament".

"Beyond the Casino Economy" is a much more solid and well-crafted book. Like Livingstone's volume, it was published for last October's Labour Party conference. It was sponsored by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, the National Communications Union, and the National Union of Mineworkers, and acknowledges contributions from dozens of economists, trade unionists and Labour activists.

To the great credit of the three authors, it reads well and clearly, not like a book drafted by committee. The core of it is detailed and convincing argument that modern information technology make planning and social control *more*, not less, necessary and practicable. The technology lends itself easily to wide free distribution of information, but capitalism compels "increasingly roundabout strategies aimed at making knowledge unusable by competitors".

The book, however, has two grave shortcomings.

Any convincing socialist programme today has to explain very clearly how what it proposes is different from the debacle of Stalinism. The authors, however, accept the claim of Stalinism to represent socialism, with only minor criticism ("the advantages of exclusive reliance on highly centralised planning have now exhausted themselves"). Drafted before the recent upheavals in Eastern Europe, but published in the midst of them, the book suffered discredit from events before it was even on the shelves.

The texts it quotes reverently to back up its strategic arguments — titles like "Zarodov, *Leninism and Contemporary Problems of the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism*", Moscow 1976" — are those now being pulped or relegated to dusty reserve stacks all over Eastern Europe.

Strategic ideas from such sources contribute to the second main problem with "Beyond the Casino Economy". Having made a good case for a comprehensive socialist programme of public ownership and workers' control,

the book then concludes by proposing no such thing, but instead that old Stalinist favourite, an "anti-monopoly" programme.

This "anti-monopoly" programme would centre around the nationalisation of 25 of the top 100 industrial companies, and of the banks and financial institutions. This would not "of itself break the boundaries of capitalist society"; but it would move us into an intermediate state (presumably what the Stalinists used to call "advanced democracy") from which progress to socialism would be easier.

The tiger of capitalism still cannot be skinned claw by claw. Limited action programmes to mobilise workers round particular issues are one thing; blueprints for a future Labour government to skin one claw of the tiger are another.

Marxism without bullshit?

Jon Pike reviews 'Alternatives to Capitalism (Studies in Marxism and Social Theory)', Edited by Jon Elster and Karl Ove Moene. CUP

'Alternatives to Capitalism' the latest in the series 'Studies in Marxism and Social Theory' that has provided the main voice for the school known as analytical Marxism. The book is fairly boring in itself but it is an important mark in the evolution of that group to an acceptance of 'market socialism' and provides an opportunity to assess the way academic Marxism has gone over the last decade.

'Analytical Marxism' or 'no bullshit Marxism' began with the publication of Gerry Cohen's 'Karl Marx's Theory of History' in 1978. This was an attempt to recast orthodox historical materialism with the tools of analytical philosophy. There are two key features of this approach. Firstly, the analytical Marxists tend to assume that all fundamental entities are 'simples' — non-contradictory, unitary 'small bits'. Therefore analysis means getting down to these simples: the nuts and bolts. But

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nuts and bolts are static ideas and this poses problems for Marxists. To elaborate, Marxism has to do with movement: the 'laws of motion', processes of development, and so on. But movement implies contradiction. At its most basic level it implies something both is, and is not, in a certain state at a particular instant of time. Contradiction within an entity however means that the entity has at least two attributes, for example, it is both a use value and an exchange value. If an entity has two attributes *essentially* (in other words, take away one attribute and you haven't got the same thing — in this case a commodity) then it's not a 'simple' as required for analytical purposes.

The second and consequent problem is that it's difficult for analytical philosophy to include the idea of necessary connection or causation, since, as Hume pointed out, if we can imagine every connection, why should we believe that any particular connection should hold true. Causation then becomes a matter of coincidence and accident rather than of necessity.

This adds up to Marxism without Hegel, dialectics, or the analysis of alienation. Cohen's book presents a form of 'technological determinism' where the productive forces are the determining feature of any society and the productive relations exist in a form that is functional for the development of the forces.

'Karl Marx's Theory of History' struck a lot of people as an interesting and worthwhile book, but one which could be read in a number of different ways. With the publication of 'Making Sense of Marx' (sic) by Jon Elster in

'85 the theoretical framework becomes clearer. The rescuing of Marxism meant the abandonment of Marx's method and his world of essence and its replacement by rational choice theory and 'methodological individualism': the idea that classes as such don't act and instead all worthwhile explanation must be rooted in terms of individuals. These two approaches meant a framework lifted more or less straight from classical economics. Economic Man, that all-knowing, all-calculating, entirely selfish fiction is the new basis for the rescue of Marxism.

Two things are worth saying: first that this is not only wrong but shows a wilful misunderstanding of Marx. His polemic against the bourgeois economists and 'robinsonades' is a polemic against much of what passes for text book Marxism today. Marx argued that the idea of the 'individual' was a socially and historically specific construct, related to the needs of a capitalist ruling class to promote competition and narrow self interest as its ideological justification.

Second, that to use the loaded

notion of the individual like this is less a rescue of Marxism itself than an attempt to rescue the Marxism of the academy, by bringing the most respectable tools of non-Marxist study — analytical philosophy, rational choice theory and liberal economics — to bear on Marx's writings. As such, the project has secured a few careers — Cohen is now Professor of Political Theory at Oxford. But the analytical Marxists are not just careerists. They also reflect Anglo-Saxon prejudice against the sorts of tradition Marxists value: the essentialist, dialectical methods of Aristotle, Hegel and Marx himself, and against continental philosophy more generally. The school can also be seen as an attempt to patch up the gaps in Stalinist 'theory' after key bits of Marxism have been abandoned. The analytical Marxists end up throwing away the labour theory of value, dialectics and contradiction, class, alienation, essence and appearance and the conception of society as a totality of social relations.

'Alternatives to Capitalism' reveals something of what is left after this de-bullshitting of Marxism has happened. But there's a problem. Elster and Moene don't seem too sure of what capitalism is, since the main focus is on profit-sharing and competing cooperatives within a framework of market relations and widescale private ownership.

More than this, however, the impression is of an amalgam of hugely different articles (we go from 'Internal subcontracting in Hungarian Firms' to 'Are freedom and equality compatible?' (!) in eighty pages) and a comparison of various 'alternatives' completely abstracted from the living movement for socialism. The introduction gives us a discussion of four criteria on which we're supposed to decide upon which 'alternative to capitalism' to go for. This sort of choice, outside history, is the mark of utopianism, unrelated to the labour movement and its history or to any analysis of where capitalist societies are going.

Why is any of this important? It's been true for a long time that active socialists treat academic Marxism with a great deal of caution. On the other hand, the label 'bourgeois theory' is too often used as a meaningless swear word. We need to say *why* these books are bourgeois and welcome the exceptions. Analytical Marxism constitutes a challenge to and critique of Marxism normally from within, and is widely influential, for example in the *New Left Review* and the turn towards market socialism. It should be rejected in favour of a decent materialist and dialectical method and a politics that is rooted in the labour movement.

P.S.



'I have made enough faces'

"She's like wax in my hands ...and when I am finished with her, she will please the very gods."

Thus spoke Mauritz Stiller, the Swedish film director who discovered Garbo and took her to America in 1924. Garbo was only nineteen but was soon to become the brightest star at MGM, the studio whose boast was "more stars than there are in heaven".

Garbo may have been impressive while she was still learning the craft of film acting, but the shy star was soon to become formidable. When, after three successful pictures, MGM refused to raise her wages from \$600 to \$5,000 a week, Garbo went on strike for six months. MGM, with the public clamouring for more Garbo pictures, was forced to climb down. Garbo had won her independence.

She lost all her savings in the Wall Street crash of 1929, but went on to make another fortune in costume dramas like *Camille*, *Conquest* and *Anna Karenina*. At 27 she was earning \$250,000 a picture. She died a millionaire.

Public interest in Garbo never waned. Her romances which, despite a few close calls, never led to marriage, her yoga, her brief vegetarianism, were all splashed across the world press. She was as newsworthy in her eighties as she had been in her heyday. Sightings of Garbo on the streets of New York were rare, but always eagerly reported. With her death came more probings of the mystery surrounding the star.

For Garbo never explained herself. In her last press interview in 1928, she said: "Your joys and sorrows, you never can tell them. If you do tell them, you cheapen the inside of yourself." Garbo refused to speak to the press again. When she retired at the height of her spectacular career, her only explanation was: "I have made enough faces".

Garbo's films were immensely

popular, providing romantic escapism to a country in the grip of the great Depression. Surprisingly, most of her films ended unhappily. The audience went to see her suffer, to indulge in an orgy of masochistic martyred nobility. For Garbo was always noble.

More sinned against than sinning, her fallen women always redeemed themselves by self sacrifice of the loftiest kind. Her lovers, usually callow younger men, were renounced at the cost of great suffering. Her eyes seemed fixed on an ideal, something higher than human love, a divine love, distant and noble, far removed from the mundane and everyday. Her eroticism wasn't threatening, or carnal, like Marlene Dietrich's; it was almost spiritual. On screen she wasn't a woman, she was a goddess, a goddess in love with love, and therefore different from mere ordinary mortals.

"You only get a face like that in front of the camera once every hundred years," said Stiller, and the public agreed. But it wasn't only her incredible beauty that made Garbo enduringly interesting. It was her mystery, her reserve, and the inexplicable world weariness that lay behind the amazing face. What was wrong with Garbo? Why couldn't she find happiness?

Garbo was only twenty six when she played the ballerina Grusinskaya in *Grand Hotel*, but when she spoke the lines: "I've never been so tired in my life," the words rang true. In that film she also spoke the lines that would ever after be attributed to her: "I want to be alone".

And it seemed she did. She became ever more of a recluse, using aliases and disguises to protect herself from the discomforts of her enduring fame. She wanted to be left alone, but the world would not let her be. No wonder she grew tired of it all.

Garbo was strikingly beautiful, but she was also a blank, a sphinx, and that may explain the secret of her appeal. As critic Pauline Kael said: "You could look into Garbo." It's true. Garbo seemed very open to the camera, but she didn't signal her feelings and thoughts the way some actresses do. She seemed to enclose you in a private moment and to speak to you alone, as if you alone could understand what she was feeling. Her blankness helped. Simone de Beauvoir said: "Garbo's visage has a kind of emptiness into which anything could be projected." She could be wax in your hands too.

What the camera captured in her too brief career was the magic "of a sensitive face under the power of inspiration." Shall we ever see her like again?

Lillian Thomson