

A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVES



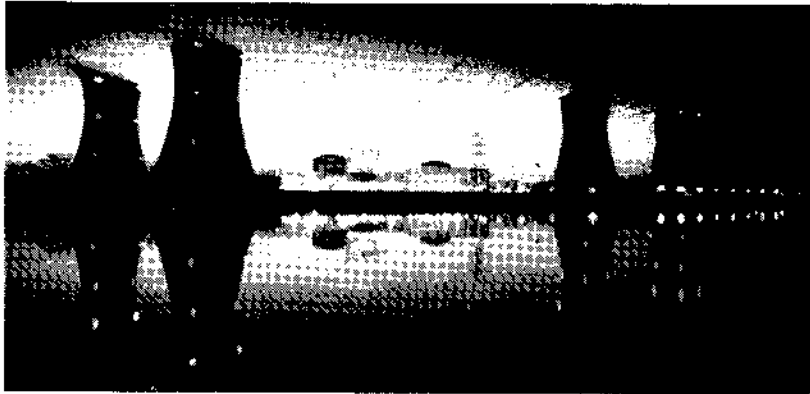
**Realignment...
for What?**

TONY BENN on Workers Plans

Reconversion in BARROW

MICHEL RAPTIS on MARX

SOUTH AFRICA



I'm not afraid anymore...

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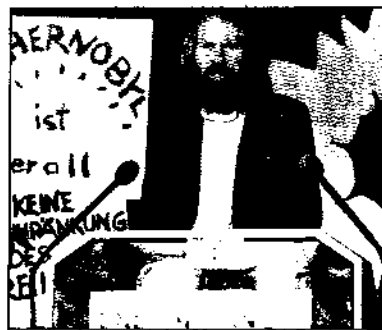
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1 EDITORIAL

NEWS

- 2 **BRITAIN: Prison Officers, Cornish Tin Mines**
- 3 **Labour Left Co-ordination. The other realignment. DANNY NICOL**
- 4 **INTERNATIONAL: Die Grunen Conference, Chinese CP rediscovers Trotsky**

FEATURES

- 5 **Chernobyl and Ecology. EMMA FOOTE & BEN SCHOENDORFF**
- 6 **The US new "Truman Doctrine". HARRY CURTIS**
 Arab reactions to the Libyan raid. Interview with **MOHAMMED HARBI**

SPECIAL ALTERNATIVE PLANS IN EUROPE

- 8 **A European Conference on Alternative Plans. JEAN-PIERRE LEMAIRE & HARRY CURTIS**
- 9 **Swords into Ploughshares. Reconverting Barrow. An interview with HARRY SIDALL, shop steward at Vickers Barrow.**
- 11 **"Rediscovering a Common Interest". TONY BENN's address to the Brussels Conference.**

- 15 **The Issues behind the "Left realignment". A discussion with HILARY WAINWRIGHT and MIKE RUSTIN**

- 19 **Unions and Wapping, a critical assessment. KEIR STARMER**

- 21 **SOUTH AFRICA: The road from Anti-Apartheid to Socialist Revolution. An interview with NEVILLE ALEXANDER**

- 26 **Rediscovering Marx. For a creative marxism. MICHEL RAPTIS**

REVIEWS

- 31 **Whose Freedom? Labour's new campaign**
 Star Wars, E.P. Thompson (ed.)
- 32 **Trade Unions & Politics, Ken Coates & Tony Topham**

THE APPEARANCE OF YET another socialist journal on the British political scene might well appear as somewhat of a mixed blessing. Who needs another paper that always presents the "truth" and pushes the one and only "correct line" when so many already do? But *Socialist Alternatives* is a journal with a difference...

politics with a difference...

THATCHERISM IS RAPIDLY LOOSING its hold over British politics and yet the Left finds itself in such a mess that it appears unable to present a coherent socialist alternative. Disunity and lack of direction are the order of the day. That much has been made clear by the ongoing wrangles around the *Left Realignment*. One time allies now find themselves on each side of a new divide that has split a Left to the exclusive benefit of the Labourite old guard.

WE FIND NO COMFORT in the break-up of what once was the *New Municipal Left* as we feel *Realignment* offers no real alternative. With on the one hand the politics of vanguardism epitomised by the Merseyside *Militants*' "from-the-topism" and, on the other hand, the unholy alliance of the realigned Left with a Labour right-wing whose commitment to defending capitalism is as strong as ever, participatory socialism remains the odd one out. We should have no illusions, the realigned Left's acceptance of the bulk of the Labour right's hopeless neo-keynesian economic programme and the suspect willingness of the very same right to ally with them on anything from expelling *Militant* to... yes, expelling *Militant*, gives the game away. In these circumstances, one wonders how the realigned Left's commitment to the self-organisation and demands of the new social movements will in practice amount to anything more than electoralist lip-service.

A GAPING SPACE FOR A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE has thus opened. It is a socialist's job to try and develop it by both taking seriously the concerns and demands of the new social movements and concretely working towards a radical extension of popular control over wealth and power. This can only be achieved by building a new kind of alliance from the bottom up integrating both the traditional wing of the labour movement and the new social movements. Clearly, such a project is fundamentally at odds with the Labour Party leadership's present economic strategy which provides no real alternative to Thatcherite economics, only a difference of degree.

socialism with a difference...

SOCIALIST PRACTICE STEMS FROM one's vision of socialism. To us, socialism means the generalised self-management of society as a whole. This implies that it is only through the self-organisation and selfactivity on their own terms by the different oppressed sections of society that humanity will liberate itself from all forms of exploitation - sexual and racial as well as economic. Socialist practice must accordingly be geared towards uniting all those in struggle against the capitalist system and fostering their self-organisation. Gone are the days when a self-proclaimed "vanguard" could hope to "lead" the struggle to its victorious end. Groups and parties fighting for socialism should, in their

structure as in their practice, prefigure the type of social organisation they claim to be fighting for. In effect, then, one of the most pressing tasks of the socialist movement is patient and principled work at all levels of society to make socialism, and with it feminism, ecology and anti-racism, the *common sense of our age*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH A COMMON SENSE necessitates the widest debates and a willingness to reconsider critically the "tablets of stone" of socialism in the light of the evolution of society in the past 150 years. It also requires a close examination of the concrete experiences and examples pointing to the emergence of this *common sense*. The recent past is rich in such examples from May 68 in France to the extraordinary Polish revolution where *Solidarnosc* actually demanded the fullest workers control and self-management of society. In Britain itself, the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in, the Lucas Aerospace Alternative Plan and, more recently, the experiences in popular planning around the London Docklands and in Sheffield, are but a few examples of a new approach to political and industrial struggle pointing towards a radical rethink of the socialist movement's practice. As more traditional approaches - whether right or "Left" - have proved unable to resist the Thatcherite onslaught, such a rethink could become one of the movement's greatest assets. In Europe, an Alternative movement ranging from the German Greens to sections of the revolutionary Left is already emerging. We ought to develop its British counterpart.

a paper with a difference...

FOR ALL THESE REASONS, *Socialist Alternatives* will not be a paper that resorts to easy answers. It should be clear to all that today, no-one party group or individual can claim to have all the answers. We have to learn to listen to each other and try to build on common ground. For our part, we believe that this new consensus will have to be built *against* the prevailing social and sexual order - not with sections of its establishment as *Marxism Today* proposes - if it is to prove more than a temporary alliance doomed to break up as the system plays one section against another.

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVES HOPES to play its part in the forging of such an alternative consensus. Accordingly, we will lay our editorial emphasis on open questions rather than definite answers, challenging thought rather than petrified dogma, unorthodoxy rather than the "correct line". We will pay special attention to concrete experiences in self-organisation and popular control - both in Britain and abroad - and open our columns to their participants and the debates they spark off.

SIMILARLY, OUR EDITORIAL POLICY will be very wide. We welcome contributions, articles, replies and comments from readers and activists in both the new social movements and the wider labour movement. We will seek to practice what we preach and effectively reflect the diverse and lively alliance that is the key to general emancipation.

Viva Geevor!

THE PRESENT CRISIS of the British tin-mining industry appears to have many parallels with the coal strike of 1984-85. Accordingly, the same types of issues have surfaced, if on a smaller scale.

The Government have made it clear that they are not prepared to support the industry through its conjunctural crisis. Recently, it rejected Geevor mine's appeal for help. 375 jobs are at risk at Geevor and, with three other mines and associated industries, it is a total of 4,000 jobs that could go. Rio Tinto Zinc, the company that owns South Crofty, Pendarves and Wheal Jane mines, have made plain their intention of closing the whole operation on August 1 unless Government steps in. But, of course, this is **not** going to happen.



As with coal, tin-mines, once shut, cannot be re-opened should the tin market get better. Here too, management have advanced the same worn arguments about pits being "uneconomic". How bitterly ironic when, through the coal strike, Government and the press more than once held up the Rio Tinto privately owned tin mines as models of what "economic" mining should be about.

Once again, we see two logics clashing. That of the short-term view of market speculators who only see that tin prices have fallen from £8,500 per tonne to £4,500 (ie 60% of production costs) and that of working people and their communities. As with coal-mining, should the tin-mines go, in the absence of any alter-

native employment locally, it is whole villages that would turn into ghost-towns.

In such a situation, socialists and union activists should be centring their demands on community needs. It should be up to the people in Cornwall to put forward their own alternative plans to save the tin industry, diversify their production and revive their communities. Once again, this points to the pressing necessity for unions to involve themselves and their members more directly into open political action in defense and promotion of working people, their communities and their projects. ■

Behind Bars

ON 16th APRIL, THE Prison Officers Association (POA) held a ballot on whether to take industrial action. 81% voted in favour. Rioting in prisons helped insure that the dispute was settled within days. Whether the underlying problems of the British prison system have been "settled" is altogether a different question. The breakdown of talks between the POA and the Prison Department was a direct result of the Government's intransigence over the question of staffing levels in Britain's gaols. In Thatcher's "law & order" Britain, it is significant that the POA sought, in face of increased violence in Europe's worst overcrowded gaols, to "negotiate their safety."

Never before have prisons been so appallingly overcrowded. In Leicester, 40 men have to shave in one lavatory while at Bedford prison 44 men have to share one lavatory, one urinal, one washbasin and one sink. In fact conditions are so bad that the 1984 report of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons recorded that "sanitary arrangements in many penal establishments are uncivilised, unhygienic and degrading." The report also underlined that present plans meant that a significant proportion of prisoners will still be using chamber pots by the end of the Century. On top of this, the new Government cash limits would involve further staff shortages and services cut.

The result of all this is that an increasing number of inmates spend more and

more time locked in the small confines of their cell. Political response to this barbaric travesty of justice could take two forms. One, of course, is to demand a massive increase in staff and a new building programme. The other involves a complete reassessment of crime and the criminal process.

In 1984, out of a daily average prison population of 43,350, only 8,151 were violent offenders (sexual offenders included). All the others were serving time for burglary, robbery, petty theft, fraud, etc. - all offences that involved no element of direct violence. Particularly alarming, during the whole of 1984, 20,000 people were sent to prison for fine defaults. Out of these, 60% were unemployed.



It is clear that this situation is wholly socially unacceptable. Not only should prison officers be allowed to determine staffing levels, but prisoners should have much greater control over the conditions of their imprisonment. In the end, it should be down to communities to decide what the criteria for temporarily depriving individuals from freedom, is, not left to a Government whose irresponsible social and welfare policies have produced the greatest increase in social despair and crime we've seen this Century. ■

Cumbersome but Essential

DANNY NICOL, member of CLPD, assesses the new Labour Left grouping, **Labour Left Co-ordination**.

Labour Left Co-ordination came about because of the need for a co-ordinated, united response to the shift to the right in the Labour Party leadership. The leadership has already ignored crucial Conference decisions – such as those on the miners and the rate-capped councils – and has been seen backing a witch hunt which is being directed not only against *Militant* members, but against many Labour Left activists up and down the country. The chances of the next Labour Government being little more than a Tory government writ slightly smaller appear increasingly as a distinct probability. This spurred a number of Left groups to action for unity. The groups involved in LLC are the Campaign Group of MPs, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, the Women's Action Committee, the Black Sections, and groups around certain newspapers (*Socialist Action*, *International*, *Socialist Viewpoint*, *Labour Briefing*, *Worker's Power*, *Socialist Organiser*, etc...) Unfortunately, the (misnamed) realignment has deprived us of the support of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee and Clause Four. These erstwhile comrades now seem to feel their best interests lie in defecting to the non-socialist wing of the Party.

It has not been easy to reach decisions, partly because there are so many different groups involved in LLC and also partly because of the ultra-left politics of some participating groups. Nowhere has this been better shown than in the protracted arguments that we have had about who should replace Michael Meacher on the Left slate for the NEC. Whilst, given the way he deserted the Left on so many issues, especially when his crucial vote at Conference allowed Kinnock to make that disgraceful speech against the miners, there was general agreement that he could no longer be supported, there was precious little agreement on who was best placed to replace him. Some groups were aiming at a "pure" slate eliminating anyone who had



Labour Left hangs on...

ever deviated from the Left line. This went as far as to include Jo Richardson!... Others wanted figures little known outside the capital such as Russell Proffit and Narendra Makanji. We have witnessed the emergence of a nonsensical "we don't have to win" attitude. In contrast, the idea of having Diane Abbott who has the virtue not only of being a black woman but of having already started to establish herself – twice – as a NEC contender in the women's section did not meet with such widespread approval.

Nonetheless, LLC has done some good things. In my opinion, the best so far is the publication of *Witch Hunt News* which could prove crucial to winning the argument over the current growing spate of expulsions. This essentially factual and concise broadsheet throws necessary light on disciplinary proceedings brought

against Labour Party members and pressure groups. Interestingly, these actions have sometimes been related to reselection procedures; local Labour Party leaderships, anxious to protect their sitting MPs from the democratic rigours of the present system of reselection, have spend much time and effort in the manufacture of fraudulent trade union delegates for selection conferences and then have expelled anyone who dared to complain. This is especially grave as, contrary to popular belief, individual members have no automatic right to appeal to annual Conference. The fact that the NEC shows signs of launching "investigations" into these, speaks volumes on the double standards currently practised at Walworth Road. LLC has also organised a series of meetings at regional parties conferences entitled *Winning with Socialist Policies* together with the Campaign Group and the CLPD. These have put the case for fighting for a radical socialist economic policy, resisting the witch hunt, supporting working class struggles and positive discrimination for women, gays, lesbians and blacks, and campaigning for greater party accountability.

LLC has also sparked important discussions on such issues as economic policy, where we broadly backed Andrew Glyn's *A Million Jobs a Year* and co-sponsored with the Socialist Society a conference on it. The Labour Party's future success may well depend on whether we are successful in pressing this subject at annual Conference: last year's Conference, in rejecting anything more radical than *A New Partnership, A New Britain*, was profoundly depressing for the Left.

Whilst meetings are cumbersome and progress slow, the LLC can at least claim to be playing some role in organising the fight back. Let's hope that it can get its act together over the other issues. ■

Witch-Hunt News is available at 20P per copy (postage incl.) or 1 for ten copies (postage incl.). Send orders to WHN, c/o 36, Melbourne Rd, London E17. Subscription from Labour Party branches and organisations welcome!

A redder shade of Green

HARRI GRUNBERG, delegate to the Last German Greens Conference, reports on the advance of the party's Left wing.

The German Greens held their Conference on May 17/18/19 in Hanover with a view to adopting their programme for the General Elections to the German Bundestag in January 1987. Conference took place under the shadow of the Chernobyl disaster which resulted in 75% of the German population opposing nuclear power. Conference debates reflected the wide mobilisation and public awareness of the nuclear issue. The Greens are clearly benefiting from the growing rejection of the CDU/FDP coalition policies and of "nuclear" parties generally. The resulting rise in the party's standing benefits essentially its Left-wing.

The German Greens have a very different history from that of other Green parties in Europe. Die Grunen were born out of a convergence between activists with a far-Left background and ecologist forces (both grassroots activists and "conservative" ecologists). However, the "conservative" wing rapidly left the party. This resulted in Die Grunen adopting a firm Left-wing orientation.

The electoral setbacks in the 1985 local elections strengthened the standing of reformist forces in the party with the result of promoting the "realist" wing of the party advocating an alliance with the SPD oriented towards long-term reformist perspectives. After the emergence of this orientation and the entry of the Greens in the regional socialdemocratic government in Hessen in 1985, the Left had been pushed onto the defensive.

But Chernobyl heralds a new political situation for the Left. Ecosocialists can

now present a "Left" perspective aiming at reflecting and capitalising on the wide social mobilisation and use it as lever on the SPD. The greater pressures the mass movement will apply on the SPD, the greater the chances of realising a "Red-Green" alliance on a Left, anti-capitalist basis.

The Hanover Conference fully adopted this perspective. Among the resolutions adopted for the Green Manifesto 1987, were motions calling for the scrapping of all euromissiles, withdrawal from NATO and an anti-capitalist alternative based on the socialisation of the economy under social self-management and popular planning through producers and consumers councils. The motion proposed by the trade-union section of the party which spelt out this self-managing strategy was overwhelmingly carried.

Another symptom of the shift to Left was the militant support given to FRELIMO and the ANC which resulted in closer links with national liberation movements. The ANC speaker to the congress opened his speech: "comrades...", then he paused and asked: "Is it all right if I call you comrades?" "Yes!" came Conference's thunderous answer.

On the whole, then, Die Grunen's Conference 1986 has proved once again that the German Greens are a force to be reckoned with by all socialists aiming at developing radical Left-wing politics. It is now clear that self-managing socialism will either be Green or won't be at all. ■

Trotsky in China

THE CHINESE Communist Party, after nearly 70 years of careful study, has made a most striking discovery. Its historians have just established that Leon Trotsky might have played some role in the October 1917 revolution in Russia and even later in the Civil War. All socialists should salute this great advance for historical science.

These incredible findings are presented in a new book by Communist Party member Li Xianrong, **A Critical Biography of Trotsky**. As Zhu Tingguan said in a review of the book published by the Chinese review *Shijie Lishi* (World History), "it is not easy to assess

objectively a complex historical figure like Trotsky." Indeed. The figure of Trotsky is still pretty hot stuff for the bureaucrats of the People's Republic of China who, until a few years ago were explaining that Stalin had masterminded the whole of the Russian Revolution from A to Z. But as Zhu Tingguan notes, "breakthrough of this sort are of great importance not only for the field of world history. The questions of the victory of socialism in one country, permanent revolution, the question of socialist accumulation and its tempo, the methods of socialist transformation and construction, and in particular the historical experience of the inner-party struggle in the USSR, are all of enormous contemporary importance".

THE RE-EVALUATION of Trotsky's role is also important by what it reveals about the new developments in China. Deng's new course has had to be accompanied by a tremendous release of democratic energies and a new thirst for intellectual research. In the same way as the Krushchev era in the USSR produced a sense of new freedom that eventually escaped the Party's grasp bringing about Mr K's downfall, "liberalisation" in China has been accompanied by a renewal of civil society. The first sign of this was the "Peking Spring" of 1981 which was severely repressed by Deng's army and police. However, it seems there is little the Party can do, or even is prepared to do, to revert to its absolute control over all intellectual life in China. Furthermore, as regards the reassessment of Trotsky, one should note that so far it has been limited to his role in the Russian Revolution and its direct aftermath. Much hotter material like his writings on the defeat of the 1927 Chinese revolution have yet to surface and be debated in the open.

Nonetheless, the Chinese are currently engaged in the publication of various works by Trotsky (among them **Revolution Betrayed**) and have even published a number of works by Trotskyist writers such as Ernest Mandel's **Late Capitalism** and Pierre Frank's **History of the Fourth International**. As Zhu Tingguan notes then, "we will need to be courageous in dealing with theoretical problems; we must dare to seek truth from the facts; we must dare to take some risks; we must not be afraid of making mistakes and we must not worry about sarcastic comments." ■

KATASTROPHA

Away from media hysteria, EMMA FOOTE and BEN SCHOENDORFF take a closer look at the meaning of Chernobyl.

OF THE TWO TYPES of fallout from Chernobyl – ecological and political – it is hard, judging by the tons of highly toxic rubbish and the cloud of misconceptions spread by the British press, to say which is worse.

From the moment when the first reports of the catastrophe started reaching the West, the media have been adamant to make full use of it to prove two points essentially.

First, Gorbachev's self-styled "new image" is little more than a new packaging for the same kind of Brezhnevite incompetent bureaucratic leadership. The Kremlin, it is contended, are giving nothing away, won't pay any attention to the very real concern of citizens in Western and Eastern Europe alike – not to mention the Ukrainians. The implication, of course, is how could the West trust the peace proposals of a regime that makes such a cock-up of a nuclear accident? It can't of course. No doubt about it, the bear is just as nasty as ever.

How convenient, this accident. One of its main effects has been that of diverting attention from Reagan's aggression on Libya. The real issue wasn't the presence of US bases on British soil, nor was it the real nature of Britain's "special relationship" with the United States, it timely became nuclear power. As *Newsweek* noted: "Among the Europeans, the talk was no longer about the rashness of Reagan's Libyan policy, it was about the irresponsibility of Gorbachev's handling of the Chernobyl crisis."

BUT OF COURSE, no Western Government wants a real debate on nuclear power, least of all the British who consciously decided to run down the coal industry in favour of the "politically reliable" nuclear industry. The whole question was how to avoid such a debate arising among reports of mass graves, 2,000 dead and hundreds of thousands

more to die both in Russia and abroad in the wake of the radioactive plume. So the Government, nuclear industry and the professional media ideologues suddenly came up with all sorts of scientific-looking "facts", casual suits and friendly smiles to explain to us why this "could never happen here, not in a 1,000 years."

The main arguments in support of this line were comprehensively expressed by *The Economist* in its May 3 1986 editorial. They identify two main sets of reasons why the plant at Chernobyl was less safe than those in the West. One set technical and the other political.

As regards the technical side of the argument, *The Economist* claims that: "Russian reactors of the Chernobyl design would not have been approved in any Western country". But of course, this is only partly true. The main reason why it wouldn't have been approved is because the Western European markets are already saturated and wouldn't accept any competition from the East. On the technical side of the argument, it is claimed that Chernobyl-type reactors have a number of basic flaws. First, there is the lack of a containment shield. But this is, as *Newsweek* notes, an almost universal feature of earlier Western reactors. In Britain alone, 26 Magnox reactors lack such a shield. Secondly, there is the highly dangerous mixture of graphite moderator and water coolant which makes Chernobyl-type reactors highly volatile.

The evidence from the West show that we are no better, and certainly the experience of Three Mile Island and Windscale where the supposedly safe mix of graphite moderator and CO2 did not stop the graphite from catching fire seem to indicate as much. In fact, water had to be used to put out the fire. In effect then, the so-called technical reasons don't hold water (not to mention graphite!) and the fact is that the international scientific community considered and still does consider Chernobyl-type reactors as technically "safe" (as the significant lack of outrage when the Russians decided to re-open the three intact reactors at the plant bears witness). The evidence so far seems to point to human error combined with technical failure as the cause of the catastrophe – exactly as with Three Mile Island and Windscale before.

ON THE POLITICAL front, it is contended that judgement on nuclear power should be suspended because Chernobyl happened in a secretive society. "Secrecy is not compatible with the safe management of complex and dangerous technologies" explains *The Economist*. Clearly we would all agree with that. But how hypocritical it is for the West's nuclear industry to tar the Russian's with that brush! No industry is as secretive as the nuclear one – both civil and military – and it shows no sign of changing its ways. This much was made clear by the French Government's failure to disclose the full facts about radiation levels in France or the fact that, barely ten days before the Chernobyl disaster, a major incident went



unrecorded in a British nuclear plant. Furthermore, it is not just Soviet industry that is corrupt, bureaucratic and inefficient. A recent book by the American economists Gordon, Bowles and Weisskopf, **Beyond the Wasteland, a Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline** shows how the biggest US firms, many of them contractors for the nuclear and defence industries, display precisely the same bureaucratic characteristics. Nuclear industry is inherently deeply secretive, highly centralised and thoroughly undemocratic whether you paint it red or blue.

TECHNICAL PROGRESS, by its very nature and due to our incapacity to envisage all eventualities other than through experience, advances by trial and error. No great technical advance has ever been achieved without its fair share of disasters. The question thus isn't one of the colour of this or that regime, it is whether we are willing to pay such a price for the dubious benefits of nuclear power.

Our answer is no. Radiation knows no frontiers and Europeans have started to realise how, in this nuclear world, deeply intricate are the questions of their mutual survival. If radiation recognises no borders, neither should we. The European anti-nuclear movement has been revived by this concrete proof of the rightness of its arguments. In Western Germany 75% of the population have expressed their desire to see nuclear plants phased out. In Austria, a strong movement has developed aimed at the German nuclear industry. For the first time ecology has become, on a European scale, an issue that everybody has got to face.

CHERNOBYL HAS brought to us all the necessity of rethinking our vision of progress and development away from a productivist model and towards a greater emphasis on the qualitative dimensions of our lives. Green politics are not about including a few references to "environmental issues" in electoral manifestoes, neither are they about rejecting all technical progress. They are about putting the goals of pluralistic human development at the centre of all technological advance. They concern the way people live in their natural environment just as much as the way they live in their social and technical environment. Ecology means that everyone's fate is dependent on everyone else's. Chernobyl has proved that much. ■

The Reagan-Truman

The Americans are not half as mad as they look, argues **HARRY CURTIS**, it's just their new way of doing it.

THE "GENEVA SPIRIT" is as good as dead. In spite of the ever more radical disarmament proposals thrown in by the Kremlin, the US strategists appear to be determined to revive the "Truman doctrine". Only this time, they'll make it even more pervasive and irresistible.

An increasing number of White House, Pentagon and State Department strategists openly admit to be developing an aggressive "global unilateralism" aimed at "rolling back" the so-called communists advances in the world as well as reaffirming US political and economic hegemony over the rest of the "free world."

THE RAIDS on Libya were a perfect example of what the US mean by that. Any serious observer admits, as an independent report from Western "terrorism" experts recently pointed out, that Libya accounts for less than 5% of all terrorist actions in the world today. Further-

more, the overwhelming majority of Libyan-inspired attacks are directed towards Libyan political opponents. "Terrorism", then, has clearly got nothing to do with the raids on Tripoli and Benghazi.

The most striking thing about the raids are that, instead of being against "terrorism", they are in effect directed at a number of specific aims, most of which have little to do with the diminution of terrorist actions in Western Europe.

The best way to clarify this is of course to look at the reaction of the US lobbies as regards the attack. A surprising unanimity could be observed in the US in the immediate aftermath of the raids. Although some on the Left are often driven to think that this is due to the fact that the US are today peopled by 72% odd of Dr Strangeloves, most specific US pressure groups have actually improved their position as a direct result of the F 1-11's virtuosity.

IN ADDITION to the Washington hawks, the raids strongly benefited the industrial-military and SDI complex, the pro-contra lobby, those American firms who would rather not see Western Europe develop a policy of its own and resist market penetration and, of course,

"Sheer Madness"

MOHAMMED HARBI was a leader of the socialist wing of the Algerian FLN. He is the author of many books on the middle East. He talks to *Socialist Alternatives* about the effect of the US raids on Libya in the Middle East.

What has been the reaction to the US raids on Benghazi and Tripoli in the arab world - both as regards the governments and the populations?

I think it is very important to distinguish the two: governments and populations. As regards governments, it is clear that many knew about the preparation of the raids and, in as much as they consider Gaddafi as a destabilising factor, they tacitly approved. As regards the populations, the full conse-



doctrine

the Zionist lobbies, who were getting impatient with all the "peace talks" nonsense. All got something out of the operation.

Politically, the raids allowed a beleaguered Reagan administration which had just suffered defeat at the hands of Congress over aid to the Contras a new lease of popularity. Handy when you have to confront a hostile Congress on your budget proposals.

But the main target was Western Europe itself. The Reagan administration is about setting the political agenda in Europe. It does that by pressing deliberately "mad" and highly dangerous policies. The first example of this new course was seen with NATO's "double decision" over Cruise and Pershing in 1979. At the time, many pundits predicted that the US was pushing Europe too far too soon. But the fact is that by doing so, the US imposed **its own** agenda on its European allies. The last thing the US want is an independent Europe capable of opposing its foreign policies. The application of the "Reagan doctrine" requires that the US be prepared to ride roughshod over the wishes of its political allies also short-circuiting those that appear nervous or not credible.



Weinberger: "controled madness".

THERE IS NO doubt that the Reagan administration has so far been remarkably successful in doing just that. At the very moment when the Europeans were beginning to think they should get together to discuss their economic recovery, the cowboys arrive and impose "terrorism" as the only item on the agenda. Significantly, this is not only aimed at preventing the development of a new "Euro-Left" around the Italian PCI and the German SPD but also at forcing the European right to abandon all idea of independence and effectively promote the whole of the US line. How this corners the German ruling right-wing coalition or the French neo-Gaullists is clear for all to see.

The new US global strategy is thus in a very direct sense a cowboy's strategy. It shoots all over the floor to make everybody dance to Reagan's tune. Madness it is, but a controled madness that has an implacable logic of its own. It is a self-perpetuating spiral which takes the world closer to annihilation everyday. It is about time that the citizens of this world get up and say "enough" to this madness. ■

quences have yet to be felt. What can be said is that the raids have deepened the confidence crisis between peoples and governments, a crisis that started with the siege of the Palestinians in Beirut.

Do these raids herald a new course in the US's Middle East foreign policy, have they abandoned the idea of building alliances with arab regimes like Saudi Arabia?

I don't think it should be seen like this. Saudi Arabia is necessarily allied with the US due to the internal logic of the Saudi system. The Saudis, on their own, are incapable of competing against Iran or Iraq for hegemony in the region. Consequently, the Saudis have always had to act as an internal US lobby in the US's world strategy. But of course, it's a weaker lobby than those the US are really interested in, namely the Zionist lobbies.

Will the raids lead to a revival of Soviet influence in the region?

Soviet influence has always been important with those in search of a real alternative to the US. In the present situation, there is no other potential ally than the USSR. If Europe was to show some independence from the US's Middle East policy and adopt more reasonable positions on the Palestinian question, the range of potential alternatives would be greatly broadened. But today, there certainly is a strong pro-Soviet trend - by necessity rather than out of inclination or conviction.

Do the raids signal an end to the US's "peace plans", what are the consequences for Arafat's "peace talks" strategy?

The US strategy in the Middle East is sheer madness. It brutally throws peo-

ple's backs against the wall - whether they are pro or anti-US. The Middle East governments, especially the pro-American ones, are therefore disorientated. The key today is the Palestinian strategy. If it could be reformulated to achieve Palestinian unity and break free from the domination of the arab regimes, I think it would be a great step forward. The Palestinians have no choice other than reunification. Contrary to what some of the radicals think, time is not on their side!

So, are these raids an own goal for Reagan?

They certainly have been a mistake. I think it is politically dangerous to deepen the feeling of helplessness among the arab ruling classes. In the long run, I don't know what the consequences will be, but it can't be good for the US. ■

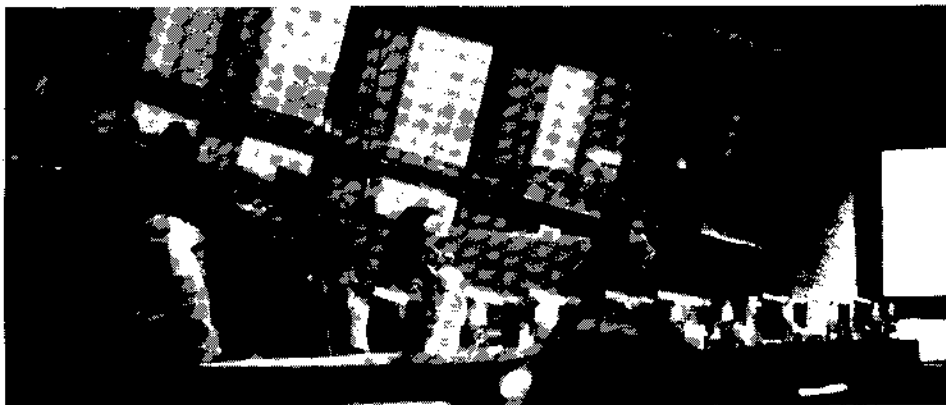
Alternative Workers Plans

The European Connection

A spectre is haunting
Europe, alternative plans.

JEAN-PIERRE
LEMAIRE and HARRY
CURTIS report from
Brussels.

transformed. Such a rethink would have to centre around three main questions. First, the fact that the aims of production were a legitimate ground for industrial action and the class struggle. Second, that a new unity had to be built between the different sections of the working class as well as between producers and consumers. Thirdly, that grassroots democracy was



Different experiences, common perspectives

THE BRUSSELS CONFERENCE on alternative planning held on the 9-10 April 1986 in the Euro-Parliament offices represents a major advance in more ways than one. For the first time trade unionists, activists, researchers and politicians from over ten European countries came together to exchange experiences and debate about their practice of alternative planning. Secondly, it brought together various sectors of an all too fragmented European Left with the Green-Alternative movement. Significantly, the Conference was co-organised by the German Greens, the Italian Democrazia Proletaria, the French Federation for an Alternative Left and the Socialist Society in Britain.

COMMON TO ALL participants was the idea that traditional trade union practice and culture had to be radically

essential, not only as an aim, but also as the concrete means of mobilising workers' skills and initiatives.

This, as **Hilary Wainwright**, of the GLC's Popular Planning Unit underlined, was made necessary by the current climate that led to the inevitable defeat of strategies limiting industrial action, no matter how militant, to the workplace. She insisted on how the British experiences in popular planning had allowed for the forging of links between the traditional union base and different sections of the urban population, women, blacks and the unemployed. As **Alberto Tridente**, a Democrazia Proletaria Euro-MP underlined, alternative plans are not meant to obscure the basic realities. Nor are they meant to counterpose the necessity of enhancing working class power in the workplace: "the working class isn't dead, it must be the base of all our ac-

tivities." Nevertheless, it is fair to say that often movements which formed their political identity outside of the traditional labour movement have had a strong impact on the formation and development of alternative workers' plans. **Frieder O. Wolf**, German Green Euro-MP, pointed to the input by ecological groups into alternative plans in agriculture and the chemical industry. Nor can we underestimate the peace movement's input into plans and campaigns for the reconversion of different sectors of the arms industry.

On the whole, the debates revealed a plethora of varied experiences. What came across clearly was the potential popularity of alternative plans. For example, in Nemoeg, Holland, workers from 7 different firms combined to produce a common alternative plan. This resulted in an unprecedented flowering of ideas from the workforce who not only evolved practical ways to defend their jobs but also started reflecting on what they were producing. In one firm alone, Smit-Ovens, the workers came up with no less than 30 different ideas for socially useful productions.

NONETHELESS, IF the concrete experiences proved very different not only between countries but from one experience to the other, the political problems faced and the reflections developed were strikingly similar. What appeared clearly was that alternative planning represents part of an overall alternative culture moving away from the Keynesian model which has been the framework of so many debates on the Left for the past 40 years. As **Alberto Tridente** said, what is needed now is the development of a comprehensive alternative culture that could counterpose the current dominant ideologies. This could be done both by improving the balance of forces in the workplace in favour of working people and also by centering around people's lives. Institutionally, it is clear that nothing can be achieved without greatly increasing the Left's still weak position.

We thus need to start from people's needs and from what we have decided we want to consume. As **Giorgo Cortelles** put it, we need to redress an economy that "stands on its head". We also need to take full account of the consequences of economic development on the environment. This should be done directly, at community level, and clearly dangerous sectors, like the nuclear industry, be clos-

ed down. Politically, the success of workers' plans depends on a redefinition of trade unionism beyond the workplace. Similarly, as Hilary Wainwright said, the concept of a "unifying" political party separate from society has to be put into question. The British experience, she noted, showed that parties couldn't claim to represent society anymore. Instead, the role of the party should be to make links between groups in society and disseminate ideas throughout society.

ALTERNATIVE PLANS, are no magical answer to all the problems the labour movement face today. They are often born out of a defensive reaction to plant closure or job-axing by management. Initiative and imagination, if necessary, are not sufficient to ensure a plan's success. What the Conference showed, was that most plans had often failed to be eventually implemented or, when they were, they weren't implemented on the workers' terms. Nor could "perfect plans" ever convince governments and managers. In as much as they represent an alternative logic to capital's, they are a threat to it and treated as such. As G. Alezard from France said, "we have to force implementation, not convince."

But workers' plans are nonetheless an essential part of all future socialist strategy if only because they are a unique means of mobilising the creative capacities of the working class. Furthermore, in doing so, they provide workers and communities alike with a concrete vision of an alternative mode of social organisation based on needs and people rather than on profit and capital. In that, they are essential tools in the ideological struggle. Clearly then, without a practice, workers' plans are nothing but an empty slogan. Without global radical (or even revolutionary) ambitions, they finish up as a means of diversifying production and markets and a tool of management's control. Between these two poles lies the space where we ought to develop a practice of alternative workers' plans as an integral element of a new strategy.

The Brussels Conference has shown that the premisses for developing a greater European understanding on these questions exists. At the Conference, a network was set up which will provide a vital link between all the participants. From its success might depend the future development of an alternative-socialist movement on a European scale. ■

Swords into Ploughshares

Reconversion at Barrow

HARRY SIDALL,
Convenor, Barrow
Alternative Employment
Committee and a worker at
Vickers talks to HARRY
CURTIS about the
campaign for the
reconversion of the
shipyards that build
Trident.

How did the alternative plan for the Barrow Nuclear Shipyard get off the ground?

Since 1979, we have been concerned with the proliferation of the nuclear arms race and the fact that the yard would be geared solely around Trident with no other product being built. We decided to look into the possibilities of alternative work. We looked at the problem and it was quite a costly operation: when we drew up a report, it was going to cost about \$12,000 to fund research.

What happened to the report?

It never really got off the ground because management became interested in it at the time. We listened to what they were saying and they seemed to be sympathetic to the danger of the yard becoming a oneproduct industry. Due to the hostile attitude of certain trade union leaders in the area, the report never got anywhere. Also the trades council was becoming involved in something far more important, ie the setting up of the centre for the unemployed in conjunction with the local council, with workers initiatives showing the way. The idea was never forgotten, merely shelved!

When was the first report actually drawn up?

About the beginning of 1980. We were then asked by Alan Milburn about

the idea of holding a conference in Barrow called: "Trident, Jobs at Risk" and the whole idea got off the ground again. We invited various trade unionists to attend an ad-hoc meeting. At the time, I wasn't involved but my convenor asked me to go along to this meeting. I've since realised that it was the most important thing I've ever done in my life. Prior to the conference, Danny Pearson from TASS and Terry Mc Sauley, who was chair of the trades council, met with CND and explained that we couldn't afford the necessary research. So the following October we organised a rally in Barrow at which CND handed us a cheque for £12,000 to fund a research worker.

So, CND agreed to pay the money?

Yes, and with no strings attached. Also, we have done a lot of research on where the work on Trident is to be done and we did issue one interim report on the cost of Trident and its effect on employment. The first initial research report is due to be released shortly.

How important was the rise of CND in sparking off the Barrow reconversion campaign?

Prior to 1980, CND's attitude was slightly too moralistic. We're all aware of the immorality of nuclear weapons, but isn't it also immoral to put 12,500 people out of work and destroy a community, which would have happened in Barrow?

In 1983, Barrow went Tory for the first time. It's been said that this was because of the Tories' commitment to Trident. Do you think all the efforts put into alternative employment and conversion have now reversed the situation?

The major reason Barrow went Tory in 1983 was the Trident issue, but it was also the inability of the Labour Party and the Labour leadership at the time to put a viable alternative to the workforce in Barrow. Since then, we have worked a lot with the Labour Party. We've had Martin

O'Neil and Denzil Davies up. We've said to the Labour Party that we must have a viable defence policy before the next General Election. None of us are going to campaign on the kind of policy we had last time - ie a lack of policy. Now it's certain that both the Labour Party and the SDP are going to cancel Trident. If it's a hung Parliament and the Tories are relying on the SDP then Trident will go. There's a possibility that even the Tories will cancel Trident. But the Labour Party has made a specific promise that they will replace Trident with six conventional hunter-killer submarines. Though they are nuclear powered, they carry torpedoes and not nuclear weapons. That's good in as much as it's changed a lot of people's attitudes. It's also changed management's attitude - they weren't bothered whether they built Trident or not. Vickers is now

privatised. There was a management-employee buy-out and 80% of the workforce have participated in buying shares. The management are quite happy with Labour's policy.

Is the Alternative Employment Committee actually thinking in terms of alternatives to arms production? Has it started to think in the direction of more socially useful productions linking up with community groups?

At the moment initial research has been on skill audits, plant audits, and really fighting Trident. But the next stage of the research is to look into the products we can produce - we've already got several ideas going. We would then involve the community - we've got to. The management consortium buy-out has taught us this: they involved the local

community urging locals to "buy shares in their local shipyard." We would like to approach local community groups to see what they would like us to produce.

It's been said that people have bought shares at cut-price and it looks as if, rather than involving the workers more, a lot of people are just in it for a fast buck and will sell in 2 years time. Do you think privatisation and the idea of share-ownership will prove successful in keeping Barrow in private hands? What would the response be to renationalisation?

Personally, I think if the shipyards hadn't been nationalised when they were we wouldn't be here now. There wouldn't be a shipbuilding industry in this country. But the type of nationalisation that seems to prevail doesn't work. It doesn't put the control in the hands of the workers. Neither, however does this consortium buy-out, but at least it gives the workers more of a share in what's going on. It's a move in the right direction - I don't entirely agree with how it's done but I think there are lessons in it for the way in which nationalisations should go in the future. Workers should have a say in the company: the workers should be the owners of the yard, not the bureaucracy. That's what the present system of nationalisation is. However, we worked on the principle that we weren't interested in the workers as shareholders but as employees of the company. Buying shares was left up to the individual's conscience.

What is the future for alternative production in Barrow? How popular with the workforce do you think plans for alternative production will be?

12 months ago we faced a brick wall. But there's been a change in political feeling such as the slight easing of the East-West tensions. Also the fact that the Labour Party has a reasonable defence policy means that workers in Barrow are guaranteed that they won't suddenly find themselves on the dole. Whatever happens, the workforce will look, along with us, for alternative work in place of that which has been done away with. I would think it's got a very bright future. It's not so much a problem as a golden opportunity. ■



Rediscovering a Common Interest

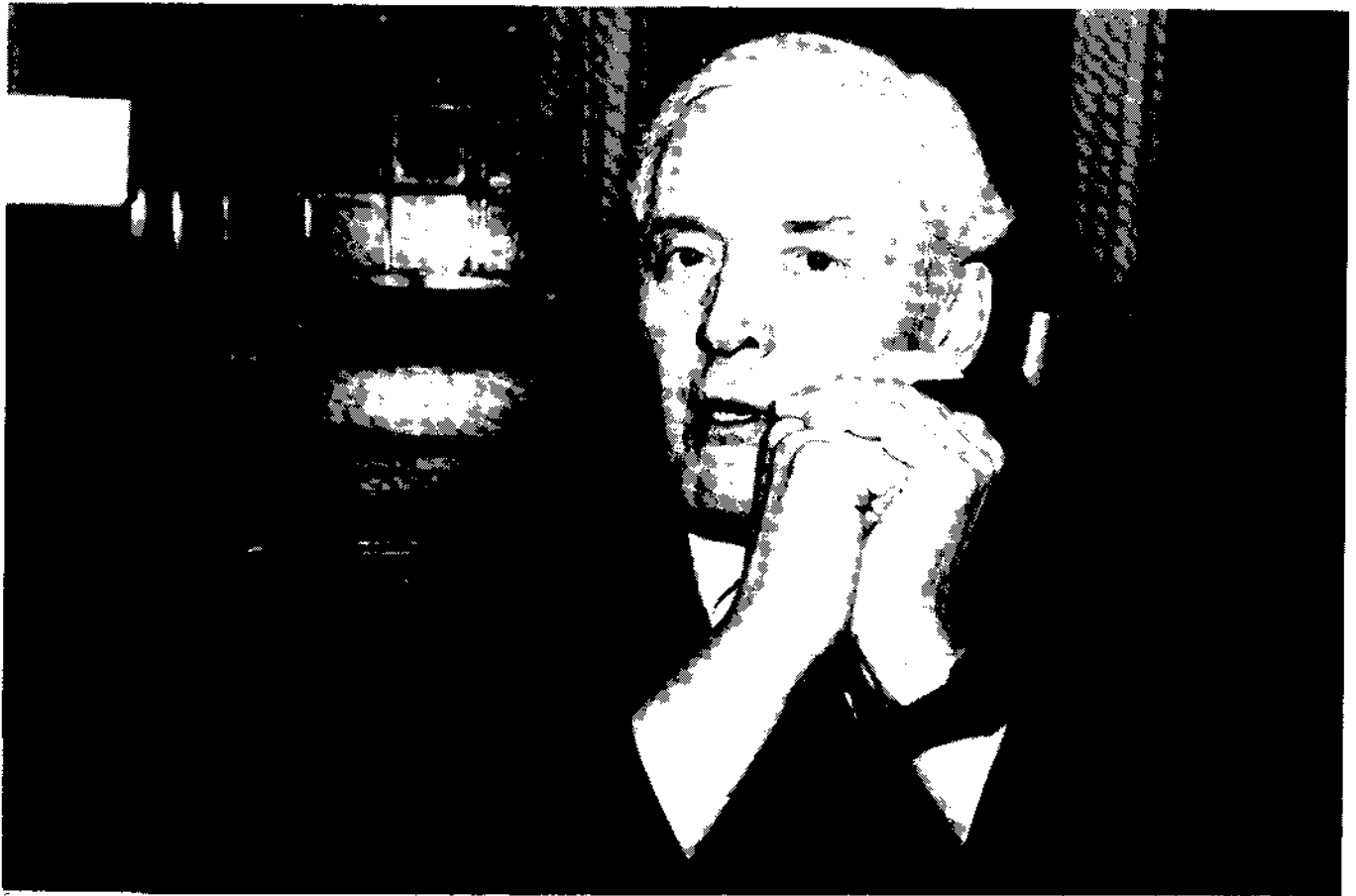
In his address to the Brussels Conference, TONY BENN argues that we shouldn't wait for permission from above and start fighting now to move from profit to need.

I would like to bring to this debate my experience as an MP over 36 years, an industrial minister for 11 and a member of the Council of Ministers of the EEC for 5. I therefore want to look at the question from the point of view of the existing structures in which I have lived for most of my political life. I think what is interesting about this debate is that we are slowly rediscovering a common interest, shared experiences and shared aspirations. It is these shared interests that we have to set against the background of the crisis, the attacks on the people we represent, mass unemployment and the offensive of capital rampant in our society using unemployment deliberately for political purposes, a major attack upon the trade union movement, a shrinking of the democratic scope in the sense that room for manoeuvre through the ballot box is reduced, attacks upon civil rights and the use of the Cold War to grab the resources that are needed for human need.

At the same time, there is a great deal of evidence of worker's initiatives of one kind or another - when I say workers' initiatives, I don't think we ought to limit it only to the industrial area. The Lucas Aerospace Alternative Plan, which began in my ministerial office about 12 years ago, and which developed out of a meeting we had, is one example, but I think the Greenham Common Women too are an example of workers plans, one where people with

absolutely no authority and in control of no institutions whatsoever set up a camp, establish a demand for peace and, as a result, have a profound effect on world thinking. Similarly the miners who during the year-long strike organised themselves in ways that gave them confidence about a capacity to organise which they never realised they had before: they ran soupruns, they ran advice systems, they ran meetings, they published pamphlets, they wrote poetry, they sung music, and out of it came a degree of confidence, which was what really frightened Mrs Thatcher and the British Establishment. It is against this background that I would like to look at what we have learned.

I think our starting point must be a recognition of the limitations of the old structures which the European working-class movement built up over a Century or more - I don't want to be misunderstood, I'm talking here about the structures we built up - and why it was that at a critical moment they proved unable to perform the functions for which they had been created. Let me begin with the trades union movement. The trade union movement was an example of a collective pressure brought to bear by working people who said "*unless we are together, we will be defeated by our employers*". The trades unions are thus a great achievement, a precondition of success now under attack because they have become so strong - even today, the requirement to further strengthen them should be very evident - but we have to recognise that in their present form, and this is one of the reasons why workers plans have not been allowed to be developed, they have to some extent become a mirror-image of the capitalism with which they negotiate. They are locked into a defensive, responsive position - as distinct from a positive one. They have increasingly been incorporated into the structure of the state; in the Common Market, they are described as "social



Tony Benn "don't wait up!"(photo: F. Berteletti)

partners" – how Marx would have described the working class as a social partner with capitalism is an idea that requires some reflection... And of course, because they are large organisations with a bureaucratic structure and managerial imperatives of their own, they tend to be afraid of anything that comes up from underneath.

The second structure we set up was, of course, the collective use of the ballot-box to open up opportunities for people who could not afford individually to buy a home, to buy a pension, to have education, to have health; the use of the ballot-box, in short, as a purchaser of public services. Now this has come under attack because the ballot-box is an alternative source of power to capital. Having come under attack, it now needs to be revitalised. The trouble about the way in which parliamentary democracy or parliamentary politics has developed is that it has become an argument about rival ways of running an unchanged system. If it is true that trades unions have become incorporated into the structure of the state, how much more true it is that political leaders of Left parties have become so incorporated. Julius Nyerere set up a one-party state in Tanzania and when an American journalist criticised him, he replied "*Well, even in America you have a one-party state but, with typical American extravagance, you have two of them!*" Undeniably, there is some element of accuracy in that.

The way in which electoralism has developed has reduced democracy to politics by proxy where indeed even the impulse of the electorate has been reduced to what the pollsters produce by telephoning a few people and describing them as "public opinion". This capacity to

manipulate the ballot-box for the purpose of running a parliamentary system has of course found no room for workers' initiatives.

The third structure we set up after trade unionism and some elements of parliamentary democracy was of course the social democratic parties themselves. A very important initiative, it aimed at the utilisation of the democratic structure for the improvement of working class conditions and the right of workers' representation. All this went with a socialist analysis of society. But, in practice, social democracy – and we've seen this with Mitterand in France, we saw it with Callaghan in Britain, we're seeing it with Gonzales in Spain, we're seeing it with Craxi in Italy, we're seeing it with Soares in Portugal and we may even be seeing it with Papaandreu in Greece – really amounts to a defeat of this idea by international pressure, revisionist ideology and a very limited vision of what can be achieved. The fear that many of us certainly have is that if this social democratic alternative to rampant capitalism fails, it will open the way for the hard right as it appears to have done in France with the growth of the National Front.

These three structural failures, and that's the way they ought to be described, were to some extent concealed from us by the post-war boom. After the boom ended, capital reasserted itself by the development of monopolies, by the internationalisation of capital by the bankers and the companies, by the use of unemployment, by the control of the media and has succeeded in dividing and confusing people in such a way as to make it hard for workers' plans to be taken seriously. The state has become an adjunct of capital and is fully used by capital. The two most vivid

examples that come to my mind are the use of the state police to defeat the miners and the print workers in Britain and the use of the state by Reagan to try to revitalise a declining American capitalist economy through the Star Wars expenditure programme which, quite apart from being an attempt to bankrupt the Russians, is also the only way in which capitalist society can fund high technology and hope that, trickling out of the Star Wars budgets, will come some of the technology that could make America stronger vis-a-vis Japan. These are part of the problems that we face.

My experience from 1974-75 as a Minister for Industry and later for Energy until 1979 was that when these workers plans appeared, at Lucas or the attempts to set up co-operatives in the newspaper industry, motorcycles or whatever it happened to be, it met with the most bitter resistance from the British Establishment. I used to wonder why. The answer is that the discipline of capitalism requires a firm to have the right to sack a man or close a plant, and if there is any life beyond that type of capitalist death, this threatens the entire disciplinary system of capitalism. If a company says we will close a plant and then the workers get together and decide to re-open it again, the entire discipline on which capitalism works is undermined. **Looking at it from a general political point of view, what we really need now is a fresh start in our thinking.** It is very tempting to blame all the failures on individual ministers, to become defeatist, to become disillusioned, to become cynical, but I don't believe that is the right response. What we have to do now, it seems to me, if we are to provide the environment in which the workers' initiatives and alternative plans are going to be able to prosper, is to look at the foundations upon which such a system might rest.

“We need a reassertion of the moral argument in politics.”

A first step must, without any doubt, be the reassertion of a moral argument in politics. If we're talking about needs rather than profit, we are basing it on the idea that people have a right to certain things, to work, to homes, to education, to health, and that right is a right not confined to one country but a right that has to be struggled for internationally. Secondly, we have to rediscover solidarity not only in struggle - although the solidarity of the European, American and East European labour movements for the miners was very impressive - but in an overcoming of the divisiveness which is an integral part of capitalist propaganda. The way the capitalists run the media is to try and divide black from white, employed from unemployed, catholic from protestant, British from French, etc. Unless we can rediscover the fact that we have common interests and reflect it institutionally through combine committees as for Ford, Phillips and Kodak or in any other way, we are going to find it much harder. Thirdly, I think we have to rediscover the vitality of democracy as a challenge to capital. Capital works on the simple principle that if you have money, you have power - you have power over communication, you have power over investment, you have power over the creation of demand, etc. - and unless we challenge that head-on by saying that, by virtue of

living, we have rights and saying that we expect those rights to be reflected through democratic institutions, we are going to be defeated.

We also need a greater analytical function than we have had. It's no good describing the failure of a Western government in a crisis as a failure of the ministers in the Cabinet. That is not an adequate explanation. It's a corruption of politics into personality politics when you talk about the failure of Thatcher, the failure of Reagan, the failure of Mitterrand.

Finally, we have to rediscover our strength, because it is an extraordinary thing that the system which is now doing us such damage is a system accepted by people through the ballot-box when it comes to elections. They vote for it and believe there is no alternative. Therefore there is a failure on our part that we have to recognise.

“If we wait for permission, then we can wait for ever.”

What we have learned, I think, is that we make greatest progress by doing things. If we wait for permission, if we wait for sponsorship from the top, then we can wait forever. If we do it, people begin to react and that is what Lucas, Greenham and the miners achieved. If you do it, you get confidence, you discover things about your own capacities that you didn't think you had.

Another very important point to make here is that the working class, far from shrinking, is incorporating into itself levels of managerial, professional and technical skills, that were denied to the old working class - although of course it has changed in composition because of changes in technology. When we talk about the working class today, in a proper and broad context, it incorporates people with a capacity to run, to organise, to manage, to develop which was simply not true of the old manual working class upon which the labour movement was built.

The obstacles to our advance are the power of capital, the extent to which the state machine is an adjunct of capital, the role of political parties of the Left as partners with capital, the trade union limitations which I mentioned and above all the Cold War which persuades us that we are about to be invaded by Gorbachev and therefore we cannot

“Trade unions have become a mirror-image of the capitalism with which they negotiate.”

have hospitals and we cannot have schools because we have missiles, and also the divisiveness to which I referred.

Looking at the way in which a strategy at the political level might correspond to the demands which are being put forward today, I think we have something to learn from capital itself. Capital doesn't bother to put its major figures in the parliamentary arena at all, it works from outside the system by putting pressure on the system and it

acquires from Parliament statutory powers that enable it to be absolutely free from the limitations that could be imposed upon it by natural justice. For example, the power of a company is to do anything it wishes whereas the power of a local authority is limited to what Parliament has allowed it to do. The power of a company is to exclude the risk of bankruptcy by what is called "limited liability", if the company goes bankrupt, the directors just go away and set up a new company. We have in fact forgotten that in the 19th Century, laws were passed giving capital absolute freedom to operate in ways that made its growth possible. As for labour, we have tended to think that all we have to do is to elect a Labour government or a Labour council, and all will be done for us. We have failed to make the demands for enfranchisement that would give to labour the statutory power and the funding to allow it to develop in the way that would be necessary. Looking at the statutory framework of law, it is easy to set down what would be the requirements to allow labour and the trade union movement to operate as freely as capital does and to allow local authorities to do the same.

If we do that, then of course we'll come up against the funding problem. It is interesting to note that the unemployment in the 1930's was ended by public expenditure, not by capital recovering. When we rearmed, my grandfather didn't buy a gun, my grandmother didn't buy a tank and my uncle didn't buy an aircraft, the

"Parliamentary democracy has become an argument about rival ways of running an unchanged system."

government bought the arms. By that means, it threw the unemployed into employment, they earned their wages, paid their taxes and funded the war. The lesson we have to learn is that it will be by public funding of these popular initiatives and workers' plans that we'll overcome the crisis. If we want to make public funding acceptable, we have got to have the analysis of needs so that people see what need there is. What we must now do, is to develop a manifesto of demands. We have to restate the demands that labour makes on the system and not work on the basis that if you vote for us, there will be promises that will be discharged by people at the top. That means that we have to make preparations now so that those demands have life and reality and are not just paper demands that can be held to be unrealistic.

Finally, if we are to succeed, there are four preconditions. First, we ought to persuade people that if



Tony Benn "from them to us"(photo: F. Berteletti)

they do the work on the alternative plan, something will actually happen. One of the reasons why, over the last few years, the impetus of workers' plans has diminished is because of the fear of unemployment and the feeling that it is hopeless and that no matter how hard you work on the plan, nothing will happen. Secondly, we need confidence in our own capacity and a recognition that we do not need permission before we start. Thirdly, the overcoming of fear by hope, because there is no question whatever that the psychology of fear is to repress activity, energy and motivation. Finally, we need a clear statement of what we want which is to move from profit to need, from war to peace, from "them" to "us" and say we do not need to wait for the people at the top to decide it and to think of politics in terms of **now** and not some strange period in the future when a new government will somehow take over and make it all possible. This reminds me of the long history of the Christian religion when the Bishops said to you: *"life may be very hard now, but when you are dead, it will be all right, the angels will bring you a cup of coffee in the morning and you do not have to worry."* There is an electoral version of that: *"do nothing now and when there is a Labour government, then everything will be all right."* If we allow politics to be monopolised and controlled by the people at the top of the structures they will say: *"Do nothing! Wait! Don't rock the boat! Don't disturb it and everything will be all right."* If we accept that analysis, then I think we are really abandoning our historical mission. ■

Realignment...

...for what?

Realignment is the order of the day. MIKE RUSTIN, HILARY WAINWRIGHT and BEN SCHOENDORFF discuss the origins of the new Left and the issues behind the present seeming crisis of direction.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: The new left that was born out of 68 eventually ended up integrating the Labour Party. How did this happen and what were the relationships between the movements outside the Labour Party and the internal developments in the Party?

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: The origins of '68 lay very much in a kind of reaction against the Labour Party. There was the "older generation", people who had had great hope in the Wilson government of '64, who had canvassed and were very enthusiastic and who had been let down by that government. And then there was a slightly younger generation who hadn't been particularly involved in '64 but who had found themselves not only fighting discipline and the regime within the universities but at the same time campaigning against Labour government policy, particularly on Vietnam and on race and only tangentially on industrial matters. The people radicalised by '68 carried on the momentum out of - and in some ways away from - the Labour Party until 1974, when radicalisation started to take place within the Labour Party, most noticeably amongst people like Benn and Stuart Holland. Still, it was on the whole a radicalisation in two compartments. Processes in the Labour Party were fairly internal and not connected to processes on the outside. This lasted until the '74-79 when Benn and people around him took their campaign in the Labour Party beyond policies and centred it around the power structures of the Party. The policies were right, the problem was why weren't they implemented. Then started this challenge to the power structure of the Labour Party and as it became more and more successful and gathered momentum, people who had been part of the '68 generation felt that things were opening up in the party. They felt it from a lot of different points of view - I know a lot of feminists thought not that women's issues were being taken account of but that the Party was opening up and that the future was very much up for grabs. On the other hand there was a limit to the hopes people had had in '68 - the revolution didn't happen - and then the organisational hopes, the organisations and parties that were formed, strengthened or given new impetus in '68 ended up to a large extent in a sectarian dead-end. So there was the limits of the '68 politics and the opening up of Labour Party politics.

MIKE RUSTIN: The history of the '74-79 government was one of Conference being continually at odds with the administration and being continually ignored. Accountability became the crucial issue. And then Benn emerging at the end of it all to say that accountability was indeed the issue made a big difference. Also the experience of a lot of post-68 people in extra-parliamentary groups - including trotskyst groups - that placed a lot of importance on organisation and discipline. They provided a different kind of resources for people in the Labour Party to stop going

through the motions of submitting resolutions, the kind of tokenism of the Tribune Left, and produce some recruits, organise majorities and actually do something. That was visible both in the campaign for constitutional reforms and in the subsequent development of a strong left-wing base in some of the local parties - especially London - which depended on a different attitude to organisation than had existed in the Labour Party before. The old idea that there shouldn't be a factional organisation inside the Labour Party had been a way of keeping everybody quiet.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: The end of the Keynesian consensus in the late '70s plunged the far-left into a big crisis. Essentially, it had become involved in a left-wing critique of Keynesianism. When the Labour Party or the trade unions leaderships asked for a £10 rise, they would demand £15. They came to concentrate on purely economic issues and that came up against the development of the new social movements. In other countries, like Germany, this crisis led to a rethink from which the green-alternative movement emerged and moved beyond the Keynesian model to put forward an altogether different vision of society aiming at the elimination of all forms of oppression and not just economic issues. This has not happened in any clearly distinguishable way in Britain and all such developments have so far been fragmented. Why is that?

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: First, I would challenge a bit the idea that the politics of '68 were like that. It was obviously produced by the boom and Keynesian expansion. That produced its confidence. But, it also provided the seeds of such an alternative vision. The student movement, for example, was very hostile to economic marxism. I remember a lot of discussions then about forms of authority that weren't economic and about personal relationships. Although feminism wasn't really on the agenda at the beginning, we had a lot of discussions about Reich and sexuality and examined parts of society that weren't directly to do with capital and labour. The trotskyst groups were influenced by this too.

MIKE RUSTIN: One reason why the break was less clear in Britain is that there had been a first wave of CNP in the early 1960s. This was an initial experience of green politics. There had also been a softening and opening up of generational and sexual ways of life as a result of a flowering youth culture which didn't require and didn't get the political explosion that occurred in Italy and in France. May '68 here was a less important event than it was on the continent. After '68, what people thought was the most hopeful kind of struggle was the trade unions, it was the two miners' strikes and the shop stewards actions. The trotskyst groups were fortified in their view that the important struggle was on the factory floor by the fact that the trade unions seemed to be gaining in militancy and not declining as the revisionists had predicted. So there was a kind of renaissance of the old left politics as well as the new left politics at one and the same time.

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: Yes, in a way the students' movements represented a move towards what's happening now. I remember Marcuse's arguments about the periphery, the womens' movement, blacks and students being the impetus. The class struggle was dead. And then the class struggle popped-up again. People were uneasy, they kept the two analyses separate in their heads, often in different compartments. I don't remember connecting them much.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: Do you think this inability to bridge that gap eventually became a factor in the breakup of the new municipal Left?

MIKE RUSTIN: I don't think the new municipal left did break up. It has actually been defeated by the Thatcherite onslaught and the abolition of the Metropolitan Counties. But, as a political formation it remains the most vital element of the Left. It remains the most pluralist and also the most confident and hopeful area of Left-wing activity. The problem is that everything is overshadowed by the prospect of a General Election and the question of whether the Labour Party is going to get into power. But abolition and the Tory attack on the councils have been important in destroying the organised political base for an alternative political leadership. That's what the long-term purpose of it was and it's been successful. It's a defeat but that's a different matter from a loss of direction or a rethink.

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: Yes, it could be like the shop stewards movement earlier this Century, a sort of dispersal, a bit like poppy seeds flying out and then growing rampant elsewhere. Just talking to colleagues who have been part of that process, you can see that people have gone off to different areas determined to apply those ideas. It was a political defeat, but people were ready to go on into a new phase with the GLC. The seed pods were ready to burst. In a period of industrial weakness and demoralisation, the access - unique for the Left - to



Forcing realignment on his terms

resources and forms of power produced a confidence in ideas that had hitherto been developed in a rather academic way. That confidence is still there.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: I still think that there now are, broadly, two different types of projects at the level of the municipal Left. Surely the project of people like Livingstone is very different from that of, say, people around Labour Briefing.

MIKE RUSTIN: I don't know enough to answer that too precisely. I think Livingstone has been compelled by GLC abolition and by the strength of Kinnock's position in the Labour Party to make some accommodation. In effect, he's had to transfer his scale of operation from the London Labour Party to the Labour Party nationally. This is an important tactical shift from the point of view of his followers, especially since one of the strengths of Livingstone's position was the very large resources that the GLC commanded. On the other hand, the confrontational project of the so-called hard Left in Liverpool and in London seems to me to be pretty futile. One can understand why they would want to continue the struggle to the end but I don't see much political gain in losing battles with central government. They depend on the external environment being changed in a favorable way in the same way as people with a more pragmatic and tactical kind of orientation. I can understand why Livingstone has made the kind of

move he has. Yet, I think that there is more scope than Livingstone currently shows sign of recognising to take a more independent position. I think he could now be criticised for operating in such an inside way as to weaken the Left's position outside.

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: I'm doubtful about labels. People haven't got fully worked out positions. There is a tendency to think that, just because Livingstone is a public figure, he's got to have worked everything out but I'm sure he'd be the first to admit that he hasn't. Strategically, in terms of Left municipal politics, there isn't a big divide of historical significance. Livingstone could quite happily live in some kind of forum with Briefing.

MIKE RUSTIN: There's a question though, whether he's got crushed between two contending forces. Borough labour parties like Lambeth still have a base from which to pursue their position. On the other hand, there is the Labour Party machine.

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: Livingstone is symptomatic of the problem of the constituency of GLC politics. The end result - whether intentional or not - of the GLC politics was to bring into being a constituency that is relatively independent of the London Labour Party. It's very diffuse, has got no self-conscious identity of its own, so it can't constitute a political base for anybody. It's got no political channels. The only time when it was brought together was during the festivals. The best option for Livingstone is to consider how this constituency - black groups, feminists, but also trade unions at the base - could be politically developed and how the Labour Party could be somehow changed to encompass it.

MIKE RUSTIN: What's alarming in the situation is that, on the one hand, you've got an intransigent Left being bashed over the head by Kinnock - one of his main platforms is the attack on the far Left - and you've got a pluralist Left allied with Kinnock and Blunkett which has gone temporarily into suspension. This leaves a very free field indeed for a pragmatic - not to say opportunistic - Labour Party leadership to do whatever it likes. And the notion that you can do something about that after they get into office, when they will already have fully committed themselves to moderation doesn't seem in the least a credible option. It does seem very repetitive and reminiscent of what happened before. The Labour Party has got this extraordinary ability to Hoover up all the credible elements there are and make use of them in one way or another and destroy any independent forces around it, whereas in other countries such as Germany, partly because of the electoral system, partly because of differences in culture, independent formations do retain some capacity to act. In Britain, that independence is yet again disappearing.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: It seems to me that one of the lessons the Left ought to have learned by now is that of Gramscian politics, which is that we should move away from the vanguardist approach of immediate frontal assault to one geared towards building broad popular mass support for a radical project. Such politics were practiced on a small scale with by the GLC where an alternative hegemonic vision was put forward. But now its institutional power base has gone, and it seems as though there's only *Marxism Today* left to promote Gramscian politics - although I believe they are not really advancing any potentially hegemonic alternative vision. If you look at the Labour Party, you see that what *Marxism Today* seems to be supporting is an accommodation to the Thatcherite consensus, not a radical ideological challenge. You can see it with law & order, the family, the economy, with an attack from the right on the AES, share ownership, etc. Do you think there are still any prospects of articulating and building a truly alternative consensus?

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: What happened in the GLC and Sheffield was, at least economically, the beginnings of an alternative consensus, but it hasn't been taken up nationally, and the pressures for unity within the party make the prospects for it to be taken up very slim. A lot depends on whether the intellectuals and activists who are involved in working for or with local authorities can sustain the work that they've been doing. Both during and after the election, when people will be looking for an alternative, I think a lot of ideas advanced by the GLC, in the tradition of the Lucas shop stewards, will come into life if enough work is done to keep them alive till then. So, I don't hold out much hope for the development of an alternative consensus between now and the



Setting the agenda?

next General Election; it's now a matter of keeping things going with whatever resources available.

MIKE RUSTIN: We must remember that Gramsci thought that the principal organising agency of a counter-hegemony was the party. The question is why don't we have a party that can do this. Part of the blame must lie with the Labour Left who mostly pursued a narrow and minoritarian perspective after 1979. They thought that you captured power as part of an essentially internal, mechanical operation. We would get our people in and make some sort of appeal as a Left-wing leadership. They underestimated how vulnerable that sort of strategy would be in terms of public opinion, and also neglected to change the party at grass-roots level into a more open mobilising agency. To a certain extent, the less people you had in the party, the easier it was to organise. The alternative way to do it was through administration. The GLC effectively said "never mind the party, we'll do it through County Hall by funding, grants etc." That was OK while it lasted, while the state apparatus was at their command. But, throughout this period, the Labour Party didn't change from an essentially electoralist machine into something capable of relating these movements and constituencies to one another. There was this continuously fragmented structure that has been the same for over 30 years, three separate strands: an intellectual Left organising itself through journals and conferences, CND and the independent single issue campaigns, and the loyal party workers. There has been very little capacity to maintain a mass base, consistent pressure and a fresh flow of ideas. I think that's why it has been possible for Kinnock to insist on the importance of a successful electoral formation as the only viable form of politics.

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: I'd put the emphasis slightly differently. It wasn't so much their vanguardism as their over-estimation of the possibilities for change within the Labour Party which led them to concentrate exclusively on constitutional reforms and not to consider campaigning around policies.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: Do you see that there is any distinct political project of the "realigned Left" - whether it be in the Labour Party or, more generally, a project for society?

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: I must say I have difficulty seeing one.

MIKE RUSTIN: I think it's been hijacked. There was a notion that a more open, democratic, populist Left could emerge. This was partly seen as a response to the post-79 renovation of the Left - *Marxism Today*, for instance, has argued this case - but this has in effect been trumped and taken over by a very vigorous new Labour Party leadership which has defined realignment in its own terms - the lowest common denominator: electoralism. I still believe there remains a sceptical non-aligned Left constituency that can and needs to be spoken to. It's very important that we don't go through 1964 all over again and only realise what's happening two years later.

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: A process of realignment has been going since 1956. It's been a realignment away from vanguardism in its stalinist and worst trotskyist forms. There's been 56, the MayDay Manifesto and then the Bennite phase. In some ways the *Marxism*

today phase - maybe because it's been determined by an argument inside the Communist Party - has at times been a bit dishonest in, say, its approach to the GLC. They were initially very critical and argued that a rather intransigent "prime" of Left politics couldn't become popular. Then, when it did become popular, they pointed to it as a proof of the validity of their own strategy. In one particular example, when *Marxism Today* assessed the GLC very favourably while insisting that it had no support within the traditional trade union and labour movement, Sheila Rowbotham wrote this furious letter saying how the GLC had had terrific support in all these sections of the unions and that one couldn't attempt to polarise the traditional labour movement and the social movements because the situation is much more complicated than that.

MIKE RUSTIN: In defence of *Marxism Today*, I suppose they would say that the GLC did change a bit, that they became more sure-footed and were helped in a way by Thatcher's attacks to tone down some of their wilder ideas and address the main issues. The other thing is that *Marxism Today* has been quite important in characterising Thatcherism and the need for a counter-hegemonic populist politics. It remains to be seen what they're actually going to say now. In any case, it's important that there should be some significant Left faction which is prepared to work with the Labour Party but is also prepared to openly argue for its own terms.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: One of the main issues in these debates has been the question of the new social movements. Now I have the feeling that the type of integration we are now seeing - possibly in the wake of things advocated by *Marxism Today* - is essentially cosmetic. In effect, it is broadly similar to the type of integration we've seen in the French Socialist Party: a lot of lip service but no real structural change. In France, the women's movement ended up with a "Ministry of Women's rights" that didn't do much, didn't change much and didn't even provide much funding. I think there was a real connection between that and the massive demobilisation of the feminist movement that took place there.

MIKE RUSTIN: I think your description of it as cosmetic is about right. There seems to be very little capacity on the part of the LP to modify either its policy making, policy presentation or discussion activity in a way which would hand over any significant influence to non-party elements. I think this would crucially depend on them being able to enter a dialogue with the social movements in which they didn't control everything. I have the impression that the group Kinnock has surrounded himself with are really old-style Labour politicians of the most narrow kind. The choice not to rejuvenate the leadership, not to put younger people and people with a different kind of background into a position where they can at least argue a case in public is depressing. In fact it's exactly the Wilson formula over again.

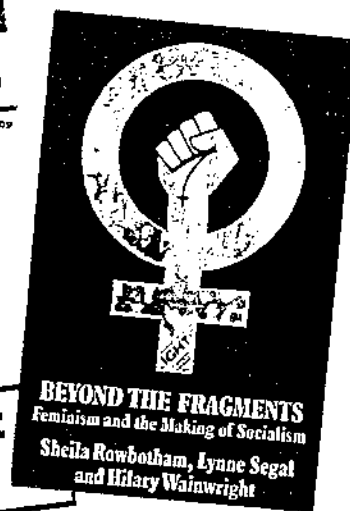
HILARY WAINWRIGHT: Yes, it's really just a change of image. The only sense in which women have been taken on board is that we've seen

**EMPOWERING
THE POWERLESS**

a
statement
from

the socialist
SOCIETY

The other "Realignment"



more women in political broadcasts, they look softer with less men in boiler suits.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: What about the present crystallisation taking place in the feminist movement between, on the one hand the radical feminists (often, strangely enough on the right or the realigned Left) and, on the other hand, socialist feminists who seem to be driven towards a "purer" socialist position still?

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: It's not terribly clear. After the first few years of the feminist movement, there was a growth of the socialist current. The division between the two currents was often based more on an area of debate rather than on agreed positions. It was also based on a commitment to working class women and to some kind of priority towards them. I suppose what happened is that those women who became more confident through the women's movement evolved, as their next political desire, a will to reclaim socialism for feminism. At least they wanted to become a part of the socialist and trade union movements and attempt to redefine the practice, the theory, the priorities and the agenda of socialism. This led to a kind of dispersal of the socialist feminist movement as women started working in different unions, became researchers, trade union educators, started establishing women's sectors, women's courses, etc. As a result, there now are women within political organisations challenging and sometimes totally disrupting the male leadership, their style and a lot of their politics. This has led to major changes. Within the LP, a lot of women became involved in recreating womens sections as feminist groups and attempted to challenge the power structures of the party. But that has meant that, as they vacated their specifically womens' movement, it became defined in radical feminist terms. For example, feminist events like "Feminist Book Week", would tend to be more radical feminist than socialist feminist. I think there's now a regrouping - at least intellectually - of socialist feminists to try and come out of their various dispersed activities and look at where feminism has got to in terms of reforming the Left. There is also alarm at what has happened to feminism, in particular at the essentialism that has grown up: the idea, often associated with Greenham, that women *per se* are peaceful.



The realigned Left lie low

BEN SCHOENDORFF: The other side of this debate is the question of class politics. Now do we have to see this as necessarily opposed first of all to the politics of the oppressed and, secondly, do we have to see it necessarily as the politics of the old trade-unionism? Is there any future for some other kind of class politics?

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: There's an important distinction between class politics meaning the politics of the labour movement's existing institutions and the idea that there is a future in struggle, initiatives and politics based at least partly at the point of production. I'm pretty critical and think there are some severe limits and dead-ends in the present institutions of working class politics. This is partly because of the narrow definition of their own sphere of activity - which is again to do with the relationship between them and the Labour Party. The problem is that they can hand over to it all wider political concerns - whether it be matters of industrial policy or matters of social policy - that could concern them. That, of course, only reinforces their narrowness. But

there sometimes is a tendency, from this critique of those institutions, to reject politics concerned with production and utilising the power workers have at the point of production.

MIKE RUSTIN: In England, there hasn't really been a very vocal revisionist group arguing for the supersession of class. There have been some people who have argued that you can't just go on using old class slogans and hope that they are going to deliver anything by themselves. But people who have argued that haven't argued that class is irrelevant, they have argued that any kind of viable politics in the present structure has to be about class and other things. I think the aim of the New Left since 1956 has been to articulate within the same movement both the new social forces and those based on class. I can't think of a single significant contributor to the discussion who argued that class wasn't the most fundamental organising principle in British socialist politics. On the other hand, as Hilary noted, a lot of the main contributions from New Left elements - in and out of the Labour Party - have argued for the importance of production issues, of employment generation, workers' plans, the use of government power to regenerate the economy, etc. There has been a shift back to a concern with the economy, away from the distributive, Fabian-type welfare issues. The main development has been the attempt to create a democratic industrial politics which is not simply about the old defensive class institutions but nor the courting of conservatism as an alternative political base.

BEN SCHOENDORFF: What's in store for the future. Do you see the next Labour government as just another Wilson-Callaghan affair or are we going to see some decisive shift towards pluralist socialism?

MIKE RUSTIN: The omens are bleak. The problems that we are about to face economically and internationally are greatly underestimated. In addition, the new forces that have been active in the Labour Party for the past few years have been effectively neutralised. It's difficult to see Labour surviving long in office without facing demands from the trade unions and welfare constituencies which it will be under pressure to put down in a repressive way. For that reason, I'm almost inclined to take the view that if they were forced to operate in a more pluralist environment with a hung Parliament and constitutional reform squarely on the agenda, it might in the end be for the best. This might create an alternative agenda of political reforms including regional government, decentralisation and electoral reform which would exclude the Right from power. But there's also the view that if Labour gets in and can manage to renew its mandate, you'll then be able to make changes within the Labour Party. New forces will gain in influence as time goes by. Of course, one can look on the bright side. But the history of recent Labour governments is so dismal on exactly the formula that we've now got that it seems to me hopelessly conservative to want to try one more time. I think it might be better if the whole structure was radically shaken up and a different set of options created.

HILARY WAINWRIGHT: I'm very very gloomy about the likelihood of a Hattersley/Kinnock Government starting off being anything different from the Wilson Government. In a way, it'll be worse because of the circumstances that it will inherit. I don't place quite so much hope as Mike on the Liberals partly because in the circumstances a hung Parliament would face, the radical constitutional reforms won't be first on the agenda. On the contrary, the role of the Alliance will be to legitimate the more right-wing policies of the Labour leadership - in terms of economic policy, incomes policy and so on. A lot of pressure will have to be put on Left MPs by Left activists and trade unionists to make sure that they play a very different role from that which they played under earlier Labour governments and which really consisted in exerting a bit of pressure for very traditional demands. The Left has got to espouse, from its own point of view, constitutional reform, in particular electoral reform. It has got to articulate an economic policy that can be presented as an alternative. Obviously, Kinnock won't implement it, but if Labour goes down in chaos without a clear alternative being on the public political scene, it really could lead to a very right-wing Tory victory. The Left in Parliament - hopefully not divorced from the Left outside - have got a real responsibility. In effect, they could hold the Parliamentary balance and therefore their ability to think in the long term and to think independently will be a crucial element for the future of socialism. ■

Trades unions in a Wapping world

At the time of going to press, it looks as if the Wapping dispute is going nowhere fast. KEIR STARMER argues that Wapping is one more example of the necessity for trade unions not only to be defended, but also to enlarge themselves.

FIVE MONTHS INTO the print-workers' dispute at Wapping, the situation has developed in an all too familiar way. The state is using all its machinery from the courts to the police on the picketlines to ensure that News International papers continue to be published and delivered. No-one can seriously argue, after the appalling attacks by mounted police on demonstrators and the continued harassment of residents (including towing away of cars hindering the passage of the TNT convoys sweeping through residential areas at 60MPH with no licence plates) that preserving the peace has even a token place in the events at Wapping. The TUC and Labour leadership have paid, at most, lip service to the printers struggling to defend the very principles of the trade-union and labour movements. All of this, against a background of high unemployment and "property-protecting" employment laws, represents a very real threat to trade-unionism. In response the EETPU has espoused "new unionism." SOGAT and the NGA appear by contrast as "old-style" even Luddite. Far from it.

THE EETPU AND THE "NEW REALISTS"

The EETPU's acceptance of "no-strike" agreements, single union negotiations and unchallenged management prerogative epitomises the "new realism" of the TUC and Labour leadership. These elements regard the lessons of the miners' strike solely in terms of compromise and collaboration rather than conflict. New realism is based on the rejection of class and instead finds itself on the market as provider of workers' benefits. It finds its form most sharply in strike-free deals with companies like

Toshiba and Hitachi. In the name of democracy, one of the most effective tools in the struggle to realise workplace democracy is signed away. The right to strike and effectively negotiate is discarded in the rush towards an extreme form of business tradeunionism.

DEAN AND DUBBINS - OLD STYLE UNIONISTS?

It is the much-publicised stance of the EETPU that helps portray the leaders of the NGA and SOGAT as old-style unionists. The aborted agreement (before negotiations with Murdoch broke down), to ban strike without ballots, binding arbitration (initiated at any stage by either side), reduction in the number of chapels, and balloting on the future of the closed shop portrays them in a different light. Furthermore the new proposals by Brenda Dean for a more centralised union mirror the new realist image of unionism as simply another tier of management. On this model, membership of the union is very like membership of the AA, an insurance policy against breakdown, but devoid of real involvement. Clearly the differences that Brenda Dean and Tony Dubbins have with the EETPU are not political but organisational. The struggle for workers' control, on the other hand,



The message

means effective defense of the unions, supporting national and local pickets and a principled advocacy of solidarity action. However, an effective struggle for workers' control requires also that the unions radically extend the scope of collective bargaining.

DEFENDING THE UNIONS

There is no future for a trade union movement that is defeated by the attacks of the government, the courts and the police. As a result print support groups have sprung up as spontaneously as the miners support groups did two years ago. Their role in co-ordinating local and national demonstrations, pickets and boycott campaigns is potentially decisive in an industry where stockpiling is impossible.

Trade unionists all over the country and especially in Fleet Street are being asked to take action in support of sacked printworkers. This kind of sympathy action could fulfil two objectives: firstly, of course, "unity is strength" and the News

International strikers need all possible solidarity in their struggle against "militant management". Secondly, the workers for the *Guardian, Telegraph, Express and Mirror* group papers will soon find themselves in exactly the same position as the News International workforce. Most Fleet Street employers are not yet ready to go as far as Murdoch, not because they lack in spirit, at this stage they merely lack the resources. By waiting until their various employers have all set-up their alternative Wappings, the workers remaining in Fleet Street will then find that any action they take is ineffective. Already production union leaders at the *Daily Telegraph* (which is due to start printing at a new press hall in the Isle of Dogs) have been asked for a legally binding agreement ruling out industrial action. Clearly, defending the unions is essential: without them there will be no base for collective action. Nevertheless defence is not enough. If the unions are to challenge management prerogatives in any realistic way, they can

only do so by extending the terms of collective bargaining: an extension that cannot be realised without a commitment to enlarge the unions themselves.

ENLARGING THE UNIONS

There are many levels of control in industry, for instance what to produce, by what process and the terms and conditions. For the greater part of this Century, the union movement has concerned itself only with the last, industrial unionism reaching a peak in the 1970's. In times of recession, the question of control goes further than terms and conditions. The miners in 1984 (unlike 1972 and 1974) were essentially disputing the Coal Board's right to close pits at the dictate of the short-term market. It was soon realised that questions of control went beyond the pit-heads. The massive support network of, among others, Women Against Pit Closures, Gays and Lesbians Support the Miners, Blacks and Asians Support the Miners, signified this extension. Similar developments can be seen in the printworkers dispute. In the face of a likely sell-out the rank and file unionists insist on greater involvement in the articulation of union demands. It should not escape one's notice that SOGAT, so keen to follow the letter of the law on pre-strike ballots, was less keen to involve the workforce before negotiations with Murdoch broke down. Greater control in industry is meaningless without greater involvement within the union and beyond it.

Following successful battles by SOGAT women clerical workers on such issues as the non-operation of Visual Display Units by pregnant women, the women have taken a high profile throughout the dispute, often showing that they are not "behind the men" but "in front of them". The first women's demonstration at Wapping drew not only supporters from Women Against Pit Closures, but also other women in dispute (for example, the Cambridge Health Authority strikers). These are important examples of how trade unions can begin building horizontally within and beyond the union, thus extending the challenge from simple workplace control to control over industry and community.

The challenge posed by Hammond, Dean and Dubbins (not to mention Murdoch), can only be met if unions are defended as collective organisations. The challenge of control can only be met if unions are radically enlarged to encompass the political elements of control throughout society. ■

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South Africa from Anti-Apartheid to Socialism

NEVILLE ALEXANDER, a prominent **National Forum** activist talks to STEFAN BUNDSCHUH and HARRI GRUNBERG about the situation in South Africa. It is not yet a revolution, he argues, but the fight is a fight for socialism.

What, in your view, is the root cause of the present black revolt in South Africa?

Two things essentially. I would say the political factor is the most important. The economic situation only comes second. Politically, the Government, by deliberately leaving the black population, especially the young, out of the so-called new constitution has effectively told them that black people and black youth are, for all intents and purposes, aliens in their own country. That, in the end, is the root cause of today's revolt. Black youth especially have made clear since 1976 that they weren't prepared to take it anymore. The mobilisation has extended to school pupils in the past few years and has led to widespread strikes in schools. And, of course, on top of that, there's the appalling economic situation. Unemployment has grown to such an extent that, in the urban areas, over 30% of the black population are unemployed and of course South Africa has no unemployment benefit - for the vast majority of the black population, there's no Welfare State. In the short-term then, the present intensity and radical nature of black revolt can be understood by reference to the misery caused by the economic situation.

What are the prospects of the present movement then?

You mean whether a potentially victorious revolution could take place? First, this raises a number of questions about the concept of revolution itself. If you mean a socialist transformation and a socialist revolution, then there's still a long way to go. I don't even think that the revolt in its present form could lead to substantial change in the present regime. At best, successful economic sanctions could force concessions on Botha such as integrating a few blacks into the governmental structure as he did with Asians and coloureds. I don't think we can expect much more. The fact that the Botha Government base themselves on a quasi-parliamentary system means that they must reckon with the white electorate. They just can't ignore the extreme right's reaction. Thus they can't bow to the blacks' demands nor even move towards bourgeois democracy. This could only be imposed by a military dictatorship, alone capable of enforcing real compromises. Neither Botha nor Bures, nor any white in South Africa, have any intention of doing it themselves.

But there's been a growing development of the armed struggle. Does it not present a potentially successful perspective in the medium term?

Yes, but we must here distinguish between two different things. First, it is true that the South African democratic movement has steadily radicalised since 1976. An extraordinary sense of alienation has developed among young people and there's no doubt we are now in a pre-revolutionary situation. The majority of the population would be prepared, not only to support the struggle, but maybe even to participate. A recent poll showed that, in the cities, 63% of blacks would be prepared to support armed struggle. Trotsky made the distinction between a



"I'm worried about the effect of sanctions on our economic situation."

disposition to support the armed struggle and actively taking part. I think that today a sizeable proportion would be prepared to join the armed struggle. Although this is true, it doesn't in the least amount to saying that a successful revolution could happen today. A victorious revolution demands that the army rally to the side of the revolutionary people and the working class. It also demands infiltration of the state bureaucracy and apparatus - not quite the case in South Africa! The situation is not yet mature. The army is composed of 90% whites which means it is not a "popular" army; it is not composed of the "children of the people" as was the case in Iran. For this reason, comparisons with Iran are misleading. In Iran, as in Russia before, the soldiers could switch over behind the revolutionary masses and the army become a centre of the revolution. This is not yet on the cards for South Africa. Similarly, state bureaucracy is almost entirely in white hands. And this is why a victorious revolution is not likely in the near future.

One of the most important strategic questions facing the revolution and the movement in the next ten years will be that of neutralising the army and infiltrating the state. It is thus unlikely that a successful revolution could take place in

the next two or three years in South Africa. Of course, there could be unexpected developments but I doubt whether they would lead to any such clear outcome. The current cycle of revolt followed by state repression is inscribed in *the logic of current developments*. In a way, it is similar to the Paris Commune. It has to happen and will produce specific political, organisational and ideological consequences. From this, we will then have to prepare for the next stage.

A surprising feature of the South African situation is the role of the church. If we look at Bishop Tutu's latest pronouncements, the church seems to be moving towards partial acceptance of insurrection against apartheid. What exactly is the role of the South African church?

The church is not homogenous. I think that its leaders, bishops and administrators hold fundamentally liberal views. They believe it would be possible to establish a non-racial capitalist regime in South Africa. They are deeply committed to non-violent struggle against apartheid. But the pressure is on from the church's grassroots - including priests and clergymen - and it is extremely strong and intense. This simply reflects what is taking place in the

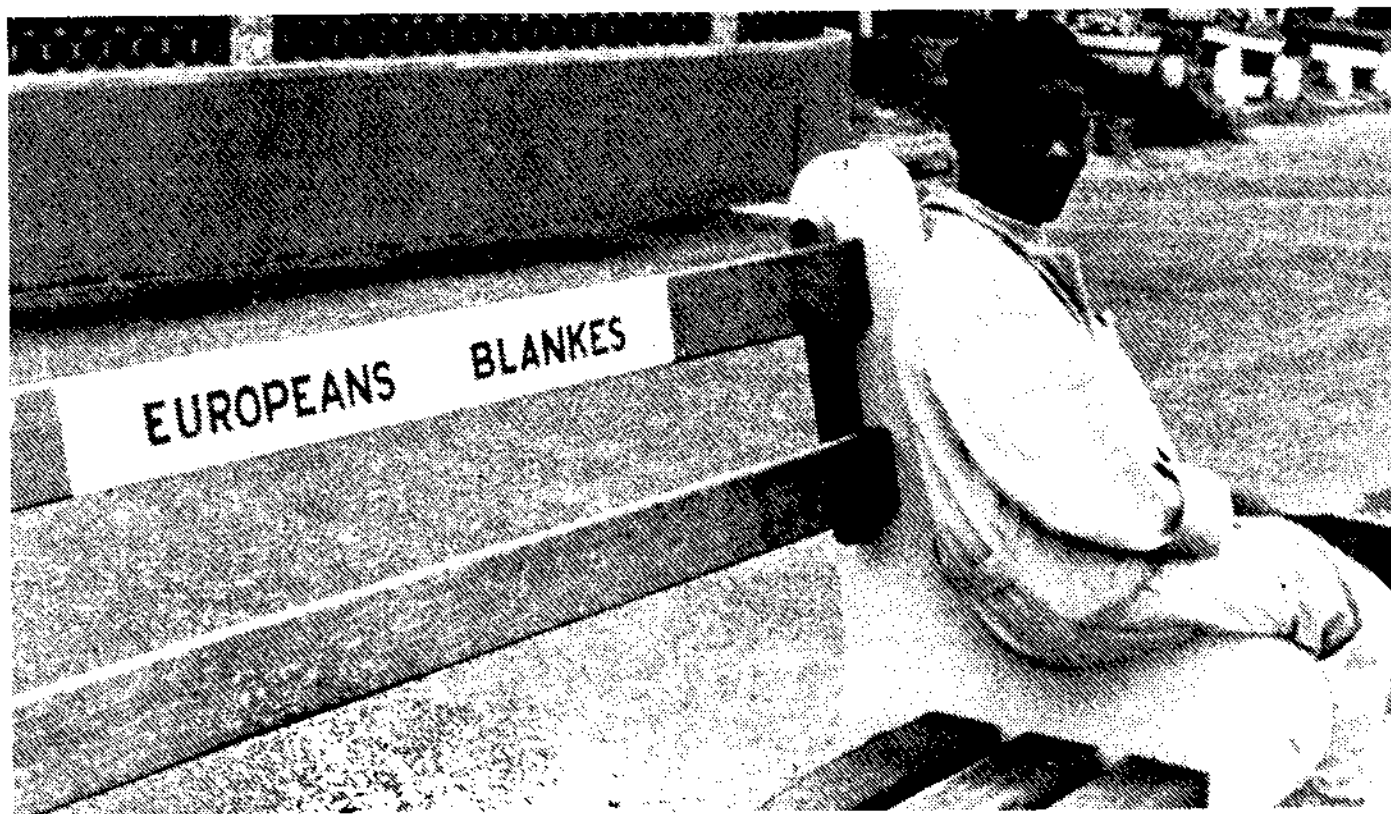
wider community of the oppressed. Accordingly, South American type "theology of liberation" is very widespread. In my view, those priests and church members supporting "black theology", as it has come to be called, have basically accepted the idea of insurrection and they could go as far as openly supporting the armed struggle. But, on the other hand, the leaders of the church are opposed to such developments and are exploring every avenue in search of a so-called peaceful solution. It has to be recognised that the church and, above all, the Church Council, have played a role in the creation of the UDF. Its majority – albeit not exclusive – support for the UDF has been determinant in the competition between the National Forum and the UDF. To an extent, it is one of the reasons why the UDF, as opposed to the National Forum, has become the mass movement we now know.

Time and again we have been told that the EEC governments consider economic sanctions ineffective as a means of putting an end to the apartheid regime. What's your view?

The problem is really a simple one. I think there are three aspects to it. First, from our point of view, that of workers and political activists living in South Africa, the question of whether sanctions should be applied and foreign capital move out is not one on which we ought to take a line. In a way, to us, whether foreign capital moves in or out of South Africa is like whether there will be rain or drought. If it rains, it rains, if it doesn't, well it doesn't.

But, on the other hand, it is obviously the duty of the international working class – especially in the West – to force their capitalists not to strengthen the regime; and there's no question that international investment in South Africa doesn't benefit black workers but in fact strengthens the power of white capital, and thus reinforces the apartheid regime. But, in truth, it's no business of ours. It is not for us to tell you whether or not you should invest here.

As regards the third aspect, it is in the very nature of the world capitalist system that, when one capitalist moves out, another one from Israel, Taiwan or even South Africa will move in and invest in that market. It is possible that, in the short-run, disinvestment will have negative consequences for white capitalists but, in the long-run, it will probably not matter one way or the other. Let me repeat, though, that the international working class must seize every chance and opportunity to help South Africa move our way and, in a period like this, disinvestment and international sanctions are certainly a factor favourable to us. One thing is clear: the argument that investment in South Africa leads to the regime's liberalisation has been decisively refuted. Investment leads to no liberalisation whatsoever. Liberalisation in South Africa takes place as a result of the evolution of the South African economy – with or without international investments. The South African economy has developed in such a way that the government and capitalists have to reform the political system. They have to concede more rights to the black population and make concessions. But,



instead of the global liberalisation which is so much talked about in the West, we can now see that the South African government has used the past ten years' economic development as a means of creating and supporting a black middle class. Thus, if some blacks have profited from international investments, the benefits have been limited to this black middle class which numbers at most a few thousand members and have failed to affect the overwhelming majority of blacks.

The newest development is the involvement of the black working class in the movement. This has led to the birth and rapid growth of trades unions. What is their role in South Africa's future political evolution?

The development of the trade union movement is a natural offspring of that of capitalism and industrialisation. One of the first concessions the Botha government has had to make has been the right to trade union organisation, the right of black workers to affiliate to a trade union. As a

“A victorious revolution demands that the army rally to the side of the revolution and the working class... Not quite the case in South Africa!”

socialist, I need not emphasise the importance of that concession. The regime understood that the working class would use this right, irrespective of whether it was granted or not, and so decided to concede it so as to preserve its future chances to control and even, if possible, destructure the movement. But the government has failed in this aim despite all the differences within the trade union movement – differences which, in my view, should not be exaggerated; put in perspective they are not very important. What is important is that 20% of the South African working class is today organised in trades unions. In the last analysis, the national liberation movement depends on this organised social base. Still, workers are not just organised in trades unions. They are also organised in sporting, youth, cultural organisations, etc. But, historically, trades unions remain one of the most important forms of workers' organisation.

I think that the majority of trade union leaders would want a slower evolution if they could. But the trade union leadership is also under pressure from its base. The leadership would rather have nothing to do with “revolutionary” politics, but there is nothing they can do about it at the moment because the pressure from the rank and file is so strong. This can be seen with the miners who, because of pressure from below, have had to support a consumer boycott. In fact, the miners' union is still too weak to lead this type of large political action but it is clear that they now want to do it, that the leadership is committed to it and that they will do it. The same is true of other unions.

The South African government wouldn't hesitate to break the trade union movement were it to engage into more directly political actions. But the unions leaderships won't be able to stop this and they will have to move onto the political plane because their base won't listen to the government. It's a very difficult question of strategic importance. I don't think we will see a labour party emerging from the union movement in the near future. I think that the three major South African tendencies, the UDF, the

National Forum and the trade union movement should converge. With the exiles and the armed groups, we should rally in a structure broadly similar to that of the PLO in which we could work together and yet retain different programmes, strategies and even tactics. This is a real possibility even if it is today rejected by all tendencies. I think, in the

“It is the duty of the international working class to force their capitalists to disinvest.”

light of our present experience in the campaign against the new constitution, that we are now moving in this direction.

South Africa is known as a country of super-profits where growth has been so high that the whites have needed apartheid to guarantee their high profits. Could this change, is a non-racist capitalist future open to South Africa?

I don't think so for two main reasons. First, social inequality which is a product of the capitalist mode of production in other countries will always take the form of racial inequality in South Africa. This means that the great majority of the poor will always be black and, vice versa, that the great majority of the rich will always be white. In this sense, a non-racist capitalism is impossible here. The workers will always feel oppressed not just as workers, but also as blacks. The second reason comes from the evolution of capitalism in South Africa. In order to develop, capitalism must broaden the domestic market, it must grant higher wages to black workers. The same laws governing advanced capitalist countries then apply to the South African economy. New capital investment methods will have to be introduced and that will inevitably lead to a structurally determined rise in unemployment. But we are already in a paradoxical situa-

“Capital will have to rely on a black middle-class, as it were, as its junior partner.”

tion where, for all the low wages, there are over 3 million blacks unemployed. I think unemployment can only increase in the future and capital will then have to rely on a black middle class to act, as it were, as its junior partner.

But there is also a white poverty. Can the white poor be won over to a non-racial society?

That depends on two things. First, the near-totality of the liberation movement has always held a non-racist ideology. Ever since 1912, we have always said that we are one nation of which the whites are a part. Hence, as regards the movement, there are no obstacles to the integration of whites in a future socialist society. All this, of course, will depend on the whites themselves and the way they behave, as Trotsky himself noted in 1934. There are today nearly 5 million whites in South Africa and at most 2 million can leave the country. The others will have to make the best of the situation. Paradoxically, I think that the Boers, the Afrikaans-speaking whites, will have fewer problems adapting to the situation than the English-speaking whites who still believe in England's supremacy. I say this because the Boers, and in fact all the Afrikaaners, don't feel European one bit, they are Africans!

The South African liberation movement is not united, what are the differences between the various organisations?

The two main tendencies are the UDF and the National Forum. The other tendencies effectively exist in the shadow of



one of these two organisations. The third tendency is of course the trade union movement. So far, it has remained at a safe distance from the two others. The main differences are linked to the fact that the UDF is willing to ally with liberals – even white and bourgeois – whereas, we in the National Forum refuse it.

Even tactically?

Even tactically, yes. In fact, we are willing to accept to act along parallel lines but, as regards our movement's revolutionary perspective, we cannot accept fighting apartheid in alliance with white liberals or the liberal parties. We believe it impossible to fight against apartheid without at the same time fighting against the capitalist structures.

Is the UDF the prefiguration of a future coalition government?

Maybe. But I think this is a rather simplistic way of looking at it. I think the UDF is essentially a temporary phenomenon and that it will necessarily split as soon as the South African government will show a real intention to start negotiations with one tendency or the other. I think the conservative wing of the UDF will then split. In effect, the UDF statutes are so vague that even the official opposition party, the *Progressive Federal Party* has declared itself willing to co-operate with the UDF. They have already started doing so. So, on the one hand there is the question of the alliance with the South African liberals but, on the other, there is the question of socialism itself. We believe it our duty to try and put, in practice, not just in theory, socialism on the agenda. This is why the Azanian People's Manifesto, which is in fact the real programme of the National Forum, tends towards socialist analyses, solutions and slogans. Take the land question, for example, we say that land must not be used to further exploitation and oppression. This is – roughly – a socialist demand. It's precise content is a matter for the movement's internal debates to decide. We are thus putting socialism on the agenda. In contrast, the UDF programme is not a socialist programme. It is so broadly defined that it is only anti-apartheid in the liberal sense, not anti-capitalist.

What about the ANC?

It's a very difficult and touchy question. The ANC is the largest armed struggle organisation and any criticism levelled at the ANC can be interpreted as being counter-revolutionary. This is a gross oversimplification and is also an unreasonable attitude. The ANC is very friendly to the UDF whereas it is much more reserved in its attitude to the National Forum. But, in spite of the

fact that ARAPO and other National Forum organisations are very critical of the ANC and some of its actions, they are not enemies, but look upon one another as potential allies in the national struggle.

And, programmatically, does the ANC want a socialist revolution in South Africa?

The ANC is not a homogenous organisation. I think that some ANC groups and organisations would have no difficulty in supporting a socialist revolution. But, of course, there are the groups that have traditionally shaped the ANC's public face and who think that we must first fight apartheid and then only capitalism. This means putting forward democratic demands and refusing to go much further. But all this is being changed by the pressure of the popular movement and those who support socialism and socialist solutions are probably gaining ground in the ANC ranks. In other organisations, like the PAC (Pan African Congress), I think socialism is freely talked about and most analyses have come under heavy socialist influence. In practice, though, it is extremely difficult to say how these organisations will react for they are not socialist parties fighting on a socialist programme.

To come back on this question, is there a movement that could become a guerilla movement?

A guerilla war in South Africa could only take the form of a civil war in which the guerillas will only represent a fraction of the great popular movement. They won't be able to operate around a "focus" as happened in South America for the foundations of the armed struggle in South Africa will necessarily take the form of a civil war. In recent years, the ANC has principally focused on sabotage operations, that is essentially propaganda actions. The PAC and other smaller groups have also carried sporadic operations. But it seems most guerillas have been arrested by the police. Still, I repeat, the foundations for the armed struggle reside there in the civil war.

What about the influence of revolutionary marxism in South Africa?

A number of revolutionary-marxist groups work at all levels of the national liberation movement, in the trades unions as well as in sporting organisations. The differences between these groups are often minimal and sometimes boil down to personality clashes. I think the main task facing all these groups is working towards a unified party. Some progress has already been made in that direction. ■

Rediscovering Marx

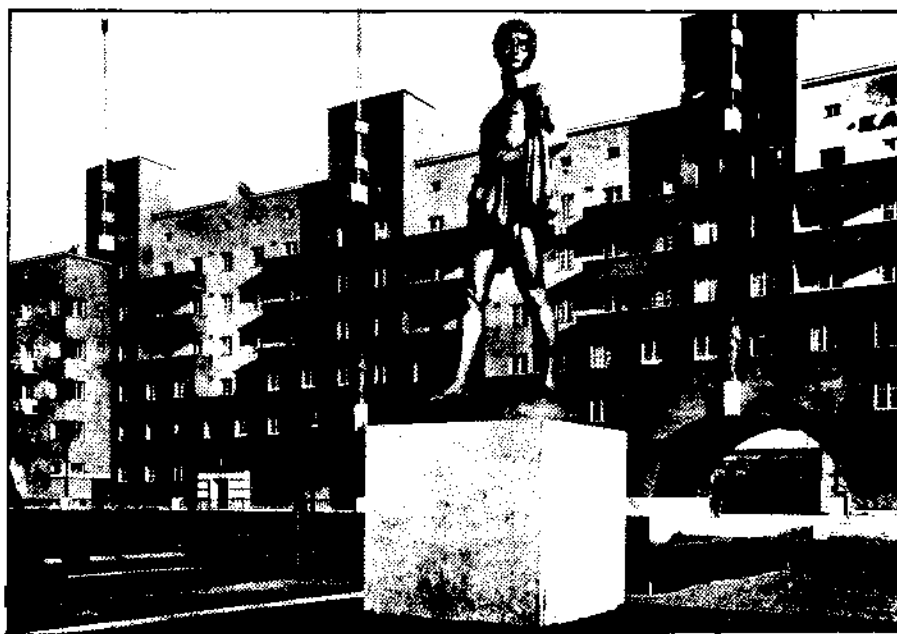
There is still a lot that's relevant in Marx, argues MICHEL RAPTIS. All it takes is an open mind and a creative approach to both his writings and the world we are living in.

THE CAREFUL STUDY OF MARX'S WRITINGS is necessary for anyone wishing to "go beyond" marxism. This is even more important as Marx's Collected Works have only started to become available since the end of World War II. It is thus quite easy to understand those whose references to Karl Marx are based, not on a close reading of the whole of his works, but on partial readings and secondhand accounts. For too long ignorance has surrounded the historical development of Marx's thought. This, as well as the interpretations that have fallen upon marxism from organisations and states seeking to appropriate it, have made a return to Marx's "original marxism" absolutely necessary. This need is felt by all those who have long been committed to socialism and the labour movement, and who have seen themselves as "marxists" on the basis of a narrow knowledge of Marx's writings. We used to trust our "masters" and their interpretation and application of marxism. As for myself, I have never ceased to read all I could find by and about Marx, putting my trust primarily in those interpretations advanced by Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky. But, unable to find in them satisfactory answers to the new problems arising, I have had to go back to the original texts.

By reading them, I sought to find the concrete method Marx himself had elaborated, his fundamental concepts and analyses. Simultaneously, I have always tried to keep abreast of all the criticisms levelled against Marx, regardless of which quarter they came from.

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AMAZED BY THE EASE with which some judge and criticize Marx, complement his theories or even "supercede" them without ever taking the trouble to study his works seriously. But, I suppose, the same could be said of the so-called specialists on Plato, Aristotle, Hegel or Freud. I must confess my amazement at their recklessness and arrogance. This isn't to say, however, that one shouldn't - as one would if one, like Marx, "questioned everything" - criticise Marx or any other marxist writer without having first thoroughly studied their entire collected works.

IN THE DIALECTICAL SENSE, IT IS BOTH NECESSARY and inevitable to supercede Marx's writings. This process is inherent in his works which, far from being a closed system, remain open to any new scientific advances and social experiences. Karl Marx himself would have seen his works in this light. His contribution lies in the elaboration of a body of concepts, analyses and a method which, as a coherent whole, have, more than any previous theory, helped us to see through our social reality. This opened up a new conception of our social being, qualitatively different from that of our biological selves. Is it any wonder that today, a century after Marx's death, problems have arisen to which Marx himself didn't and couldn't have given any satisfactory answers?



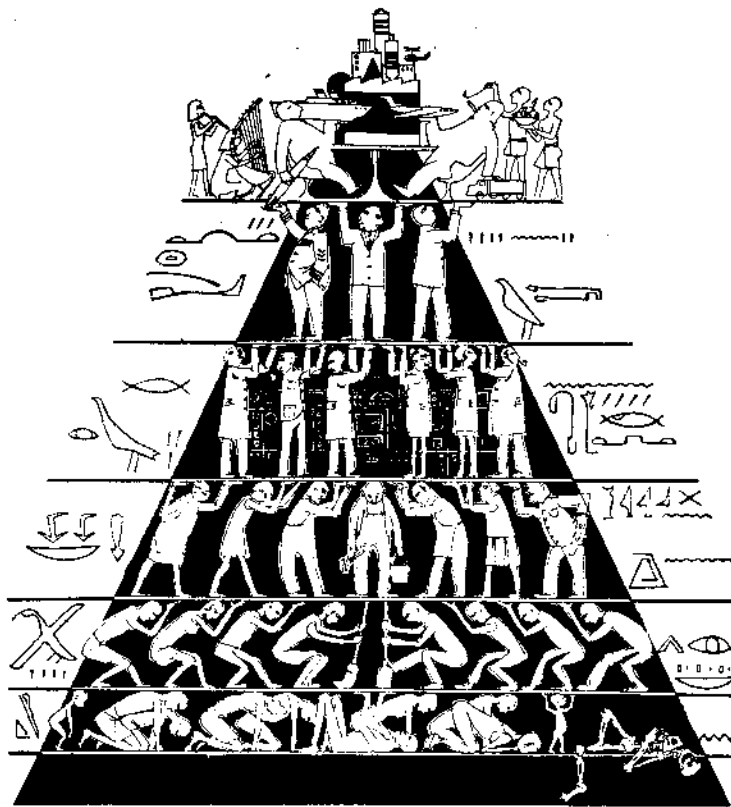
Karl Ehn, *Karl-Marx-Hof* (1927-1930), Vienna.

I WISH TO DISCUSS A NUMBER OF THESE PROBLEMS which, in my view, are directly connected to the present reality and revolutionary action – by which I mean action that tends towards a radical social transformation. We are faced today with a new crisis of the capitalist system, an economic crisis on a world scale which so far has failed to produce any perspective for recovery in the short term. There is no doubt, for anyone acquainted with Marx's economic writings, that his theories, more than any offered by bourgeois economics, contribute to explaining some of the fundamental determinants of this crisis. Broadly, it is, in the last analysis, a crisis of overproduction. The difficulties arise from a fall in the rate of profit, linked, on the one hand, to an increase in the organic composition of capital, and, on the other hand, to a narrowing of the world market's capacity for absorption. So, part of the question can be satisfactorily answered by using Marx's concepts and analyses as exposed in *Capital* and other writings.

MARX NEVER COMPLETED HIS ECONOMIC WRITINGS as he had planned. He thus never closely examined the state, international trade or the world market. In short, he never went beyond analysing the capitalist system as an ideal average and never considered more closely its concrete workings on a global scale. Yet, such an analysis would have allowed room to uncover not only capitalism's "tendencial laws" but also the factors that caused these tendencies to be slowed down, deformed or even reversed over entire periods. Hence, it is essential, from a practical point of view, to examine capitalism in its global and concrete reality, taking into account factors as important as the new economic role of the state, the international banking system, the relation between centres

and peripheries as well as the relations of the centres with the growing sector of the bureaucratic states. Only in this way will we be able to understand why, for example, the evolution of the crisis has proved controllable up until now. It would also allow for a clear appreciation of the perspectives. It seems obvious that capitalism has prolonged its survival thanks precisely to the new role the state has taken on since the 1930's, thanks also to the role of the international banking system, the new relations with the third world as a supplier of raw materials and market opportunities for the centres' industrial output, and, finally, the development of exchanges with the bureaucratic states. Globally, we have witnessed a strengthening and an inflationist extension of the market. This remains the main problem of capitalist accumulation and production. *Capital*, as Marx had envisaged, needs to be completed taking into account the new conditions found both in the centres and in the peripheries. Today, this task is one of collective elaboration.

THE NEW SITUATION AND NEW PROBLEMS facing socialists and the labour movement today require closer examination of Marx's "original marxism", and a closer look at a range of concepts he himself elaborated. This is necessary to the strengthening and actualisation of our ideological tools. Hence, a fundamental debate around soviet-type regimes has begun to gain momentum in the ranks of the international revolutionary Left. This debate is central to the understanding and the characterisation of those regimes which are distinguished by a staterun economy and the political monopoly of one party. This debate involves such fundamental concepts of marxism as the definition of class, production mode and even the content of the word socialism.



I CAN'T DO JUSTICE TO THESE DEBATES here. I will thus limit myself to pointing at Marx's own treatment of these questions as we find it in his writings. I am in no doubt that Marx himself was the most dialectical of "marxists". He was both the most profound and the most wary of mechanistic and systemising interpretations of the concepts, analyses and method he developed. In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between him and F. Engels who nonetheless remained his closest ideological collaborator.

MANY MARXISTS STILL CONFUSE the definition of class – especially that of dominant class – with ownership of the means of production: they neglect Marx and Engels' references to the law of the division of labour which, historically, has had for consequence: "*the discharging by the masses of simple manual labour while a few privileged persons directed labour, conducted trade and public affairs, and, at a later stage, occupied themselves with art and science.*" (F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring*). The division of society in classes is thus based on the division of labour.

One could hold that any social layer which, through monopoly of political power, knowledge and culture, controls and runs the labour of other layers and the common affairs of society, constitute a dominant class, or in practice acts as one. This definition applies particularly well to those societies based on collective ownership (in effect state ownership) of the means of production and exchange. In any case, there isn't a complete theory of classes in Marx. This question was to be dealt with at the end of part III of *Capital*. Neither do we find a theory of the state, the mode of production or even of socialism, its concrete workings and political and economic content. Looking at the diverse references to class made by Marx (and not only the far too schematic and linear exposition

given in the **Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy**), one wonders whether a more appropriate definition should not be based on the distribution of income and production rather than ownership of the means of production. This would be based on the division of labour which is determined not only by the economic forces but also by the social relations between exploiter and exploited, the governing and the governed.

WHEN MARX WROTE OF THE "ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION", he added that the state, embodied in the monarch, was the supreme owner of the land. A gigantic bureaucracy of all ranks controlled the economy and in practice displayed all the characteristics of a dominant class. This analysis was openly advanced by N Bukharin in his **Historical Materialism – A System of Sociology**. In a state-run economy and society, what should be the fundamental criterion to define class: the formal relations of ownership and production or the real social relations determining who really controls and runs production and society, who, in effect, manage as their own

"Theoretical developments should not be arbitrary but rooted in concrete social experience."

property the "collective" means of production? Similarly for the question of the mode of production: are Eastern societies characterised by a particular mode of production? It can be argued that, for Marx, a production mode isn't just a concept, an economic relation between means of production and agents of production but rather a **social relation** determining the concrete social conditions in which, in each epoch, the extortion of surplus labour, surplus product, production, distribution and appropriation take place. Such a definition includes both the economic, political and social dimensions. The precise interaction of these dimensions is of course specific to each stage of the historical development.

IN THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION, the economic element is dominant. Politics, the state and the bourgeoisie's political domination all conform to the imperatives of capitalist production which came to establish its dominance, as it were, of itself, over the previous modes of production and their remnants. But, in the socialist stage, the character and nature of political power and the transitory state are determinant to the economic affirmation and perpetuation of the system as a whole. Thus, the question of who – the direct producers and citizens or the state bureaucracy – controls and runs the state, the economy and society as a whole determines the nature and future of the system.

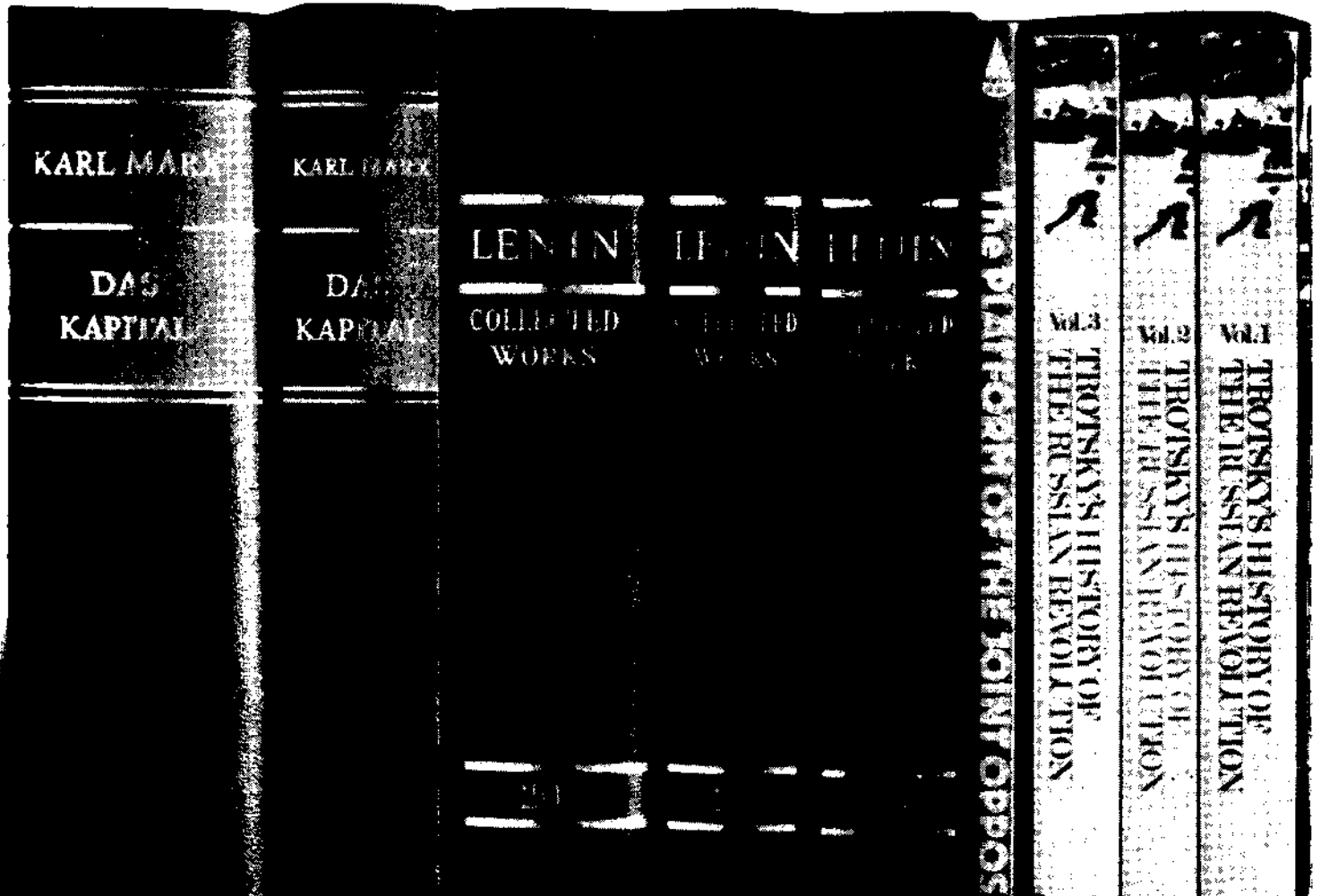
MARX WROTE LITTLE ABOUT THE SYSTEM REPLACING CAPITALISM. He only gave general indications as regards its political and economic functioning. This approach stemmed from his method

which recognised that theoretical developments should not be arbitrary but rooted in concrete social experience. Like all other theories with ambitions to scientific status, marxism is an experimental theory which can be verified by social experimentation and which then bases its further development on these experiences. It is clear from the whole of his works that Marx never stopped envisaging the effective disappearance of both wage labour and the state. If, in relation to these two essential goals, Marx distanced himself from the anarchists by choosing a transitory road, it was because the conditions of his time didn't allow for the immediate transition to a classless and stateless society. This still holds true today with the difference that there now exists a material and cultural development on a European scale which allow for a quasi-immediate transition to a self-managed society of the form promoted - if in a sometimes confused and pragmatic way - by the Polish working class and citizens.

ALL HIS LIFE, MARX SUPPORTED EXPERIENCES in direct democracy and remained to his death resolutely anti-statist. He considered that socialism meant a society of free and equal producers, consciously applying a collectively planned programme. One finds the

idea of a free producers associations' federation, as opposed to an increasingly centralised state, in Marx's writings on the Paris Commune (in **The Civil War in France**). As Engels noted in 1891, for Marx, the most important lesson of the Paris Commune was relating to the selfmanagement of industrial enterprises and the unification of all workers' associations within one large federation ie: "through an organisation that would lead, as Marx rightly said, to communism." For the last three years of his life, Marx studied closely the Russian agrarian communes (Mir). He was considering whether revolution could rapidly come to Russia and whether it would foster the "free development" of agrarian communes, which could then become a regenerating factor for Russian society giving superiority over the capitalist regime.

THIS THOUGHT OF MARX IS CRUCIAL to an understanding of the way in which, towards the end of his life, he reflected on a series of questions: that of the content of, and the "transition" to, socialism. It also refutes the idea sometimes attributed to him that he always saw as "necessary" the prior development of capitalism and the extreme industrialisation and automation of the economy. In my view, he was well aware of the dangers of this



Patching up the pieces

development and would today be the first to condemn the present evolution of our "industrial civilisation". Can we forget what he said in 1856 when he pointed to the mortal dangers stemming from the progress of science and technology (already then) dominating people and reducing them to a "mere material force"? (Address for the anniversary of the **People's Paper**, 18 April 1856)

LET ME CONCLUDE BY RECALLING the fact that Marx adhered until his last day to the fundamental idea that the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves, not that of "masters" - individuals or groups - who, from outside or from above, inoculate the masses with "consciousness", "lead" them and represent them. This idea of Marx is best seen as a kind of categorical moral imperative determining both his thought and his actions. From this point of view, he was a warm partisan of the inevitable and necessary pluralism of working class parties, of trade union independence (from both parties and state) as well as of all forms of workers' selfmanaging organisation fostering direct participation. For this reason, he opposed any organisation of the communists separate from the other working class parties. On the contrary, he strongly advocated the communists' integration into the class and their participation in the actions and everyday experience of the class. We should reconsider these thoughts in the light of the rich historical experience acquired since Marx's days. Such a revision would lead to a

conception of the "revolutionary" and "vanguard" party fundamentally different from that advanced in their days by Lassale and Kautsky and which has since been present throughout the world labour movement in one form or another. Marx resolutely opposed all elitist interpretations of the necessary - nationally and internationally - "communists' association". The socialists are only armed with a deeper consciousness of the general conditions and long-term goals of the struggle of the most deprived social layers whilst keeping in sight the wider interests of humanity as a whole. They are active in all the formations and sectors of the multiform social praxis. The relation between the socialists and the masses of society and the sense of their action, differ in all essentials from the prevailing monolithic and elitist caricatures advanced by "revolutionaries", members and supporters of the so-called "unique party of the vanguard".

NEW SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENTS SUCH AS Solidarnosc in Poland, the Greens in Germany, the feminist movement and the movements for unilateral disarmament are developing today. In effect, there is a form of alliance between the working class and these new social forces whose references are to the general interests of humanity. These movements are a privileged ground for socialist activity. They are in fact prefiguring the future of the socialist movement and the forms of organisation it will come to adopt - at least in the industrialised countries of East and West. But that's altogether another story... ■

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WHOSE FREEDOM?

KEIR STARMER looks at some of the issues behind Labour's new *Freedom and Fairness* Campaign.

The Labour Party's new *Freedom and Fairness* initiative involves much more than simply dropping the red logo. It is primarily a follow-up to the *Jobs and Industry* campaign, which was an attempt to illustrate how a future Labour Government would create jobs and wealth. Consequently, *Freedom and Fairness* aims to show how this wealth would be distributed - by improving education, health care and other services. Special attention is also drawn to crime prevention and safety in the streets.

Launching the campaign, Neil Kinnock said "it is a practical application of democratic socialism - broadening and deepening individual liberty by enabling people to be free from poverty, exploitation and fear and free to realise their full potential, free to enjoy real chances, free to make real choices." Unfortunately these platitudes mask a number of shortcomings in a campaign where what is not said is more noticeable than what is said.

Firstly, *Jobs and Industry* is an unsound base on which to build further campaigns. *Freedom and Fairness*, like its industrial counterpart, presumably safeguards the freedom of capital in Britain whilst showing little regard for the freedom of the workforce and community to extend their political control.

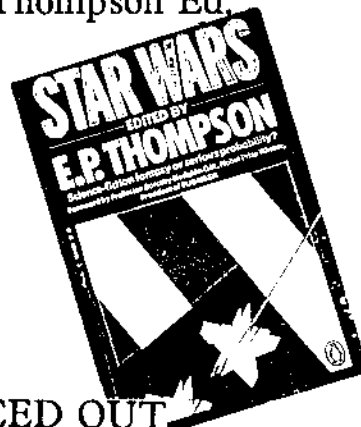
Secondly the campaign is supposedly rooted in a section of Neil Kinnock's Party Conference speech last autumn which signalled an end to dirigiste state socialism and its replacement by a more enabling state. This sounds fine, the 1979 defeat can be seen as a rejection of corporatism and statism by the electorate. It is unfortunate however, that *Freedom and Fairness* should interpret this as a reaffirmation of market values coupled with an extension of home ownership.

Finally, the campaign, presented to the Party as a socialist initiative, is in

reality a reflection of the findings of the latest Mori/Marplan/Gallup opinion polls. Socialist freedom cannot ignore the right to be free from oppression whether it be exploitation at work or racism and sexism in the wider community. In rejecting state socialism, *Freedom and Fairness* marks an important change in emphasis that should be welcomed by all socialists. Unfortunately, by turning back to the market economy, it misses a third alternative, that of participatory socialism based on democratic planning. ■

STAR WARS

E.P. Thompson Ed.



SPACED OUT

SDI MAY NOT HAPPEN. It has always been Reagan's baby and he'll have to retire in 1988. The space shuttle crash was also a blow - even if it was used to reinforce calls for the programme to continue. The Democrats have never liked the project and spending cuts may prevent the massive spending needed. As R. Bulkeley writes in this new collection, "few parts of the SDI will be effected in the near future". After reading Ben Thomson's essay in *Star Wars*, one can't help asking why are the US doing it? The technical and scientific problems involved are immense if not insurmountable. The original "impenetrable shield" is now generally accepted as impossible. Whatever else it will do, it won't stop Cruise missiles and other sub-based missiles. SDI would also have immense difficulties coping with countermeasures e.g. radio interference or dummy warheads. Moreover, with ten space shuttles flying 3 missions a year, the proposed orbital laser stations would be completed in an estimated 6,000 years. The electric power needed to operate it would involve around 60% of the total US output. Finally, SDI would need, for co-ordination, sensors and computers up to 100 million times more efficient than those existing today. After reading this, one might have the impression that the US administration are purely

and simply mad. But there are very good reasons to keep the SDI project going. These are both economical, the development of a permanent "arms economy" and the use of the defence sector to pull the recovery, and political, the growing Freeze movement in the US. Big money is important. As P. Anderson notes in his essay, "high-tech companies are keen to get their hands on SDI contracts." Already 26 billion \$ are projected for research and, in Europe alone, 1b\$ are already up for grabs. As a Boeing representative roundly puts it: "there's a lot of money here". More worrying, in the past three years 2,300 Pentagon staff have retired straight into arms contractors jobs. The result is a significant amount of self-induced demand for more defence orders. These processes are outlined in EP Thompson's two excellent pieces in this book.

IN A COUNTRY WHICH increasingly robs the poor to feed the war economy, Star Wars can also be crucial to the survival of Medicare and Food Stamps. SDI is seen as essential to carrying the whole US economy into the third industrial revolution. By doing that, it will also suck ever increasing amounts of money into a wasteful, useless and destructive project while millions die of hunger world-wide. The monstrosity of the SDI project follows from the logic of a world system dominated by military blocs themselves prey to their arms industry. In addition to this, some US strategists like Edmund Teller, believe in bankrupting the Russians through the arms race. "SDI can only aggravate the arms race", writes R. Bulkeley in a brilliant piece on the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction and its relationship to Star Wars. It puts the arms race on a higher, more expensive and more destabilising plane.

E. P. THOMPSON'S BOOK superbly outlines the logic, politics and economics of Star Wars as well as its international effects. Where it fails is in pointing the way forward for socialists in resisting such "military Keynesianism". The conclusion from the book seems to be: "Isn't it horrible, this Star Wars business?" But we already knew that didn't we? It thus looks as if it is aimed at the average *Guardian* reader rather than at the activists. Or maybe it's aimed at the "decision-makers" actually involved in the process? "We", says Thompson, "aim to make it difficult for Europe and SDI". But how can this be achieved if the strategies for progress are "beyond the limits of this book"? As the absurdity of the arms race reaches new heights, war becomes more likely - not less - and the job of finding effective strategies to put an end to this madness becomes more pressing every day. It is to be hoped that Thompson and END will soon want to tackle the issue of how to fight against Star Wars. ■

TRADE UNIONS & POLITICS Ken Coates & Tony Topham



AT A TIME when the trade union movement is suffering the frustrating experience of being rendered "industrially lame" by mass unemployment, anti-union legislation and the pressures of the slump, Ken Coates and Tony Topham's new book offers some solace.

Integrating the recent experience of 79-85 into their overall view of trade-unionism, they explore the political role of unions throughout this Century. Having noted that one of the main problems of the trade union movement in the post-war corporatist era has been the separation of union leaders - who by nature of their commitments are necessarily out of touch - from their members, the authors also underline that the corporatist structures have had all-pervasive ill-effects. This has to a large extent prevented unions from resisting the Tory onslaught in a creative way. Not only are the unions plagued by organisational weaknesses but they have also largely ignored wider community struggles.

The dismantling of pluralist values by the Thatcher Government has put an end to such corporatism. Having been excluded from the corridors of power, the trade unions have been forced to reassess their relationship to politics. Nor do they have any choice in the matter, the 1984 trade union laws have further reduced their already limited scope for independent action. Pursuing this analysis, Coates and Topham move on to assess the miners' strike. One of their criticisms is that the NUM's political perspective, in the absence of a effective relay from the Labour Party, proved too narrow. They suggest the battle for public support could have involved picketing dole offices and giving a greater emphasis to the case for coal among the poor, pensioners and

other damp ridden home owners. This exemplifies the book's main theme - it is never too late to learn that when one's industrial strength is weakened, political responses become more, not less important.

The obvious question that arises from the first section of **Trade Union & Politics** is, of course, that of the type of political activity the unions should get involved in. In articulating their response, Coates and Topham, again drawing on an impressive wealth of historical material, manage to thread a narrow path between the view that trade unions are a "revolutionary" force and the converse, expressed by writers such as Perry Anderson, that trade unions, being a product of the capitalist system, are incapable of spearheading the anti-capitalist struggle. Coates and Topham, recognising that strikes, being essentially defensive, cannot be an effective vehicle for an alternative social project, nevertheless insist that even from such limited action, new advances in trade unionist practice could be achieved.

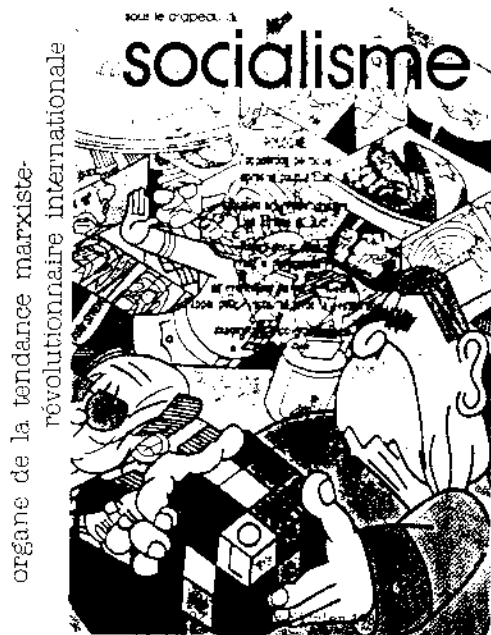
Again, they draw on the example of the miners strike to show the effect of the

involvement of women and the quasi-spontaneous public support from all over the country. However, Coates and Topham seem to shrink from the conclusion that trade unions could challenge the existing social order by integrating the demands of these new movements into the more traditional union values. They base this on the recognition that if people won't vote a Government out of office, they are unlikely to try and oust them through industrial action. This conclusion comes as a bit of an anti-climax after the first threequarters of the book and the last chapter on the *General Strike that will come* urging the unions to limit their political perspective to fighting for a Labour victory appears rather unconvincing. However, even within this narrowly "legislative" approach, they are adamant that the trade unions should put the case for a redistribution of political power as well as material wealth. This somewhat rekindles the enthusiasm carefully built up throughout the book.

Rich in detail, relying more on informed hypotheses rather than emphatic answers, **Trade Union & Politics** comes as a timely stimulant to a beleaguered trade union movement. ■



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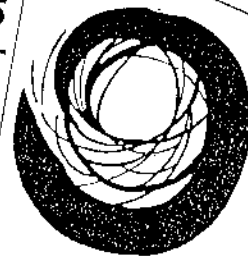
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