

A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE S

Refounding Labour
GORBACHEV REVOLUTION
PHILIPPINO GUERRILLAS
FRENCH STUDENTS
Building New ALLIANCES



**Spring
in Autumn**

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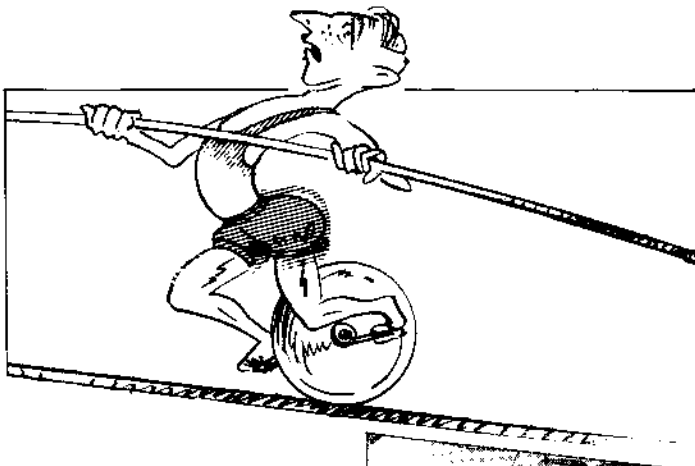
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This is stranger than I thought...

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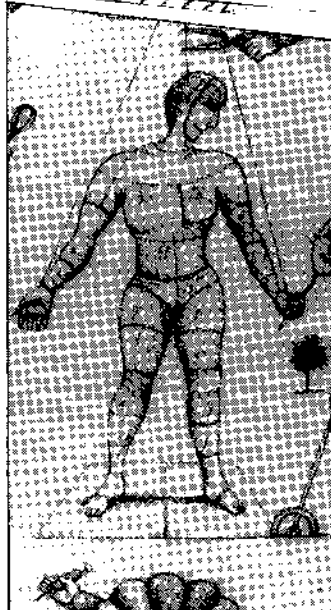
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To our readers

Production problems stopped the February/March issue of *Socialist Alternatives*. We have now acquired new hardware and warmly thank all those - here and abroad - who so generously donated. We are now back in business and, with the next issue, will be one year old.

In this issue, you will find a feature on nuclear power, the French Student Movement, and the Philippino Guerrillas.

In the wake of the next General Election and whatever the result, the Labour Left will once again find itself under attack from all sides. We explore the potential behind the idea of a refoundation of the Labour Party with Tony Benn and Hilary Wainwright.

Still, the Left must look beyond the Labour Party to define the kind of politics it fights for. We launched *Socialist Alternatives* to promote debate around the ideas of alternative politics in Britain and, true to our young tradition, explore further some of the issues involved.

Turning East, we take a sympathetic look at the Dynamics of the Gorbachev experiment with some striking Soviet views on socialist selfmanagement...

Finally, we would like to turn *Socialist Alternatives* into even more of an interactive magazine and give greater scope to our readers to either write or make suggestions on how to improve the paper. Not being a magazine of 'professional' socialists, not being tied to a party line, we crucially need feedback from our readership if we are to continue provide a useful service to the movement. Please, feel free to contact us. This is, after all, your magazine.

By the time the next issue of *Socialist Alternatives* comes out, the next General Election might well have been called, fought and, barring a miracle, we might well be on our way to our third term of Thatcherism.

If that happens, or indeed, if Labour wins, what should the Left do? Should we look to an increased Left intake to the PLP to provide the lead? Or should we entrench ourselves around our principles to resist the Labour Right's vengeful onslaught in the wake of a defeat? How should socialists embark on their road to Damascus, and what should they take to help them along the way?

If Labour loses, in our view, it will be because it has entered the electoral arena (the only one it knows) backwards - falling over itself to appear uncontentious, middle of the road and acceptable. The leadership has campaigned as if the current Right-wing consensus was given, permanent and unchallengeable. But this is a vision of politics that denies politics itself - for politics is nothing if it isn't about promoting new and 'eccentric' ideas and turning them into the 'common sense of the age'. This is indeed what Thatcher has done so successfully.

Yet, to a large extent, Thatcherism's strength has been the Left's weakness. The new Right's hegemonic steamroller has only flattened what already laid pretty low. Unlike the high priests of Eurocommunism, we are not so much mesmerised by Thatcher's successes as we are appalled by the Left's - both parliamentary and intellectual - response. You do not build popularity for socialist ideas by asking Edwina Currie to be so good as to give us a few tips.

Hegemony means the ability for a political force - Left or Right - to project a future for the whole of society. Thatcher has done it by appealing to the mythical middle-income white Southern home owning family. In the Thatcherite future, there is no room for anybody who deviates from this monolithic model. The Alliance too, are fishing in the same waters and accepting that image as the one and only positive model in today's Britain. Not to be outdone, Labour leaders are now rushing in to prove they too are 'mainstream'. But what mainstream? Surely not that of the majority of people who are not middle-class, white, married, home-owning, straight, and so on. Yet these 'minorities' represent a potential majority support for a radical alternative to Thatcherism.

Still, it would be wrong to believe, like some on the Labour Left have increasingly tended to, that a simple arithmetic addition of minorities automatically produces a majority. It doesn't; as the embattled London Councils are bitterly finding out. A majority can only be built by projecting itself as a potential majority, i.e. in terms that can relate to everyone in the community of the oppressed. Hence, an alternative socialist hegemony will not be constructed by replacing the working class as the agent for socialist transformation by blacks, lesbian and gays and so on, but by advancing values that can appeal to all 'minorities' while projecting a positive image to the rest of society.

Hence the Left needs new values. One such value must be pluralism (a highly positive concept). Where Thatcherism promotes only one type of successful individual, socialism should project a multitude of them. Where Thatcherite individualism leads to uniform yuppiedom, socialism should advance a new type of individualism where the individual, instead of being repressed and constrained by society, is positively encouraged to develop freely her/his own individuality. Such an approach, combined with the older values of equality, justice and solidarity, could provide the Left with the ideological strength it needs to confront the Thatcherite challenge.

It's high time we realised that the time to criticise the old Left is past. So is that of utopian programme writing. The Left must now regroup around those basic values that will allow it to project all the positive experiences of the past few years (and there are many: feminism, miners' strike, CND, municipal socialism...) into a broad project addressing itself to the whole of the people of Britain.

Not-so-loony Left

'Loony Lefty Lefty' screamed a most-inspired *Sun* headline. The gutter press seems to have successfully tarred some London Labour councils, along with their



anti-racist and anti-sexist policies, with the brush of insanity.

The council's response, a dogged persistence and refusal to renege on their commitments, laudable in so many ways, also seems to have added further fuel to the tabloid campaign.

Instead of defending the principles upon which such positive discrimination and anti-prejudice actions are based, Kinnock and his front-bench colleagues fall over themselves in their haste to out-rant the *Sun* and condemn such 'zealotry' and disruptive antics.

Even among the Left magazines such as *Marxism Today* and the *New Statesman*, the repudiation and distancing of Left Labour councils by 'sensible' campaigners against sexism and racism' carries on apace.

What can be done to stop such a reactionary backlash led by those erstwhile socialists? An acknowledgement that the issues of race and sex must be handled by the Left in a manner conducive to building support for those issues amongst the community, not just through resolutionsary politics, seems a prerequisite.

This need not mean a revision of the political content of such action as advocated by Eurocommunism and its current fellow-travellers.

Rather the political content of such initiatives would be enhanced if they were made part of an overall strategy by the Left, a genuine attempt to build radical alliances in the community as opposed to believing all anti-discriminatory action



must be taken in a spirit of re-entrenchment, stony faces against a hostile world.

Alex Harvey

Lesbian & Gays

The defence of lesbians and gay rights has recently been a bench mark amongst socialists. This issue, perhaps more than any other, has characterised the challenge, and the failure of the new Left lesbian and gay rights became Ken Livingstone's trade mark, and now, of course his mill stone (perceived from the standpoint of the upwardly mobile Tribunitite Left).

And in the present homophobic climate, where AIDS is commonly agreed even by some 'radical feminists' to have redefined areas of public sexual morality, the principled defence of lesbian and gay's freedom to define and live their own sexuality is not enough.

But it is ever more important to do just that. Nothing exposes the hypocrisy and narrowness of Thatcher and the moral majority's social vision than their gay bashing praise of good, old-fashioned heterosexuality.

Never mind Cecil Parkinson and Jeffrey Archer, the Right will claim its opposition to lesbian and gays to ensure it is the party of decent sexuality.

By pressing for equal rights for lesbian and gays the left is able to expose not only the shameful prejudice that underlies the fundamental social credo of the Right but also a system of narrow and arbitrary



values through which it promotes its own definitions of sexuality.

The redefinition of our sexuality that a full recognition of lesbian and gay rights calls for, can force a discovery of how artificial and restrictive so many of our perceived roles are.

Far from allowing a return to neo-Victorian sexual values which paint homosexuality as not only shameful but criminal, the Left must continue to project a different sexuality, one which, by challenging bourgeois norms of acceptability, becomes an integral part of the pluralist socialism we have to build. ■
Alex Harvey

In the meantime, the Labour Party has made practically no response to this latest cover-up by the Tories. The class divide in the country's health is the bleakest demonstration possible that class issues are still at the base of our political actions. What is the Labour Party doing to unite communities around a defence of their dangerously underfunded NHS facilities? Nothing, of course. Promoting the rights of all sections of society – the working class, women, children, blacks, gays – to the sort of health care they want and need could be another way of uniting marginal interests and the mainstream class conflict. But Neil Kinnock's too busy



Health & Class

for that, playing at being an elder statesman in the court of King Ronnie. ■
Emma Foote

The Health Education Council's latest report on the nation's health, *The Health Divide*, was the non-event of the year. At the very last minute, it's launching press conference was banned, by the Council's Chairman, Sir Brian Bailey. The report highlighted the widening gap between the health of the rich and the poor in the country, and pointed to poor diet, inadequate housing, bad working conditions and unemployment as major causes of serious illness. It bluntly stated *all the major killer diseases now affect the poor more than the rich and so do most of the less common ones.*

Sir Brian, who called the report *political dynamite in an election year*, is due to become chairman of the new Health Education Authority, when the present Council is disbanded on 1st April. The new Authority will run under NHS (i.e. government) supervision, with its Executive appointed on a short-term contract. Clearly, this latest ban is part of a larger project on the Government's part to remove the Council's independence to criticise government health policy.



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Besieged

Nearly 40 years after having been driven out of Palestine by the Zionist forces, another grim chapter has opened in the grim history of the Palestinian diaspora. Sabra, Shatila and Bourj-Al-Barajneh, the Beirut Palestinian camps which, in the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion had become synonymous with Maronite barbarism and Zionist cynicism are back in the headlines of horror.

This time they are besieged by the Syrian-allied 'moderate' (read midly pro-Western) Shiite Amal militia. Starved of food, medical supplies, shot by snipers, their houses bombed to the ground, the Palestinians have held on with such courage and determination that not even the Syrian army, which invaded Beirut in February, on a 'peacekeeping' mission has yet been able to enter the camps.

Amal and Syria claim that the 'war of the camps' has been started by the return to the camps of PLO fighters and that the



siege only aims at disarming them. This is why, presumably, Amal snipers daily shoot Palestinian women and children...

In fact, Assad has embarked on an unproven attempt at adding the 'Palestinian card' to his hand. But, in order to achieve that, he needs the PLO's skin. Hence the 'war of the camps' - implicitly supported by Israel and the West. To succeed, Assad needed a blitz victory. Amal failed to deliver and the siege sparked-off a reunification of the divided PLO as well as a general realignment of Lebanese 'Left' militias around the beleaguered Palestinians.

The next PLO National Council will see for the first time since 1983 the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front and Yasser Arafat's Fatah seat in the same hall - with both sides making concessions to the others.

Yet, beyond the bottom line of preserving Palestinian independence from other Arab states, the PLO has yet to evolve a new strategy. Arafat's dream of wren-

ching a Palestinian state through headline grabbing diplomatic overtures has ground to a halt in the face of Israeli intransigence and US contempt. On the other hand, although a strong armed defence is more necessary than ever to prevent holocaust at the hands of either the Zionists or reactionary Arabs, it is far from clear what an armed struggle strategy might look like. Palestinian leaders might do well to reconsider the role of the Palestinian masses in their revolution. They, not the diplomats, hold the key to victory. ■

John F. Walter

Shifting the Goalposts

Surprise surprise, just when the prospects for disarmament were brightening up, an official US Defence Department report titled *Soviet Military Build-Up* has made some startling discoveries. According to this, far from having slowed down on Soviet military buildup, Gorbachev, while making cosmetic overtures to the Western media, has presided over a dramatic growth in Soviet military power. In 1986 alone, says this report, the Soviets have launched 15 nuclear subs, installed 55 new intercontinental ballistic missiles and developed new sea-launched cruise missiles. But there are always the sceptics. Major Robert Eliot from the US Strategic Relations Institute warned that the report 'should be taken with a pinch of salt'. Far from representing an actual build-up, he warned, the figures merely reflect 'worst case' calculations. Phew!

Meanwhile, in Moscow, Thatcher is now insisting that disarmament be made conditional on the Soviet Union becoming a different kind of political system.

So what's happened to the heralds of the zero option? Haven't the Soviets come round to their point of view? 'Well', we are now told with a straight face, 'the zero option was only advanced because we knew the Soviets couldn't have it. It was all a joke really'. In other words, the Euromissiles were never meant as a counterpart to Soviet nuclear 'superiority'.

Gorbachev's far-reaching propositions have thrown US imperialism in confusion. At Reykjavik, the cunning Russian almost got an unsuspecting Reagan to agree on the total elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2,000. Thank God, the Star Wars issue saved the West by preventing an agreement. And the President has now been taught better than to believe his own heart-rending speeches on the end of the nuclear age.

The Americans, French and British are today falling over themselves trying to

think of some new conditions to impose on the Soviets. A short-range deal, conventional forces, Afghanistan, refuseniks... next thing you know they'll say Cruise can't leave until the USSR drops exchange controls... Meanwhile, even if there is a deal, as Weinberger is now saying, Pershing will stay, but converted to 'short range'.

So what happened? The truth is that Cruise missiles were only ever partly targeted at the Soviet war machine. Their main objective was the consolidation of US hegemony over Europe. As for the zero option, it was never more than lip service to the cause of nuclear disarmament at a time when the European peace movement was strongest. Now that the movement has lost momentum dropping, as CND in Britain, its initial direct action strategy in favour of what END leader Miet Jan Faber has called 'the long march in the institutions' - parties, churches, etc. - imperialism can get away with the most blatant cynicism. The opposition it is now facing is not that of a mass movement, but that of institutional parties.

For an example of how institutionalisation can kill a movement's spirit look at Britain where Labour has supposedly taken up CND's objectives. Kinnoch, the received wisdom goes, in order not to appear pro-Soviet, has got to refer to US-Soviet efforts at disarmament (when the last thing the US want is disarmament). Furthermore, we are told, nuclear disarmament is so important to Kinnoch that he is now prepared to keep Cruise if it promotes it. Finally, to celebrate the new spirit of peace, Labour will put all its weight behind reinforcing NATO's Oh-so-weak Eastern front. If anybody can make sense of that, I can't - nor can the voters apparently.

But where is the outrage at the US's constant shifting of the goal posts? Where is the principled attack against the shift from 'deterrence' theory - so far used to justify nuclear weapons as a necessary evil - to the 'no matter what we'll keep them' attitude now being taken by the West? Hush! There's an election around the corner!

In this matter as in others, by accepting the Right's agenda, the Left and progressive forces have boxed themselves into a corner from which they are utterly unable to resist imperialism's assaults. The one lesson of CND rebirth in the early '80s was that disarmament would only make it to the politicians' agenda if a mass movement forced it on them. The truth now emerging is that - Labour government or not - without popular pressure nuclear weapons will stay - whether Glynys likes it or not. ■

Harry Curtis

Whose defeat?

The West German elections saw the return of the Right-wing Kohl government. But there is more to this 'defeat' of the Left than meets the eye explains CLAUS DONAT.

It is rather difficult to analyse the outcome of the West German Bundestag elections. If the voters have given Chancellor Kohl's coalition four more years, the CDU/CSU coalition registered its worst result since 1949 – a drop of 4.5% since 1983. While the SPD successfully avoided a crushing defeat, it still lost 1.2% and polled 37% of the vote – their worst result since 1961. The real winners of these elections are thus the two small parties, the liberal FDP of Foreign Minister Genscher which improved 2.1% on its 7% in 1983 to 9.1% and the Greens who, with one million new votes, shot from 5.6% to 8.3%.

These elections will have a deep impact on German politics. For the first time the two great mass parties have seen their respective share of the votes fall simultaneously while smaller parties have now established themselves as a permanent element of the West German political equation. The voters have emphatically rebuked retiring SPD president, Willy Brandt who, in 1982, saw the Greens surviving 'five years at most...' Five years on, the Greens have become a permanent thorn in the social democrats' side.

The SPD registered its worst results among the service industries employees and youth. Minus 6.2% in Hamburg, minus 7.9% in Munich, minus 6.0% in Frankfurt, minus 5.7% in Stuttgart. Only in traditional blue collar constituencies has it maintained its positions – regardless of the political orientation of the local SPD leaders. In the Ruhr where Rau campaigned against an alliance with the Greens, the results were similar to that in Saarland where the regional Prime Minister, Oskar Lafontaine openly campaigned for such a Red/Green alliance.

The SPD is facing a deep structural evolution in the electorate. People increasingly refuse to identify with the traditional blue-collar industrial working class. But the social democrats' losses are the Greens' gains as shown by their results in traditional SPD regions and towns: 18.4% in Freiburg, 13.9% in Frankfurt, 14.5% in Bremen, 11.0% in Hamburg and some mind-blowing results in the 'alternative' boroughs: 30.4% in Hamburg-St-Pauli; 41.8% in Bremen-Ostertor. At the same time, they have stabilised their positions in 'difficult' regions: 7.5% in North-Westphalia Rhenanie, 7.7% in Bavaria, 7.1% in Saarland.

The Greens' electoral gains confront the SPD leaders with a real Catch 22. On the one hand services industries workers and the small petit-bourgeoisie once solidly SPD, are now voting for the small parties. On the other hand, if the SPD takes the road of a Red/Green alliance, they risk alienating their 'moderate' electorate to the FDP. The crisis of the SPD is thus only beginning.



Greens marching on.

Meanwhile, The Greens seem to have only cause for rejoice. In spite of internecine strife, they have managed to campaign firmly on their programme emphasising their differences with the mainstream parties – especially on ecology and peace. They can now depend on a parliamentary group of 44 which, in addition to the old 'stars', Otto Schilly, Petra Kelly and Antje Wolmer, has seen the arrival of disarmament expert Alfred Mechttersheimer, technology-expert tradeunionist Ulrich Briefs and even a cop, Thomas Wueppesahl who founded a 'progressive police personnel association'. Another notable feature is the fact that the Greens, with the smallest

overall parliamentary group, has the largest number of women MPs – 25 – of all parties.

The Greens are thus well set for four years of solid parliamentary work. Yet, the Greens have had a relatively easy campaign. The struggle between 'realists' and 'fundamentalists' – or 'eco-socialists' as they are now named – will take a new bitter turn if and when the SPD starts making coalition overtures at the national level. The SPD is already pushing the Greens towards an alliance in the coming local elections in Bremen, Rheinland-Palatinat, Schleswig-Holstein – even Hamburg. But the SPD is not without its divisions either and those opposed to the Red/Green road are now back on the warpath.

A number of obstacles thus stand in the way of a 'Red/Green' alliance on a programme acceptable to both the Greens and a renovated SPD. If such an alliance is to emerge, the Greens, too, will have to do their homework and clarify their positions.

The elections also saw a slight shift to the Left, with the ruling CDU/CSU-FDP coalition losing 9 seats. Within the ruling coalition, the liberals gained ground as Kohl and Strauss' rabidly right-wing campaign (referring to 'concentration camps' in the GDR and comparing Gorbachev to Goebbels) made the FDP appear as a moderating influence on their CDU/CSU partners. reinforced the liberals – some say this was not entirely accidental... As a result, some social democrats are now hoping for the ruling coalition to break up thus opening the way for a new SPD/FDP alliance – thus removing the Green headache. But, for such a possibility to acquire substance, the SPD would first have to significantly dent the Greens' electoral support.

Finally, the CDU/CSU have lost ground among the German peasants who massively abstained. At the same time, and in spite of the Rightwing rhetoric of the Christian Democrats, the tiny neo-Nazi party (NPD) doubled its vote to 0.6% which makes it eligible to claim the hefty sum of DM 1.4 million (£450,000) towards electoral expenses. Thus the CDU/CSU now stands to lose votes both to the Right and to the Centre.

The German political landscape is undergoing a major evolution which will deeply transform it. In this changing environment it will be up to the SPD and the Greens to make the most of opportunities as they emerge and advance a credible alternative to Chancellor Kohl's neo-liberal conservatism. ■

El Nuevo Movimiento

Six months after his reelection, Felipe Gonzales is an unexpected renewal of the popular movement. JOHN F. WALTER reports on the school pupils who started the biggest shake up of Spanish society since General Franco's death..

Barely 9 months after being returned to office with an increased majority, Felipe Gonzales's socialists are facing the strongest wave of popular unrest Spain has seen since the days of the Republic in the 1930s.

This unprecedented outbreak, which started in December with the massive student demonstrations, has now spread through to the workers – even the doctors are striking over the state of the health service.

What has happened to Spain's socialists, who up to then had, better than any right-wing government would ever have, forced upon Spain a massive recession, the highest level of unemployment in Western Europe, entry into NATO and the EEC, even the privatisation of national assets? Where has all the irresistible Felipe effect gone?

The socialists who had thought they could strain the Spanish social fabric almost indefinitely in the name of 'modernisation' are now faced with a people that refuses to stand for a dual society.

As in France, it is the students and school pupils who sparked off the movement. As in France, the student movement developed specific modes of organisation which put the emphasis on self-organisation and self-management. Elected and revocable student councils soon sprang up in every school and university and evolved their own regional and national co-ordinating structures. Unlike France, however, the movement lasted more than a month and, almost from the start, a spontaneous alliance was forged between school and university students and the rest of Spanish youth, over 50% of which are unemployed.



Trained by General Franco...

The level of despair among Spanish youth today can only be grasped through the violence of the *movida*, a unique phenomenon consisting of a human wave of young unemployed and outcasts who, after a few drinks, go on the rampage, looting the town's shopping areas and pelting the Guardia Civil.

But the government has not been able to cash in on the violence as the students squarely put the blame for the despair – and hence the violence – on the shoulders of the socialists' irresponsible social policies. This stance was made all the more popular by the fact that much of the police's hierarchy, structure and methods are – and are seen to be – relics from General Franco's days.

Far from simply demanding the abandonment of the Government's plans to cut higher education, the students have put forward their own alternative demands and are now fighting, not only for universal access to a free and properly funded education, but also for education to be, in the words of their *Platform* 'non-religious, non-sexist and for peace' and, crucially, they are fighting for control over the education system. One of their main criticisms of the proposed reforms was that they further restricted the right of students to participate in the decisions concerning them.

It is striking to see how the demand for increased control, itself an aspect of self-management, has emerged as one of the central characteristics of the Spanish student movement which even took it one step further than the French did. Interestingly, although less overtly 'apolitical' than their French counterparts, the Spanish students have made clear their rejection of traditional 'delegational'

politics. Of the political groups, only those, such as the *Movimiento Comunista* (1) who have actively sought to promote self-organisation rather than capture control have seen their influence grow. The 'vanguardist' sects have remained stagnant, generals without an army.

In Spain as in France, the student's example has sparked off a wave of strikes. A tidal wave of industrial protest and mass strikes has gripped Spain forcing even the socialist-dominated UGT trade-union to distance itself from the government and join the Communist-led Workers' Commissions (CCO) in pressing for across-the board wage increases of around 7%. In a country where in the past 12 months profits have risen by 6% while real wages fell by the same amount, workers feel they are victims of a singularly selective crisis. A general strike called by the CCO was nearly called off and the unions are set to keep the pressure up on the government.

However, no co-ordinating body has been set up between the students and the trade unions and when joint demonstrations have taken place, it has very much been through local initiatives. The active wing of the trade-union movement, the CCO, dominated as they are by the Communist Party, are wary of sharing any sort of power with the students – rather like the French CP had back in '68. On both sides sectionalism and, sadly, sectarianism are checking the development of a movement that, given the chance could open the way for a major political and social upheaval.

Still, there have been signs of progress towards a greater unity. Already an effective 'rainbow alliance' of all Left, Communist, ecologist, feminist and alternative groups had formed around the NATO referendum. The new spirit of unity thus created had been reflected in the Communist Party where warring factions had reunited under the leadership of Gerardo Iglesias who promised to turn his party into something of a Spanish Green party.

It will now be up to those forces who have so spectacularly burst onto the stage of Spanish politics to advance their own alternative vision and turn their movement into a force for self-management, freedom and socialism. ■

(1) *Movimiento Comunista*: Revolutionary Left group formed in the '70s along 'maoist' lines. Far from degenerating into a dogmatic sect, the MC has in recent years shown itself most receptive to new themes and concerns such as feminism, homosexuality, anti-militarism, ecology and so on. Whilst remaining firmly revolutionary in outlook, they place a strong emphasis on self-management – as a means and an end to socialism.

Wapping: End of the Street?

The Wapping dispute ended with a crushing defeat. Unlike the miners' strike it contained few new elements. KEIR STARMER considers some of the deeper issues behind this victory for capital.

The end of the News International dispute at Wapping poses very real questions not only for the trade union movement but also for advocates of the socialist 'alternative'. Three aspects of the dispute warrant close attention. Firstly, why was there such a lack of union solidarity with the print workers? Secondly, what view should be taken of the alarming increase in state power to protect individual 'entrepreneurs' and, thirdly, how could trade unions as they stand today fit into the anti-capitalist alliance for 'alternative' socialism? (This, of course, includes the problem of how to approach new technology.)

Just as with the NGA dispute at Warrington and the year long miners' strike, the TUC response and support for the print workers, extended no further than resolutions of condemnation at the sacking of the News International printers. Even worse, it was TGWU drivers who made sure that at the end of the strike Murdoch could claim that far fewer of his papers were lost than would normally have been the case in any one year (not to mention the action of the EETPU in helping undermine negotiations between Rupert Murdoch and the NGA and SOGAT). Of course, in part, this lack of solidarity is a reflection of the hostile economic climate of 1986-7, with 3.5 million unemployed etc. But also it points to an ideological victory for Thatcherism.

Unlike Heath before her, who sought only to reduce the power of trade unions, Mrs Thatcher has sought to undermine the very basis of their existence. This she has done by arguing that workers' interests are synonymous with the interests of free enterprise, and hence best protected by it, rather than out dated unions. Over the past eight years, the trade union movement has not won any major industrial dispute. Thatcher can legitimately claim a victory so far as her assault on the unions is concerned.

Where 'ideology' has not proved enough to force the trade union movement on the retreat, State power put the boot in to defend 'free enterprise. No dismantling of state machinery here as in the welfare sector. After Orgreave, no

one should have been surprised when 'paramilitary' policing methods emerged in Wellclose square. Whilst, of course, police violence and provocation should be condemned at every opportunity, it is necessary to go further and recognise that policing of any sort that is unaccountable stands directly in the path of any progress towards social emancipation, whether it be of workers made redundant in the pursuit of yet further profit or whether it be of ethnic groups coming to terms with racist oppression.

This leads to the question of the role the police should play, if any, in civil society. Who are they protecting and from what? Who controls them and for whose benefit? In short these questions bring us



Keeping the peace at Wapping.

back to the age-old question of 'the state'. The scenes at Wapping and the general build up in repressive state power in the last eight years, make an answer to this question all the more pressing. Selfmanaging socialism aims at reducing

the role of the state to its coordinating functions whereby various self-managing initiatives can be brought together, just as they might be at local, regional, national or international level. What is important is that any state-level 'coordination' must,

by very definition, come and be controlled from the 'bottom up'. With this analysis in mind and given state action at Wapping it is clear that thorough democratisation of the state is needed, including making the police accountable to the community they are meant to serve. It is no good simply criticising the violent aspects of current policing as Kinnock and Willis have done, without addressing these deeper issues.

Turning to the third aspect of the dispute *Socialist Alternatives* has consistently argued that the emergence of new social movements means that we must rethink 'socialism' in such a way that their emancipatory demands blend into an alliance with the demands of the fighting section of the working class.

'the trade union movement has not won any major industrial dispute since 1979'

The defeat of the NGA and SOGAT at Wapping, not only further shows how these demands overlap (many sacked workers were part-time women workers), but also comes as a timely reminder that whilst working class struggle may have changed in nature over the last 100 years of so, it is still very much a reality and is central to any wider emancipatory framework. We cannot argue for the right of women, blacks, gays and lesbians etc to organise autonomously and articulate their own demands, if we are not prepared to defend also the right of trade unions to organise and take effective action. This naturally involves the positive reversal of the 'ideological' onslaught of the last 8 years. Whilst the task will be a hard one, an alliance with the other emancipatory movements can only help - for they all confront questions of production in different ways. With questions such as those of who should produce, for what, in what way etc the criteria for new technology should be social usefulness rather than increased profit margins. One good way to advance the cause of socially useful production would be to develop a nation-wide campaign of struggles around the call for a European-wide reduction in the working week to 35 hours without reduction in living standards. As well as reducing unemployment, it would take us one step nearer to a different society in which people will have time and scope to develop away from the oppression of the workplace. From this standpoint, the union movement could have had the strength to offer alternatives to the 5,500 redundancies at Wapping. ■

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Spring in *December*



The French student struggles in December of last year came as a snub to traditional political organisations. In spite of the apparent lack of 'revolutionary' demands, the student's emphasis on solidarity and equality and their reliance on self-organisation may well lead to much more than the shelving of one or two governmental initiatives argues MAURICE NAJMAN.

Fifteen years into the crisis, the Left in France was on the retreat on all fronts. Socialist values had hit rock bottom and individualism, law and order and even plain racism were going through the roof in the ideological markets. Neo-liberalism was on the offensive and France appeared all but resigned to becoming a dual society. It was the end of confrontational politics; it was the coming of age of French democracy which had at last elevated to the status of a normal liberal democracy...

Neo-liberalism knew it would not have a smooth ride over French society. Too many social and political resistances, too many cultural traditions stood in its way. The social and political movements would react at some point. The whole question was where that point was and what form the reaction would take.

The problem for the movements was that they did not seem to have any alternative to present and that this inability, alongside other factors (unemployment being the greatest), accounted for the conspicuous silence of the Left.

This seemed an easy victory for the prophets of 'winning France', the fans of private enterprise and the shibboleths of 'market democracy' reinforced by the realignment of the '68 generation, now constituting the shock troops of neo-liberalism's ideological offensive....

If there were still differences between the conservatives bloc and the progressive one the Socialist is trying to set up, there was no opposition of projects anymore, merely two versions of the same basic model. This opposition had been the hallmark of French politics since the French revolution and had its roots in social divisions which, thanks to modernisation, are nowadays increasingly obsolete. This is most clearly seen in the dramatic decline of support for the Communist Party. In its own (deformed) way, it represented the expression of a radical opposition to the established order and its disappearance would open the way for a Socialist Party to establish itself as the sole political and electoral focus for all those who, for one reason or the other, remained more or less opposed to the social consequences of letting loose the market economy (rather like the US Democracy in a way).

But the Student movement has wrecked havoc in this well prepared scenario. It is yet too soon to provide an analysis of this winter's movement that could go beyond the *a priori* justification of theories developed earlier and in relation to other movements. Yet it is possible to advance hypotheses and intuitions. True or false, it is nonetheless a necessary and useful process to conduct. The first thing to note is that for the first time in 15 years a mass movement (again led by the young) has, through mass democratic activity, strikes and demonstrations, forced a government to capitulate on the battlefield. Quite ironical if one considers that this was the government of 'force' and 'authority'!

'Why should we deduce, from the fact that the movement has not, in contrast with '68, placed its demands in the framework of an overall revolt that French youth accepts society as it is?'

The victory will have long term effects and radically change the French political climate: it proved that 'they' can be defeated. Not a small feat. Even if the basic situation is still the same, the 'structural' crisis, the overall balance of forces and the disarray of the labour movement are still with us, the movement has at least resulted in a 'pause' in the government's neo-liberal reforms and a shelving of a programme which, a few months ago, was regarded like holy scripture.

At the ideological level - particularly important at a time when no ideology has yet been completely established, its hegemony - neoliberalism has been dealt a body blow. As the sociologist Edgar Morin rightly noted in *Le Monde* (13/12/1986) '...through the young, a large part of French society is regrouping around its original programme, that of 1789'. By fighting against a law which speeded up the march initiated by the socialists towards more social inequalities and a dual society, the students and school pupils have ripped open one of the major elements of capital's 'crisis solving' mechanism. Tentatively, they have laid down the basis for a general recomposition founded on the revolutionary values of equality and solidarity. And in doing it they have given mass action a new legitimacy.

The University system reform was but a part of a global project advanced by a right-wing education think tank grouped around the semifascist *Union Nationale Interuniversitaire* one of whose leaders is today one of Chirac's main advisers on Higher education. The aim of these people was to reshape completely French higher education by promoting an open competition between universities. This of course would mean the end of national degrees and the freedom for universities to set their fees at any level they wanted as well as asking for funding from industry...

The students have refused to accept the proposed 'double selection' (once for a first degree course, then for the second degree). They have rejected the proposed 'selection before trial' and thrown out capitalist criteria of 'competition', 'survival of the fittest', advancement of the sole 'winners'. In short, they have refused what was one aspect of an overall management strategy aimed at splitting up the labour collective, the development of low-paid insecure jobs for the young, women and immigrants, and, crucially, at integrating workers and technical staff to the 'enterprise culture' through all sorts of 'Japanese' methods.

The student's victory on this front is a major which could become even more significant if the call issued by the *National Coordination* before its self-dissolution for students to advance alternative proposals taking into account the interests of workers and the unemployed is heeded. Should they do that, the students could give the signal to a global anti-liberal counter-offensive.

The values of equality and solidarity that underlay the movement and opened the way for a wide popular consensus around the students grew out of a wide variety of struggles and social processes which often took place outside universities.

It is no accident that, as a result of the students' movement, the government should have shelved its proposals to make access to French nationality more difficult to the immigrant population. One could already see the universities and schools mobilising for a fight in defence for the immigrant population's basic rights.

Without being obvious, the links between those two issues were forged in the everyday experiences of the generation which emerged from December with its own identity and demands. As the writer Albano Cordeiro rightly noted 'nobody thought of making a distinction between the 'French' and the 'others'. This prevailed from day one, i.e. before the death of Malik (born of Algerian parents and savagely killed by police truncheons)... One can thus say that Malik's death (as well as that of Abdel, a young Algerian killed, not as a result of the student movement, but of the Government's anti-immigrant 'law and order' policy, symbolise the end of a 'long march' started back in the '70s and which led to conquest of the 'right to difference' for a section of France's population which has been at the receiving end of all discriminations and racisms - the youth born of post-colonial immigration.'

Just looking at the demonstration on TV one could see the massive scale on which the 'second generation' of immigrant workers (the beurs (1) participated, often assuming leading roles. This 'fusion' is not just a result of the multi-cultural nature of French education. If the *identification* between the movements was so strong it was also because a great many features of the student movement had already been found in the movement of the 'second generation' in recent years: jealously guarded autonomy, rejection of any 'political' recuperation, non-violence and the knack to present as 'legitimate' their ideas and demands.

The role of *SOS Racisme* was, from this point of view, central (regardless of some of the many criticisms that can be levelled at the movement's leadership): in a great many lycees (secondary schools) its activists took the lead from day one and became the 'cadres' of the movement.

In the wake of the anti-racist struggles of the past few years, lycee-based 'Band-Aid' and Third-World committees sprang up and developed a strong sense of solidarity with the oppressed people of the Third World.

In this impressionistic fashion, the conditions for a wider movement slowly matured – to the surprise of those 'official' ideologists who only saw in the young a projection of their own image, the 'Bof generation (2)', disillusioned by the 'revolutionary' dreams of '68, a generation as enthusiastically converted to 'market democracy' and to bourgeois parliamentary institutions as they had once been to unreconstructed stalinism. These



Political? We're only doing our job!

'Do you call 'apolitical' a movement that forces a government to backtrack on one of its major projects and shelve the bulk of its legislative agenda?'

ideologues, shibboleths of 'Western human rights ideology' convinced, after a late discovery of the Gulag, that any project aiming at radically transforming society is necessarily a one-way ticket to totalitarianism jumped onto the movement's bandwagon so as to legitimise their renouncements and, at last, escape the guilt of their reconciliation to society as it is.

Would you call it apolitical?

Two French students, YVES and RENAUD reflect on the experience of a movement that shook French youth. The movement seen by those who made it.

—For years universities had failed to provide a focus for socialisation. Students came to the same place but didn't know each other. There was no sign of any ideology except for the tiny groups of student union and political activists.
Renaud

—I find it hard to understand what students thought before they took to the streets. Having been formed by a traditional Marxism, it is often difficult for me to grasp the new phenomena that have deeply influenced young people in recent years. **Yves**

—They spoke of a new individualism and competitive spirit. But not enough attention was paid to what contradicted this individualist egotism. In the previous few years the very strong mobilisations against racism and in solidarity with the starving in the Third World had been an expression of solidarity in action. **Yves**

—Like everybody else, I have been very surprised by the movement. With hindsight, I see that there were indications of what was coming. For example, there had been very strong student demonstrations in Bordeaux and Montpellier. I, for one, thought they were nothing but isolated incidents. **Yves**

—I think it is now clear that what emerged in the movement was a new generation, a generation which in a very short time went through an extraordinary experience of struggle, stikes, direct democracy, police repression and, finally, victory. I think this was indisputably a very strong political experience especially from a movement claiming to be apolitical. **Yves**

—After the police violence and the death of Malik apoliticism disappeared from student meetings. Better still, it was the 'apoliticos' who were now making speeches that were clearer and more determined than those of the early days 'politicos'. **Renaud**

—In the beginning the German Greens were not looking to change society either. They were fighting at grass roots level to solve ecological and environmental problems but that led to a rejection of productivism and of capitalist logic. **Yves**

—The traditional manipulatory tactics of the far left did not work. The students refused to endow a few with a monopoly of representation. They refused to trust anybody else to solve their own problems. The clearest indication of this was the election of revocable delegates on a binding mandate. **Renaud**

—There was also the tremendous role played by second generation immigrants in many universities. The 'bours' had the leading role and often they were the most determined participants. They greatly contributed to the ethical dimension of the movement and put flesh on the demand for equality. **Renaud**

The only way to impose such a 'reading' of the movement was to discredit all references to May '68. It is striking to see the masochistic delectation with which they echoed the barely used slogan '68 c'est vieux, 86 c'est mieux' (3) and tried to blow it into significance. To them, what is 'old hat' in '68 is not the (pseudo) leninist practice and discourse through which they reduced the radically new content of this great self-managing movement, but its subversive dimension, its character of radical protest (not to say revolutionary potential). What's 'way better' in '86 is of course the fact that the students and school pupils have not (at least explicitly) put forward demands for radical social change.

Thus, in a neat hat-trick, a great socio-political movement was turned into a 'democratic lobby', a 'revamped human rights league', a 'moral generation'... Anything to conceal the emergence of a social force, of a *new political subject* defining, through its aspirations and dynamics, a 'new political culture' in very much the same way as other 'alternative' movements, women and peace for example, have done.

Take, for example, the much publicised 'apoliticism' of the movement.... Do you call *apolitical* a movement that forces a government – this government of all governments – to backtrack on one of its major projects and to shelve the bulk of its legislative agenda? Do you call *apolitical* a movement that opens up such divisions in the ruling right-wing coalition as to plunge the country on the brink of a major political crisis? Nonetheless, by claiming such 'apoliticism' the students – in the early phase of the movement especially, but less and less as the movement's internal dynamics pushed them forward – were trying to say something. What exactly that was is open to various interpretations. Albano Cordeiro, for one, sees it as 'a refusal to act as a 'base' or 'legitimation' from which political forces (including trade-unions) could speak for them. It is thus the traditional function of the political structures whose role it is to transmit demands and grievances from the bottom up which is under attack... As if to accept labelling their movement 'political' opened the way for institutional politics to appropriate it'. 'Apoliticism' as a guarantee of the movement's autonomy? After all, why not?...

What is loosely labelled 'politics' is not only a word alien to their life (not only *their* life either) but is perceived as totally unable (as a representative system) to honestly reflect a selforganised community without distorting its will in the process. From this came the procedural obsession with the extreme 'formalisation' of the structures of self-organisation and of mass democracy and which periodically erupts in local or sectoral strikes (through strike committees) or at the national or general level (the Paris Commune in France, the 1905 and 1917 Soviets in Russia, the 1920's Rate – Councils – in Hungary and Germany, the self-managing committees in newly liberated Algeria, the 'coordinadores industriales' – industrial coordinations – and 'commando comunales' – municipal committees – in Allende's Chile, even the 'shoras' – councils – in the early stages of the Iranian revolution) has a wider meaning and one would be forgiven for asking 'Why is that which is good for the students not good for society as a whole?' Cordeiro rightly notes that 'nobody wants to see this wider political meaning of the movement because it contradicts the principle which postulates the irrevocability of MPs for the five years of their mandate'... and because, more generally, it is contradictory with a liberal democracy built around the voters as sectionalised citizens, disconnected from the very communities that shape their social individualities. And some want us to believe that the students are the guardians of liberal democracy...

The movement did not proclaim revolutionary aims? Big deal! Neither has it explicitly declared its will to link with society as a whole and thus with the world of labour? Yes but even that changed as soon as State coercion entered the arena. The question is are we justified in seeing a rejection where a less dogmatic approach would seem to point towards a void, itself a consequence of past failure and of the lack of alternative 'programmatic' references and towards the inherent limitations of a movement which had too little time to develop to its full potential.

Why should we deduce, from the fact that the movement has not, in contrast to '68, placed its demands in the framework of an overall revolt, that French youth accepts society as it is?

In fact, the student and school pupil movement, similar to all sociopolitical movements before, bears no given direction. In

'It is therefore the traditional function of the political structures whose role it is to transmit demands and grievances from the bottom up which is under attack'

itself, it is no more 'integrated' than it is 'revolted'. It is pregnant with a plurality of contents and possible directions, some of which are mutually contradictory. Its future direction can only be the product of a number of specific internal and external, political, social and cultural factors themselves the result of a complex balance of forces, the least element of which is not the dominant interpretation of the movement the media have given.

Its consensual dimension can just as well be seen as a protection against the harsh realities of a crisis-ridden civil society as the sign of a 'spontaneous' political intelligence where the limited nature of the demands and the high level of abstraction of the values advanced appear as the only available method preserving both the unity and the political dynamics of the movement.

Great flows of ink have been spilled on the 'realism' of this youth which did not care for 'utopias' in their struggle – thus reducing the movement to a form of 'moralising corporatism'. Of course, it would be wrong to read in the movement a revolutionary content only conspicuous by its absence. But why oppose 'morals' and 'utopia' as some have done. Aren't solidarity and equality 'concrete utopias', at a time when official statistics show that 40% of young people are unemployed and that only 26% have found stable employment?

After December, the young people have said 'nothing will ever be the same'. The experience of these past few months will see, let us hope, the future realisation of this other 'utopia'...

Notes:

1. 'beurs': slang word used by 'second generation' arabs to label themselves. 2. In 1982, the *Nouvel Observateur* magazine published a famous study of French youth which it termed the 'Bof generation' which roughly means the 'couldn't give a toss generation'... 3. '68 is old hat, '86 is way better'.

Alliances and *Left Strategy*

DAVID BURCHELL, leading member of the Australian Communist Party debates the issues raised by what has been termed the 'alliances strategy'.

The following article is intended to provoke discussion around aspects of a trend of thought in left politics which, while hardly new in a general sense, has taken new directions and gained new emphases in recent years - which I will call, for shorthand purposes, 'the alliance strategy'. Briefly expressed, the alliance strategy takes as its central reference-point an image of the political canvas where the radical and progressive forces are linked by a system of tacit and explicit alliances developed through the processes of day-to-day political programs and political theory. At the same time, it proposes a concept of alliance which is far broader and more complex than simple programmatic compromises or political deals: one which picture processes of dialogue and communication (and, at times, even of struggle)(1) as forging links between social and political forces and movements, their political and day-to-day cultures, and their theoretical traditions. It is, in a sense, a generalisation of what we have learnt about the nature of political alliances on to the complex terrain of society as a whole.

While this is basically a practical strategy, in the sense that it seems to have emerged over time as a fact against the grain of several of our traditional theoretical assumptions, it is one which has considerable consequences for our theory as well - even though valuable precedents for it can be found in the theoretical writings of Antonio Gramsci and in the political writings of other figures such as Togliatti. It is also an experience which suggest some lessons for how we conceive of the formation and development of our theory itself. Eric Aarons put it polemically, but well, when he asked:

'But if we give up the view that marxism does, or should, or will (if re-interpreted yet again) provide us with a unitary theory, a total explanation, a formula for prediction - will that not stop us from getting it all together in our heads' and leave us all at sea?' (2)

Nevertheless, this still leaves open the thorny question of how and from where we obtain 'our theoretical resources' in the first instance. If this is not at the present time a critical puzzle, this is very largely because we still have so much theoretical catching-up to do.

Now, on the question of the desirability of coalitions or alliances among the left and progressive forces on the plane of political practice, not many of us, on what could reasonably be called the renewable left, are in much doubt. Obviously, the left is in a bad way (and this goes for the whole left, not merely the organised left) and without some forms of alliances and coalitions with like-minded people and movements, the left is not only not going to get very far, it may, in fact, in the foreseeable future, cease to exist in any organised manner at all. But what is in doubt, and what is in desperate need of a bit of 'theory' in the sense of the word outlined above, is how we should conceive of such alliances operating, what should be the groundrules and even, in a sense, the morality under which they should be constituted, and what, in the first instance, they should set out to achieve.

There are two distinct problems here. The first relates to how alliances operate between what might be called the traditional left - and in particular the trade union movement - and parts of the left outside it; the second to how alliances should be constructed in a more general sense. The first of these relates largely to ways of looking at alliances which are fundamentally hostile to many aspects of socialist renewal altogether. The second relates to attitudes among members of the organised left who are broadly sympathetic to the alliance strategy but who, by dint of their political education, force of habit, and so, tend to conceive of the strategy in a reductive, hierarchical, or even downright authoritarian manner.

The argument against the alliance strategy, in the sense in which it is defined above, can take either of at least two forms. The first (and more traditional) approach is to assert what is called the 'leading role of the working class' (meaning, in fact, the trade union movement), in any alliance or coalition between left and progressive forces. Now, it bears saying that simply to assert the 'leading role' if anything in this manner is quite meaningless; meaningless not because the working class is 'finished' as a class (whatever that might mean) but because, literally, it has no practical reference to reality. 'The working class' (i.e. the organised working class) simply acts in any concrete political conjuncture as an element of a coalition of forces - social, institutional, even cultural - defined by the political balance of forces in society as a whole. Obviously, as an organised grouping with an enormous amount of muscle, the trade union movement has to be an important part of any realistic strategy for change. But no power on earth can give it some sort of centrifugal force in alliances negotiated on the terrain of political activity as we daily experience it. 'Leading roles' are not bestowed from the heavens - they are earned.

The second argument against the alliance strategy as defined above is a good deal more difficult to come to grips with. Its key phrase – as canonised in the title of a booklet produced by the hard-line wing of the British CP – is 'class politics', though it is far from clear exactly what that means. A familiar feature of the 'class politics' school of thought is its propensity to define itself not as a positive approach to understanding political reality, but rather by means of a primarily negative critique of the alliance strategy. Thus, the authors of the *Class Politics* pamphlet describe the theoretical basis of what they describe as the 'newer left' as 'the idea that ... issues such as peace, sexism, racism and law and order are not class issues and cannot be fought out as *class issues*' (my emphasis – DB), entailing a strategy based upon 'substituting the politics of new 'movement' and 'forces' for class politics' and 'denying that they can be adequately located there' and leading to an incipient liberal pluralism in which the 'new forces' and indeed the labour movement itself become so many discrete interest groups which can only be held together at any one time by a populist electoral programme based on the lowest common denominator of political acceptability' (3).

And indeed an obsession with 'pluralism', as the perceived 'dissolving agent' of an ordered hierarchy of political forces such as is allegedly represented by the term 'class politics', is one of the hallmarks of the class politics approach.

Yet, viewed in another light, the class politics approach appears not so much as a nostalgic view of socialist political

'Leading roles are not bestowed from the heavens. They are earned'

strategy, as a theoretical construct serving rather different practical ends. On one level, 'class analysis' serves as a hammer for beating over the head certain trends in the women's movement in recent years which are frankly sceptical of the supposed 'marxist-feminist' synthesis as a basis for socialist feminist practice. On another, it serves as a kind of moral prioritisation of the concerns of the traditional left, by the rather oblique device that class politics is seen to be effected by bringing the priorities of all major parties in alliances to the altar of an already defined class analysis. And, of course, both these elements are related: it is precisely the 'betrayal' of 'unity' within the working class (defined as above) that contemporary trends in socialist feminism have engendered, via their critique of the structures as well as the practice of the labour movement, which constitutes the defining case of refusal to succumb to the arbiter of class analysis.

In a theoretical sense, this class politics vogue, which is itself deeply implicated in what Stuart Hall has aptly described as the 'fundamental marxist revival' is both a self-protective response to the bewildering new forms of the left's crisis, and a defensive response to the theoretical gulf which looms between older styles of politics and the politics of newer forces and movements. But, in a practical sense, it simply serves to carry on the old vanguardist approaches by new means: class politics, like the leading role of the working class, is a fount of true consciousness not itself amenable to transformation or redirection in the unfolding of the alliance process.

The second problem arises among supporters of the alliance strategy who tend to reduce it to a mechanical and hierarchical process which reproduces many of the least attractive features of the existing organised left – and which are at least a part of the reason for its waning influence and appeal. This kind of approach can take any of a number of forms – appeals for coalitions based substantially along existing organisational lines, which become (or tend to become) mere coalitions of convenience for the sake of individual issues which are left essentially unrelated to other

issues; notions of new parties or organisations which substantively reproduce existing structures or patterns of work, without any conception of the different needs or philosophies of groups at present outside such structures; and conceptions of alliances or coalitions based upon interpretations of programmatic unity which tend to reduce the idea of common programs to the lowest-common denominator approach. This last tendency is especially galling when it is precisely the operation of contradictions which socialists schooled in the marxist tradition have always felt to be the driving force of practical and theoretical advance.

Undoubtedly, it would be easy enough to find broad agreement between, say, the trade union movement and much of the women's movement, for the proposition that 'working class living standards have to be defended and improved'. It is much less easy, however, to forge instant unity around the question of how, in an economy where (whatever the method of ownership of the means of production) the total wage bill is subject to definite constraints, redistribution within the working class ought to be effected, so that the preferential status for men's work can be countered. In the words of Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, 'If women are to share domestic labour equally with men, then men will have to increase their time spent on unpaid work. If women to increase the level of their earnings to the point where they match men's, then men's earnings will inevitably decline in relation to women's. If women are to occupy skilled, higher-paid jobs in equal numbers with men, then there are bound to be fewer of these jobs available to men' (4).

It is difficult to see how what I will term the reductionist view of alliance politics can cope with this sort of challenge. Where the class politics and leading role approaches try to bluff through such contradictions by saying (for instance) that industrial militancy is



Women brushing up the left's image.

capable of solving all wage questions, the reductionist view of alliance politics simply remains silent.

But it is impossible to understand the nature of the obstacle posed by the reductionist view of coalition politics unless it is recognised how deeply it runs through the accumulated processes of thought and habit of all of us.



The workers at the centre?

In the final analysis, the reductionist view of coalition politics (even in its most sophisticated forms) tends to defuse the impact and the implications of the roles, aims and philosophies of the constituent elements in alliances – for instance, by reducing them to the status of minority, or single issue, groups which are then felt to be somehow 'all part of the same mass'. Yet is precisely upon the terrain of the autonomy and the difference of the constituent elements that genuine, fruitful alliances are negotiated and maintained.

Historically speaking, it has been the reductionist view of coalition politics which has dominated the left's conception of the role of alliances and alliance strategies. For many years, alliances were treated basically as expedencies outside the normal ground rules of politics: where the out-and-out vanguardists approach had, of necessity to be temporarily tucked away in a cupboard, as it were - as in the Popular Front era (5). Historically, it is as close to a strategy of alliances in its own right as we have been able to get.

It is no coincidence, then, that the first serious attempts at formulating the kind of alliance strategy discussed here (and the kind of organisational forms capable of co-existing with it) came from outside the political culture of the traditional left – which is to say, of course, from within the experience of the 'new' women's movement of the 1970s. Here the oft-cited classical text in Hilary Wainwright's introduction to *Beyond the Fragments* (1979), although perhaps a more developed conception of the same basic

approach is again provided by Beatrix Campbell: 'Alliances are not simply about arithmetic – aggregating groups of people, regarded as minorities, adding them up so that they become a majority. That view of alliance reduces politics to electoral arithmetic. Alliances are political processes which transform the constituent parts in their encounter with each other. They are political dialogues in which the constituent parts become both collective agents for change and also the subjects of change' (6).

This is an important concept, and one fraught with implications for the rest of our theory. And yet the theoretical tools we have inherited from the marxist tradition are almost silent on the nature of this kind of encounter. I would agree with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their remarkable recent work on *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* that a prime reason for this is the all pervasive 'essentialism' which has underlain many marxist conceptions of the political process – although, as will be noted shortly, I have some reservations about other aspects of Laclau and Mouffe's approach (7).

By essentialism I mean, very broadly, the belief that the political process is given structure by an essence or essences which have a kind of universal quality independent of the existence of the structure itself. 'Motive forces', determinations in the last or any other instance, 'objective' class interests and so on are all concepts which have played this sort of role in marxist theory from time to time, quite independently of the conceptual status of other elements in the analysis. And, of course, today the catch-all essentialist device is the class politics approach, with its never-ending search for an essential 'class' belonging for problems, issues and movements; to give them a kind of fixity which could put them (as it were) comfortably 'in the frame' of our inherited assumptions about politics.

While Laclau and Mouffe draw their particular formulation of the function of essentialism from the French theorist Jacques

'For many years alliances were treated as expedencies outside the normal ground rules of politics'

Derrida and his critique of the structuralist trend in academic thought (8), it is equally applicable to less rarefied approaches to social theory. The value of this general approach is that it 'it frees up' our theory for a more realistic understanding of the political processes we can see going on around us every day. Like some of the more fruitful trends in contemporary social theory, it demonstrates 'a desire to think in terms sensitive to differences (of others without opposition, of heterogeneity without hierarchy)',(9) thereby demonstrating also an ability to see concepts in terms of the irrevocably heterogeneous nature of the forces for progressive change in societies like ours, and, indeed, the increasing cultural and social plurality of the societies themselves. In the words of Reanto Nicoloni, until recently Rome's Communist Councillor for Culture, 'In cultural habits and customs today there no longer exists the possibility of organic interpretations of society or values. On the contrary, there is a confused, contradictory, uneven plurality of wills, cultural expressions, values... and we must consider it a positive phenomenon'.(10)

The problem with Laclau and Mouffe's approach to the questions, though, is that once they've dismantled the framework of some of our more stubborn misconceptions of politics and hegemony, they remain very vague about how to understand concretely the kind of terrain they've opened up. In an earlier contribution they described the hegemonic strategy a little grandly, as consisting of a 'vast system of alliances that are continuously redefined and renegotiated' (11) – a phrase suggestive of perhaps a little too much intellectual enthusiasm and too little concrete analysis. In short, they seem less interested



in their discoveries than in the process of discovering itself. So it is probably worth while mentioning briefly here – by way of an ending, if not a conclusion – a few of the consequences that flow on from placing an alliance strategy, shorn of its essential features, at the centre of our analysis.

One of the most tenacious beliefs of many marxists – against all the dictates of our political experience – is that, by pointing out that people who identify themselves by means of particular movements, issues, lifestyles, subcultures, and so on which seem to escape the net of the traditional concerns of our analysis, are part of the 'broader working class', this somehow explains their senses of identity in class terms. The practical correlate of this, of course, is the fond belief that if only 'marginal' or 'backward' elements of the population could come to see themselves as workers, first and foremost, somehow this would unlock for them a ready-made critique of patriarchal capitalist society – which they would thereupon seek to overturn. Now, it bears mentioning that there are good historical precedents for such a situation – the experience both in Australia and Western Europe between c.1850 and the 1920s is an obvious one – and in hardly any of these cases did they lead to anything resembling a revolutionary situation. But that is, in any case, largely beside the point. The real point is that realistic class politics today lies in understanding the various interlocking, but different, cultural and social experiences by which people whom we might classify as part of the popular masses identify themselves as standing in a certain relation to that larger imagined entity known as society. Knitting together the self-perceptions of people's relations to society is itself a form of alliance-building on the ideological plane which helps to make sense of what we mean by 'working class'.

On one level this requires 'a means of grasping not the singular meaning (a revolt against capitalism!)' of people's self-identification in the culture of their daily lives, 'but the pluralism of the play of styles, codes and languages which can now be seen to constitute the realm of the popular' (12). On another, it requires an understanding of the 'underlying drift of cultural change', and of the dynamics which have produced 'a more loosely-textured,

more diffuse and diverse daily experience' (13) across the entire span of the social forces to which we attach the name of the working class. Put simply, it means that we have to seek alliances within the working class across lines of connection which have little or nothing to do with politics with a capital P. This not only means broadening-out our understanding of alliances: it also means broadening-out our conceptions of what alliances can be negotiated around. Here, an exemplary instance of the possibilities of this new conception of alliance politics is Britain's late lamented Greater London Council, which forged alliances with the voluntary sector, with community groups, with grassroots popular music and its supporters and other supposedly apolitical social forces through its innovative grants policy.

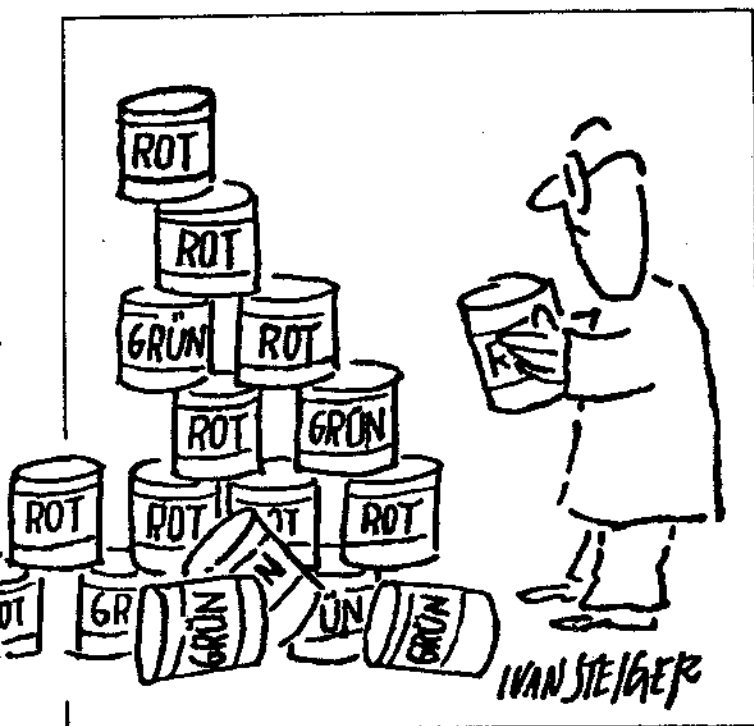
Probably the most profound and far-reaching consequence of an alliance strategy 'freed-up' from essentialism, though, lies in that cluster of ideas to which we commonly give the name 'hegemony'. Indeed, part of the problem lies in this important concept, as is now coming to be realised, is that in a sense it tries to explain too much (14). Hegemony has been used, at various different times or

'Any realistic account of hegemony has to understand that the various elements which make up a hegemonic consensus or way of looking at the world are drawn from the whole range of experiences within people's social existence'

even at the same time, to explain the ability of a 'leading force' in society to hold together a ruling bloc comprised of sometimes quite disparate social forces; to the ideological, political and cultural mechanisms by which such cohesion is secured; to the political-cultural commonsense by which the aims of the hegemonic bloc are generalised to secure the support of the broader masses; and also less directly to the coercive or juridical mechanisms which may or may not be essential to the process, depending upon the nature of the society.

By bringing our understanding of alliances and essentialism to our thinking about hegemony, however, we can quickly discover several things about the idea itself. One is that any realistic account of hegemony has to understand that the various elements





breaking new ground...

which go to making up a hegemonic consensus or way of looking at the world are drawn from the whole range of experiences within people's social existence, and not merely from the agenda of politics with-a-capital-P. This is simply the extension of the insights which alliance politics provided into the politics of 'class'. And, by the same token, the ideas underpinning such a hegemonic consensus are always far wider and more sophisticated than the tunnel vision which usually goes by the name of political ideology.

In an earlier incarnation, Laclau and Mouffe used to argue that hegemony was the articulation of a central 'hegemonic principle' with other ideas and values (what they called 'popular-democratic' as opposed to 'class' ideologies). But, of course, this is in itself a kind of essentialism, in that it assumes again that the

The idea of a unified socialist commonsense, like that of a totalising theory, is one which runs against the grain of all the insights of alliance politics'

essential element – in this case the hegemonic principle – stands outside of or prior to the other, contingent, elements. It is a much more adequate expression of the insights of the alliance strategy simply to view the so-called hegemonic principle as itself a contingent, historical tradition – a tradition which socialists have inherited from earlier generations of socialists, which has often been transformed, and which will continue to be transformed, in its encounters with other radical or liberatory sets of values and beliefs.

Nor is a hegemonic commonsense or way of looking at the world simply a matter of connecting up different views of politics, seen as representing the perspectives of different social forces or movements, into some sort of seamless whole. Rather, a hegemonic commonsense is one which is able to come to terms

with the irreducible differentness of perspectives within a much broader perspective which assumes certain shared general values about society, democracy, gender, the environment, and so on. This is neither a good thing nor a bad thing: it is simply an observable fact about the nature of beliefs and values within a society like ours today, as well as within the left itself. The idea of a unified socialist commonsense, like that of a totalising theory, is one which runs against the grain of all the insights of alliance politics.

Finally, there is a whole complex of unanswered questions around the general problem of the perceptible gap (we could almost call it a quantum leap) between the alliance strategy as we know it in our experience, and a further stage in the strategy which would eventually push society in a socialist direction. Put slightly differently, this is the problem of how to move from the actually-existing forces for social change we have been able to detect at work in the last ten to twenty years or so, to a much broader tacit social consensus within the popular forces as a whole. (Which is not to mention the distinct but related controversies about the role of the state, parliamentary democracy, and so.) When it comes to these sorts of quandaries, we are only at the beginning of being able to see our way through to answers which make sense in terms of the political changes we can see going on around us. ■

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Notes:

1. As Joyce Stevens makes clear in her contribution to the recent volume *Moving Left: The Future of Socialism in Australia* (1986), entitled, 'The Politics of Re-structuring Socialism', pp. 149-163.
2. Eric Aarons, 'Linking Class and Movement', *Australian Left Review* 83, Autumn 1983, p. 9.
3. Ben Fine et al., *Class Politics: An Answer to its Critics* (1984), pp. 3 and 63.
4. Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (1982), p. 247.
5. And of course – as veterans of the era hardly need to be told – the Popular Front's experiences and its lessons remain the major historical antecedent of many of our current ideas about politics and hegemony, particularly in the debates around Eurocommunism. A rough outline of this lineage was sketched in *Australian Tribune*, 11.9.85.
6. Beatrix Campbell, 'Politics, Pyramids and People', *Marxism Today*, December 1984, p. 26.
7. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985). See also the more intelligible if more limited account of 'class' essentialism in Laclau's earlier book *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977), in Ch. 3.
8. The debt to Derrida is clear from the latter's essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' in *Writing and Difference* (1978), where he imagines the concept of structure without a 'given' centre.
9. The citation is from Hal Foster's introduction to the popular collection of essays published in Britain as *Postmodern Culture* (1983), p. xv.
10. Cited by Ian Chambers and Lidia Curti in their essay 'A Volatile Alliance: Culture, Popular Culture and the Italian Left' in *Formations of Nation and People* (1984), p. 118.
11. Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, 'Socialist Strategy: Where Next?', *Marxism Today*, January 1981, p. 22.
12. Colin Mercer, 'A Poverty of Desire: Pleasure and Popular Politics', in *Formations of Pleasure* (1983), p. 88.
13. Stuart Hall, 'The Culture Gap', *Marxism Today*, January 1984, p. 19.
14. Stuart Hall in fact recently noted that it was precisely this problem which led him into the territory of his important analysis of the ideological underpinnings of 'Thatcherism' in Britain: 'Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop et al.', *New Left Review*, 151, 1985, p. 119.

In the tracks of the *Alternative*

In this second article on the Alternative movement in Europe, HARRY CURTIS and MAURICE NAJMAN explore the forces and the type of political movement that might come to turn the 'alternative' into a revolutionary force for the 21st Century.

So far there is no mass political force which is grouping within a common framework all those – socialist, feminist and ecologist activists – who struggle for the construction of a self-managed and pluralistic socialist society. In this article we argue that it is now necessary to campaign for the creation of a new type of organisation that would allow all to join in the struggle against all forms of oppression – capitalist and otherwise – while retaining their autonomy and particular identity.

We need to reconsider the idea of the revolutionary process in light of an increasingly complex society where, in contrast to Marx's expectations, the extension of wage labour has led to greater social, cultural, racial and sexual differentiations. This development has been reflected in the way that people have increasingly moved away from party and trade-union loyalties towards confused aspirations for a 'new politics'.

In such a context, there is no point in defending the sectarian utopia of the 'unique leadership' of the revolutionary movement. The way forward is in developing a variety of united fronts of the oppressed, i.e. (the development of) a social and political movement which, at times, will go beyond the strict framework of the class struggle. We are talking about a global emancipatory movement where an alliance is being forged between the various movements born out of the crisis of capitalist civilisation.

However, this path is full of contradictions. The interests of different social layers can and often will clash in the process. There is no *a priori* harmony between all the component parts of the alternative movement. The alternative project which will only be forged through the most thorough political debates. Clearly, the self-managing socialist currents can play a very positive part in the elaboration and the application of the alternative strategy.

In the new conception of the movement we propose, the role of the activist layer is not to lead the movement. It must limit itself to fostering and promoting self-organisation by proposing a series of political and programmatic answers to many different problems arising from the movement. Socialists should encourage and

support as well as taking an active part in all experiences in workers' and community control – no matter how 'limited' they may seem and, indeed, be. Their effect can be to promote a collective ability to project a different type of society, as it were a prefigurative form of *AgitProp*. In times of major national crisis, these experiences will be remembered and could lead to the emergence of appropriate forms of self-organisation such as community and workplace councils, committees, etc., which, by allowing people to take into their control what had formerly been the exclusive preserve of capital and the state, would then lay the foundations for the self-managed republic. In other words, the people would be in a position to take power for themselves, not for some *vanguard* party or group.

The definition of a new global programme is all the more urgent given the deep crisis of the socialist movement. Since this crisis was largely caused by the appearance of new social identities, it can only be overcome by facing up to the challenge of forging an essentially pluralistic labour movement – which would count among its components the very forces that led to the rise of the alternative movement.

'We need to reconsider the idea of the revolutionary process in the light of an increasingly complex society'

The alternative, as a new political culture, is an attempt at a response which stands in radical opposition to capitalist society, its productivism and its patriarchal structures. The other candidates fighting for the hearts and minds of the people in the 1980s are, neoliberalism and a post-social democratic 'social-productivism'. They are, at the ideological level, the enemies the alternative will have to defeat if it wants to become the dominant force in society.

It is of course too soon to say whether the alternative will succeed and become the specific form of the revolutionary project into the 21st century. Its experience to date has displayed contradictory features and, on the whole, could be characterised as a peculiar form of 'radical reformism'. However, by drawing its strength from the social movements' self-organisation and self-activity, it takes us one step nearer a renewal of the revolutionary movement. But, if it allowed itself to become increasingly integrated into the stiffening framework of the institutional game, the alternative would only serve a limited renewal of traditional reformist parties and organisations. As socialists, we should work

towards the strengthening of the 'revolutionary' option and support those forces that could lead to the emergence of mass left-alternative wings in the traditional parties and trades unions.

The development of an independent and pluralist Green/Alternative force, originating on the one hand from the new social movements – feminism, ecology, lesbian and gays liberation, peace, and so on – and, on the other hand, from the socialist and labour movement – especially its revolutionary wing –, is both necessary and possible. The existence of an organised and conscious alternative force, no matter how small, would allow for the expression, the – theoretical and practical – development and the representation of the only current radically opposed to a capitalist, productivist and/or bureaucratic logic which traditional political organisations have, one way or the other, only served to reinforce.

In Western Europe, the alternative current represents in the region of 5% of the electorate. In Britain, it doesn't but one must take into account the specific institutional forms, both the voting system and the particular relationship between the Labour Party and the unions. This greatly restricts the scope for the development of the alternative movement as an independent electoral or even organisational force. This drew those activists who, in Germany, would have joined the Greens to join the 'Bennite' wing of the Labour Party. It is therefore possible to estimate that the bedrock of support for green/alternative politics in Britain is more or less what it is in the rest of Western Europe – between 4% and 6% of the electorate.

Still, if in Britain, among the would-be alternative activists who joined the Labour Party in the early '80s, many got trapped in constitutional wrangles or became cut off from their base as they took up office in the local state. Gradually, the sight of a broader project was lost as 'Realignment' proceeded to redraw the lines of debate along both sides of the familiar reformist/revolutionary debate. A debate made irrelevant by the outdated visions of both the 'reformist' and the unreconstructed 'revolutionaries' who saw 'Realignment' as a wonderful opportunity to wave about their worn copies of Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*. That neither changing the world through five minutes of democracy every five years or by storming the Winter Palace have got anything to do with the problems and aims of today's social forces is plain for all to see. And it is well reflected by the fact that young people do not join the Labour Party anymore and that branch and ward meeting attendance is fast dropping back towards the appalling levels of the early '70s.

It is, however, possible to revive this movement around the project for a refoundation of the Labour Party as advanced by Tony Benn and Eric Heffer. This would allow for all the movements to regroup in the common framework of a new Labour Party while preserving their identity and autonomy. One of the major advantages, which became glaring during the miners' strike, would be that such a refoundation would ease the way for an alliance of the new social movements with the traditional trade-union movement.

Furthermore, it is possible to work within the Labour Party for its refoundation as the strategic debates currently taking place in the traditional parties address the self-same issues as those the alternative movement does. All left parties (Labour, communist and revolutionary) face the socialist projects' crisis of identity, and none has yet come up with a decisive answer. Some, like the Labour leadership, have even refused to address the question at all – relying instead on others (the CPGB 'Eurocommunist' leadership) to do the dirty work for them. We

'The way forward is to develop unified fronts of the oppressed'

believe alternative socialists can step into the debates and be a breath of fresh air in an atmosphere more used to sectarian abuse (whether of the 'loony' or 'reformist traitor' type) than to the type of thoroughgoing reconsideration the situation requires.

In this rethink, alternative socialists are the only force which has no hang-ups towards the new social movements (it is one of their political expressions) no illusions towards Right-wing reformism (it was formed in opposition to it) and no inferiority complex towards the revolutionaries (it sees itself as carrying the revolutionary banner into the 21st century). Finally, it hosts no sectarian disdain for those who come from diverse traditions and backgrounds – indeed it positively welcomes them.

Thus, intervening in the recomposition of the Labour movement and developing the alternatives are, as we have seen, two essential aspects of the same approach. At the centre of this unfolding dynamics of differentiation we find the same questions, the same problems, the same contradictions and the same themes. These are common to the large traditional parties and the new emerging alternative forces. The theoretical clarification and programmatic elaboration are in this sense as important as the concrete experiences and the forging of grassroots unity. ■



Got the message?

Refounding the Labour Party

Socialism is not given for all times. It is constantly changing and responding to the demands of social forces in society. It would be nonsensical to suggest that any one form of organisation is relevant for all time. However, the same general themes which underlie a socialist analysis of society at any given time should be the guiding lights in the search for an answer to the question of organisation. Socialism should, of course, be anti-capitalist. Yet, it should be much more. It is a generalised theory of emancipation, social, economic and cultural, whereby people have control over their lives and their environment in all respects and at all levels. Not control in the sense of each individual making choices in his or her life in isolation from each other, but control whereby individuals can extend their choices in solidarity with each other.

If the vision of socialism is of an anti-capitalist movement for emancipation, then the question must be put, what is the best vehicle for the existing social forces – with a view to prefiguring the society it struggles for.

In 1918 when the Labour Party adopted its present constitution the forces of socialism were very much confined to trade unionism. This was reflected in the composition of the Party. Strong links with the trade unions and a handful of socialist societies. This formed the basis for the Party's numerical and political growth in the next 30 years.

However, in the 1980s it is necessary to acknowledge that new social forces have arisen alongside those identified back in 1918. Over the last 30 years there have emerged a constant stream of new struggles and demands, which have, generally speaking, found organisational strength and voice outside the Labour Party. For

example, the struggles around feminist, racial and sexual issues, and indeed peace and ecology. Instead of rejecting the emergence of these new movements because they do not fit neatly into the traditional class analysis of British society, we should recognise their revolutionary potential. They question all aspects of civil society, from our personal relationships through to our relationship as humans with our environment. This necessarily encompasses questions of production, hitherto considered the sole domain of the traditional 'class struggle'. These new forces therefore represent an extension of our perception of 'socialism', and, if linked to the more traditional social forces such as trade unionism, could be capable of effecting real revolutionary change and pave the way for anti-capitalist emancipation. Clearly, given the emergence of these new forces, exclusive reliance on forms of organisation which have their roots in the stage of development of the socialist movement in the early 1900s could be disastrous. The Labour Party must therefore aspire to represent the real social forces in society today. This will require a 'refoundation' along radical lines. As it were, a British 'Green' party with a strong socialist identity.

It is only by providing a framework within which all emancipatory groups, including the working class, can articulate their own demands, in solidarity with one another but with no hierarchy of oppression that the revolutionary potential of each can be realised. It would not just reflect better society's evolution, but more fully prefigure our vision of a socialist society based on generalised self-management. Should the Labour Party fail to take up the challenge of refoundation it could find itself confined to history books. The social forces in society will wait for no 'party'. ■

TONY BENN, HILARY WAINWRIGHT

TONY BENN talks to **KEIR STARMER** about the necessity to 'refound' the Labour Party if it is to become the party of general emancipation.

Keir STARMER: In a joint memorandum, written with Eric Heffer, submitted to the NEC some two years ago you introduced the idea of 'refounding the Labour Party. You link this to what you call the 'crisis of representation' in the Labour Party. What is so important in these ideas?

Tony BENN: The crisis of representation simply refers to the fact that the way party parliamentary structures have developed has denied a voice to millions of people who are now oppressed: unemployed people, old people, gay people, black people. The Labour Party has been unilateralist for 10 years, yet it is only a few weeks since the PLP, for the very first time tabled a Commons motion that actually reflected our policy. All this has created, in my opinion, a very serious crisis, not only for the Labour Party but for British representative democracy. The Labour Party was founded to be a representative body - the Labour

Representation Committee. It isn't that, and so, first of all you have to extend the range of people looking to Labour. This means that the Labour Party must reorganise itself to cater for a lot more autonomous groups; after all constituencies are autonomous. We must now bring in more autonomous groups and let them speak through the party. It will take a special Conference to refound the Labour Party on this basis. It will have to be able to absorb within it a whole range of socialist ideas and it will have to be much more democratic in its own structure. The current confines of electoral politics make it difficult to raise this question but it must be raised.

Keir STARMER: But isn't there a problem in opening up the Labour Party to new

Labour Putting people first



KEIR STARMER takes up the issue of 'refoundation' with **HILARY WAINWRIGHT**, who thinks that the Left has got to get on with refounding itself as well as demanding it of others.

Keir STARMER: As we get closer to a General Election, the polarisation of the Left in the Labour Party seems complete. On the one hand we have the soft Left who have made their peace with the Right to the extent of accepting their economic policy and, on the other what seems to be a London-led new Left which, in so far as it is putting great stress on combatting racism, sexism, heterosexism, and so on, seems to be the only 'alternative' force

left. What do you make of this polarisation?

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: I don't think you can see the forces that operate independently of Kinnock as primarily London-led. In fact, the strongest expression of those ideas are actually found in Manchester, Sheffield and Scotland. The fact that the GLC provided a united focus for this type of politics, it has come to appear as London-led. But in fact there is a much wider national movement behind it.

The evidence that something independent of the Labour leadership is happening can be seen by looking at the miners strike. Instead of the Labour left passing resolutions against their leadership, you saw a broad left including

women's sections, black sections, and so on setting up support groups, liaising with other community groups inside and outside the Labour Party. So this new polarisation is clearly different from the traditional Left/ Right polarisation that is quite familiar in the Labour Party. The polarisation now is much less internal and the new Labour Left has a very real independence.

Keir STARMER: What are the implications of this new polarisation, given for example, the fact that many of the elements comprising the so-called new Left have structures, as well as politics, very different from the party leadership?

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: Putting it at its most fundamental, I don't think that the

TONY BENN

autonomous groups in that many of these struggles around feminist, racial and sexual issues, not to mention those about peace and ecology, have not only developed 'outside' the traditional labour organisations but have also, in many respects, rejected traditional modes of organisation?

Tony BENN: Yes, I think that is true, but it is really a reflection of the failure of the Labour Party to do its job properly. If the Labour Party closes its doors to the idea of an autonomous 'green' group or 'women's group' or 'black' group, then they grow outside the structure of the Party, and they tend therefore to be denied the influence that socialist ideas would have. This damages them as they are cut off from the mainstream of socialism, and it damages us because we are cut off from the mainstream of their argument. I think the outcome of refoundation would not be an 'ordinary' party. It seems to me that capital is organised in 'autonomous groups' outside parliament and has people in parliament who represent it whereas we lack not only a proper representation in parliament but also a movement outside that is organised in a strong enough way for it to be able to influence events. Without a strong movement - whoever is in the seats of power in Whitehall - nothing much will happen. I think people understand this. That is why the Labour vote falls and why tactical voting has such appeal, because if you don't have a strong movement and clear ideas to attract people, they will

float about according to the advice they get from the pollsters.

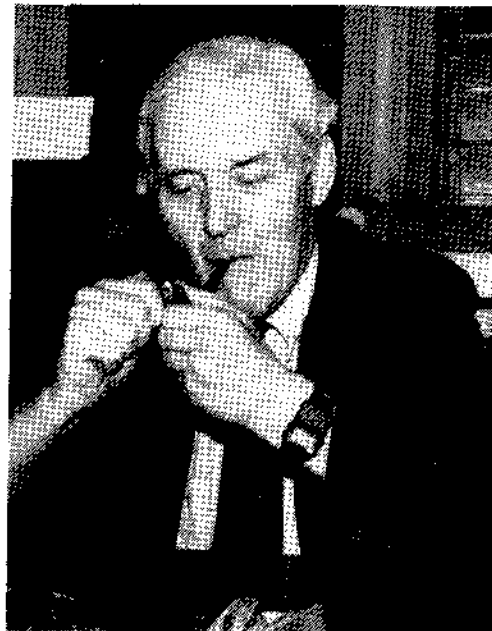
Keir STARMER: How much do you think that refoundation of the Labour Party has got to do with the changing nature of the working class itself since 1918?

Tony BENN: A lot. The working class has changed in composition during every century in history. 200 years ago we had an agricultural working class which moved into industry. Then you had craft unions from the guilds in the middle ages and general unions coming up. We've seen immigrant workers and Jewish workers escaping from the pogroms in Russia. Now you have far more women workers, part-time workers, non-unions workers. The re-examination of the composition of the working-class is a very important factor. But we must also remember that there is a very big *unwaged* oppressed element. Women at home are unwaged and are oppressed. Other people are oppressed, for example gays, who have been made scapegoats for the crisis in capitalism. So I think the 'patchwork quilt' of a proper democratic socialist movement will be made up of a lot of streams and strains that were not actually present in 1918. That is why we must, in a sense, start all over again and refound the movement.

Keir STARMER: But is it possible to create this 'emancipatory alliance' as it could be called without, on the one hand, subordinating the demands of the new

social movements to the class struggle and without, on the other hand, undermining the continued importance of the class struggle?

Tony BENN: I have never seen any contradiction here, because if you look at it in a completely objective way only 5% of the people in this country have actually



Beyond the confines of electoral politics...
(photo F. Bertalotti)

benefited from the Thatcher government. So it is astonishing to me that we are warned not to espouse minority causes because minorities can never win. The rich minority has established hegemony over the people of this country by succeeding in dividing, largely through

HILARY WAINWRIGHT

leadership really has a vision of a different kind of society. They are concerned with winning the election, so as then to make various reforms. The point about the new left is that it does have a distinct vision of society, the economy that it wants, the kind of state that it wants: it's not a fully theorised vision and is more implicit in their practice. But the practices of the GLC, the miners, the Lucas Aerospace Committees are really expressions of an idea of the economics of need, based on democracy.

Keir STARMER: Surely this challenges the whole role of the Labour Party, which was constituted in a way which forged a link purely between the trade unions and the party at the highest levels, for essentially parliamentary reasons?

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: Yes, it certainly challenges the primacy of a purely parliamentary strategy. But I think some strong elements of this new left are within

the party, having been attracted to it for a number of reasons. For example, because of the Labour Party's strong links with trade unions, it has been really the only party to represent the working class at all.

Keir STARMER: What is important, if some elements are within the party, must surely be the question of whether this 'inner party' or 'party at the base' has the potential to transform the present Labour Party and its structures into the sort of campaigning apparatus it needs to further its aspirations. Isn't this part of the whole question of 'refoundation'?

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: I think whether or not the 'inner party' can win depends, confined as it is in the Party's present structures, on what support it receives from the trade unions themselves. They tend to ultimately ally with the leadership and so really the Left needs to assert its independence of the party structure more

clearly and work as much in the unions as in the Party.

Keir STARMER: The other aspects of this problems also stems from what Tony Benn calls the 'crisis of representation'. If there are millions of oppressed people that are being denied an effective voice, as he suggests, couldn't this provide some of the impetus for 'refoundation'?

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: I think there has been a 'crisis of representation' for quite a long time now. In fact, it's probably always been true, but now it's particularly groups like the unemployed, women and black people. The strategies put forward by the Labour Party in the past have failed them, and present party policy, for example, the economic strategy offers no long-term solution to their respective oppression. They are disenfranchised in the Party. How can Kinnock et al respond to the demands of, for example, the black community if he won't let them organise

the media, a natural majority who are 'working class' ie. people who depend for their income on their labour whether they be doctors or white-collar workers or whether they be manual workers, miners or supermarket workers. These constitute a natural majority that would benefit from democracy and socialism. I do see a danger in arguments such as those associated with Eric Hobsbawm who said, in effect, that the working class has disappeared. It has changed. The Marxist analysis of the evolution of classes is itself based upon the idea of continuing change not a frozen pattern. Any serious socialist must take account of these changes. And clearly the international aspects of this have become much more dominant recently, with atomic weapons and pollution crossing frontiers. So I don't think anyone can have any doubt about the relevance of the class analysis to a modern 'emancipatory alliance' as you call it. A manifesto of liberation is what we are really talking about.

Keir STARMER: So, why do you think that important elements in the Labour Party are unwilling to enter into a strategic rethink at any level about the role and make-up of the Party?

Tony BENN: I think it's because it would threaten their power in the party as it now is. To be candid, the objection to the Young Socialists, to an autonomous women's movement, or to black sections is not so much an objection to these people, but that, if these things came about, young people, women and blacks would be strong, would be autonomous and would be radical and would challenge their power. What you have now, and this

autonomously to put forwards those demands.

Keir STARMER: Yes, this is part of the theme of refoundation. Namely, that rather than, even those on the Left saying 'yes, we understand your oppression, give us your vote and we'll take up your issue', it's really a question of 'opening' the party, or handing it over to those groups so that they can use it for putting their demands forward on their own terms.

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: Whilst that sounds fine in theory, it won't be that easy. A big factor is that the Labour Party has a history that has refused to embrace many of these groups. So now many of them are not going to have much trust in it. So I think first the Labour Left, within the Party as it is, has got to show that it will share power and support the demands and struggles of these movements. It is a bit unrealistic to think that you can simply demand refoundation; you've actually got to get on with it at constituency level, as Tony Benn himself has done in Chesterfield. This 'refoundation' of the Left is going on, to a certain extent, with

phrase was put to me by a French 'renovateur' communist the other day, is a situation in which the bureaucracy has given up defending socialism, rather they are a bureaucracy defending their bureaucratic position. They are frightened of any change that might lead to people saying, 'well what about you', or 'we would rather have it done differently'. A bureaucracy confined to defending a structure is not capable of winning a majority for change in society. I think this is the dilemma that we are in.

Keir STARMER: In the wake of the purge of *Militant*, attacks on Labour Party Black Sections and now the campaign against

'I think that there has been a crisis of representation for quite some time now'

the 'London Left', which has often championed the issues and struggles of the new movements, what are the real prospects for a refoundation of the Labour Party in the near future?

Tony BENN: I think that they are very good, because the electoral unity which is being presented in the Labour Party has been based on the loyalty of the Left in not wanting to do anything that might be used as an excuse to divide the party, an inhibition that has not applied in any way to the Right of the Party. Yet the vitality of the debate is being maintained. the problem of electoral politics is that it does

openings for black sections, women's representation, the strength of WAC etc. But essentially, nobody is going to take the Labour Left on 'trust', as it were, any longer.

Keir STARMER: Aren't a lot of elements in the Labour Party simply going to resist any moves to focus on, for instance, black

'How can Kinnock respond to the demands of... the black community if he wont let them organise autonomously to put forward those demands?'

section or gay demands, by saying that the labour Party is out of touch with the feelings of the country, as evidenced by numerous opinion polls.

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: Well, opinion polls

impose artificial short term timetables at a time when we really ought to be 'thinking long', thinking back into our history and also thinking ahead. I think, however, that in a general way the necessity for a sensible analysis is to be found all around us.

Keir STARMER: Would you say then that overall the Labour Party should become the united party of the oppressed, rather than the party of any one section of the oppressed, for example the working class?

Tony BENN: I don't think that you can divide the two, really. If you are a young person who has never worked because you have been unemployed since you left school, you are not a trade unionist because you have never been able to join a trade union, yet you are a part of the working class. If you are an old person and have worked all your life but have now retired, you are not a trade unionist in the active sense of the word, yet you are a member of the working class. If you are a woman and you work day and night to raise a family or you have a part time job, perhaps in a company that won't accept unions, you are a member of the working class. Now the problem is that the word 'working class' has been very skilfully narrowed by public definition into meaning a man in overalls working in a motor car factory. Yet actually the concept of the 'working class' is much broader. It is not oppressed minorities that we are talking about, it is an oppressed majority. It is the imprisonment of a majority in a structure that is not in their interests. It must now be opened up. ■

are a very superficial way of measuring support. But, such as they exist, there is a strong argument for leading public opinion in the direction of radical change

rather than sitting back and following the direction of the polls, which largely reflect the dictates of the media. When power has been given to various groups to express their demands in whatever way they think best, for example, in the GLC in the early eighties, there has been very real and very widespread support. We shouldn't forget this and rely solely on the polls.

Keir STARMER: If the Left isn't strong enough to start to change the party through refoundation', what will the Labour Party's prospects be, if it remains virtually unchanged in its short-sighted approach to the new social forces?

Hilary WAINWRIGHT: I think we will be in for many years of 'coalition' politics, but of course always within the same failed consensus. The fearful aspect of that is that it could lead to a very strong swerve to the right, as it has done in France. ■

Gorbachev's Revolution?

There are many positive aspects of Gorbachev's proposals for change in the USSR. They have the potential for bringing about a greater degree of self-management but only if carried out thoroughly and taken up by the Soviet working class. So far we have only seen a first step forward and back tracking could be very easy argues DENIS FRENEY.

Among the many political jokes that reflected popular discontent in the Soviet Union in the Brezhnev period was one which went as follows: When Leonid Brezhnev became leader, he invited his mother to the Kremlin. He showed her around the splendid palace. She seemed worried. Then he took her in his luxury Zil limousine to his dacha and showed her his antiques and collection of western cars. Still she looked worried. So Brezhnev asked her: 'Mother, what's the matter, don't you think I've done well?' 'It's not that, Leonid,' she said. 'I'm just concerned about what may happen to you if the Bolsheviks come back.'

Brezhnev and his mother are dead. But his family and numerous cronies must think that the 'Bolsheviks' have indeed come back. Brezhnev's son-in-law Yuri Churbanov was reportedly arrested for corruption, on the eve of the 27 January Central Committee meeting of the CPSU where Mikhail Gorbachev delivered his revolutionary report.

Now in Moscow, jokes are doing the rounds about someone trying to assassinate Gorbachev. Like all such jokes, there is truth in their farfetched conclusions. There is no doubt a bitter struggle taking place. For Gorbachev is talking revolution and harking back to Lenin and the pre-Stalin revolutionary period. Georgy Arbatov, a Central Committee member well-known for his exhaustive knowledge of the USA and the West, told foreign journalists after the

meeting: 'I wouldn't guarantee that 100% of those there understood what it means for them.' Gorbachev's speech was directed against many of those assembled. Central Committee members had received a draft of Gorbachev's speech six days before the meeting, but the hardest hitting parts were kept for his actual delivery. He had spent three weeks at his dacha outside Moscow preparing it.

One surprise sprung in his speech was a proposal for an emergency Communist Party conference - the first since the dark days of 1941. The conference will discuss dramatic changes to party rules. It will also have the power to expel many of the corrupt and inefficient CC members appointed under Brezhnev.

The significant changes signalled by Gorbachev's 27 January speech are likely to be followed up with far more drastic measures at the emergency conference. The emergency conference has been called less than a year after the last 27th CPSU Congress. While the last congress approved the general guidelines for 'restructuring' now under way, the Central Committee elected then still left the Brezhnev conservatives with a strong base. That was reflected in its recent meeting which kept Brezhnev conservatives such as Ukrainian party leader Shcherbitsky on the Politburo, while pro-Gorbachev reformers did not get full membership.

The calling of an emergency CPSU conference gives new meaning to Gorbachev's proposal that party elections be by secret ballot, with multiple candidates. No doubt ordinary Party members will be able to defy powerful conservatives in their area.

Gorbachev painted a brutally frank picture of the state of the Soviet society and economy. He condemned 'conservative sentiments, inertia, a tendency to brush aside anything that did not fit into conventional patterns'. The theoretical concepts of socialism remained to a large extent at the level of the 1930s-1940s, while Lenin's ideas were interpreted 'simplistically' and 'emaciated'. Growth rates of the national income in material production in the past three five-year plan periods dropped by more than half. Most targets were not

met since the early 1970s. The economy as a whole became cumbersome and relatively unreceptive to innovation. 'Parasitic sentiments', 'social corrosion', 'callousness and scepticism' arose. 'The world of day-to-day realities and that of make-believe well-being were increasingly parting ways.' 'Report-padding, bribe-taking, encouragement of toadyism and adulation' spread. 'Many

'The calling of an emergency CPSU conference gives new meaning to Gorbachev's proposal that party elections be by secret ballots with multiple candidates'

party members in senior executive positions were beyond control or criticism' and so on....

Gorbachev made it crystal-clear that he was talking about a 'a turning point and measures of a revolutionary character. We simply don't have any other choice. We must not retreat and do not have anywhere to retreat to... We must advance and take society to a qualitatively new level of development.'

The difference between Gorbachev's reform packet and previous attempts to grapple with the economic and social crisis in his turn to the ordinary worker and citizen. Everything depends on 'the maximum activation of the human factor and the further development of democratic forms characteristic of socialism... 'Of primary importance is the development of democracy at the point of production and the consistent introduction of truly self-governing principles to give every worker a sense of being the true master of his (sic) plant.' A draft law for such grassroots 'self-government' is to be

submitted for nationwide discussion, Gorbachev said. 'The crucial issue of the development of democracy in production is the introduction of the system of electing heads of enterprise, shops and departments, heads of sections, farmers and units, production team leaders and foremen (sic)'. Secret ballots, with a 'larger number of candidates' will be introduced to 'rid the voting procedure of a number of elements of formalism'.

In an article on the concept of 'socialist self-government' published by the Soviet foreign-speaking theoretical magazine *Kommunist*, Dr A. Auzan identified 'self-government' with 'socialist economic self-management.' (see extracts in this issue of SA) Self-management, Auzan says, 'has not been used in the Soviet science until

'The difference between Gorbachev's reform packet and previous attempts to grapple with the economic and social crisis is his reliance on the ordinary worker and citizen'

recently. Moreover it was spurned by most economists who viewed any attempt at using this category as a rehash of anarcho-syndicalist ideas foreign to marxism.' This is an understatement. The deeply-seated bureaucratic model which has dominated Soviet economics since Stalin means that talk of self-management in the USSR today is very significant. Auzan's article certainly puts him in the frontiers of Soviet 'economic science'.

The bureaucracy has many means of defence, however. The most bureaucratic bureaucrats will endlessly mouth the words of 'socialist self-government.' And nothing will happen. That is no doubt why Gorbachev stressed that 'practical rather than verbal' attitudes by leaders is the 'decisive yardstick'. Equally crucial to 'socialist self-government' is the opening up of the media, culture and other public means of expressing criticism and dissent. Otherwise, those in positions of entrenched privilege will victimise those who challenge them and any who oppose them in elections.

Giant steps have already been taken in 'openness' in all these fields, and represent the most obvious and visible sign of the revolution under way. But this is, in a positive sense, only the first step.

The resistance of the 'socialist conservatives' to Gorbachev's reforms reminded Soviet commentator Aleksandr

A Soviet Bonaparte

The Gorbachev leadership is something qualitatively new, argues MICHEL RAPTIS. It could well spark off a movement no bureaucrat will be able to stop.

Since the days of Andropov it was clear that the Soviet bureaucracy had to find a way out of the dangerous immobility of the Brezhnev years. Major reforms, on a scale at least as important as Lenin's New Economic Policy had become an absolute priority.

Up to the 27th CPSU Congress, Gorbachev had limited his reforms to foreign policy and disarmament proposals culminating in the Reykjavic proposals which forced the Reagan administration on the defensive.

But Gorbachev's main objective was always domestic as USSR's domestic position determines its foreign policy stance. Gorbachev wants not only economic 'reform' but a much more radical change, a 'revolutionary

Bovin of how he and his generation 'watched with bewilderment, pain and a disgusting sense of our own impotence' as the 20th Congress reforms of Khrushchev seeped 'through the bureaucratic sands'.

The need for 'order and discipline' appear regularly in Gorbachev's speeches. But in context, this refers to the near-anarchic bureaucratic mismanagement. No doubt it also applies to many workers who have grown cynical and even comfortable in the years of Brezhnevian inertia. 'Order and discipline' could well become the rallying cry of the Brezhnev conservatives, seeking desperately to turn back the clock and stop ordinary workers giving real content to 'self-government'. No matter the laws that will be passed, the danger remains that the stifling bureaucracy will turn them into a formal and empty shell. Only if the Soviet working class gives real meaning to the Gorbachev resolution will it survive. If it does, the consequences on the rest of the world and the socialist movement will be the greatest since the October revolution. ■

restructuring' of the whole of Soviet society. Nothing short of this would allow the USSR to face up to the challenges of the coming scientific and technical revolution as well as allowing it to resist the reactionary offensive of US imperialism.

The consciousness of the necessity for change is shared by a whole wing of Soviet bureaucracy. In spite of the rather vague character of the analyses and measures advanced at the 27th Congress, Gorbachev used his position to force his interpretation of the Congress' decision thus legitimising the advances initiated on all fronts at a remarkable pace.

Gorbachev and his allies are well aware that the Soviet Union has reached a watershed. The bureaucratic degeneration of the country which started after Lenin's death and accelerated in the past few decades had reached an incredible level, the full details of which are now emerging both in Gorbachev's speeches and in through the current explosion of declarations, pronouncements, articles, plays, films etc.

Recently, for example, the Soviet actress Alla Demidova noted that 'we have not yet gone over the Gorbachev effect. If we can now see that all is open to us - everything is allowed - we have not yet sorted out what to do with this new freedom.'

Soviet society is undergoing a shake up the consequences of which are still unpredictable. Two of the most important documents that indicate the nature of recent developments are Gorbachev's 19th June 86 speech to the Congress of the Writer's League and his 26th January report to the Party's Central Committee.

Taken together, they are at least as important as Krushchev's 1956 'secret speech' to the 20th Party Congress. Whereas Krushchev concentrated on the denunciation of Stalin, Gorbachev is concerned with denouncing party and state bureaucrats, in his view the main culprits for the advanced degeneration of the regime. Furthermore, Krushchev's reforms were very limited whereas Gorbachev speaks of a necessary 'revolutionary restructuring'. Gorbachev further insists on the necessity of

developing 'democracy' as the cornerstone of his 'reform/revolution'. Speaking in front of the Writer's League, a gathering free of the Stalinist hangups which still restrict his freedom of speech within the Party, he developed his vision for the reconstruction of Soviet. Gorbachev noted that although 'a very deep and very important movement' in support of his 'reform/revolution' had started, 'a very long and drawn-out struggle is on the cards. Between the people who long for change and the leadership stands a layer of government and party bureaucrats which act as a buffer.' This layer fears that the changes 'might deprive it of some of its privileges. There are many who abuse their position. We all know that here nothing is more profitable than holding office.'

The extent of the bureaucratic degeneration is such that 'reform will

Gorbachev has no illusions regarding the scale of the opposition he will meet - including attempts to overthrow him. Several times already he has talked of direct personal threats made against him. In a revealing reference to Krushchev he

and which will do the same to the new leadership.'

Gorbachev's report to the 27th January 87 Central Committee meeting outlines proposals for change. It emphasises that the Soviets must rediscover Marxist theory which, for decades, had remained at the level of the 30s and 40s. Then, the main problem was 'the extensive development' of the economy. Further on, the speech directly attacks Stalin and his ideas: 'The roots of this situation go deeper in the past and are to be found in the specific historical period in which, for reasons we all know, free debate and creative ideas were banished from theory and social science while the judgements of the 'authorities' had become indisputable truths.'

Further on he points out that scientific research had been stifled and Stalin's

'There is no doubt why Gorbachev stressed that 'practical rather than verbal' attitudes by leaders is the 'decisive' yardstick'

require enormous efforts and incredibly hard work... It will take generations to complete the reconstruction'.

For all the resistance the reconstruction might meet, it will have to go ahead. Gorbachev has declared that with their backs up against the wall there was no choice but to move on at any price.

A detailed picture of the terrible effects of bureaucratism in the USSR emerges from Gorbachev speeches. He describes the horrendous reality of a bureaucratic degeneration that those trained at the school of Lenin and Trotsky had spotted from the beginning and relentlessly denounced and analysed. From this point of view, the recent developments in the USSR provide a shining, if belated, justification of the revolutionary Marxists' anti-bureaucratic struggle. This is something Mikhail Gorbachev can't ignore for long. His 19th June 86 speech expressly mentioned 'the necessity of going back to our past' and returning to Caesar's what is Caesar's. That means not just rehabilitating Bukharin but also, and this will be more troublesome, Leon Trotsky.



Pondering Krushchev's example.

said 'Our enemies have understood who we are. They do not fear our nuclear strength...They have but one fear: that if we succeed in developing democracy here, we will win in the end. This is why they have launched an all-out campaign against us, this is why they speak of the apparatus which knocked off Krushchev

'Only if the Soviet working class gives real content to the Gorbachev revolution will it survive'

dogmas presented as the basic tenets of socialism. This enormous theoretical backwardness had had 'a negative influence on the solution of practical questions'.

Gorbachev's main answer to these problems is 'democracy'. 'The revolutionary reconstruction of the country is only possible through democracy and because of democracy.' Gorbachev's motto is 'Free work and free thought in a free country.' To get to this situation, says Gorbachev, we need to democratise the economy through the introduction of 'socialist self-management' in state enterprises. This will 'give every worker a sense of being the true master of his (sic) plant'. Gorbachev has already announced the drafting of a bill on workplace self-management based, he says, on 'direct democracy' and on Lenin's vision of a 'real self-government of the whole people'. This bill will be the subject of nation-wide consultation.

Gorbachev also presents a whole series of proposals for the democratisation of cooperative agriculture, the electoral system, soviets,

trade unions and the party. According to him this is only a start.

Is it all just words? For now let us insist on the following points. The Gorbachev phenomenon is a product of a crisis-ridden USSR. This crisis has helped the emergence, from within the ranks of the bureaucracy, of a 'bonapartist' leadership. They are trying to save the essentials of the system and draw their support from the most 'enlightened' section of the bureaucracy - scientists, technocrats, intellectuals - a cultural elite very *au fait* with what is going on in the USSR and beyond. This elite is found in the party, government ministries, the army and the cultural establishment. These people meet regularly and debate freely.

As soon as the new team attained power it acquired a 'bonapartist dynamics'. This is so because in the current state of Soviet society, the leadership can not root its support in the interests of some homogenous layer of the bureaucracy. Hence its strength and weakness.

The leadership have launched an all out attack on the conservative and parasitic layer of small, middle and high



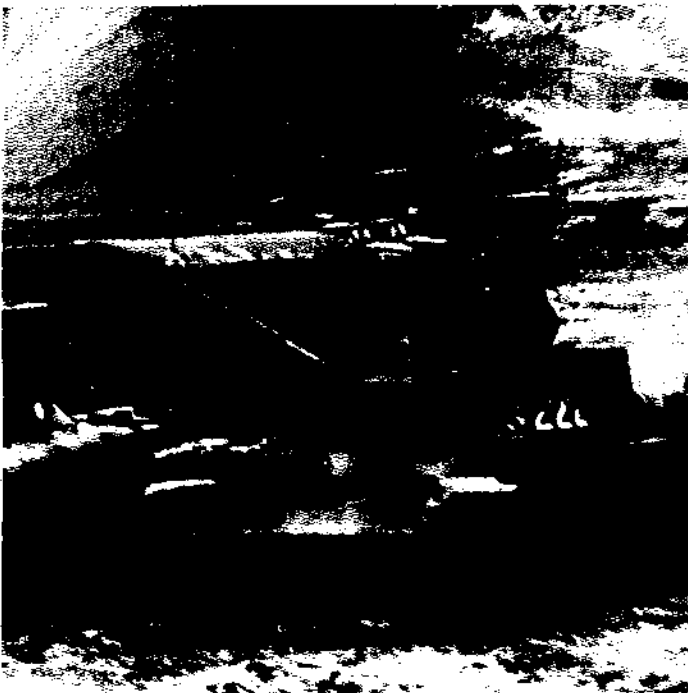
Is it all just words?

bureaucrats which is still in a majority both in party and state apparatus. It is a struggle of historic dimensions. It could lead to the Gorbachev's downfall as it led to Khrushchev's. Alternatively, it might force Gorbachev onto the retreat in which case, the new immobility would take the

USSR back to the brink. Thirdly, it could spark off - albeit involuntarily - the rise of new forces that could prove to be uncontrollable - either in Russia itself, the other USSR nationalities, the Eastern countries or in the communist parties of the Western world. It is indeed hard to see how a 'bonapartist' leadership could 'reconstruct' Soviet society 'from the top downwards', without, at some point, having to appeal to the masses thus involuntarily sparking off a major mass movement.

We must therefore expect, if Gorbachev maintains the momentum of his reform/revolution in the coming months, major social movements and explosions. In particular, we can expect dramatic developments in the satellite countries - with revolts flaring in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. *Solidarnosc*, in as much as it regroups the forces that could make the most of the Gorbachev momentum. *Solidarnosc* could steer these movement in the direction of the 'self-managed republic' to which Gorbachev is now referring.

That the present Bonapartist leadership in the USSR sees no answer to its crisis other than moving towards the self-managed republic goes some way towards demonstrating the power of this conception and fully justifies the importance we have long given to it. ■



What about Afghanistan?

Self- management *Soviet style*

Official soviet publications are pretty hot stuff these days. Much of the infamous stuffiness has gone and 'open' debate is the order of the day. We reproduce below extracts from a Kommunist article by leading Gorbachevite intellectual Dr A. AUZAN. To be read with a pinch of salt...

The 27th Soviet Communist Party Congress has called for Socialist economic self-management to be extended to promote yet greater democracy in Soviet society. It should be admitted that the concept of 'selfmanagement' has not, as a matter of fact, been used in the Soviet science of political economy until recently. Moreover, it was spurned by most economists who viewed any attempt at using this category as a rehash of anarcho-syndicalist ideas foreign to Marxism.

Of course, treating the problem of self-management apart from the fundamental precepts of Marxism-Leninism is fraught with the danger of reverting to centuries-old stereotypes of thinking appropriate to 'atomistic' market economy, individual or group ownership. Yet well-justified rejection and criticism of such modes of approach must in no way be taken as an excuse for the inaction of Marxist political economists in devising positive solutions to the problems of selfmanagement under Socialism. While tacitly postulating the 'deferment' of selfmanagement until the advent of the highest phase of Communism, such a 'negativist' concept would cut working people's self-governing activity off from the actual relations of production under Socialism and, as a matter of fact, set this activity against institutional government.

The Leninist concept of self-government, put at the base of the CPSU's present activities, reposes on the findings of the political and economic investigation made by Marx in his Capital. His analysis

of the capitalist mode of production has shown that the separation of property from labour presupposes a despotic type of management at a capitalist enterprise, while the separation of property from management produces a professional official type of control of the property that belongs to somebody else. In other words, makes management bureaucratic.

It is the society of working people as a whole that is the subject or, as Lenin said, the 'director' of Socialist planning. The plain sense of this proposition is that effective economic management within the framework of society is feasible only by involving a large mass of working people in it.

So it is self-management by working people, which combines work and control, that is fundamental to enhanced managerial efficiency. Selfmanagement in the economy operates, in other words, as a special form of materializing Socialist property through the activity of its owners – the members of a working people's society.

In pointing up the first steps to take towards workers' control of production, Lenin said 'we recognize only one road from below, to draw up the new, basic economic principles'. One of such 'changes from below' is the operation of cost-accounting teams which are entirely self-managed. It is this 'low' level that tries out the ideas of selfmanagement and works out the ways and means of advancing and upgrading it to be applied at higher levels of organization of production.

The clearest indication of such team self-management is the electivity and competitive replacement of managerial officials. This practice of choosing team leaders, foremen, and shift superintendents is already being tried out. But that is not the end of it by any means. The 27th Congress called for the principle of electivity to be applied to sector and shop superintendents as well.

However, electivity by itself does not yet guarantee the execution of the electoral will, if the production unit itself does not have a certain measure of autonomy. Another important condition of selfmanagement is the business contract implying the autonomy of a

production unit in using public property and responsibility for the results of selfmanagement. But without the electivity of managerial staffs, the business contract can only enhance the role not of a team as a whole, but of a team leader as such who becomes a kind of self-styled 'employer'. To sum up, electivity and contract operate, in tandem, as indispensable and sufficient prerequisites for the promotion of selfmanagement.

There are some problems at enterprises today that do not lend themselves to effective solution unless and until such a system of selfmanagement is organized. These are, for instance, the well-balanced distribution of operational assignments, the formation of workforce subunits with due regard for human interests, distribution by performance rating for the entire workforce, smooth functioning.

With two levels of economic management to consider under Socialism – not only at enterprise level, but at national level as well – it is only natural for self-management to be contemplated at this level, too. Democratic centralism is the major category revealing the essence of dialectical interaction of these two levels of economic management. What is naturally inherent in the top echelon of planned management is not only 'centralist' but also 'democratic' elements presupposing social activity in resolving the economic problems of national importance.

For instance, it is impossible, without direct mass participation, to assure proper concern for the rational exploitation of natural resources. For example, the Resolution of the CPSU Central Committee and of the Council of Ministers of the USSR 'On Suspending Work Concerned with Diverting Part of the Flow of Northern and Siberian Rivers' said that this decision had been taken 'in view of the necessity of an additional investigation of the ecological and economic aspects of the problems of diverting part of the flow of Northern and Siberian rivers, which has also been urged by the general public.'

To sum up, the development of economic self-management is not confined to the framework of individual production units. Operating as it does as a sophisticated, complex, and integral phenomenon, it must increasingly cover all levels of Socialist social production and all of its phases. The development of economic self-management is of decisive importance for the furtherance of democracy in other areas of societal activity, since forward-looking change in basic relations is fundamental to the renovation of the totality of social relations under Socialism. ■

Red Politics – Green Philosophy

The green challenge is more than just turning red into green or vice versa. It is more a question of developing a common ecological psychology. PAUL HACKETT explains why.

The self-managed republic will have to be an ecological Republic'.

This is the conclusion reached by Andre Berger in his article on 'Socialism and Ecology' (Socialist Alternatives Oct/Nov 1986). There are many (myself included) who welcome this prognosis. Berger's article followed in a long line of debates by both 'Greens' and 'Reds' discussing the possibility of a Green-Red alliance.

Authors such as Bahro Weston and as already mentioned Berger, have commented upon the essential similarities that run through both ecological and socialist political movements. It is, however, wrong to make the assumption that the Green movement grew directly and solely out of the socialist parties, and as such is no more than an extension of these.

Furthermore, it is incorrect to assume either 1) that all Greens are necessarily socialists or that all socialists are necessarily sympathetic to ecological concerns, or 2) that the Green parties will welcome support, either direct or indirect, from the left, or that the socialist parties will welcome an intrusion from the Greens.

In considering the first of these points, we must ask just who or what the Greens are. The Greens have been variously cast in the role of the 'radical', 'new', 'alternative', or the 'middle class' left of the eighties. However, some Greens may also embrace beliefs traditionally associated with the right - beliefs centering around a love or regard for the richness and beauty of the countryside. However, it is true of all Greens that these views, far from remaining at the level of 'aesthetic vision' are always carried through to the wider political field.

Both radical and conservative greens would agree that there are limits to technological growth. Both may be appalled by the dangers of nuclear power - human and environmental. In asking what the Greens are, we should also query who or what they are not. The

Greens are not simply the expression of an extreme 'environmental' faction. Ecology is indeed more than an experience born of one's personal relationship to nature. Being 'green' means not only embracing the 'protection' of the earth, but also a philosophy extending to human beings - their relationship with and use of their planet. It also means thinking at the level of local communities and the scope of their involvement as a prerequisite to social production.

So, whether all socialists do, or should become, Green, the self-managed Republic, as Berger argues, must surely embody ecological principles.

Berger argues about the needs for the Greens to adopt a 'socialist' and 'anti-capitalist' dimension in their project for an ecological society. He rightly points to the nuclear industry to illustrate this argument and to highlight capitalist interests in ecologically dangerous modes of energy production. But, as he also points out, often, the trade unions accept capitalism's anti-ecological requirements in order to preserve jobs. Ecologists, who can expect no help from the nuclear industry bosses, must therefore overcome trade-union resistance. Thus, 'it is not



England, green and pleasant land...

Not the new Khmer Rouge

DENIS FRENEY, who recently visited the Philippino guerillas reports on the life of *New People's Army* activists.

Ka Maria was waiting at the rendezvous point to take me into the hills to meet the NPA. A few hundred metres down the narrow path through the coconut palms and undergrowth, she pulled a .38 pistol from the waist of her jeans and held it at the ready. She turned and asked if I was ready for a stiff two-hour walk. Overweight and out of condition I told her with little conviction that I was. Some 20 minutes later she announced she had a 'nice surprise' a little further down the clearing. A dozen young people were waiting with M-16s, M-14s and pistols slung over shoulders or propped up in or around the hut.

Ka Maria was not herself in the NPA, but a member of a Semi-Legal Team (MLP) which works in the 'white areas' still not organised by the NPA. The MLP are armed only with handguns, usually concealed in their jeans and covered by a t-shirt. Ka Maria and her comrades ('ka' is an abbreviation of the Tagalog word 'kasama' which means comrade) carry out social surveys in the white areas, prepare reports of the social structure of barrios or towns, pinpoint the specific problems of the poorest sections and sow the seeds of mass organisation among the peasants or workers. After making this initial contact, their work is taken over by Armed Propaganda Units (SYP) which intensify political education and organisation, building a strong organisation among the peasants who begin then to put their own demands on the landlords for a reduction in land rent.

After the SYP have done the basic work, the Armed Consolidation Units (PPT) take over. They strengthen even further the organisation of the landless peasants, until the whole village is 'consolidated'. Informers are warned several times, then if they persist, they are either expelled from the barrio or executed. In a consolidated barrio, the NPA can move around freely, in the sure knowledge that the peasants will alert them to any movement of the military along roads near the barrio, before they face any threat. The NPA unit would then move on to another barrio and the

peasants greet the military with a friendly wave and a professed ignorance of any NPA activity in their peaceful village.

The NPA comrades in the camp were dressed in a wide assortment of t-shirts, jeans and the inevitable thongs. One woman comrade even sported a Marcos election t-shirt - one of those handed out free by Marcos in the 1985 election campaign! Only a few had any clothing resembling a military uniform. Ka Willie who had just turned 18 and had joined the NPA two years previously did have a military jacket he had captured from a soldier in an ambush. But he would not have it for long, as such clothing is sent to the fully-fledged mobile guerrilla platoons of companies which are the striking force of the NPA. The NPAs were

years old. Ten days with the NPA dispelled any image of grim-faced, brutal, gun-happy guerrillas, as painted by Enrile's military and their US friends.

The night march was very hard going, mostly along tracks turned slippery and muddy by the previous night's rain. After a while we arrived at a more substantial peasants house. Before we slept the modern digital transistor radio belonging to Ka Alexander was turned on to get the news from local radio stations - and the enemy's Voice of America! While waiting for the news, younger comrades bopped to Beatles music coming over the radio - hardly fitting into the image of the 'New Khmer Rouge'.

Health problems are among the more serious problems facing the guerrillas, as they are for the peasants. Stomach ulcers



indistinguishable - except for their arms - from Filipinos seen every day in the barrios and towns. The reason is simple - in the big majority they were the sons and daughters of landless peasants, with a sprinkling of ex-students and those who came from middle peasant or worker families in the towns.

Ka Maria came from a nearby town and was one of the few who could speak English. But soon Ka Alexander emerged from one of the interminable meetings that were held during my stay with the NPA. He was the 'old man' of the unit - he had joined the Nationalist Youth (KM) whilst a student in a city in 1970, during the mass upsurge known as 'the First Quarter Storm'. In 1973 he had gone to the guerrilla zones in Bicol and had remained there for the past 13 years. He was 36

are one of the most common and serious illnesses. The cause is easily understood: the guerrillas, like the peasants, subsist on a poor diet of rice or cassava and vegetables. Meat is at best a monthly luxury, while milk and other dairy products are virtually unknown. Even fruit is not a common part of the diet, while there is an excess of sugar consumed from the cane which grows everywhere. Not surprisingly, dental problems are also widespread. And while alcohol is unknown among the NPA, most of them smoke like chimneys. Their diet means no one actually starves, although on Negros and other hard-hit islands, starvation does exist. But the guerillas' poor diet is sometimes broken by periods of real hunger, when they have little or no food while moving away from military

offensives. There are no doctors in the barrios, while even in the towns there are few. The NPA uses traditional herbal medicines, which are grown in gardens around every peasant house. They are effective for minor complaints but more serious cases must be taken to the towns and cities for treatment, often at high cost. The same applies to wounded NPA.

The NPA applies very strict rules to its relations with the peasants. Not even a thread is taken. It is for the peasants to offer food and other material or for the NPA to buy it from them. Ka Alexander explained the obvious truth: the NPA is fighting for the interests of the peasants and workers. The NPA itself is composed in its vast majority of landless peasants. If they in any way antagonise the peasants or act arrogantly towards them, then the peasants would turn against them and the military would wipe them out. Certainly, the NPA units I accompanied were absolutely dependent on the peasants in the barrio, not only for food and shelter but also crucially for intelligence about military movements.

The units I met were not mobile guerrilla units but from the various semi-legal propaganda of consolidation teams. Their weapons were essentially for self-defence, although occasionally they would join in an ambush or eliminate a notoriously brutal military officer or criminal.

Ka Alexander explained: 'Our propaganda units and for that matter our fully-fledged guerrilla units do not fight when the enemy wants them to. We choose the time and place when we attack. The enemy knows we are everywhere, but they only see our shadows.' Talking to the guerrillas, it became clear that most of them had seen no military action, even though most had been three to five or more years in the NPA. It was a tribute to their security, based on their massive popular support. We went up the 'main street' with comrades carrying their M-16s over their shoulders, in the midday sun, past the church, schoolhouse and community centre. We greeted the peasant 'tays' (fathers) and 'nays' (mothers) and their numerous kids as we went by, and passed the houses of the middle peasants with a friendly wave, all in the knowledge that even the barangay captain, appointed by the government, was on our side.

Ka Alexander was a leading cadre of the Communist Party of the Philippines in the unit and the district, but was not the NPA commander of the unit. The unit commander was Ka Henry, who had joined the NPA at the age of 31 after working most of his life as a tenant farmer for a landlord.

He had been five years in the NPA

and seen some action. He spoke no English and had only a basic elementary school education. He and Ka Alexander had no special privileges. Ka Henry was only in supreme command in an actual military confrontation. All other decisions were taken collectively.

The NPA is of course an army. In the units I met, there were almost equal numbers of men and women. However, in the actual fighting units there are few women because, the NPA say, of the enormous extra demands placed on them in terms of constant long marching and fitness. Only married couples slept together, but there were plenty of love affairs going on among sweethearts, and more marriages were scheduled. And there was plenty of touching and human contact among all the comrades. The units I stayed with were remarkably free of any tension. They formed one big happy family. Perhaps the good-humoured joking, which spared no one, including Ka Alexander and Ka Henry, provide the necessary safety valve. But more decisive was the absolute dedication of all comrades to the cause for which they were fighting.

'The NPA is fighting for the interests of the peasants and workers it is composed in the main of landless peasants.'

In Diosmabalos barrio, 'before the comrades came' in 1980, the villagers had been terrorised by a gang of five criminal elements. In one case they had tied up a husband and raped his young wife repeatedly before their children. In another, they had hacked the arms and legs of a peasant who resisted their efforts to steal his crop, leaving deep gashes which required long and expensive hospital treatment. They had also chopped off three fingers on one hand of his 13 year old son who today is in the NPA. The barangay captain had proved powerless to arrest the gang and so the peasants asked the NPA to carry out justice. The gangleader was executed and the other four fled the barrio and province. Today, two elderly *nays* told me there was no crime in the barrio. Before the comrades came in 1980, 'you couldn't even leave your washing on the line' for fear of it being stolen!

Even in the units I was accompanying, a security lapse occurred. On my last night we moved to a neighbouring barrio, closer to the road, to facilitate my departure. A few younger comrades had gone ahead and selected a peasant's house for our stay overnight.

I was surprised at the peasants who were to be our hosts. The children were lice-ridden, malnourished and poorly clothed. The wife was skin and bone while the pups which are normally healthy in every other house I had visited were mangy and one near death. Nowhere had I seen such poverty and neglect, and I thought that the family had been selected precisely because they were the poorest of the poor. As we waited for the comrades to finish cooking dinner, two peasants arrived from the barrio. They immediately went into a huddle with Ka Alexander and the temporary unit commander. (Ka Henry had gone off elsewhere.) Finally Ka Alexander took me aside: the peasant whose house we were to sleep in had been given three warnings by the peasants' militia as a suspected informer. The comrades who had arranged our lodging had not consulted the barrio peasant's committee before choosing the house! The neglect in the household reflected the fact that they were not organised and lacked that self-pride I'd witnessed elsewhere.

After a hurried dinner, we set off on another hour-long night march. But the comrades were meticulously polite to the peasants whose home we were evacuating, paying for anything they had used and cleaning up before they left. It was a subdued and grim-faced group that marched that night. The mood was not helped by the loud chorus of barking from the multitude of dogs protecting each peasant's house we marched by. I'd earlier been told that 'even the dogs are organised in the barrios' because any military sneaking up for an ambush at night would be greeted by an uproar of barking. That night it seemed to me that someone should have told the dogs that we were '*kasama*'! Finally we reached a small peasants' house in which we quickly went to sleep without the usual round of joking and music.

In the middle of the night, the house's dogs erupted into a fury of barking. Comrades grabbed their rifles and scattered around the house, reinforcing those on guard duty, while I desperately tried to remember the passwords for that night! After much whispering and a few cocked guns, it was discovered that the intruder was a wandering water buffalo which had very nearly ended up as the next week's meals... No military appeared that night or the next day. But I gave silent thanks to the vigilance of the peasants of that barrio.

In the next issue of *Socialist Alternatives*, Deneys Freny will analyse the current situation in the Philippines, one year into the Aquino era and the prospects for the NPA after the failure of the ceasefire.

Just Say No

One year after Chernobyl
PATRICK PETITJEAN looks at some of the most unsavoury aspects of the international nuclear cover up.

Did the Chernobyl accident really take place? Judging by the official reactions in the Soviet Union as in the Western World, it didn't. The three other reactors at the Chernobyl plant were reactivated even sooner than the unscathed ones at Three Mile Island, and the British authorities seem to have resolved to draw no lesson from the accident beyond a cosmetic revision of emergency plans. As regards public opinion on the other hand, Chernobyl put the anti-nuclear power lobby in the majority for the first time. Nearly one year on, by picking up fragments of information (generally too 'specialised' to make good headline stuff), it is possible to analyse what happened and learn the first lessons - summed up below in 21 points - from the world's greatest nuclear accident to date. Not a pretty sight!

1 Nuclear explosions are possible in Chernobyl-type reactors and PWRs. Yet, experts claimed the possibility of such an explosion was only limited to fast breeders. A nuclear explosion took place at Chernobyl.

2 Such an explosion would cause all security systems on nearby reactors to go on the blink. It wasn't a thermal or chemical explosion that blew the concrete shield off at Chernobyl.

3 The effects of a nuclear accident know no frontiers as we already knew through atmospheric tests. Chernobyl's direct effects were felt thousands of miles away, its indirect effects all over the globe.

4 Without frontiers, the effects know no time limit either. The radioactive iodine might have gone, but the cesium released will be with us for decades. After falling on our soils it will concentrate, first in

plants, then in cows and their milk: we haven't heard the last of it yet. Furthermore, the effects of nuclear accidents are cumulative. The next one in, say, five years' time will add to that and so on. The same applied to atmospheric nuclear tests. That's why we stopped them.

5 Nobody knows precisely the levels of radioactivity (as a proportion of the core) that the Chernobyl accident released. The Russians say about 5%, nearer 20% say the Western experts. What they all agree upon is that it was several times what an atmospheric test would release...

6 Over 30 years, Chernobyl will claim more victims than the current wave of terrorist actions. You wouldn't know it by comparing the Government and the press' reactions.

7 When, at the post-mortem Vienna Conference, the Russians estimated that, over 30 years, the victim toll will number in tens of thousands, some Western experts claimed that those figures were grossly inflated.

8 Chernobyl revealed that the so-called 'acceptable levels of radioactivity' were little more than the result of a political balance of forces, a measure of social awareness and the product of a given level of scientific knowledge. In no way do they represent a level under which one is safe from any effects. This, of course, does not apply to the nuclear industry's experts who regard it as a vague notion above which one should be mindful of a faintly possible danger.

9 In any event, with the cloud of disinformation spread by the commercial lobbies, a country might well stick to the official levels in its domestic markets but merrily break them on its exports markets. And that's how Brazil was sold EEC milk (from France and Ireland) with levels of radioactivity well above that of the official Brazilian norms. Unsurprisingly, rather than send back the milk, the Brazilian government raised the norms leading to endless court actions by consumers' associations.



Radioactive milk for Brazil.

10 Accidents are not impossible. They are not even rare. Accidents will happen, in five years' time, in ten years' time...

11 Total protection from human error, no matter how sophisticated the 'safety nets', is not an achievable goal. Only the obscure sect of the technology adorators (adepts of which are found in ministries and institutions such as the UKAEA or the CEBG) still consider the human factor a negligible quantity. To others, the real questions is whether the unavoidable risks are worthwhile? Are they really taken in full knowledge of the likely consequences?

12 Nuclear accidents are difficult to circumscribe in their duration: it took over two weeks before the Russians felt on the top of the situation at Chernobyl. Radioactive leaks have been as important between the 5th and 10th day after the accident as they had been before. The only difference is that the winds pushed them Eastwards and away from the West. Months after the accident, radioactivity was still emitted from the site...



And what if I press this one?

13 It is undeniably better to contain the radioactivity of a fused reactor in a concrete shield rather than release it in the atmosphere. But, in case of accident, the products are there and do not disappear overnight, only time has an effect on them. Should we then turn wrecked reactors into museums of the future? The same applies to waste: the longer it takes us to stop nuclear production, the more waste we will have to look after for thousands of years. It is so hard to crack the problem of how to get rid of them that it has even been suggested that they should be sent to outer space.

14 In costing nuclear programmes, the consequences of an accident are always left out. Yet who can tell the cost of closing land to agriculture, medical care and monitoring over decades, large-scale decontamination operations – not to mention immediate rescue services, the price of crops wasted, etc...

15 There is also the contradiction 'economics/safety'. What government would consider closing all reactors of the same type if it is shown to be potentially dangerous? The Russians have refused to do it with the RMBK-types, would the Western governments do it for the PWRs?

16 From the point of view of economics and raw material, nuclear power was always seen as a parenthesis (of 1 to 2 centuries). But is it not rather irrational to operate reactors for 30 to 40 years and then have to look after the waste for centuries?

17 The more the risks of major accidents are played down, the less we are prepared to deal with them. This is

glaring in nuclear plants: confronted with daily denials of the risks of accident, it becomes difficult for the workforce to realise it has an accident on its hands when the day comes. This also applies to emergency plans: the im preparation of evacuation procedures would be more likely to increase the victim toll than reduce it. Anyway, who cares since accidents won't happen here...

18 As regards radioactivity levels, since an accident is all but impossible, there is no real point in carefully monitoring it is there? No Western country was prepared to face the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. No-one knew what to say to farmers, what crops were most threatened, etc....

19 One must also note the consequences of nuclear power in terms of social control – especially in the wake of an accident: hundreds of thousands of people in the Chernobyl area will have to submit to close monitoring for the rest of their lives.

20 Nuclear power is not amenable to population control nor to any form of 'democratisation'. This is due to the fact that it is necessarily integrated to the military-industrial complex and the state apparatus – in Britain just as much as in the USSR. The power of the pro-nuclear lobby gives an idea of British capitalism and the role of the army in its midst. Anyway, whether it is democratically controlled or not, the consequences of

nuclear power are just as unacceptable. Thus the only thing there to control is the fast decommissioning and phasing out of the whole programme.

21 If we want to be able to avoid the nuclear option, we need to shape the choices anterior to the decision to build this or that plant. We need to bring decisions about general technological development to the arena of democratic political choice. Once a plant is designed and built, it remains the same regardless of the colour of the government of the day. I doubt whether the post-Chernobyl weeks would have been any better under Kinnock/Cunningham...

Chernobyl was a graphic 'demonstration' of the issues that the anti-nuclear movement today concentrates on: health, economics, military implications, lack of democratic input in major choices, repressive measures, social control and Third-World domination. For the first time, these have emerged as concrete and (so to speak) burning issues. In this respect, we have now entered the 'post-Chernobyl' era.

It is now more urgent than ever to close the nuclear parenthesis and this can only be a central objective for any progressive force. The coming struggles against nuclear power and, in particular, the June 1987 demonstration in Paris will prove a test of the viability and the impact of the new eco-alternative-self-managing convergence.



I'm a P.R. agent for the CEGBI

Budding Talent, Chantal Montellier.



...I WAS AN ACTIVIST IN A VANGUARD PARTY, FEW WOMEN EVER TOOK PART IN DECISION-MAKING, THEY WERE CONFINED TO MENIAL TASKS...



'LESS THAN 20% WOMEN ON THE PARTY LISTS! NOT VERY ENCOURAGING!'

AND YESTERDAY'S MEETING!... NO WOMAN ON THE PLATFORM AND NO WOMAN-SPEAKER FROM THE FLOOR! RATHER DEPRESSING, ISN'T IT?'



YES, YOU'RE RIGHT... BUT, AFTER ALL, YOU WERE ONLY GRANTED A VOTE 40 YEARS AGO... SO, BE PATIENT!..

YOU BET!



AS I'VE ALWAYS SAID, POLITICS SHOULD BE FOR MEN!

BEEH!



'BE PATIENT, MIM. SURE!... SHAME THOUGH, I THOUGHT I HAD GOOD IDEAS!'



I LIKED ART. I TOOK UP PAINTING, BUT WHEN I TOOK MY WORK TO ART GALLERIES



BUT EVERYWHERE THE SAME ANSWER:

'... NOT BAD, BUT YOU SEE, WOMEN'S WORK IT DOESN'T SELL!'



reviews

WORKING GIRLS a film by Lizzie Borden LINDA DORRELL

Cynthia Payne (Madame Cyn) has often said: 'Men want sex and girls want money, and that's really what it's all about'. In *Working Girls*, a film about prostitution, Lizzie Borden seems to be taking a similar line. Her film portrays prostitutes as being not under the control of men, but in control of men - or rather their 'very vulnerable penises'. All well and good. We live in a world which likes to paint women as weak, as victims and as always 'on top' so why not redress the balance a little? But I'm uneasy about the way Borden does this. By showing prostitution as 'just another mundane job', her laudable desire to 'demythologise the power of the phallus' ends up turning brothels into places where sex is as harmless as buying a quarterpounder with chips over the counter - prostitution as one of those expanding service industries dear to Thatcher... But, yet again, it is male sexual needs which are being catered for, and it's men who wield the consumer spending power.

As we watch Molly, a suitably middle-class photographer, go through her daily grind, we are drawn to make the connection between prostitution and all the other jobs - secretary, hostess, etc - which revolve around pleasing men. It's no good feeling sorry for the fragile men who have to pay for such pampering - 'can I get you anything?' - or to say, as Borden does, that 'this kind of work isn't as bad as everyone thinks' if we don't question the power structures at work. Borden claims that many of the women in the sex industry talk about their sense of power. So, 'what right do other women have to tell them they're wrong?'. But really, what this power amounts to is pulling a few tricks on men - not giving them what they've paid for, laughing at them and so on... Let's not kid ourselves that laughter disempowers men. Industrial sabotage is not worker's control. Moreover, plenty of women in the sex industry, Linda Lovelace for example, have hardly described it as a bed of roses. Even if it were, would we want sexual

relations to be forever defined in terms of one party dominating the other?

Being paid to get laid is not intrinsically deplorable - an economic system which offers women little other viable choice is. The roles in prostitution remain gender specific and, however much 'power' it may give women in certain situations, it only serves to show how little power women have in society at large. Borden's film is



not openly moral, psychological or political. At times, it attempts to distinguish between different levels of prostitution - one of the *working girls* expresses horror when one woman says she'll 'work the streets' and the hierarchy of prostitutes does come across. Yet such distinctions are never really worked through. Obviously, Borden has only met a very select group of prostitutes in her research. There is also very little on the impact of Molly's profession on her personal life. True, Molly, herself a lesbian, is not a stereotyped character and, anyway, 'who looks like a dyke?' but the very brief appearance of black women in the film - Molly's lover in the opening sequence and another black woman at the end of the film - cannot be justified simply by saying 'there are no more black women in the film because the house itself is racist' as Borden does.

Working Girls is definitely not another voyeuristic excuse for a film about prostitution. But

it's not enough simply to reverse the roles so that men become fragile harmless babies without seriously challenging the sexual relations based on power and manipulation which allow a man to buy a woman's compliance and then condemn her for being a whore. But then, Lizzie Borden is not 'that kind of feminist' and the film is probably not aimed at us anyway. ■

SALVADOR a film by Oliver Stone TURNING THE TIDE - US intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace by Noam Chomsky (Pluto, 1985; £5.96)

JOHN FOOT

'Military aid must go forward regardless of how many are murdered, lest the Marxist guerillas win. And indeed the Guerillas must win...' *New Republic* ('Organ' of the *US New Right*).
'As the human rights climate deteriorates, US aid increases'. Chomsky

The US is the enemy of democracy and human rights in Central America. In fact it has actively opposed these 'ideals' for at least 200 years in its 'back-yard'. Noam Chomsky - a long-time opponent of US Imperialism - makes this abundantly clear in his wide-ranging, acerbic and devastating



study of US foreign policy and the domestic reaction. From Greece, to Korea, to Vietnam, to Chile, to Grenada - American intervention has opposed democracy, and reinforced the

*forces of reaction, murder and dictatorship. The two most recent victims of this process are, of course, El Salvador and Nicaragua. In both countries 'the people' have challenged long-standing and US-backed dictatorships through guerilla war and urban insurrection. In both, as well, the American reaction has been vicious. Yet, only in El Salvador was the revolution staved off. In 1981 the urban guerillas were winning - militarily and ideologically. US aid and weapons poured in, Archbishop Romero was murdered, and the death squads set totally free to become what even *The Economist* termed a 'peasant-massacring shambles' *Today* - as far as America is concerned - the situation is 'stable'. Democracy is no longer a threat.*

*Salvador - the film Vietnam veteran Oliver Stone made before his US smash-hit Platoon - attempts to deal with this period in the country's history. It's a powerful movie and it predictably failed in the US. From the brilliant opening titles - where a seething mass of bodies crawl across church steps to escape gunfire - to its last ironic frame - Salvador sets a relentless pace. Unfortunately it feels the need to describe US imperialism through, once again, a journalist. (Remember the photographer Nick Nolte in *Under Fire* or Sydney Schanberg in *The Killing Fields*?). However, this predictable device is overcome by James Wood's high energy performance as the boozing, self-confessed 'scheming bastard' Richard Boyle - a part for which he has been nominated for an Oscar. Boyle takes us through the Salvadorean nightmare. We see a hill of dead bodies horrifically piled up in a quarry; we witness Romero's murder in his cathedral (following a moving liberation theology sermon) and we are forced to watch the horrific rape and killing of four American nuns in (rather too) graphic detail. Salvador also has one of the best horse-charges in film history!*

City Limits dismissed the film as 'sexist' - but to my mind this was plain silly. Boyle and his friend are sexists - yet they are not heroes. In fact they are clearly, in Boyle's words, 'Louses'. This is a true story and as such should present a realistic portrayal of what Boyle was like. (Boyle himself co-wrote the script.) In addition the devastating counter-argument to Boyle's treatment of women is shown by their

presence and leadership on the front-line of the guerilla war and the ideological struggle.

The film's best moment is its end. Yet, unlike Barry Norman, I refuse to give away the whole plot in one review. Go and see *Salvador* (if you can). It makes *The Killing Fields* look like a teaparty - and it doesn't play *Imagine* at the end. Instead of hoping for peace, *Salvador* shows exactly who is preventing that peace and activity promoting mass murder.

Many questions remain from the film which can only be answered through Chomsky's analysis. Why are the US in there? How do they get away with it? and how can it be stopped. Noam Chomsky believes that the US is protecting its '5th Freedom in Central America'. The 'freedom to rob and exploit'. It props up undemocratic and murderous regimes (for example, Guatemala; 100,000 killed since 1960, 100 political assassinations a month in 1984, 10 disappearances a week, 100,000 orphans, half-a-million displaced; the lowest life expectancy in Central America) to maintain this economic 'freedom'. In addition there is a continuous propaganda campaign willingly taken up by the meek US media. Chomsky is cynically contemptuous of the US press. Reagan and his cronies only have to mention the 'Great Satan' - Communism, and the media jumps to attention. The people's struggle is pushed into violence as 'legitimate' secondary associations (trade-unions, pressure-groups, etc.) are destroyed. 'Socialism' is shown to be an economic and political failure. The net result is domestic acceptance - a nondebate. In the recent debates on contra aid not one senator has even tentatively supported the Nicaragua government. All this despite the fact that most 'independent' commentators have described it as the most democratic country in Central America.

Forty thousand children die every day from malnutrition and disease resulting from starvation. We (the US) help kill them, with policies designed to have this predictable consequence' (Chomsky, p.42). The US must prevent revolutions doing what they tend to do - spread. This is the basic motivation behind the 'Contra' obsession. No revolution can succeed, nor can any revolution be seen to succeed. No matter how many lives it costs - the

people must be kept in check.

For Chomsky, the fight starts in Nicaragua and El Salvador - but must be waged in any form where people will listen. We can constrain governments at the very least. The anti-war movements of the '60s hold back Reagan now. We must argue and tell the truth about Central America - before thousands more die in appalling, and preventable conditions. Chomsky's book (and other work) is an excellent tool for this task. 'If we had the honesty and the moral courage, we would not let a day pass without hearing the cries of the victims' (Chomsky, p.170). Other freedoms, socialist freedoms, must take precedence over the 'freedom to rob and exploit' required by capitalism. The final word shall go to Chomsky, this 'means changing the structures of power and dominance that impel the state to crush moves towards independence and social justice within our (the US's) vast domains'.

'Divided Loyalties - Dilemmas of Sex and Class'

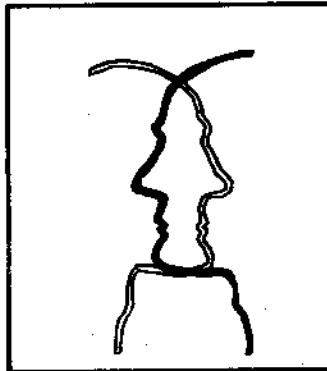
Anne Phillips

JANE ALEXANDER

I have a friend who is black, middle-class and a woman. I also have a friend who is white, middle-class and a woman. I have another friend who is white, working-class and male. Everytime we attempt to discuss socialism and feminism we end up arguing about it. Anne Phillips' book *Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class* is about us.

Too much feminist theory has ignored class, or at best regarded it as being irrelevant. Anne Phillips restores class to the feminist agenda, giving us a timely reminder that in practice the women's movement has had to deal with the class issue time and time again. Indeed, class actually affects and defines the experience of women. Class therefore does matter, and yet class as a concept is often misunderstood and misdefined. Anne Phillips make the point that many jobs traditionally thought of as being middle-class, are actually working-class. Thus many women white-collar workers by virtue of their work, are not middle but working class.

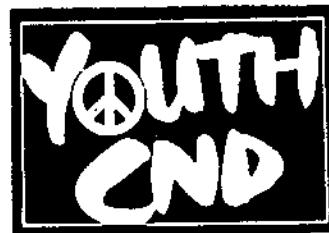
One of the most common criticisms levelled against the feminist movement, is that it is, and has been 'too middle-class'. This is despite the fact that many so-called middle-class



women are, by virtue of their work, working-class, and that many campaigns within the movement both today and in the past (such as votes for women, and the pro-abortion campaigns) maintain cross-class support. What does vary are the different priorities attached to each campaign by different women. As Anne Phillips herself says: 'That there is a tension between the politics of gender, the politics of class, the politics of race, is something we should take for granted, and it would be ungenerous to dismiss it when it fails to solve all problems'. It would have been much more instructive if Anne Phillips could have provided some sort of analysis as to the reasons why the excuse of being too middle-class is so often used to dismiss the women's movement.

I am not totally at ease with Anne Phillip's contention that: 'if class politics wanted to prove its relevance to feminism it would have to do a great deal better'. I appreciate this up to a point, for those middle-class women who prefer their feminism to their somewhat altruistic socialism, since understandably as sexism often affects them directly and personally, feminism is more real to them. For other women, like myself, class politics was always the more relevant issue and feminism came at a much later stage. The point to be emphasized, which Anne Phillips does admirably, is that the experience of women varies enormously, and that; 'Feminism operates within the confines of a class society and has not escaped its pressures.'

What a relief to my friends and I that our arguments arise from the complexity of the socialist and feminist projects, and not from personal animosity! As Anne Phillips concludes: 'Class matters, not because it gets in the way of us feeling the same, but because of the choice it suggests between the goals we pursue.' Despite the diverse conditions experienced by women, as long as they continue to be oppressed as women, then they will experience unity. Indeed, the only thing oppressive about this book is the price, which at £5.50 for a slim volume, makes it beyond the means of my working-class friend.



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HUNGARIAN TRAGEDY
Peter Fry (New Park
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ELLIS HILLMAN

The re-publication of Peter Fry's classic tour de force *The Hungarian Revolution* could not have come at a more apposite time. Despite important differences there are interesting parallels between the period immediately after the accession of Khrushchev to the Secretaryship and Leadership of the Party and the emergence of the energetic Michael Gorbachev to the same position. Then, as now, we see a mixture of 'reforms from above', attempts at grappling with the terrifying Stalinist inheritance, and resistance to such changes from the more conservative elements of the bureaucracy (the 'Anti-Party' Group of Malotov, Kaganovich and Malenkov).

The brutal suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 came in the aftermath of Khrushchev's much vaunted reforms. In the wake of the 70th



Hungary 56.

Congress, it was a turning point for many genuine members of the Communist Party who had up to then followed every zig and zag of the Moscow line, and swallowed every incredulity peddled by the Stalinists of the time including the post-war version of the Moscow Trials (the purge of the 'conspirators' in Poland (Gomulka), Hungary (Rajk), Bulgaria (Kostov) etc).

Peter Fry was sent to Hungary to cover the events that led to the Hungarian Revolution for *The Daily Worker* in October

1956. He reported what he saw - but found that his dispatches were suppressed. The truth hurt too much. He saw at first hand the Hungarian Revolution at the critical points in its development - in Budapest, Magyavavor, Gyor and Baboluz. He saw the uprising and the police. He saw too, how the Nagy government was undermined by the Stalinists, and eventually crushed by the guns of the invading Soviet army. The statue of Stalin was toppled in Budapest. Yes, but as Peter Fry puts it 'Stalinism, vengeful, cruel, remorseless, ... had returned to Budapest.' 30 years later Peter Fry's account of these events retains all its freshness, impetuosity and relevance. ■

Choose Freedom-The future of democratic socialism
by Roy Hattersley
(Michael Joseph,
£12.95)

PAUL DERRICK

As the Labour Party prepares for a new general election Roy Hattersley has produced a new book about what he means by socialism which should have been aimed at helping the Labour Party turn its socialism into a vote winner and make its economic strategy more convincing. Unfortunately it does neither of these things because Roy Hattersley is not at all clear about he means by socialism and does not attempt to link Labour's immediate task of, convincing the voters that it can achieve a major reduction in unemployment without significant inflation, with the party's socialist purpose.

The book is divided into two parts: the first about principles and the need to achieve liberty and equality for freedom and fairness. The second is about practice and includes a chapter on *The Case for Clause Four*. Roy Hattersley emphatically rejects the idea that socialism means wholesale nationalisation with a shopping list of a couple of hundred major companies for nationalisation as he is convinced that such a commitment would lose Labour votes. But he

does not make clear what he does mean by socialism. He devotes a good deal of attention to co-operatives and welcomes the formation of around 1,300 workers' co-operatives in the last ten years, but most of them are small and have only a marginal impact on the economy. So, like the Labour Party statement on Social Ownership, Roy Hattersley contents himself with commending public investment in capitalist companies and employee shareholding in capitalist companies.

Increased public investment is obviously important for achieving a major reduction in unemployment through economic expansion; but how many members of the Labour Party regard state shareholding in capitalist companies on the B.P. model as "social ownership"? He also calls for a major extension in employee shareholding without saying much about how it could be achieved, but that is hardly social ownership either. He commends the Swedish system of employee shareholding through wage earners' funds; but Swedish companies, like others, are still run for the profit of private shareholders. He insists on a more equitable distribution of wealth, but says little about tax changes which could help to achieve it, such as the separate taxation of personal earned and investment incomes with highly progressive taxation on the latter. He is highly critical of merger mania and profiteering in the City; but not clear about what he thinks could be done about it. With big gaps between share values and asset values and companies continuing to be run for the profit of private shareholders it is likely to continue.

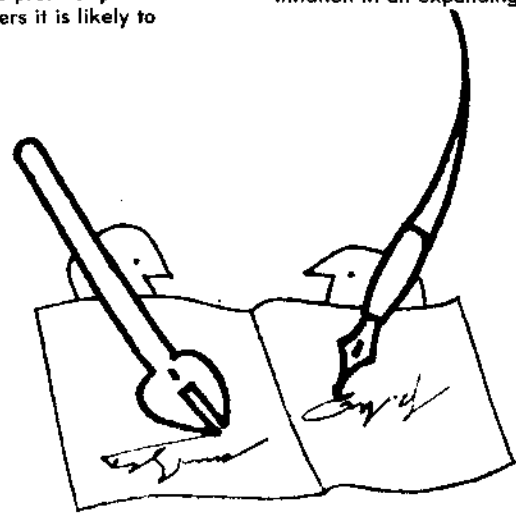
Hattersley devotes a good deal of attention to economic strategy and continues to say that priority in the allocation of resources needs to be given in national economic assessments to investment to provide jobs rather than to wage increases and calls for what he calls "wage planning". But he ought to be aware from the experience of the last forty years that incomes policies that do not apply fairly to all incomes are unlikely



The Mad Hatter...

to be acceptable to trade unionists. He says little about dividends although the TUC says they have been increasing three times as fast as wages and would be likely to increase more with economic expansion under a Labour Government.

Roy Hattersley runs away from the incomes problems by merely saying that a Labour Government would make the best bargain it could with the trade unions over "wage planning". It is high time he realised that the problem of controlling inflation in an expanding



MICHAEL

economy will not be solved without replacing capitalist ownership of the socialisation of limited companies so that they are run in the interests of the workers and the community instead of for the profit of private shareholders with a permanent limit set on the return as well as the liability of the shareholder. This is a formidable task and would be likely to take time; but the Labour Party is committed by its constitution to replace capitalist ownership by common ownership; and a book such as this one should make some attempt to discuss how it should be achieved. Instead, Roy Hattersley proposes that most of industry should continue to be run on a capitalist basis - with some increase in state shareholding and employee shareholding in capitalist companies. Unless the Labour Party does more work on social ownership and economic strategy than Roy Hattersley has done in his book, it is unlikely to convince the voters of its economic strategy or turn its socialism into a vote winner. Roy Hattersley has many sensible things to say but he avoids the two big problems: making clear what he means by socialism and making clear that Labour would be able to achieve a major reduction of employment without significant inflation because of its socialist commitment. ■

STATE CAPITALISM: THE WAGES SYSTEM UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Adam Buick and John Crump (MacMillan, London, 1986)

RICHARD BARBROOK

This book is an energetic summary of the case for a theory of state capitalism as a necessary component of any examination of the contemporary world, East or West. To most people, even those who are politically active, state capitalism is a phrase used by 'ultraleftist' groups like the *Socialist Workers Party*, the *Socialist Party of Great Britain* or anarchists. It seems to have something to do with an esoteric debate on the class nature of the USSR and has little relevance to the struggles facing workers in their daily lives. This book tries to make some of these connections, but if only partially succeeds. Yet it is important

because it challenges illusions about Russian imperialism which are still held by otherwise apparently sane people. Tony Benn's attacks on *Solidarnosc* is only the most recent illustration of this long tradition. With the emergence of the reformist leadership of Gorbachev, it is especially important that Marxists retain their critical faculties concerning Bolshevism.

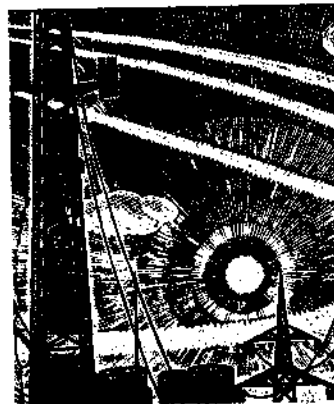
The irony of the USSR's current technocratic reforms is that it has made the British Left more Stalinist than the Kremlin! Gorbachev wishes to follow the examples of Hungary, 1968



Progress as seen by 'Pravda'.

Czechoslovakia, Poland and now China, in creating some form of 'market socialism'. Yet both the Stalinist and the Trotskyist Left see state planning as inherently socialist. *Militant's* dream of 'nationalising the top 200 monopolies' is only a crude expression of a more general belief that Socialism is ruled by a benign bureaucracy, i.e. their own party or faction. The importance of this book is that it sets out the Marxist perspective on such assertions. The authors centre their analysis on the social relations of production in state capitalist societies and how they affect the proletariat. In Russia, they see that the working class was largely created by the industrialisation policies of the Bolsheviks and is constituted as an exploited class through the selling of its labour-

power to the state. Moreover, their consciousness is formed within a society dedicated to buying and selling not only workers' labour, but all goods and services. In this Buick and Crump follow the approach of Kuron and Modzelewski in the famous 'Open Letter to the Party' of 1965. They all see the development of state capitalist societies as part of the evolution of capitalism as an international system. Capitalism reproduces itself as a mode of production by constantly changing not only the technology and organisation of production, but also types of



capitalism. In this view, the emergence of state capitalist societies comes as a response to the imperialist penetration of underdeveloped countries. This locates such societies historically, as part of the spread of capitalism as a global system. Lenin himself described post-1917 Russia as 'state capitalist' and showed great enthusiasm in adopting the techniques of German war planning and the American Taylor/Ford methods of mass production. Thus state capitalist societies are seen not as 'degenerate' forms of socialism, but as stultified forms of national capital accumulation. The change of ownership does not change the social relations of production of capitalism, especially wage slavery. On the contrary, state capitalism has been one of the major methods of industrialisation in the Third World, where the example of the Bolsheviks has had more success than in already developed capitalist societies.

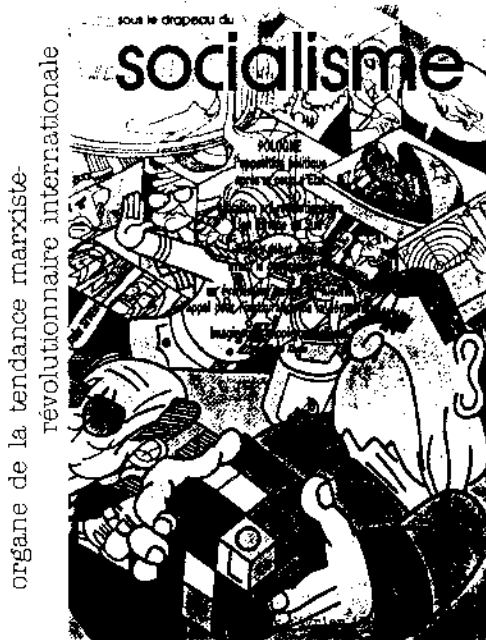
The importance of such an analysis lies not just in our perception of the rivalry between the superpowers and our solidarity with workers' in the East. It also affects our

politics within Britain. Few on the Left will argue now with the capitalist nature of nationalised industries within our country. The 1984/5 Miners' Strike should have cured most people of such illusions. But the British Left does persist with an utopian dream of state planning under its own leadership. As many Leninists are now councillors or union bureaucrats, this statism is no longer an intellectual's theory, but permeates day-to-day practise in councils and unions. The rhetoric of Bolshevism can provide the ideological cover for old-



fashioned clientism and authoritarianism long favoured by the local state, opposing more democratic methods of selfmanagement, such as housing co-operatives, voluntary organisations and so on. As Marxists, it is necessary to oppose such currents within the labour movement, even if we have to occasionally work with them! But the weakness of this book is that it tells us what is wrong with these statist, but offers us no alternative way forward. Buick and Crump admire the SPGB's intransigent stand, but this has led them to political irrelevance. We are offered no method of moving towards Socialism without the apocalyptic world revolution. Though 'ultraleftist' in theory, it leads to political passivity in practice. Marxists are not opposed to political and economic reformism when the working class benefits. The problem for the Left is that many socialists cannot see beyond providing goods and services for the working class, instead of enabling people to manage themselves. The task of *Socialist Alternatives* should be to provide this practical alternative to state capitalism, self-management. ■

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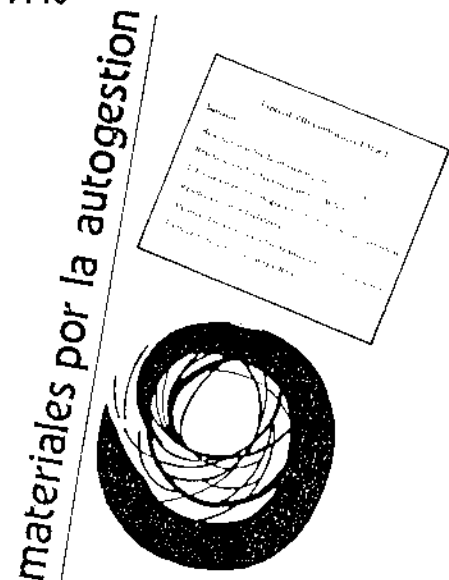
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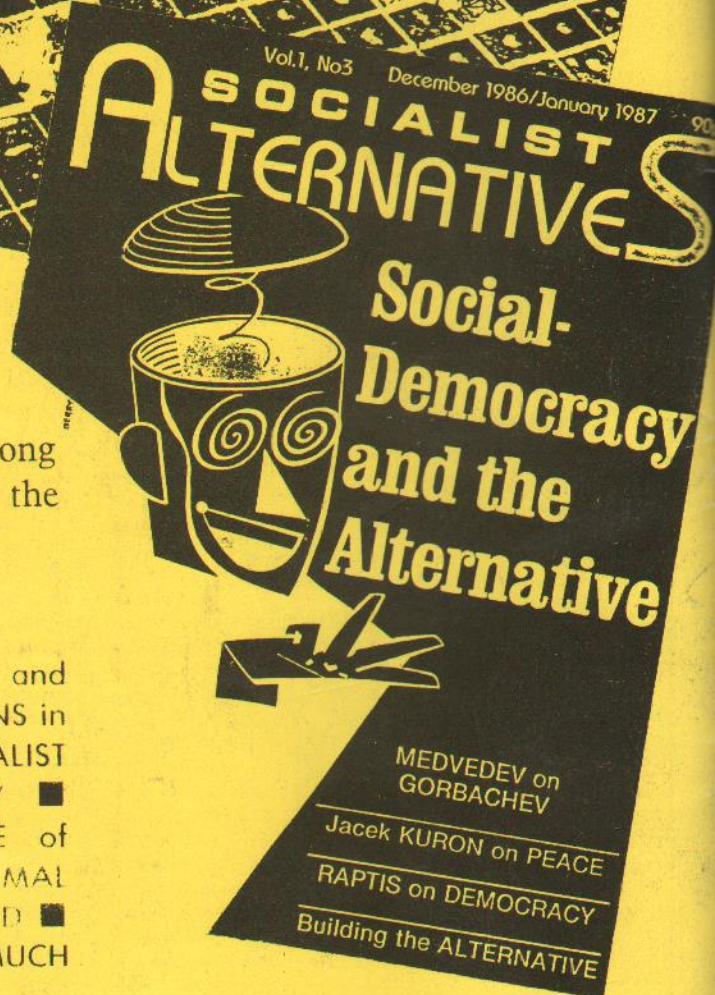
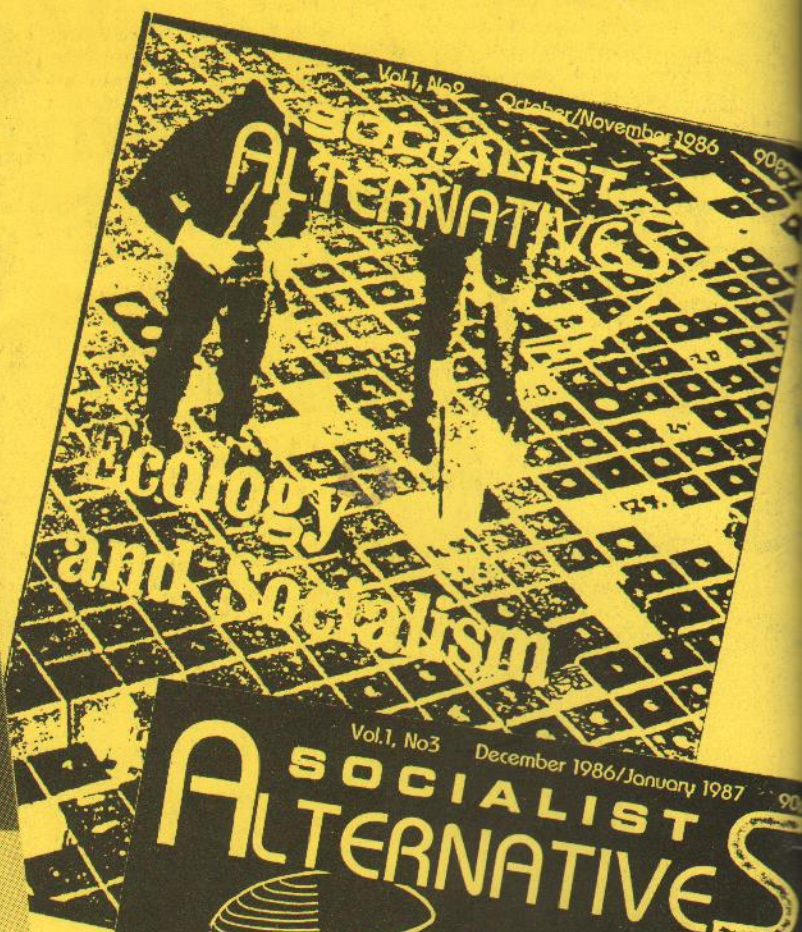
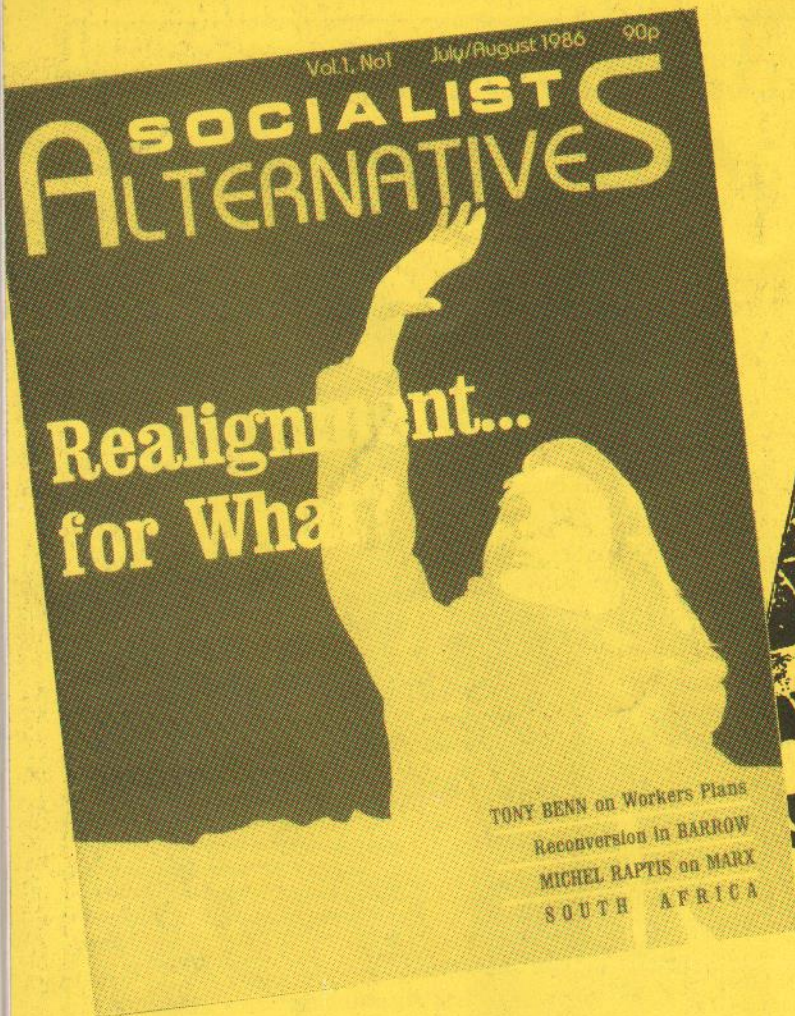


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