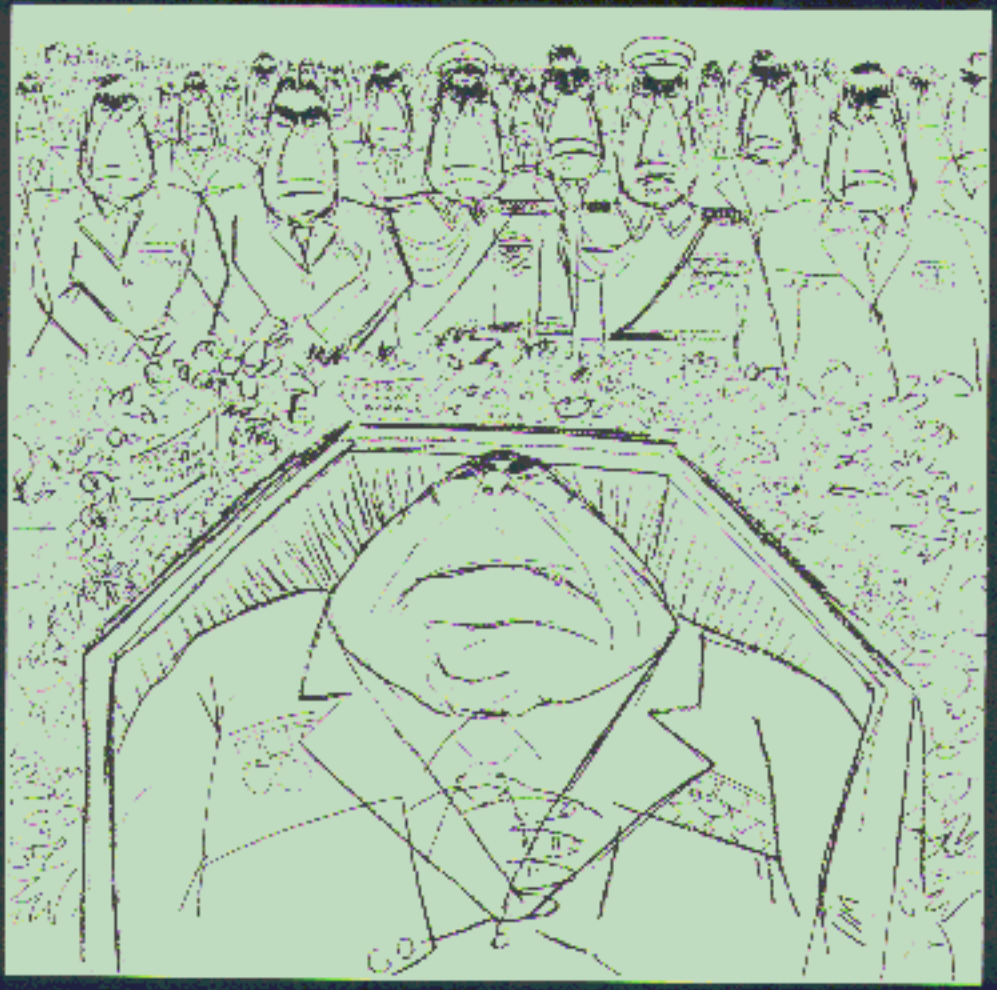
1982: 11 Dec 9-Jan 12 50p
(Issue 49)

socialist REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

The Tsar is dead, long live the Tsar



INSIDE: Miners, Import controls, Dialectics, Disco's

Bosses toe the line

Stuart Ash looks at the CBI, the 'bosses' trade union', and its links with the Government.

Howe's mini-budget came just a week after this year's CBI national conference at which leading employers had called for immediate measures to lift manufacturing capital out of the crisis. In front of the CBI conference were the results of an end-October survey of member firms showing not just no economic recovery but a further slide into redundancies and closures this winter.

We are currently witnessing this predicted further round of sackings.

The CBI called on the Tories to extend job schemes to reduce the headline figures of unemployment and abolish the so-called jobs tax, the National Insurance Surcharge. But they also passed a motion which said that measures to alleviate unemployment should not prejudice the need for competitiveness!

Howe has met them half way by agreeing to cut the NI surcharge to 1.5 per cent although he simultaneously announced that national insurance payments by all of us will rise next April. And now, while Fleet Street speculates about a general election tax cutting budget next March, the Chancellor is explaining to the CBI and employers in general that he can't give them immediate recovery. Every speech now made by the cabinet ministers emphasises that the problem is that the crisis is global.

Two years ago the Government's policies led Sir Terence Beckett, Director General of the CBI, to call for a bare knuckle fight with Thatcher, and to fight against manufacturing capital's collapse into stagnation. A year ago there was much talk among employers of alternatives, the SDP even seemed a realistic option to many bosses – such as John Harvey-Jones, the chairman of ICI. The 1981 CBI conference was not very keen on Thatcherdom or the same old fiscal measures: then the bosses were calling for more than cautious reflation.

This year the picture has changed, with most CBI leaders and captains of industry accepting or at least acquiescing to the Tory shibboleth of 'There Is No Alternative'. There is now much wider recognition of the fact that the traditional party of the ruling class must be backed, because of the forthcoming general election and because the crisis is truly global and remains so.

No Upturn

In his mini-budget, Howe laid on the line what 1983 would look like. His economic calculations were based on the numbers of unemployed in Britain, excluding school leavers, rising from an average of 2,900,000 in 1982/83 to an average of 3,200,000 in 1983/84. Inflation would stay at about five per cent for the whole of 1983. Average earnings would only rise by 6.5 per cent in the tax year 1983/84. Howe forecast manufacturing growth at 1% and GDP up 1.5% in 1983.

What the government is saying to the employers is that the economy cannot be turned up and they will have to make the best of it. The US economy is not pulling the world up and nor is any one in Europe. Unemployment in Britain will get worse, except that the headline figure might be further massaged with yet more govenment subsidy and scheming.

There is a major problem about the next wave of job schemes. They require employers to play a much wider and larger role to fulfill the govenment's target, particularly with the youth training scheme and the new Tebbit proposals for job splitting. Already the Building Trades Employers have said they cannot take on the responsibility of looking after or even training large numbers of young people off the dole. Other groups of employers are also questioning how half a million teenagers can be accommodated on YTS next year.

Although a good number of bosses have come back towards Tory orthodoxy, they will still be looking for changes. Most want to see a Tory victory next year in the general election and then push for radical changes when it doesn't look like rocking the boat. A minority are still outspoken. At the CBI conference, one rather portly employer from International Harvesters, possibly from the doomed Bradford factory, said he'd worked hard for a Tory victory in 1979 and he was still looking forward to the day it was achieved. His views were those of the closed down or savagely cut manufacturing base.

New figures released by the Department of Employment at the end of October show that 20.4 per cent of jobs in manufacturing were lost between June 1979 and June 1982, and the rot continues. There is no evidence at the moment that this can be turned round.

But concern about this long term trend for manufacturing capital is no longer being expressed in the social democratic terms of before. The mainstream thinking of the CBI has, if anything, grown more hawkish with much less emphasis on consensus.

The CBI itself represents much more than the manufacturing sector, with heavy representations from the finance sector, retail and distribution. Large companies like Philips and GEC are not involved in the CBI. The mandarins of Centerpoint – the apt HQ of the CBI – are also niggled by the degree to which the rival and much more right wing Institute of Directors has had much better access to the senior ministers like Howe and Tebbit. The obnoxious and ubiquitous leader of the IoD, Walter Goldsmith, has gained increasing influence in the boardrooms of capital and this has forced the CBI to move to the right to leave the IoD less room for manoeuvre.

The changing pressures combined with the greater loyalty to the Government led to the CBI's top table being overturned at the conference. A motion to call on the government to devalue the pound in order to aid exports and competitiveness was lost on a vote of 281 to 149, with large numbers of the claimed 800 delegates either abstaining or outside drinking. Captains of industry like Sir Michael Edwardes were angry that leading manufacturers could be snubbed so publicly by finance delegates and others and that the CBI staff should have allowed it to happen. Next year there will no doubt be some caucuses or fractions being organised.

A Glove Thrown

If the pundits are right, next year's CBI conference will be taking place after the general election. It will also take place in Glasgow – which is demonstrably a glove thrown down to the SWP if ever there was one. Comrades should note that it will take place in early November. Whatever shade of blue wins the election, the employers will be placing careful demands on those in power to shape a planned and careful recovery based on new levels of productivity and competitiveness in the international markets. Current pressures on wages and trade union organisation in the workplace will be maintained, if not intensified. But not all employers currently have the capacity to see beyond the crisis, perhaps only a small minority of leading companies have been laying down plans to combat rising expectations if recovery does in fact ever emerge. There will be weaknesses in their class and some obvious divisions of interest. We must seek them out. □

No end to the gloom?

The last month has seen two important developments. Tory strategy for winning the next election has had a small setback with the run on the pound but it has had a big boost from the miners' rejection of strike action and the Royal College of Nursing National Council's decision to recommend acceptance of the tiny improved pay offer and leave the rest of the health workers in the lurch.

Together these two events raise much more general issues of politics and economics. How far is any government really in control of economic development? What happens to working class consciousness in periods like the present?

The answers that are given to these two questions are of extreme importance to socialists. If the economic future of Britain is determined by the outcome of government policies, then all we need to do is to change the government by, say, electing Foot and company to office and we can once again look forward to never having had it so good.

If, on the other hand, the economy is set in an indefinite decline, with the prospect of continually increasing unemployment and falling living standards, then there is no reason why the current retreat of the working class movement should ever be halted. The set-back for the miners is just confirmation that fear of unemployment has allowed the ruling class to win the ideological battle.

During a boom, with full employment, workers are confident and prepared to fight, but because the system is expanding there is no need to generalise struggle because real improvement can be won by local struggle. In a crisis, although workers may recognise that the system has little or nothing to offer them, they lack the confidence to fight.

If any of the arguments are correct, then the outlook for socialism is gloomy indeed. At best we could hope for another period of

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REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR
December 1905

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Subscription rates for one year (11 issues): Britain and Ireland £7. Overseas Surface £8, Europe Air £10, Elsewhere Air £13 50 (institutions add £5). Cheques and postal orders payable to Socialist Review.
Socialist Review is sent free to all prisoners on request
ISSN 0141-2242
Printed by East End (Offset) Ltd, (TU all depts) London E2

managed capitalism, with its attendent miseries, oppression and class rule. At worst we could be facing an indefinite period of retreat without any prospect of change.

In fact, these arguments are fundamentally flawed. In order to understand why they are wrong, we need to go back to the fundamental structure of capitalist society itself.

In common with all other class societies, capitalism produces a surplus: more goods are produced than are needed simply to feed the population and replace worn out machines. Again, like all other class societies, one part of society, the ruling class, controls this surplus.

The method by which the ruling class controls this surplus is different in different types of societies. The ruling class in capitalism owns the means of production: factories, machinery, etc. The vast majority of the population own none of the means of production except their ability to work. In order to obtain a living they have to sell this labour power to the capitalist.

In return for a day's work, the worker receives a money wage which enables him or her to buy the goods needed to stay alive and reproduce. But a day's work produces more goods than that. The surplus is taken by the capitalist.

The capitalist does not simply consume this surplus. There are very few capitalists and their appetite for Rolls Royces, caviar and champagne, though great, has definite limits. Much more important is the fact that there are several capitalists. In order to remain capitalits they have to stay in business. If the bread or the steel they need to sell is more expensive than that of their competitors then they will be unable to shift it and they will go bankrupt.

Competitive drive

Therefore each and every capitalist attempts to make sure that their goods are cheaper than those of their competitors. They can do this in two ways. One is by driving down the amount they pay to workers. The other is by introducing new and more efficient machines which save on the amount of labour power they need to buy to produce a loaf of bread or a tonne of steel. The bulk of the surplus they extract from workers is spent on this second activity—investment in the means of production.

This is the essential nature of the capitalist system. There is no way that an individual capitalist, or even a capitalist government, can do anything about it. So long as there are Tesco and Sainsbury, Ford and British Leyland, US Steel Co. and the BSC and Mitsubishi, they have got to behave like this.

Governments can help them in this. They can give them tax handouts, they can pass laws making strikes difficult or illegal, they can cut indirect wages by reducing expenditure on schools or hospitals, but they cannot alter the fundamentally competitive nature of the system.

Boom and slump

The current slump, whether in Britain, the USA or Poland, is not essentially the result of government policy. It arises from the nature of capitalism. There is therefore very little that any government can do about it. The argument between Sir Geoffrey Howe and Peter Shore is over that very little that government *can* do about things. The slump itself is outside of their control.

But to say that is to leave unanswered the reason why the slump took place in the first place. After all, during most of the lives of most of the readers of this magazine capitalism was an expanding system. Between the end of the Second World War and the early seventies the system expanded rapidly. Clearly, something must have caused the change from expansion and relatively full employment to slump and mass unemployment.

The fundamental reason why capitalism enters slumps is because it tends to *overproduce.* This overproduction is not absolute absolute

—there is obviously not too much bread or steel in the world today. But there is more than can be sold profitably.

Once agin, this tendency to overproduction is not the result of some silly mistake by capitalists. It arises from the nature of the system. For each individual capitalist what matters is their own survival. So each invests in bigger and bigger plants in order to make their goods as cheap as possible so that it is they who survive. This means there is intense demand for new machines and for workers to labour on them. This is a boom, and is natural to capitalism.

This means that more and more goods are produced. But they cannot all be sold at a profit. Ultimately all goods must be consumed, but no capitalist can unilaterally raise the wages of his or her workers, because that would make production more expensive. In a world economy, the same applies to nation states.

Thus goods are produced which cannot be sold. Capitalists go bankrupt. Factories close. Machines rot. Workers are thrown out of work. This is a slump and it is as natural to capitalism as a boom.

But if slump necessarily follows boom, it is also true that boom necessarily follows slump. The closure of factories means that fewer goods are produced. Unemployment means that wages fall and thus profits can be higher. So the conditions for a boom to start begin to re-emerge. The logic of capitalism is that it *must* experience a cycle of booms and slumps following each other as spring follows winter.

In reality, the picture is slightly more complicated than this. What we have just been looking at is strictly called the 'trade cycle' and occurs when the system is expanding just as much as when it is contracting. So if we look at the period since the seventies, we find that there was a boom in the early years of the decade, followed by a slump in the period 1974-75, followed by a small boom until the late seventies then the coming of the present slump in 1979.

The longer term

Behind these fluctuations, there is another and longer term movement. The period between the two world wars saw a general contraction of the system. The period from the second world war to about 1970 saw a general expansion of the system, and since then we have seen a contraction.

The necessity for each capitalist to try to introduce more and more machines to replace workers means that, for the system as a whole, although the amount of actual goods produced per worker increases, the ratio of the cost of workers to the cost of machines falls. But machines only pass on their own value; only the labour of workers produces more value than it costs to replace.

So the replacement of men by machines, while it means unemployment for workers, means for the capitalist that the amount of profit compared to the total cost of production—what is technically called the 'rate of profit'—tends to decline.

For the capitalists this is much more serious than the short term booms and slumps of the trade cycle. It is not simply the question of throwing a few workers on the scrap-heap along with some rusting lathes. To restore the rate of profit needs a huge restructuring of the whole system: for example, the long slump of the 1930s followed by the massive destruction and slaughter of the Second World War.

The boom which followed the last war took off on just such a restructuring. It lasted so long because of the action of arms spending in reducing the amount of surplus that was available for new investment. We are now living through the long-term consequences of that delayed fall in the rate of

profit.

The present period is therefore one in which two sorts of problems for the capitalist economy co-incide. On the one hand there is the gradual decline of the system due to its long-term instability, on the other the impact of the short-term crisis.

The consequences of these two proceses for workers' consciousness are important. It is a commonplace to say that in the long boom workers were confident. That is true, but in reality they were confident of two things.

They had confidence in their own ability to win struggles. The organisations which they had built, most notably the shop stewards system, were capable of fighting and winning real improvements in workers' living conditions. The general experience was one of full employment and rising living standards, so even the shorter term slumps did not have any dramatic impact.

But just because the system was expanding overall, workers were confident that the system could deliver the goods. However much they might be prepared to fight the boss over wages or conditions, the basic attitude was one which held that a reasonable standard of life could be had without any drastic changes in the system.

Look at it from the point of view of the young worker entering the labour market. Although the jobs available might not have been wonderful and the pay not too good, at least they were there. With a bit of care it was possible to save up and buy a second-hand car and have a reasonably good time. For the older worker, with slightly different aspirations, the same basic belief was present—things will be better next year.

In a period of long-term contraction the picture is quite different. Both sorts of confidence start to wane. If cuts and unemployment undermine the confidence that workers have in their ability to fight back, then the protracted crisis also undermines their basic confidence in the system.

Look at it again from the point of view of the young worker. The jobs are simply not available and by no stretch of the imagination will five years on the dole let you have a reasonably good time. And for the older worker, it is no longer possible to believe that things will automatically be better next year.

Because the collapse of the mass of workers' underlying confidence in the system is combined with a fall in their confidence in their ability to fight, it is not automatically replaced by anger. That is the answer for the most clear sighted militants, but for others the pull of passivity, cynicism and reactionary attitudes is strong.

Anger to come

If the reality of economic crisis were such that it was simply a question of unbroken decline, then the task of turning these moods into mass anger would be a difficult one indeed. But we have seen how alongside the general crisis there is also the impact of the cyclical booms and slumps.

This means that the general decline is punctuated by deeper troughs and short shallow booms. At present we are in a trough. Sooner or later this will be replaced with a minor boom. The Tories hope this will co-incide with their electioneering, but since the mechanisms of crisis work themselves out on a world scale there is no guarantee they will be lucky.

For our purposes the timing of the next 'boomlet' is less important than the fact that it will come. Although it will be fairly shallow—nothing like as long or as general as the great periods of capitalist expansion—and its impact will be uneven both between countries and within Britain, it will nevertheless have important consequences.

For some sections of workers it will mean their general loss of confidence in the system will be be crossed with a new confidence about their own ability to fight. As they watch order books fill up, see fresh labour taken on and once again begin to feel their vital role in production, the conditions for a generalised mass anger will start to emerge.

It is by no means inevitable that that mass anger will lead workers towards revolutionary politics. Such a new militancy will, among other things, give a big boost to the Labour left. What happens will depend on who wins the political arguments.

It is those arguments that we are preparing for today. When capitalism once more produces from its own logical development mass working class resistance we have to be able to turn elemental anger into the conscious will to dig a grave for capitalism itself. □

Death of a bureaucrat

The death of Leonid Brezhnev has seen an orgy of praise from a press usually dedicated to attacking Russia. Mike Haynes argues that Brezhnev's main achievement lay in stabilising the Russian system. As the world crisis deepens, neither he nor his successor Andropov can hope to avert its impact at home.

So at last Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev has gone. For the last decade observers of the Soviet Union have been expecting his imminent demise and have had their obituaries ready. Unfortunately he refused to oblige and some grew impatient and published their efforts as articles on the 'Brezhnev era' or the 'succession crisis'. Occasionally an obituary even blossomed into a full-scale book and biography. Others, more patient, brushed off the dust periodically and revised their assessments as each health scare made his end look all the nearer.

Conservatism and stability

Flicking through the assessments that were published in the 1970s and comparing them to the obituaries you are struck by how little the evaluations have changed. What was said of 'Brezhnev and his era' in 1971 was said again in 1975 and is being said again today. This is not accidental. It gives us the clue to understand the Brezhnev phenomenon, its essential character being conservatism and stability. After decades of turmoil the ruling class of Russia has been allowed to consolidate and enjoy itself under what it has seen as the benevolent rule of Brezhnev.

This conservatism derived only in part from Brezhnev himself. Some western accounts have suggested that it was Brezhnev himself who engineered Khrushchev's fall in 1964. Rather the evidence points to Brezhnev being the figurehead of the anti-Khrushchev group. This group was united less by any distinctive policies than by a determination to impose a degree of stability that Khrushchev had not supplied.

Brezhnev was at the head of a collective leadership. In 1976 he was made Marshal. In 1977 he added to his General Secretaryship of the Communist Party the formal title of Head of State (Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet). At the same time his prize-winning 'autobiography' appeared. But this was no return to any 'cult of personality'. It came when Brezhnev's health was beginning to fail and after he had proved for a decade how limited his ambitions as leader were. In these terms the mini-cult did no more than honour an old man and did so because the groups around Brezhnev thought it was safe to do so.

The groups have achieved remarkable stability in the last 18 years. Brezhnev's leadership brought job security to the bureaucracy. The administrative structure of the state itself was consolidated. The leading groups of the ruling class have been able to age complacently. Death has been their major means of exit from a political life now dominated by old age pensioners. When individuals fell out of favour (and relatively few did) they were rarely disgraced in the old way.

Brezhnev, of course, wanted his own supporters around but he moved cautiously. As posts became vacant or were made vacant he filled them with his friends and supporters of earlier years. These were the 'Dnepropetrovsk group' who had proved themselves to Brezhnev in his native industrial Ukraine. But this group hardly constituted a power base that earlier leaders had.

Because of this the ruling class has been able to take its life easily compared to the pre-Brezhnev years. Brezhnev was typical. He always found time every December and January to take a month's holiday from the rigours of office. For the rest of the year he devoted himself as much to the formalities of his office as to the real issues of state power.

Brezhnev was able to do this because power became more widely distributed within the ruling class. It is no longer invested solely in the Politburo or the Central Committee though these have ultimate control. This delegation of power has not meant more democracy, it has not opened up society below which remains as tightly controlled as ever. It is a change within the top groups, integrating advisors and policy-making elites into the structure of power and decision-making. The Brezhnev era became the time of the expert and the 'scientific/technical complex'.

In these terms the experts and advisors even developed their own ideology. It is this that is supposed to define the current stage of development in the Soviet Union. What it reflects is simply Russia's continuing backwardness in competition with the west. But at a deeper level it is an ideology which legitimises the role of the experts and protects them from interventions from above. No longer did the leadership pronounce the line on everything from linguistics to biology or art.

Dead for ages

A telling example of this came in 1981 with the publication of another of the volumes of Brezhnev's 'autobiography'. The journal *Aurora* responded with an imaginary speech celebrating the triumphs of a great living writer. The piece appeared on Brezhnev's birthday and on page 75 said:

> 'It is difficult to believe that this wonderful writer is still alive. One can scarcely believe that he walks on the same streets as the rest of us. He should be dead, he wrote so many books. Any human being having written so many books would have been in the grave long ago. But this one is truly inhuman. He lives on and does not think of dying, to general consternation. Most people think of him as having been dead for ages, such is the admiration for his talent.'

Under Stalin such an attack would never have got into print. The author would have been put in a labour camp just for penning it. Under Khrushchev it is just conceivable that it would have been published though an intellectual would probably not have thought the satire worth the risk. Under Brezhnev no doubt the censors choked on their morning tea or coffee but no heads rolled. People smiled as if a good joke had been played.

This stabilising approach of Brezhnev was reflected clearly in his policies. In the economy there have been no radical changes in the last 18 years. When Brezhnev came to power an apparently radical reform was

promised but petered out to nothing. Since then the economy has been subjected to one reform after another without any of them going anywhere or changing much.

The two most important thrusts of policy have been towards the related goals of trying to increase agricultural output and to raise the standard of living. This has not been any act of altruism on the part of the leadership. They have aimed to both buy popularity at home and give workers incentive to work for the higher productivity that is constantly demanded. The posters may say 'today's record is tomorrow's norm' but what is the point of trying to hit norms if at the end of the week you have more roubles in your pockets but there is nothing in the shops to buy?

In the area of foreign policy too Brezhnev pushed for stability. He played a key role in the development of detente which he liked to think of as being 'irreversible'. Under it he hoped to come to some sort of agreement with the United States and Western Europe. This would achieve two things. Firstly it would allow the post-second world war boundaries of Europe to be accepted by all sides and especially the divisions of Germany. Secondly this would help in reducing the burden of the arms race which Brezhnev saw threatening not only world stability but the capacity of the Russian ruling class to buy off discontent at home. It would also allow him more scope to deal with the quarrel with the Chinese on the eastern borders.

The Brezhnev generation

Brezhnev was typical of a group within the ruling class that some called 'the Brezhnev generation'. What united them and still unites the survivors is their age, background, education and career patterns.

Brezhnev was born in December 1906 so he was 10 when the mass upsurge of revolt threw the Bolsheviks into power. By the time he was 15 the revolution had been through the fire of Civil War, losing in the process not only many of the best revolutionaries but the Russian working class itself. As the Civil War intensified, those workers who had not gone to the front or into administration were forced out of the towns and back into the rural villages by famine and disease. The working class as a social group melted away and with it went its political power, leaving the Bolsheviks isolated from their base as the base was no longer there. During the period of the New Economic Policy a base of popular workers' power was never recreated. On the contrary the revolution continued to degenerate as power gravitated even more towards the top and the weight of the old relations of production both within and outside of Russia became increasingly irresistible.

It was just at this time, when the revolutionary degeneration was reaching its culmination with Stalin's triumph at the end of the twenties, that the young Brezhnev and his generation were drawn into political life.

Reliable cadres

Brezhnev came from a working class background but he had initially trained for agriculture. It was here as a Young Communist that he had his first political experience — herding and terrorising peasants into collective farms at the beginning of the collectivisation drive. But his real rise began as industrialisation itself got under way. If Russia was to be made to 'catch up and overtake' the West then the whole economy had to be pushed forward at a relentless rate. What this required was reliable cadres to run the new society. Here the problem in 1928 and 1929 was twofold. In the first place there were simply insufficient trained engineers, technicians and administrators. But secondly, those experts who were working for the state were not considered reliable by virtue of either their politics or their class background. In 1928 only one percent of party members had completed their higher education and according to one estimate there were only 138 party engineers. What was necessary therefore was a drive to create a reliable stratum of competent and technically trained people.

To achieve this some 150,000 young people, mostly in their twenties, were pulled into higher technical schools and colleges to undergo training. The larger part of these were trained as engineers of one kind or another. As a result they were put on a social escalator which was to carry them into the emerging ruling class and positions of high power by the end of the 1930s.

Since most of these recruits had, like Brezhnev, a working class background it is important to pause and consider just what was happening in the years 1928-32. The first five year plan sought to industrialise Russia to allow it to compete with the West on the West's terms. This needed a huge investment that could only come from driving down living standards. But this could only come about if the few remaining rights that workers had were smashed.

This was achieved by two moves. On the one hand the working class was subject to draconian labour discipline in the factories similar to that in the industrial revolution in early nineteenth century Britain. On the

Russian tanks enforce Brezhnev's doctrine of limited sovereignty in Czechoslovakia in 1968. But the Eastern European revolt has not gone away.

other, workers' organisations were disembowelled and turned into committees for increasing productivity. This meant that genuine working class leaders in the trade unions and factories had to be removed. This attack was carried out under the pretext of the attack on the 'right Opposition' in 1928-30. In the key industrial centres like Moscow, Leningrad and the Urals, some 75 to 85 percent of the membership of factory committees were replaced as they were turned from fairly minimal organs of worker representation into production committees for pushing up output.

Lumps of wax

Thus the Brezhnev generation, in spite of being of a working class background, only began its rise after the remnants of workers' power had been eliminated. What characterised this generation was not any revolutionary idealism, but to find a place in the renovation of the Soviet state capital. They were able to survive Stalin because he needed them to run the state and because in their turn they were prepared to follow his every whim. Bukharin characterised them as zombies who 'can be turned in any direction, like a lump of wax'. When they had totally subordinated their action, will and reason to the leadership they became 'the 100 percent Jesuits' in Stalin's papacy.

This group was then carried upwards by the social dynamics of industrialisation and Stalinism. They began to emerge from their educational courses by 1935-7 and worked briefly as engineers. Then they were caught up in the purges of 1936-8. These purges came to have a terrifying logic of their own as denunciation followed denunciation. But beneath this they followed a pattern: to remove two potential groups of trouble makers from the state machine. One group were those considered to be politically unreliable. The other overlapping group were the older and less well-trained administrators who by their real and imagined incompetence (or 'wrecking') seemed to threaten the success of the regime. The purges removed these people to be replaced by the Brezhnev generation. This group remained relatively untouched by the purges and was able to capitalise on its position because of them. In Russian they were known as the 'vydvizhentsy'—the promoted workers, and by 1939 they formed the core of the middle level of administrators in the ruling class.

As a consequence the ruling class in Russia on the eve of the Second World War was one of the youngest in the world. Brezhnev at the age of 33 was a regional secretary in the Ukraine party. Kosygin was Commissar of Light Industry at the age of 35.

The Second World War further enabled them to advance their careers. Brezhnev became a political officer in the army charged with the dual task of fighting both the Nazis and any sign of subversion within the army. It was a task he carried out faithfully in the years of the war and its aftermath. Between 1945 and Stalin's death in 1953 this group and Brezhnev within it continued their advancement in the state.

The problem for them, however, was that their life was far from comfortable. As top administrators and key members of the ruling class they enjoyed a life of luxury. The social and material benefits of office were huge. Income differentials widened enormously as they were well paid for their role. What they did not have though was security. Under Stalin they seemed to live in a world of terror which was always around, and which periodically threatened to flare up against them. Similarly they could be shifted around from job to job at a moment's notice not knowing whether it would be in disgrace or what. Against Stalin they were nothing. Milovan Djilas, the Yugoslav communist, tells of his astonishment when he met Stalin in 1948 and found that no-one had the courage to correct even Stalin's minor misunderstandings. At one meeting he maintained that the Netherlands was not part of Benelux and so at least for that meeting in the Kremlin the whole geography of western Europe was altered!

The death of Stalin allowed them tentatively to push towards a greater stability in their position. But to do this the old leadership around Stalin had to be defeated and in the short term this brought instability. It fell to Khrushchev to undertake this work, firstly, by consolidating his own position within the top leadership and then by attacking the myth of Stalin in his 'Secret Speech' of 1956. Of course Khrushchev could not go too far. Both he and his supporters' hands (including Brezhnev) were as bloody in the service of Stalin as those they were now attacking. But they had to go sufficiently far to secure their own positions. What followed was in some respects more important than the speech itself. In Russia Khrushchev tried to break up the state apparatus by switching from a highly centralised economic and political organisation to a regional one. It was a reform that made little sense in planning or administrative terms and the economy probably suffered from this re-organisation. But it did make sense as an attempt to break up the power base of likely opposition, as did Khrushchev's subsequent purge of large sections of the upper party. In 1960-61, for example, most of the regional party secretaries were removed in a bloodless purge.

Khruschev's exit

Unfortunately for Khrushchev, he appeared less and less able to capitalise on these moves. His own policies retained some of Stalin's instability and poor performance in foreign diplomatic circles increasingly lost him respect. He was, they said later, a barebrained schemer. Support gathered to oust and replace him by the dour, solid and non-scheming Brezhnev in 1964.

Were this all there is to the evaluation of Brezhnev and his role then the Russian ruling class could sit back in comfort and rest on their laurels. Compared to their position in 1964 they have more than achieved the stability they sought. But there is a fundamental problem with conservatism of this kind. It may want the world to stand still but the world has the unfortunate habit of moving on. This puts any conservative in a dilemma for the status quo that he wants to defend is itself constantly changing. The result is, as Evelyn Waugh of all people pointed out to British conservatism long ago, conservatives have never been able to stop the clock, let alone put it back. This was Brezhnev's dilemma as it is the dilemma of the Soviet ruling class as a whole and indeed of any ruling class.

The source of the problem is obvious. Capitalism exists as a world system characterised by its dynamism where any company or state that wishes to survive must follow this dynamism and constantly adjust

to it. The competitive drives of the world economy wait for no man. Judged in these terms Brezhnev has not been a success. He leaves a Russia that is in a deeper crisis than he found it. Moreover it is a crisis that is at least as deep as the crisis which afflicts the West.

The stability of the Russian ruling class depends not just upon its internal condition. It rests upon its ability to defend itself against those who would dispossess it of its prizes — other sections of the world ruling class and the workers and peasants whose interests lie in the dispossession of all ruling classes. But the capacity of the Russian ruling class to control these forces is limited for their dynamic arises from the nature of capitalism as a system.

Catalogue of failures

The failure of Brezhnev to contain these forces can be seen at many levels. In his policy of detente he sought to tie down competition with the west to acceptable limits but the ties that were made did not bind. No side can control that competition; they can only attempt to moderate it and its very dynamism periodically breaks these attempts at moderation. This is because the competition is compounded of three related dynamics. At the root is the competition between states and state capitals that an ageing capitalism has made the norm in the late twentieth century. The fight for raw materials and markets, is no longer a competition between private capitalists but between huge capitals that lean on their states for support and state capitals themselves. Overlaying this is the more specific technological arms race which constantly upsets calculations about parity. And then there is the third level of dynamic — the political dynamic of crisis itself. As capitalism has entered a crisis, ruling classes have begun to turn against other ruling classes in an increasingly nationalistic fervour, which seeks to tie 'its' working class to the defence or expansion of 'its' state and nation.

Detente then has not proved irreversible and the Soviet economy has been made to assume a major arms burden throughout the Brezhnev years to keep up with the West. Many western accounts have spoken of the Soviet military overtaking the West. This is a gross exaggeration, and a product of cold war hysteria of some sections of the ruling class in recent years. In fact the technological level of the Eastern European military is still behind that of the West. But it is true that Russia, which has to carry the main burden of the Warsaw pact, has been forced to push on with its arms drive, a drive that is not in its control.

Moreover it is imposed not only by competition with the West but also with China too. The Soviet army still marshals over 40 divisions on the Chinese frontier. Its nuclear 'deterrent' has to look east as well as west. In the last months of his life Brezhnev sought accommodation here too but the likelihood of a lasting success is as limited as is one with the West.

But the threat to the Russian ruling class comes not only from the West and China. The Russian state is threatened much nearer to its borders. In Afghanistan Brezhnev was forced to move to try to stabilise both a sensitive border region against the threat of Islamic nationalism and also to ward off any overspill amongst the Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union itself. At present birth levels the Moslem population of Russia will reach over fifty percent of the population by the end of the decade. This was not an adventure that was undertaken lightly. It was taken reluctantly as the options of controlling at a distance were lost. Of course it had knock on effects too in relations with the West but even conservatives must take risks if they are to hold on to their power.

And of course there has been the threat in Eastern Europe. In Czechoslovakia in 1968 Russian tanks invaded to put down revolt and to enforce the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty. But revolt has not gone away and in Poland where the threat has been greater so have been the constraints on Russian action forcing it to work at one remove, supporting and influencing the military dictatorship.

Even within Russia the problems have grown. Under Andropov, the KGB leader, the dissident movement has been effectively silenced amongst the intelligentsia but a general discontent remains and periodically breaks out into strikes that are hurriedly suppressed.

In each area Brezhnev was pulled this way and that by the different dynamics of the system in which he was imprisoned. But his room for manoeuvre was limited.

Under him the whole Russian economy has continued to slow down. Growth in the current five year plan involves some of the lowest ever targets and even these will not be achieved. Programmes to push up output in every sector of the economy have not been met. As a result the Russian economy turned gradually to the West to obtain what it could not produce itself. Trade has dramatically increased as technology and food have been imported. But as the world economy has slumped into crisis these ties have acted to pull the Russian economy down too. Just as with Eastern Europe it has found that the world market does not want its goods, balance of payments pressures have magnified and the burden of debt to western banks grown. To a degree the sheer size of the Russian economy gives it some protection but this is diminishing as the ties become more tight and it has to bear the burden of picking up the pieces in Poland.

Shortages continue

All of this has meant that at home Brezhnev could not buy the support that he needed from the population at large. It is true that as Russian propagandists point out the food supply has got better, as has the supply of consumer goods. But this is not the point. The improvements are *not* large if the comparison is with the West. More importantly the improvements have *not* been sufficient to meet the population's expectations.

This is now so widely recognised inside Russia that it is difficult to see why some western socialists continue to see it as a land where planning produces milk and honey. The most obvious and pressing shortage is that of food. Under Brezhnev the dependence on bread and potatoes has diminished but it is still large. Brezhnev openly admitted this in proposing his 'Food Programme' in May 1982. This programme reflects the declared perception of the leadership that the question of agriculture and the food supply is 'a top priority economic, but also an urgent socio-political task'. The demand, said Brezhnev, 'for meat and diary foods is not met, there is a shortage of vegetables and fruits'. But the shortages go beyond this to cover a wide range of consumer goods.

In talking of the economy Brezhnev regularly spoke of 'disproportions' as the cause of the problem. These exist but they are not the root cause. What the continued disproportions reflect is the whole bureaucratic structure of the economy which denies the democratic essence of socialism, and the way the whole system is locked into the dynamic of competition in the world capitalist economy. Brezhnev never sought to break this — his concern was to improve Russia's position within it and he was not successful.

The future

What then of the future? Russia is still the world's second largest economy and it still has both an economic and a political margin of survival. No economy ever collapses of its own accord. It needs the workers of that society to overturn it. So long as Andropov can retain control through the continued atomisation of the working class then he and his successors will survive. But can they increase the margin of survival through reforming the economy — is a Russian 'New Deal' possible?

The answer appears to be no. Much has been made of Andropov's supposed liberalism and intelligence but the two do not necessarily go together. Intelligent he certainly is but he must live in the world as he finds it and his own margin for manoeuvre is limited. Western commentators have also pointed to the generation gap. Sooner or later the old age pensioners must either die or take their pensions and be replaced by a younger more dynamic group. But this is to confuse politics and policy with age. New blood in itself will change nothing. New policies require the social support of key sections of the ruling class and it is unlikely to be forthcoming. If anything the pressure is likely to come from the nationalistic and anti-semitic right. Just as in the west, in crisis the ruling class are more likely to turn right.

Andropov and his successors are therefore unlikely to do better than Brezhnev. The crisis will persist. At best they will present policies characterised as 'radical turns'. Brezhnev did that only in May 1982 with the Food Programme — it was, he said 'a radical turn in boosting agriculture and the related branches of the economy'. But there was nothing radical about it. If anyone checks they will see it is essentially the same turn — updated to 1982 — that was supposed to have been made in agriculture in 1964. That turn did not produce the goods and future ones are just as unlikely to. □

Detente delusions

In an age when the likes of Henry Kissinger and Menachim Begin can win peace prizes, it is only fitting that Leonid Brezhnev's death should be the occasion for a welter of peace sentiment. Tom O'Lincoln looks at the history and prospects for detente.

The man whose troops invaded Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan is now remembered as 'the champion of peaceful coexistence' (*The Guardian*) and a man who 'talks passionately of peace' (François Mitterand).

At the same time the arrival of his successor, Yuri Andropov, is hailed as a Significant Opportunity to stride forward towards detente with seven league boots. Yet on the face of it this is equally presposterous.

Andropov was ambassador in Hungary in 1956, when the Russian troops went in. He spent the period before the crisis chatting up the local liberals, but when the crunch came he was ruthless, telling Nagy that no invasion was planned when it was already underway. He has close ties with the Soviet military establishment.

And his very first speech as the new Russian boss referred bluntly to the importance of military might. Peace, he said, 'can be upheld only by resting on the invincible might of the Soviet armed forces.'

Yet if the press have been full of sentimental blather about detente, it is not merely a matter of empty rhetoric or ruling class hypocrisy. It reflects the interests of the British bourgeoisie. Which means, of course, that any temptation CND activists might feel to be sucked in by this talk of detente must be firmly resisted.

Uncertain fortunes

Just as the arms race is not the consequence of evil men or some strange madness which has fallen from the moon, but rather results from the realities of postwar cpitalism, so too with the uncertain fortunes of detente over the years.

In fact there has always been a close tie between the ups and downs of the arms race and economic trends.

The cold war, we sometimes forget, was to some extent a response to the first postwar economic downturn which hit around 1947-48. It is likely that the rather amiable relationship between Russia and the USA, which were each busy digesting their new empires, might have lasted longer in the context of an expanding world economy.

But as the world economy moved toward slump, it suddenly appeared that continued capital accumulation on both sides might require further territorial expansion—or at least a determined defence of one's own turf. There was also a sudden urgency about tightening discipline within each camp.

Hence the creation of the Cominform and the move to consolidate state capitalism in eastern Europe. Hence the beginning of the witchhunts in the west, and the expulsion of CPs from coalition governments.

Hence the 'Cold War', which became a hot war in Korea, and a vast flood of arms spending. American arms expenditure, which had amounted to 4.3 percent of GNP in 1948, rose to over 13 perent in 1951.

A great many people throughout the world, remembering that it had only been 20 years between the first two world wars, felt a third one was an immediate prospect.

The first wave of peace activity began, under the leadership of the Communist Parties. The World Peace Council was formed in Paris in 1949 at a meeting which attracted 2000 delegates, and by October of that year there were committees in 70 countries.

Petition campaigns

In the early fifties the peace movement ran a series of petition campaigns, which called for what we would now call detente. They demanded negotiated agreements between the great powers, the famous 'Five Power Peace Agreement'.

The rhetoric was classless in the extreme: 'All the women in the world want peace, and... a thousand million women can't be wrong.'

Despite the insipid politics the mass petitions constituted something of a first step. However the fixation with detente, with *multilateralism* effectively disarmed the peace campaigners rather than the superpowers.

By suggesting that the goodwill of powerful politicians could be won through petitions, it misled people. By focussing on the distant world of diplomatic conferences, it made people feel powerless. There was no immediate target to aim at. No wonder the movement never went much beyond petitions.

At the same time, the double standards which kept the CPs from opposing Russian nuclear weapons made many people suspect that the multilateralism was phoney and concealed a desire to advance Soviet interests. And indeed, rightly so.

Nevertheless, the arms race did begin to ease in the following decade. The reasons, again, were closely linked with developments in the capitalist system as a whole. The vast arms spending embarked upon after 1948 had become, in an unexpected manner, the underpinning for a prolonged economic expansion.

The way this worked was not terribly complicated. There are two closely related factors which cause economic crises according to Marxist theory. Firstly there is the problem of mass consumption: can the working class buy up all the products which industry churns out? But lurking behind the problem of 'underconsumption' is the deeper tendency for profit rates to fall.

Arms spending on a massive scale could solve the first problem rather handily. You employ workers to make bombs and planes, and they spend their wages on consumer goods.

And for a time some Marxists believed that the explanation of the postwar boom was as simple as that. But while this sort of mechanism, which amounts to a government subsidy to industry, can explain a few years of prosperity, it could hardly explain two decades of postwar expansion.

The prolonged expansion was only possible because the arms economy also provided a medium-term solution to the deeper, underlying problem of profit rates.

According to Marx, the process of capitalist accumulation which goes on during a boom leads to the progressive substitution of 'dead labour' (means of production) for living labour. Industry becomes more 'capital intensive'.

But since only living labour can produce new value, and profits are drawn from new value, this change in the composition of capital must undermine the rate of profit. And although there are also many 'counterveiling tendencies' at work, it seems clear that falling rates of profit do explain the great crises of the past.

The arms economy arrested this tendency for profit rates to fall. By siphoning investment away from other sectors, it slowed down the accumulation process. The result was slower, but steadier growth throughout the fifties and sixties.

Of course in the arms sector itself, accumulation was considerably stimulated. But for reasons having to do with the fact that arms production is essentially waste, and its products do not feed back into the system, this accumulation did not undermine profit rates in the system as a whole.

As the economic expansion proceeded, both superpowers could again begin to look primarily to consolidate their own sphere of influence rather than encroaching upon that of the other side.

Hungarian workers deserted

The first real turning point was 1956, when Krushchev began to speak of 'peaceful coexistence' and when the Americans refused to take advantage of the Hungarian crisis. These first signs of detente between Washington and Moscow were greeted with relief by most people, yet they had ominous implications for the left and the labour movement.

Peaceful coexistence meant, for example, that the Communist Parties were openly committed to the parliamentary road, rather than militant struggle against the local ruling class. And the Hungarian workers could hardly be pleased that the 'western democracies' had left them to face a sticky end in the streets of Budapest.

With some important exceptions, especially the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the

general trend to detente contined throughout the sixties. Arms spending in the US declined from over 13 percent of GNP in 1951 to about 9 percent in 1969, and the percentages continued to fall right into the seventies. In Russia the trend was similar.

The reason, however, was not a growing predominance of pacifists in the circles of power, but hard economic realities. The arms race had produced a boom, from which all benefitted and which made detente possible. But not all countries were carrying the *burden* of arms spending.

Some countries which had no significant arms establishment, most notably Germany and Japan, began to grow more rapidly than the others and the balance of economic power began to shift. The big arms producers were forced to cut back to meet the threat.

The sixties and early seventies also brought two new lessons about the political implications of detente. In Britain, a powerful new peace movement grew up which centred on the demand that this country pull out *unilaterally* from the arms race. Beginning with a rally of 10,000 at the close of the Aldermaston march of 1958, the movement was able to mobilise an estimated 150,000 by 1961.

Yet when trade union support was sought, an unexpected obstacle emerged. In 1958 and again in 1959, important left unions opposed CND resolutions calling for unilateral disarmament. The reason was that the Communist Party did not agree with them.

Unilateralism opposed

The CP was still committed to multilateralism, and it attacked the new ideas as 'divisive'. Unilateralism, the party declared, 'diverts attention from the real issue, namely international agreement to ban nuclear weapons.' As the movement grew the CP was forced to change its tune for purely opportunist reasons, but closet multilateralism has remained in the peace movement to this day.

If the CP's were prepared to sacrifice mass struggle in the west to the needs of great power negotiation, the Kremlin was willing a decade later to do much the same to the Vietnamese. At the height of the Vietnam War, when Haiphong harbour was being mined, Brezhnev met Nixon to discuss detente.

For their part, the Americans were just as careful not to encourage rebellion in Czechoslovakia as they had been in Hungary.

What brought this relative detente between the superpowers to an end was the re-emergence of economic problems, and the increasing fragmentation of the two imperialist camps.

With the more rapid growth of the non-arms-producing countries, and the consequent cutbacks in arms spending in the other states, the role played by the arms economy on a world scale declined. And as the production of weapons systems grew more capital-intensive and specialised, the benefits in terms of providing jobs and technological spin-off grew less and less.

Profit rates began once again to decline, consumer demand and unemployment re-emerged as major problems. The world began to move into a new economic crisis, and as it developed so did new inter-imperialist rivalries.

It seems clear that the Americans were the pace-setters. By January 1979 President Carter had announced substantial increases in the defence budget, and was pressing all the NATO allies to follow suit. Most importantly of all, NATO decided in December of that year to deploy the new Pershing and Cruise missiles in Europe.

All experience indicates that a drawing together of the two imperialist ruling classes can only occur at our expense.

Then came the invasion of Afghanistan, which Carter seized upon as a pretext for economic warfare against the Russians.

It is true that these comparatively recent events must be seen against the background of a long-term Russian arms build-up. In the course of the 1970s the USSR had managed to come somewhere near nuclear parity with the west (at a tremendous cost to its economy, which is only half the size of America's). And in any case, the entire process is a vicious spiral with both sides locked in.

Even so it is the USA which has the clearest interest in the heightening of the 'new cold war'. Firstly, it is obvious that Washington sees this new east-west polarisation as a means to reassert its control over wayward allies.

As Europe and Japan have outstripped the US economically they have increasingly shrugged off its political tutellage. The Reagan administration clearly hopes that the spectre of war will frighten them back under the US nuclear 'umbrella'.

No doubt the Kremlin, too, may hope for a similar chastening effect of the new arms race on the recalcitrant Rumanians or any of its present satellites who might be thinking of emulating them. But Washington has another reason for wanting a new escalation of the arms race which Moscow cannot share.

A section of Reagan's advisors believe that the US can set a pace in arms spending which Russia cannot match. By pushing the Russians to their limits in this way, and combining this with elements of economic blockade, the Russian economy can be cracked wide open. Or so the thinking goes.

Here we see the reasons why sections of the British bourgeoisie are in such a flap about detente. As the *Observer* put it:

> 'Reagan is firmly in the grip of those who believe that the Soviet Union is on the verge of political, economic and moral bankruptcy, and that if only the pressure is kept up—ruining Moscow, if necessary, through an arms race that might also cripple America along the way—the whole edifice will come tumbling down.'

At this prospect Fleet Street, and undoubtedly much of the British bourgeoisie, is horrified. Not out of a tender regard for the Russians, but because it is the European states who would necessarily be in the front line of such a conflict.

The economic crisis has pulled Europe in a different direction from America. Exports to Eastern Europe have been an opportunity when demand for manufactured goods was stagnating elsewhere. Now Reagan, with his policy of economic blockade, has threatened to close these markets off.

At the same time the talk of theatre war in Europe is rather upsetting to local ruling classes, who suspect that Reagan is prepared to fight Russia at the expense of their nation-states.

So we have Willy Brandt of West Germany calling on him to 'refrain from a policy of confrontation' and the British press anxious to 'revive the spirit of detente and the Ostpolitik of the early 1970s while there is still time'.

They place their hopes in those sections of the American ruling class who they feel are softer on the Russians, represented by former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and even Richard Nixon.

It all makes sense from the point of view of the European bourgeoisie. But what's in it for us? At first it might seem that although we are for unilateral disarmament, and have no illusions about the motives of our rulers, that detente must still be a good thing. After all, peace is peace, whatever the motives.

Detente is not peace

In reality, however, detente has nothing to do with peace. Past peace negotiations, even when they have produced real agreement, have not halted the arms race. They put an end to one avenue of research and development only to divert the arms race into new channels. In 1972 an agreement was reached to stop the proliferation of anti-ballistic missile defences. Instead we have the proliferation of satellite defence systems and first-strike weaponry. Is this an advance?

All experience indicates, moreover, that a drawing together of the two imperialist ruling classes can only occur at our expense. At the moment, for example, it would probably mean that news of the struggles of the Polish workers, or the defeats suffered by the Russians in Afghanistan, would disappear from the British media.

Moscow, for its part, would undoubtedly lose interest in supporting the unilateralist peace movements in the west.

It is tempting, of course, to hope that our rulers could somehow negotiate a way out of the problems of the world. Unfortunately, those problems are rooted in the contradictions of the very system they preside over. The class struggle is the only remedy yet discovered for that, and class struggle is the polar opposite of detente. Or as Lenin put it, commenting on an earlier phase of inter-imperialist conflict:

> 'An end to war, peace among the nations...—such is our ideal, but only bourgeois sophists can seduce the masses with this ideal, if the latter is divorced from a direct and immediate call for revolutionary action.' □

Tell it as it is

E H Carr, the leading bourgeois historian of post-revolutionary Russia, died in the same month as Brezhnev. **Duncan Hallas** assesses his work.

The death of an eighty year old academic and former Foreign Office official who never, at any stage in his long life, had any connections with the working class movement, would not normally be worthy of remark in this journal.

E.H. Carr, who died last month and who was precisely these things, is the exceptional case.

He wrote a fourteen volume history of the USSR from 1918 to 1929 (with a posthumous volume on the Communist International from 1926 to 1929 still to be published).

Trotsky vindicated

The merits of that history, by far the most serious and substantial work on the subject and indispensable reading for anyone seriously interested in the origins of Stalinism, are one thing.

Its impact and long term influence on the left, non-Stalinist, Stalinist and Stalinoid alike – not to mention bourgeois academic 'experts' is another thing entirely.

In so far as any writings can be said to have influenced the subsequent course of events, and we should not exaggerate the extent to which this possible, Carr's successive volumes did so. They changed the whole intellectual climate on the left – at least on the intellectual left and to some degree more generally.

Carr vindicated Trotsky; more accurately he vindicated Trotsky's analysis of the decline of Revolutionary Russia in the twenties, of the emergence of a conservative bureaucracy as the ruling group in the USSR and of the Communist International as a revolutionary force.

This was certainly not his intention. His treatment of Trotsky is unsympathetic. His own background as a sophisticated, cultured and slightly cynical representative of the British bourgeoisie (quite literally so as a member of the Foreign Office) inclined him to be sympathetic with the 'practical', limited and conservative forces gathered around Stalin.

It is not at all accidental that he set out to write 'the history, not of the revolution, but of the society that emerged from the revolution.' His account of the great crisis in Germany in 1923, and that of Bulgaria in the same year, which form the core of his forth volume (*The Interegnum 1923-24*), is cautiously sceptical about the prospects for revolution in either country.

Yet the German events *do* form the core of Carr's account of 1923. Unlike most bourgeois commentators (not to mention the Stalinists), he understood that 1923 was a decisive turning point for Germany, for Europe, for the USSR, for the Communist International, and therefore at one remove, for the world.

Devastating attack

Little in Carr's earlier works, notably *The Romantic Exiles*, (1933), a study of the populist exiles from the late 1840s to the late 1860s, suggested a profound analysis of the Russian Revolution and its outcome. Except one thing. His obsessive conscientiousness and scrupulous regard for demonstrable fact. Hardly enough by itself, to make a great historian but, as it happened, the most important possible qualifications apart from his lingustic skills, that a historian of Russia in the twenties could have. It was the sheer weight of his documention in a field dominated by lies, half-truths and fantasy, that made his history so outstanding.

Carr himself, in his influential and important *What is History*(1961), made a devastating attack on the empirical method, choosing as his central target Von Ranke's '*wie es eigenlich gewesen*' (tell it 'as it really was'). Of course he was entirely right as against the Anglo-American academic establishment of the time. But it was his own '*wie es eigenlich gewesen*' that ultimately destroyed Stalinist myths and the various western cold war counter parts.

When *The Bolshevik Revolution; Volume I* appeared in 1950, at the height of the cold war, there were two orthodoxies. One, represented by Fleet Street, the BBC, *Tribune*, practically everyone who could get a book published, and both the Labour and Conservative parties, held that the horrors of Stalinism, which were well publicised and even exaggerated, were the result of the original sin of Lenin, the Bolsheviks and revolution in general.

The other, the Stalinist version, was that it was all a pack of lies, that in the land of 'Socialism and Peace' there were only happy workers and smiling peasants. Trotsky was a fascist agent and Stalin was the infallible leader and teacher of the world proletariat.

The combined weight of these two sets of falsifications was immense, crushing and was disputed only by a handful of 'sectarians'.

Carr's cool, eminently factual and reflective work was ill received by the spokesmen of both orthodoxies. Professor Shapiro of LSE denounced it in terms about as abusive as those of James Klugman of the British CP, and so did all the deluded followers, not to say sycophants, of their respective dogmas. To the handful of revolutionaries of that time it came as a breath of fresh air.

Path-breaking

But it was the second volume (1952) that had the greatest impact. It deals with the Russian economy from 1917 to 1923 and it demonstrates, with an immense wealth of data from the contemporary Russian sources, how the working class disintegrated and finally disappeared as a political force. The facts so often cited by many of us are facts, scrupulously documented, extracted by Carr.

Stalin was still alive then and the British CP greeted Volume II with a large barrage of vulgar, ignorant abuse. The British establishment, with the significant exception of *The Economist*, ignored it. Over time, though, the massive, impeccable documentation had its effects.

Not quite the effect that we innocent – or fairly innocent – Trotskyists thought at the time that it would have. We believed, with some justification, that Stalinism was a system of lies, deception and murder, and that 'the truth would set us free.'

We had not then, in the early fifties, fully understood Marx's aphorism that being determines consciousness and we expected too much, at least I did, from a meticulously documented account which, unlike Trotsky's earlier work, could not be dismissed as simply anti-stalinist argument.

The 'New Left' from 1957, the more able bourgeois academics, from a rather later time, and at last the Communist Party itself, proved able to come to terms with Carr, ie with the actual history of Russia to 1929, and to interpret it in a conservative sense. They did no violence to Carr's own outlook in this respect. His one volume summary of his great work (1979) is imbued with the spirit of 'what is, must be'.

Never mind. Carr's work is a fundamental break-through in our knowledge of the history of our own century. I have stressed the impact of his earlier volumes, that was greatest at the time, but the whole work is a path-breaking enterprise. The significance of Carr is that he made it impossible for anyone who can read English, and who is not incorrigibly idle or idiotic, to believe in either the bourgeois or the Stalinist myths about the outcome of the Russian revolution. And that is a good deal. □

The price of productivity

Since the victories of 1972-74, myths have developed about the miners. Jack Robertson analyses what made those victories possible and the conditions which led up to the recent ballot defeat.

One of the most consistently depressing features of the class struggle in Britain over recent years has been the apparent ability of the government to gauge workers' militancy more accurately than most union leaders. Time after time the Tories have called the bluff of officials who threatened action but had neither the intention nor the ability to fulfil the promise.

So, on the one hand, they have proved quite ready to ignore the wails of protest which accompanied the sacking of Derek Robinson at Leyland, preferring to worry more about the level of strike action likely to break out. On the other hand, when the official leadership stood paralysed as miners' pickets from South Wales spread out in 1981, the government moved like greased lightning to stem the threat. This ability to distinguish reality from wishful thinking is at the heart of the Tories' current success.

The Tories, in other words, have picked carefully those fights they knew they could win and tried to avoid those they could easily lose. The latest vote against strike action in the pits is the second time this year that the employers and the government have measured the mood of one key group of workers—the miners. They do not yet have their revenge for those humuliating defeats by the NUM in 1972 and 1974, but they have managed to ridicule Arthur Scargill and left him looking like a latter-day Don Quixote.

The excuse for this defeat given by some of the left is to blame media 'distortion' and coal board 'trickery'. Though Mick McGahey and Arthur Scargill are not the most popular men on Fleet Street, the proprietors today are the same capitalist swine as they were in 1974. Why should the miners ignore their advice then (when Joe Gormley was President, and didn't want a strike) but accept it today? The press 'bogey' argument is no more convincing than right-wing claims that 'communists' control the unions.

Much more important is the confidence of the miners in their ability to win a fight combined with a clear idea of what the struggle is about and how it is to be won. On all these counts the miners knew they were on much stronger ground in 1972 and 1974 than during the last two ballots.

Complete closure of coal mines is not a new development. Earlier this century employment in coal mining went over the million mark; today it is just over 200,000. From nationalisation in 1947 till 1958 the numbers hovered at around 700,000 but then slumped (under 'socialist' Lord Robens) to 287,000 by 1971/72. In the late sixties pits were closing at the rate of *one a week*. Closures were taking place in every area at an alarming rate.

Picture: JOHN STURROCK (Network)

Scargill rallying the faithful in Edinburgh

A time of confusion

"At the same time productivity rose dramatically from an average of 25 cwts per man in 1958 to 44.2 in 1970/71 (see Table 1). According to the then General Secretary of the union, Laurence Daly,

> 'Far from seeing a realisation of his hopes and dreams the miner can look back upon the post war period as a time of confusion and disappointment.
>
> He has been persuaded to greater effort by successive governments and he has responded. He has been crushed by government policies which have obliterated whole mining communities in the national interest and he has accepted that tragedy in a manner born from years of living and working with imminent disaster.'

With the possible exception of the railways, no other industry was hit as hard as the mines in the late sixties. The argument that miners and their communities were badly done by was strong.

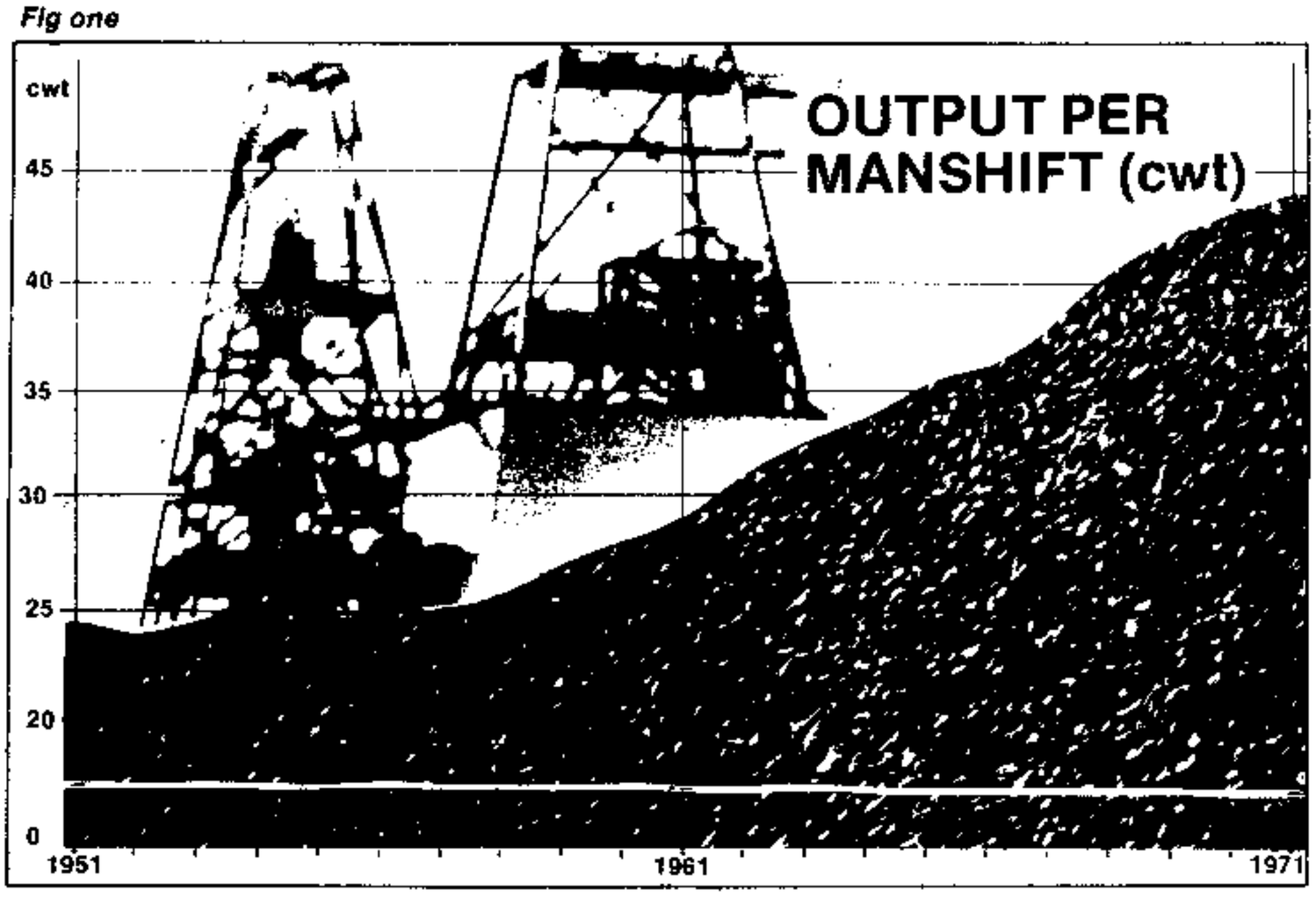
It is worth repeating that this reduction only directly affected surface workers but what happened next set the cat among the pigeons. The *Daily Telegraph*, on 20 October 1969 reported:

> 'Despite the National Coal Board's unprecedented 27s 6d a week pay offer, thousands more miners in South Wales and Derbyshire are expected to join the unofficial strike over shorter hours for surface workers today.'

The report goes on:

> 'Leaders of 70,000 Yorkshire strikers decided at Doncaster last night to continue the stoppage. By tonight, the total idle in Yorkshire, South Wales, Scotland and Derbyshire will probably exceed 100,000.'

Fig one



Lord Robens and Sir Sidney Ford were, naturally, horrified at this turn of events. The pay offer alone, which amounted to an increase of about 10 percent, already breached the (Labour) government's incomes policy. Attempts were made at the TUC by Vic Feather to get a committee of inquiry set up into the hours claim but the confidence of the unofficial movement was by now brimming. At Doncaster on 2 November 1969 a meeting was held of the Miners' National Action Committee which called upon areas to produce a leaflet for all miners in the country setting out why miners should reject the Coal Board 'tricks' package deal.

A statement for the action committee said:

> 'Because the delegate conference rejected the package deal we have the right to ask our area executive committees and area council meetings to give authority for official leaflets to be issued which will spell out why the men should vote against acceptance.'

A reporter from the *Morning Star* at the time recorded that the committee, with representatives from Yorkshire, Wales and Scotland issued a statement 'welcoming the decision of last Thursday's miners conference to reject the Coal Board's pay offer'. But the committee noted that the national executive 'was not prepared to trust the membership on the question of the eight hour day, inclusive of meal breaks, for the surface men', referring to the fact that the executive now wanted another ballot.

New technology

Between 1964 and 1972 the NUM cooperated in major changes to working practices and conditions to 'facilitate the effective use of the large capital investment programme'—the 'new technology' mining equipment of those days. In three years the labour force was reduced by 20 percent. 'Sacrifices' had been made but with no rewards to be seen.

Until the mid-sixties most mineworkers were engaged on piecework. As in engineering this had two important advantages. A large chunk of the weekly wage could be determined at local level and it produced a kind of shop steward organisation at pit level skilled in negotiating 'the rate'. The most talented bonus stewards had an extremely high social standing in closed mining communities.

New bonus system

This situation changed completely in the mid-sixties. The NCB won official union acceptance of a new bonus system, known as the National Power Loading Agreement, which by stages put an end to piecework in the pits. According to the NUM, the gradual extension of the NPLA 'decisively altered the relation between pay rates and earnings'.

The new comparison that might justifiably be made is with those highly controlled time-rates that have been established in a number of major firms with the extension of systems of measured day work. The coal face worker ought increasingly to be compared with, say, the workers on production lines in the car industry where the hourly rate is established under measured day work and equivalent systems.

Understandably, the NCB were not so unhappy with the new scheme. The 1968 Annual Report emphasised that the power loading agreement had been proving a real success. There had been a marked drop in the output lost through stoppages (the traditional method of winning a better bonus). The number of disputes in 1967/68 was only one quarter of the previous year's total. The report claimed that, apart from the effect on disputes, management now had more time to spend on improving performance and 'spends less time on negotiating piecework contracts'.

Between 1950 and 1957 miners' earnings were 25 percent higher than those of workers in manufacturing industry.

The ending of Saturday working in 1958 put a big dent in that figure. The NPLA reduced it much further. The miners had anticipated that once the rationalisation of the industry's wages structure had been completed, real progress would be made to restore the miner to a more favourable relative earnings position.

It did not happen. The decline in the relative earnings of mineworkers became so severe that the union claimed 'we have not been able to find an equivalent example of a large group of workers in the British economy suffering anything like the decline that has characterised the miners' situation.'

The introduction of the power loading agreement meant that miners were expected to co-operate in support of achieving 'one rate for the job' wherever it was being performed—a concept completely alien to the traditions of the communities—and one which did away with the 'leapfrogging' and 'catching-up' effects which develop when one section or group of workers manages to establish a new, higher rate. Nationally, the same thing happened with the NPLA. The two leading districts, Kent and Nottingham, were held back until the lowest paid districts could catch up. Table 2 shows the dramatic drop in real earnings which miners experienced.

The combined effect of the power loading agreement was to reduce considerably the miner's ability to earn his 'own' bonus—or to increase his weekly earnings in any other way. The nationally agreed basic rate was a much greater proportion now of the weekly wage and he had no immediate, direct control over it.

It is perhaps worth recalling at this point that, since the dreadful defeat in 1926, and before the 1969 strikes, the miners had been more or less written off as a doomed union in a doomed and dying industry. The NUM was regarded as being on the far right of the trade union movement. However, in many ways it was like engineering, where the union executive was fantastically reactionary and had little or no contact with the rank and file but where piecework had produced a lively union organisation at factory level.

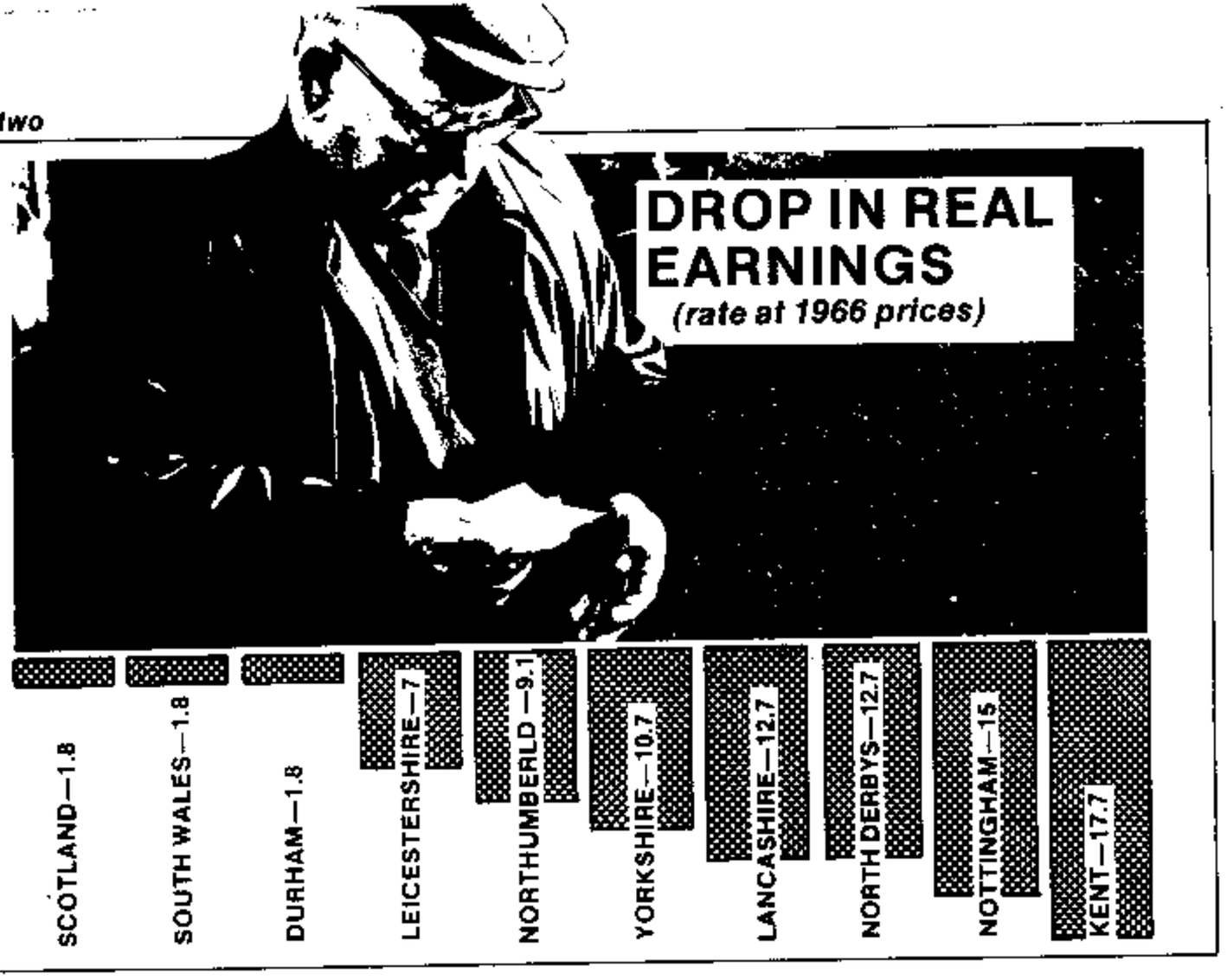
Unofficial strikes

By late 1968, dissent in the pits over the new agreement was beginning to build up a powerful head of steam. Leaders of areas like Kent, Scotland, South Wales and Yorkshire threatened unofficial 'guerrilla' strikes against the latest NCB pay offer. However, they were outflanked by the then President of the union, Sir Sidney Ford, who sent out a letter to every miner warning that to have strikes at selected collieries would be 'catastrophic' for the miners. The NUM Executive, which was controlled by the right wing but had recently been joined by Laurence Daly (winning an election for General Secretary on a 'left' ticket), called for a ballot of all miners against strike action and won hands down by 204, 695 votes to 32,699.

The following year the militants refused to wait until a ballot was called. There were two distinct parts to the miners' annual claim—one for an increase for an underground worker to give a minimum rate of £16 and the other for a 40 hour week, inclusive of meal breaks, for surface workers. The NCB offered to pay the money increase in full (an indication that they recognised the growing discontent in the pits) but would not budge on hours.

Despite clear signs by now that the Communist Party, which had a powerful in-

Fig two



fluence at the level of the local bureaucracy, wanted to bring the unofficial action firmly under its control and channel it through 'proper' union avenues, the explosion which broke out in 1969 transformed the mining industry and laid the groundwork for the great victories of 1972 and 1974. Although the 1969 ballot went in favour of the executive once again, by 193,985 votes to 41,322 (there were 100,000 on unofficial strike, remember), the following year the bandwagon started to roll again.

This time the executive of the NUM voted by 13 votes to 11 to recommend acceptance of a 12 percent pay offer and wanted a pithead ballot to be held immediately, before a national miners' conference. During the course of the ballot unofficial strikes took place across the country. There were strikes in Kent, Durham, Derby, Staffordshire, South Wales and Yorkshire. This time the vote was 158,239 to 82,079 in favour of accepting an increase of £2.7s.6d to £3 a week bringing the basic wage up to between £18 and £30.

The ending of piecework and the increasing attempts by governments (starting with Labour) to hold down wages of all workers with an incomes 'policy' had one side effect which was double-edged for both employers and militants in the union. On the one hand workers lost their bargaining power at local level over bonus, but for the first time ever the idea of all miners in the country fighting together as one union began to develop. The links built in the 1969 strikes gave a great impetus to this development. The employers had less trouble now on a day-to-day basis in the pits and had much more reasonable negotiators at national level, but they also had a lot more miners to contend with—all at once.

Ignore the government

By 1971, with a new president at the NUM in the shape of Joe Gormley and a new boss at the NCB, Derek Ezra, the stage was set for a proper sort-out in the pits. Ted Heath was the new Prime Minister and the question was whether the miners could completely ignore government policy or whether the Tories could teach the miners a lesson to last another 50 years.

The government had a barrowload of headaches. In Scotland the sit-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders over closure of the yard was gaining massive support throughout the country. One Tory minister at the time reckoned that the working class was on the verge of revolution and advised his immediate family to enjoy their 'last Christmas' together.

It is hard to believe now but Ted Heath was then seen as a dreadful ogre. The NUM described his government as the 'worst the miners have experienced this century'.

Official strike

In January 1972 the entire miners' union went out on offical national strike for seven weeks and Britain was blacked out at night. The miners came out victorious and the flow of miners leaving the pits began to be reversed as the new pay rates looked much more attractive. In 1974 the miners threatened another national strike and this time the Tories called a general election. They lost. Ted Heath was humiliated and the miners went on to smash the incomes policy and open the door for low paid workers like the nurses to win massive pay increases from the incoming Labour government (voted in on the backs of the workers' militancy).

It is not possible to go through the entire history of the 1972 and 1974 disputes here, they are well documented elsewhere. However there are a number of extremely important lessons that must be learned from the entire period if we are to understand the defeats of 1981/82.

First of all, the conviction that motivated the miners themselves did not come out of thin air or fiery speeches alone, although these would help to fuel and spread the struggle. Miners were militant because of the objective circumstances they found themselves in and the prevailing mood of the class. Pay and jobs were the two main concerns, as today, but they had a much stronger and more convincing case then than now.

The miners' confidence that they were in the right was not only sufficient to cast off fifty years of passivity in the industry but their case was so strong that *other workers* believed in it too. The single most inspiring thing about the miners' strikes was the solidarity from other workers, ending in the magnificent picket of Saltley Coke works by miners from Yorkshire and tens of thousands of Birmingham engineering workers.

Earnings go up

The success of the 1972 and 1974 strikes was so great that, even without an attractive bonus system, miners' earnings had soared. In January 1975 the *Daily Telegraph* reported: 'Car and building workers join rush for pit jobs'. In February the NCB produced figures which showed that there had been an overall increase to the industry's labour force for the first time since the war.

The glut of miners and high basic earnings produced a major headache for both the Coal Board and the new Labour government, which had appointed a certain Anthony Wedgewood Benn as Energy Minister with responsibility for the mines. Production had slumped. There were more workers but no real incentive to boost

earnings since the abolition of piecework. Rumours that the Central Electricity Generating Board saw a bleak future for coal-fired stations, and suspicions that the government hoped to 'rat' on its promises over the future of the pits were not a great encouragement to miners. Coal stocks had already reached their highest point for years.

Somehow the government and the NCB had to defuse the confidence in the pits and get back some control. The tactic they eventually developed was old-fashioned divide and rule, offering a new productivity scheme which was extremely attractive—particularly for the most modern and productive pits. There was some half-hearted opposition to the scheme from the 'left' in the NUM but, by 1977, with the entire trade union bureaucracy lined up in favour of a tight limit on wages (the 'social contract' of Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon), the temptations for the miners grew very strong.

New scheme opposed

The July 1977 NUM conference split down the middle on the question and though a narrow majority had said no, Gormley felt confident enought to start talking immediately about a ballot on the scheme. The ballot took place in late October and to the Coal Board and the NUM right wing's amazement (and the government's horror) 55 percent of the miners said no, in a record 80 percent turnout. In Yorkshire over three quarters of NUM members threw out the proposal (a figure only exceeded by Scotland and Wales). The second largest area, Nottinghamshire, voted yes—but a solid third of NUM members were opposed even here.

The Times correspondent Paul Routledge, was in no doubt that it was a 'humiliating defeat' for Gormley in particular. Yet the days after the ballot saw no offensive by the left at all. Scargill issued magisterial warnings to Prime Minister Callaghan not to intervene, and meanwhile the right-wing moved for bonus schemes at local level.

On 7 November 1977 (five days after the ballot) the *Telegraph* reported: 'Ministers, who are determined to avoid a confrontation with the miners, will start the search this week for a formula to buy peace in the coalfields without shattering completely the government's pay guidelines.'

Leaders of right-wing areas spoke out in favour of the new bonus. Lancashire, South Derbyshire and Leicestershire—three of the most productive districts in the country—announced their support because 'members are regularly producing 50 percent more coal per man than the national average'. The Leicestershire leader Jack Jones said: 'We are getting a bit fed up with our members achieving above average production figures and not getting a penny more.'

The new scheme promised up to £23 a week extra for miners for 'very little extra effort'. Left-wing officials like McGahey and Scargill were opposed to the scheme in principle—it would divide area from area and make mining more hazardous—but did very little to fight the scheme. McGahey was faced by strike action from some of his own members in Scotland who wanted the bonus system. When it came to a ballot eventually the *Guardian* reported 'King Arthur Silent as Miners Prepare to Vote'.

This was not quite right. On 9 December 1977, the NUM executive overturned the ballot; agreed to allow local schemes to go ahead; and overturned a conference decision on ignoring the government's rule on having 12 months between pay increases.

Scargill's response was to threaten legal action against the 'unconstitutional action of the executive'. Asked about this plan, Scargill told the Financial Times 'I shall be demanding that our miners in Yorkshire are not paid any less than any others round the country.' When McGahey went to a Scottish area NUM conference at the end of December the left's consititutional cretinism really came home to roost. The area voted 20 to 6 to go for negotiations on a scheme. McGahey told the *Scotsman*: 'We don't want Scottish miners to be isolated or have their living standards decline against others in British pits.'

Rot set in

When the Yorkshire miners came to vote on their scheme, in early January, the rot had really set in. But the ballot paper which the Yorkshire area gave to their members was confusing and so rigged that members could not vote against the incentives without *at the same time* voting for industrial action. The wording on the ballot paper was uncannily similar to the wording of the national ballot in 1982. The ballot wording was so devious it is worth reproducing in full:

> '1. Are you in favour of the Yorkshire area NUM conference decision to oppose the introduction of an area incentive scheme; and are you prepared to give the council authority to call industrial action, if necessary, to ensure that the Yorkshire mineworkers are paid, on a day wage basis, no less than other mineworkers in Britain for the same job?
>
> 2. The National Executive Committee decided to allow individual areas of the union to negotiate area incentive schemes. In view of this decision, are you in favour of Yorkshire introducing an area incentive scheme?'

Scargill declared he was not going to become directly involved in influencing the vote, because he had made his opposition clear enough already...but when the result came out, he declared, 'one of the most fundamental principles has been sacrificed to sustain a Labour government.'

In Yorkshire the vote in favour of an incentive scheme was 26,451 to 15,681 (36,564 had voted 'no' just two months before). Nationally the deal was overwhelmingly accepted, though South Wales held out to the bitter end. Even by January 1978, when Yorkshire was voting, the papers were claiming many miners were earning bonuses of between £20 and £25—or increases of around 36 percent.

Although the predictions from the left about dangerous working have proved exaggerated the divisions between areas and even between pits have been opened right up with the 1977 scheme. Bonus levels have varied widely ever since and the most positive features of national unity of the miners have been temporarily undercut. The 1977 Area Incentive Scheme, urged by Tony Benn, has sown the seeds for the defeats of 1981/82.

However, it also means that miners' earn-

ings have held up very well relative to other manual workers. This is not to say miners are paid enough—far from it (roll on parity with Norman Siddall). But what it does mean is that when miners consider whether to go on strike or not, they want to know if their case is 'justified' and make the same kind of comparisons as they did in 1972. Today it is the engineers, shipbuilders, steelworkers and the rest who have been hammered by closures and redundancies. The miners have had a few but only a tiny proportion. The level of wage rises across industry over the last couple of years has been dreadfully low. So, for example, a miner could expect much less support in 1982 from a railway worker who has just accepted 6 percent over 18 months than he got in 1972. Even without a strike this year the miners got 8.2 to 9.1 percent.

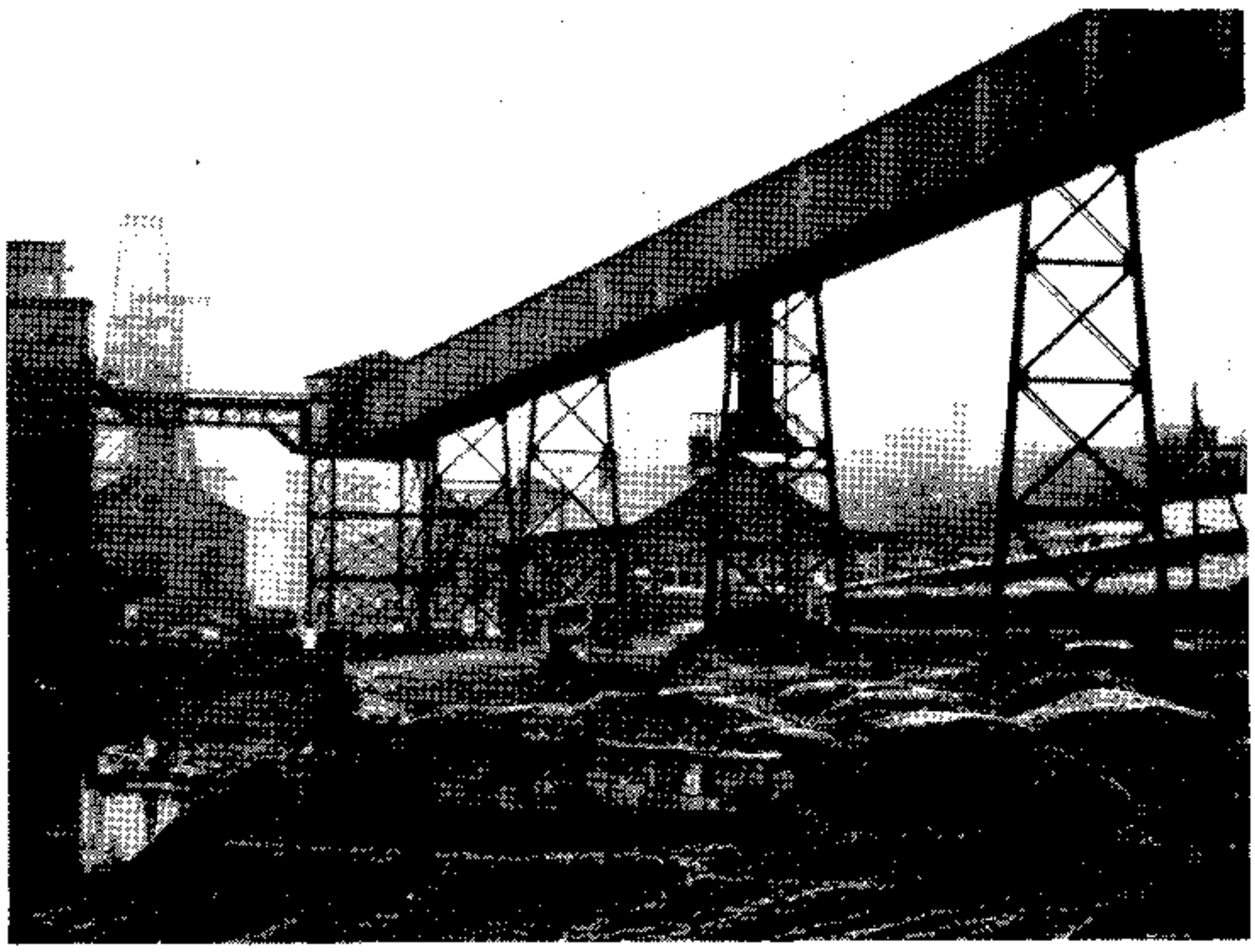
Since 1974 the level of closures has been nowhere near as high as during the Robens period. That's not to say that the immediate threats to Kinneil, Snowdon and Britannia are not serious—but they are relatively isolated examples with localised support. The miners' victories in 1972 and 1974 made the Coal Board more cautious of head-on confrontation over closures. The vast majority of the 50,000 redundancies since 1971/72 have been *negotiated* and *agreed* by the NUM at both local and national level. Compared with engineering, steel or shipbuilding the miners have had a relatively easy time of it under Thatcher, and the ordinary miner knows that only too well.

Scargill confused

We have already outlined how important the unofficial struggles of 1969 and 1970 were to build the confidence and organisation for the victories of 1972 and 1974. This time round, after three years of disheartening defeats for workers, preceded by five sapping years of social contract, the miners were being expected to arise almost at the flick of a switch. Just as many people misunderstood the euphoria for Tony Benn in the Labour Party as a sign of strength rather than weakness, so Arthur Scargill confused his vote to become president with the miners' readiness for a fight.

The lack of preparations for any struggle inside the pits is almost incredible. Only one national issue of the *The Miner* was produced specifically in support of either ballot this year and only three NUM areas have their own regular paper (Derbyshire, Scotland and Yorkshire). The Coal Board, on the other hand, has developed an increasingly sophisticated flow of management propaganda to the miners which includes posters, leaflets, a monthly *Coal News* with regional editions and clever use of local radio and press outlets. The official union machine is left standing.

The central effort of the NUM campaign on the latest ballot was the series of rallies organised in five key areas. 'Carousels of the converted' is how one miner has accurately described them. It is hardly conceivable that miners who did not already have some sympathy for Arthur Scargill and the NEC would travel thirty or forty miles in some cases, during the week, when they could see



50,000 jobs negotiated and agreed by NUM

him any night on the telly saying the same thing.

The other appalling feature of the latest campaign was the almost total lack of any appeal to other workers for support. It would likely have been much lower than in 1972 anyway, as we have already said, but the implications that the miners can sort out their own problems is a piece of mythology which did not come from 1972 or 1974. At that time the union declared proudly to the Wilberforce Enquiry:

> 'Our pickets have done something more than hasten the course of this dispute. They have acted as ambassadors of the mining community in every city and port of this country. Instead of remaining isolated and alone beside our pits, we have built the unity of action and understanding that has been the immensely positive feature of this strike'.

One reason for this could be that the executive hoped all along a vote to strike would force the government to give a little bit more money. That is only a suspicion, but if it is true it proved a very dangerous and costly gamble.

One thing the NUM leadership is correct about is the claim that the NCB intend to shut more collieries in the future and that the rate of closure will accelerate. However, the campaign to stop any closures leads to a political contradiction for the present leadership which produces some very strange contortions.

Just as Derek Robinson argued for increased investment and efficiency at British Leyland to provide a 'future for the British Car industry' so the NUM is trapped in an argument about the viability and profitability of coal mining in the United Kingdom. The kind of technology now available, such as MINOS (computer monitored coal cutting machine) and amalgamation of pits, can only lead to one thing eventually—closures and redundancies. Investment *will* be increased—to pay for expensive machinery—but there will not be any more miners.

When trade unionists get into arguments about 'improving' industry, they are talking about improving capitalism—and improving capitalism means extending the exploitation of fellow workers. If you believe that capitalism can be reformed, as most of the NUM leaders do (the majority are Labour Party members) then even in a bad patch workers in one country can demand protection from the recession at the expense of workers in some other country, for example, hence the call for import controls.

These kinds of ideas never did a thing to protect Derek Robinson. In fact he was sacked for them and today both Michael Edwardes and Ray Horrocks of British Leyland have pinched the argument and are calling for trade protection.

Role of the militant

Of course it's all very well for the Socialist Workers Party, which has a lot fewer members in the pits than Arthur Scargill has hairs on his baldy patch, to tell the miners what to do. But there are some. And it is the handfuls of militants who did more in 1969, 1970, 1981 in South Wales and 1982 during the hospital workers dispute to produce real action than the entire bureaucracy of the NUM put together.

When a real struggle arises and when, we hope, there is a general upturn in the fortunes of workers in this country it is the party network, politics and ideas which prove much more decisive than the official union leadership, whoever is at its head.

The most militant coalfields in the country to this day owe their traditions and organisation to the tiny influence of communist miners built during years much grimmer than we are experiencing today. That influence has withstood the test of time much longer than the efforts of any single individual. Our job in the next years must be to rekindle that revolutionary tradition. □

Hammered but unbroken

In the depths of the downturn of the 80's we need a little encouragement that things will eventually improve. **John Charlton** looks at the experience of the 30s when workers' defensive struggles, usually defeated, slowly gave way to more confident struggles and the rebuilding of rank and file organisation.

It is common on the left today to hear a pessimistic view of our prospects. It is hardly surprising. Thatcher rides high in the polls, after pushing unemployment to record levels, taking an axe to the welfare state and giving an open cheque book to the police and courts to deal with dissenters. The fightback from the official movement has been little short of pathetic. And the far left cannot be said to have prospered.

It is important to note that periods of downturn are not a new phenomenon. They have occurred repeatedly since the birth of capitalism and especially with rising levels of unemployment. Encouragingly however, workers have shown a remarkable capacity to recover from defeat and demoralisation.

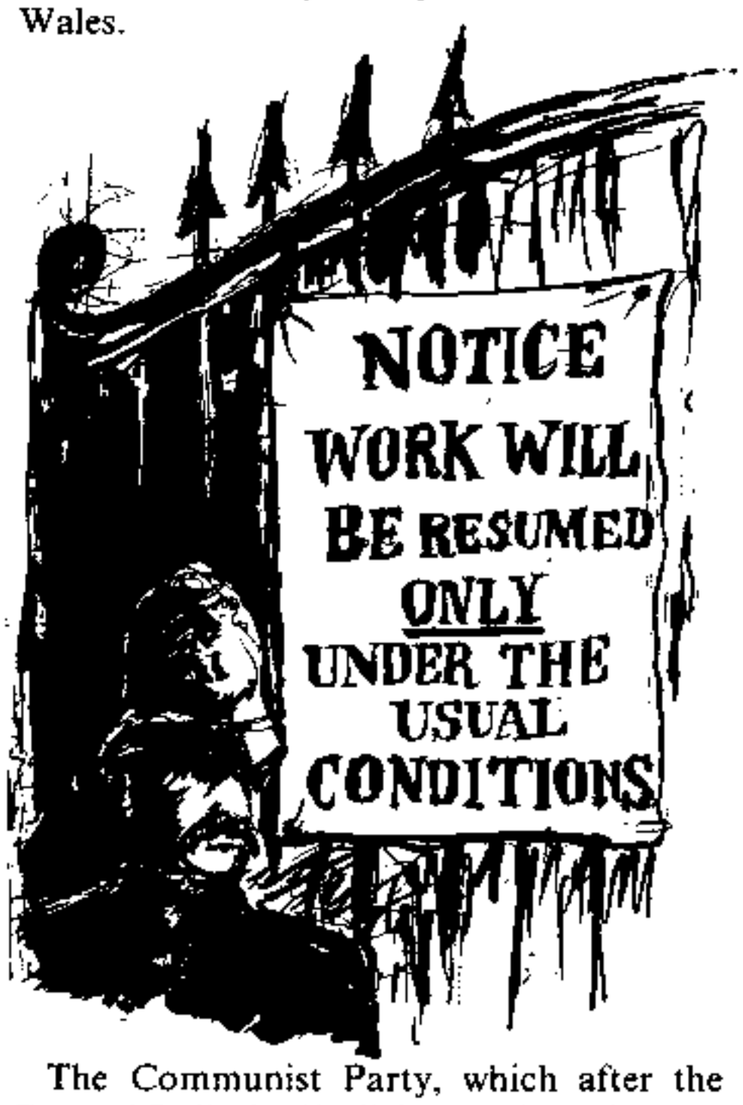
Strongly militant

In the late 19th century the British, German and American labour and socialist movements all recovered from a long period of depression and reaction during the 1870s to build massive trade unions and political organisations in the 80s and 90s. Most dramatic of all was the recovery of the Russian movement after the terrible defeat of the 1905 Revolution. The Russian workers made a revolution only a decade or so later!

In the 1930s American workers overcame the problems of mass unemployment and massive ruling class violence to build a new, militant, and at times strongly class conscious movement. It is less well known that British workers in the same decade, 'The Hungry Thirties', on a smaller scale, followed a similar course.

A strong militant movement developed during and after World War One. It was undermined by rising unemployment, determined employers and treacherous union leadership. In 1922 the Engineers crashed to defeat after a three months lockout, losing a third of AEU membership in the process. In 1926 the TUC General Council sabotaged the General Strike causing tremendous demoralisation. The Tories followed this by enacting the 1927 Trades Disputes Act. In 1929 came the Great Crash, mass unemployment, the political humiliation of the Labour Party and the shrinking of the Communist Party.

By the autumn of 1931 unemployment had risen to three millions, 13 percent of the working population, reaching over 70 percent in some areas. Trade union membership stood at under 4.5 millions, from 8 millions in 1921. It was not only that union members were becoming unemployed —many retained their cards—but that the greater part of the fall was caused by members *leaving* their union voluntarily or under pressure from aggressive employers. The number of industrial disputes in 1931 was 308 compared with 603 in 1925 and 1600 in 1920. The Labour Party, which had formed a Government in 1929, was decimated in the General Election in 1931, with only 52 MPs, and suffered humiliation in local council elections virtually everywhere but South Wales.



The Communist Party, which after the General Strike had built its membership up to 10,000, by 1931 stood at under 3000, though it lost membership and influence by tactical stupidity as much as from the downturn in class struggle.

In just a few years the trade union and socialist movement, nationally, locally and at shop floor level, had been eroded, battered and reduced in numbers and morale to a state not experienced for fifty years. For the masses out of work, negligible prospects and cuts in benefit brought a sense of helplessness and passivity. Contemporary accounts of working people's lives in the depression speak of this helplessness and of an underlying anger and bitterness—a familiar enough experience today—linked with a lack of a sense of how to fight back.

Remarkably however, considering the depths to which the movement had fallen, 1931 proved to be the bottom of the downturn, and from the autumn of that year, the movement began to spring to life. It started in a most unlikely place: the Royal Navy!

In September the Admiralty decided to impose a 1/- per day pay cut on all sailors, which hit hardest at ratings who only earned 4/- per day. Hastily arranged mass meetings of sailors of the Atlantic Fleet docked at Invergordon decided to strike, that is *to mutiny*. Within 24 hours the Admiralty capitulated, restoring the cut. Only a few days later a demonstration against wage cuts took place in Hyde Park. It consisted of 100,000 workers—largely civil servants, teachers, and postal workers, groups with no previous history of militancy.

Throughout 1932 there was a crop of strikes involving Thames Lightermen (a traditionally conservative section of dockers), miners' strikes in Durham, Scotland and South Wales, trawlermen of Milford Haven, hosiery workers of Leicester, railway workers and both London and provincial busmen. Out of the latter grew significant rank and file bodies which were to play an important part in the movement for a decade. In fact most disputes were unofficial, expressions of rank and file anger, often directed at their own officials as well as the employers.

Atrophy and growing conservatism of union officials were a marked feature of the depression; as they are today—a condition which forced activism and organisation on previously untried leaders from the rank and file.

By far the biggest dispute of 1932 was in the cotton industry, a desperate rearguard action in an industry severely hit by the depression and the changing balance of world trade. By the summer of 1932, only one in three textile workers was in a job; most on short time. Throughout the twenties the employers had been trying to force in new technology, to speed-up at the expense of jobs—with considerable success, and with wholesale compliance of the trade union bureaucracy.

Mill districts revolt

In July, believing they were dealing with a demoralised and pliable workforce, the Burnley Employers' Association announced wage cuts of up to 18 percent. The result was a massive rank and file revolt. Within days there was mass picketing, droves of angry workers and their families rushing through the streets of the mill districts forcing shutdowns, bringing Burnley to a standstill.

The Burnley workers turned to the other Lancashire mill towns for solidarity. After a month of picketing and delegations they succeeded, despite the resistance of union leaders and the police brought in from Liverpool, Manchester and West Yorkshire, bringing out virtually the whole of the 150,000 cotton operatives in Lancashire. After two months—for the Burnley workers—they were sold out, though this was presented as a partial victory. However they had shown a tremendous capacity to fight, and to fight against the stream. One can recognise clear parallels with the steel workers today.

However courageous the struggle of the textile workers, short of another General Strike, they were involved in a battle unlikely to lead anywhere but to a qualified defeat.

The industrial struggles of 1931-33 have a

common thread. They were mainly defensive battles—against wage cuts. In 1934 there was an important shift. Sections of workers moved onto the offensive. Even in the depression the recession was spread unevenly, hitting hard at the staple industries, located in the North. But there were areas of growth such as automobiles, aircraft and electrical goods.

In 1934 the first big strike took place in this sector, at Pressed Steel, Oxford. Established in 1928 by its American owners, the firm recruited 'immigrant' labour from the areas of unemployment (particularly South Wales) treating the workforce in a crudely authoritarian manner, with poor wages, little regard for safety and using instant dismissal for dissent. By and large, only skilled workers were organised, in the old craft unions controlled by a conservative leadership totally unsuited to the problems of cowboy management in a new industry, and unsympathetic to a newly established workforce.

Unskilled organise

In July 1934 a rank and file revolt developed, over wages and accident compensation. Barred from membership of the craft unions the unskilled and semi-skilled went into the Transport and General, held mass meetings, formed mass pickets, and called for solidarity actions from other workers in the car industry. They were highly successful and out of the strike built strong shop floor organisation which was to be copied and emulated in scores of workplaces.

Similar actions against victimisation, for union recognition, for better safety precautions as well as pay broke out in the aircraft industry, at Hawker's at Brockworth, Kingston and Bath; at Blackburn's at Brough; in the motor or accessory industries at Ford's Dagenham, Lucas at Smethwick, Firestone Tyres at Brentford; and at Vanesta Plywood and Coleman's Mantle factory in London. Most were successful.

Perhaps the most startling of all the actions in the engineering industry were the series of strikes by apprentices, normally regarded as the most passive members of the work force. They demanded pay rises, union recognition and improvements in their training. The stoppages started in Glasgow and the West of Scotland in March 1937 and spread to Salford, Manchester, Yorkshire, Edinburgh, Teesside, Belfast, Birmingham, Coventry and London. They set up committees, drew up a Charter and carried out their action with enthusiasm and determination, surprising both the employers and union officials. By Christmas 1937 most of their demands were won.

Also in 1937 came the famous Coronation Strike of the London Busmen. CP members had built a rank and file movement in London Transport over the previous four years. This body was instrumental in bringing out the busmen for four weeks in May for a seven hour day. Despite a courageous battle they were outmanoeuvred by Ernest Bevin, the T&G leader, failed to spread the strike and were ultimately forced back to work.

The miners, too, recovering from their appalling defeat in 1926 fought a number of successful battles against company unionism in South Wales and most notably an eight month strike at Harworth in Nottinghamshire. A national ballot on pay in 1935 showed a 93 percent majority in favour of strike!

The National Unemployed Workers' Union led a militant campaign against unemployment which was eventually taken up by the TUC. A series of Hunger Marches took place culminating in mass rallies in London and elsewhere. An estimated 200,000 people turned out for the 1936 demonstration. The campaign against the Means Test actually succeeded in forcing the government to withdraw some of its more irksome parts. The Mosleyites were routed in a series of street battles and the anti-fascist movement gained mass support.

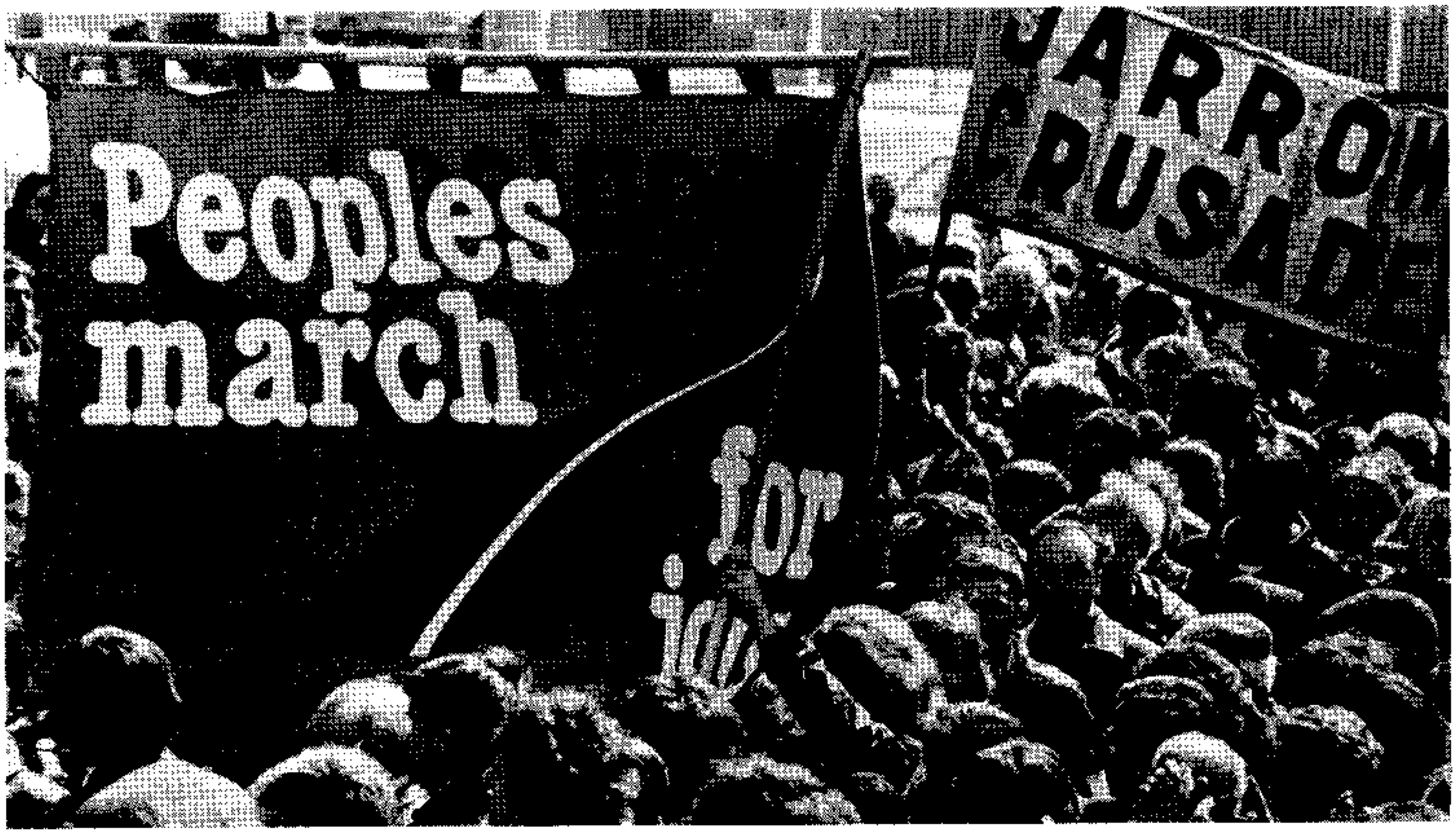
By 1937 trade union membership passed the five million mark, the number of stoppages in industry reached 1,129, Labour was winning by-elections on massive swings and had taken control of most of the big city councils. CP membership reached 12,000 and the shop stewards' movement had once more become common especially in the engineering industry.

In the light of present difficulties it is important to explain why this recovery came about. Firstly, unemployment levels began to fall after 1931, not massively, but steadily from just under three millions to just under two millions by 1937. With orders trickling into the factories and with small numbers of workers being taken on, confidence grew among the employed, expectations rose and with them a growing readiness to fight.

Government over-confident

Secondly the Government, intoxicated by its success, became over-confident. This would appear to explain its determination to push through the Means Test in the winter of 1931-32, against widespread hostility. The anti-Means Test movement grew phenomenally, sharpening working class anger, forcing concessions and so encouraging opposition. Also the very size of the anti-Labour majority made the point clear that there was no hope of workers' interests being represented in Parliament. The only hope was to fight outside, on the streets and in the workplace.

Thirdly, although the trade unions had taken an enormous hammering they had not been broken. Workers stil believed that they needed unions, the organisation still



Picture: JOHN STURROCK (Network)

The 30s meets the 80s on last years TUC's 'Peoples March'

remained intact. Once the incentive for action returned, as in the newer industries, workers flocked into them. To totally smash trade unionism, measures similar to those employed by the Nazis were necessary.

Fourthly, we should not underestimate the importance of the Communist Party. The CP had grown substantially in the aftermath of the General Strike by highlighting the craven leadership of the trade union movement and by getting involved in every workers' action, however small. By 1928 membership had reached 11,000. This advance was disastrously sacrificed between 1928 and 1932. Following instructions from Moscow they adopted a policy of trying to build breakaway red unions and characterised the Labour Party as social fascists. They were isolated and discredited but once this policy was abandoned they were able to quadruple membership in four years reaching 12,000 in 1937.

They built rank and file organisations in industry with agitational newspapers (*New Propellor* in aviation, *Platform* on the London buses, the *Conveyor* in autos) rooted in the conditions of life and work of industrial workers. And they organised around national political issues such as unemployment, the Means Test and the rise of fascism. They were highly successful in building support far beyond their membership. The CP inspired Left Book Club had 50,000 registered members by 1937.

Economic improvement

It would be wrong to make direct analogies between the thirties and today.

The long term prospects for the British economy are worse than they were in the thirties, but we can expect short term fluctuations, including a modest reflation and a small fall in unemployment. Big business is already clamouring for it. Any economic improvement, accompanied as it certainly would be by enormous Government self congratulation, would whet the appetite of workers whose real wages have progressively declined for four years or so.

The Government's abounding self-confidence can easily lead to miscalculation and accident, which can create sharp political crisis, as Ted Heath found in 1972 failing to make a small concession to Joe Gormley and avert the miners strike.

In the Thirties the upturn in the movement's fortunes came in the newer industries of the Midlands and South. It is difficult to see a 1980's equivalent. But then we shouldn't forget that no one predicted the source of revival in the Thirties before it happened. Indeed the newer industries were disregarded and even despised by the more powerful sectors of the movement.

The trade union movement today is in very much better shape than it was 40 years ago. The stagnation of recruitment to the unions is almost wholly caused by unemployment. There is no mass exodus as occurred after the General Strike. Indeed there are whole sections where people are still eager to join unions, for example in white collar jobs, both private and public. The reasons are of course defensive, but if an upturn began, this too could change. The attempt to discipline civil servants for their support of the health workers is evidence that the Government understands this potential very well!

And finally the success of the Communist Party in the late 30's, despite their often dubious political positions, indicates that a serious revolutionary organisation which maintains its organisation through the bleakest trials of the downturn, can be well prepared to take new opportunities presented when the political and economic climate changes. □

Kenyan voice of struggle

Bookmarx' autumn list includes *Petals of Blood* by the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. **Sybil Cock** looks at the writing of this important socialist writer.

Socialists tend to associate modern Kenya with big game safaris, ivory smuggling scandals and a happy home for multinational companies. The history of its people's resistance to British imperialism has faded with the 'triumph' of independence in the early sixties. The *Mau Mau* movement which struck fear into the hearts of white settlers all over Africa was defeated. Its leaders, among them Kenyatta, emerged from years of detention politically broken.

Most modern African political writing has emerged from the struggle aginst Portuguese and South African rule. It is influenced by the outlook of those struggles and speaks the language of Maoism and peasant heroism. The novels of Ngugi are quite different.

Workers' aspirations

Ngugi is a Kenyan intellectual who has spent many years in the prisons of independent Kenya.

He deals with class in a neo-colonial state—with an increasingly proletarianised peasantry and an urban working class whose aspirations are familiar to socialists everywhere.

In his recent writing Ngugi is more and more concerned with the growth of a black ruling class replacing a white one and the striking continuity of that rule.

Detained is the story of his arbitrary detention by Kenyatta. As with other prison writers it is the details of his life that provide the starting point for creative thought:

> 'The face of the warder fills the whole slit: I know nothing so menacingly sinister in its silent stillness as that trunkless face glaring at you through the iron bars of a prison cell...The voice redeems the face. "What are you doing?"..."I am writing to Jomo Kenyatta in his capacity as an ex-detainee." "His case was different", the warder argues back. "How?" "His was a colonial affair." "And this is a neocolonial affair. What's the difference?" "A colonial affair...now we are independent...that's the difference", he says.'

Devil on the Cross is a novel written while he was in prison. Written on toilet paper in his native Gikuyu, it was discovered and confiscated. Rather to his surprise it was returned on his release. The novel is about how capitalism works and it is the most entertaining guide I have ever read. It gives us some clues as to why the authorities should bother to detain a fairly respectable Professor of Literature at Nairobi University.

The central event of the book is a seminar of local and national businessmen who meet to discuss investment opportunities in the Limurur area. Their guests are the representatives of foreign firms and banks. They offer a prize—a directorship of one of the companies—to whoever comes up with the most enterprising scheme for making money in the area.

The contenders address the conference with tales of their own routes to success in business and their loyalty to foreign firms. There are violent disagreements as to the best tactics for exploitation. Ngugi makes them speak not in the language of business, with terms like 'opportunity' and 'competition', but in the language of crime. His businessmen are thieves who explain to each other the most effective ways of robbing and looting their workforces and the local peasants.

Kenyatta: Poacher turned gamekeeper

They brag coarsely about the size and price of their cars, about the grossness of their bellies and number of their conquests of women. They fall over each other in their efforts to impress the foreign visitors. We have a fantasy glimpse of the ruling class as they really are.

One contestant, Gatheeca, makes a speech:

> 'I am not praising myself for the sake of it. We came here to hold a seminar in modern theft and robbery. I will sing a song about myself that will move our foreign guests to make me overseer of other overseers, watchdog over other watchdogs, mesenger above all other messengers...'

The entries to the competition are not meant to be taken literally. They are close to Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal* in which he suggested that the surplus Irish population would do better if its infant children were used as roast meat on English dinner tables.

In all good stories there are baddies and goodies. Ngugi gives us Muturi, a trade unionist and a member of a secret revolutionary organisation, who says: 'Have you ever seen employers being attacked by the armed forces for refusing to increase the salaries of their workers?'

But the central and most exciting character is Wariinga, who suffers both as a worker and as a woman. She is the mother of a child as the result of an enforced affair with a capitalist 'sugar daddy'. She is sacked for refusing further advances. We see her consciousness developing throughout the events surrrounding the robbers' convention. At the end we see her at her strongest and most beautiful. The conclusion hits you between the eyes as you close the book.

All Ngugi's books are worth a read by socialists. He tells wonderful stories in which individual actions are always set in a class context. Narrative and outright fantasy combine with the liberal use of co-incidence to make novels which are about classes rather than individuals.

But there is another important point about Ngugi which sets him above other writers. He does not just write about the system but is also committed to changing it. He wrote *Devil on the Cross* in Gikuyu to make it part of the popular culture and to resist the domination of Kenyan culture by foreign influences, in particular the English of the former colonial masters.

Clarity and punch

His writings are a threat to the corrupt English-speaking elite. They contain no reassuring message for the new black bourgeoisie, whether they are nationalist or cosmopolitan in belief. His books in Gikuyu are in a language accessible to the masses because they are intended as a tool of political education.

Because it is Kenyan workers that Ngugi is writing for his books need some effort for socialists from elsewhere. The reader should be aware that the books are peppered with Gikuyu phrases and obscure allusions to heroes of the *Mau Mau* whose names are unfamiliar to us. But once you get into the books you will find much that is familiar. The greed and the corruption, the poverty and the fightback, may take on different national forms, but the system is international. Ngugi's clarity and punch are well worth the effort. □

No national solution

The demand for import controls to save jobs is a long standing aspect of Labour left policies. Now they have been joined by some Tories. **Gareth Jenkins** looks at the arguments and the facts.

Demands for import controls are not new. But recently, with the continuing decline of the British economy, they have become deafening. In such vulnerable industries as steel and motors, trade unionists have threatened strike action. There has already been a one day stoppage of steel workers. And Vauxhall workers at one plant have not only voted for strike action against imports, but are enlisting the support of dockers and seamen to stop the unloading of foreign cars at British ports.

Class consensus

Added to all this are rumblings of discontent from sections of the British ruling class. Ian McGregor, chairman of BSC, has tentatively suggested that restrictions on steel imports from non-EEC countries might be desirable. George Younger, Secretary of State for Scotland, and Nicholas Edwards, Secretary of State for Wales, have both urged action to protect the beleaguered sections of the steel industry in Scotland and Wales.

In the car industry, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) never ceases to complain about unfair competition from countries like Japan, South Korea, Romania and Australia. British Leyland always quotes the example of Spain, which restricts British car imports by imposing tariffs of around 37 percent, while 'we' have tariffs of no more than just over four percent.

True, the car bosses are against protectionist measures — they would prefer to get these countries to bring their tariffs down — but their arguments have given powerful ammunition to the import control lobby. There are also sections of the Tory Party, who, though they oppose protectionist measures, are prepared to threaten import controls, in order to force other countries to lower their tariffs over 'our' exports.

So all in all, a broad, cross-class consensus exists which identifies imports as the crucial danger facing the British economy and its capacity to recover. For bosses, the worry is lost markets and so lost profits. For workers, lost production and so lost jobs. It would seem only common sense, therefore, as far as workers are concerned, to preserve jobs by keeping foreign products out and ensuring that the home market is satisfied by home industries.

The British market for steel has actually increased slightly over the last year but BSC's market share has been badly hit by imports.

Bill Sirs, General Secretary, Iron and Steel Trades Confederation

It is a deeply compelling argument, powerfully reinforced by the conviction that other countries impose import controls to protect their own industries, and thus penalise Britain for playing fair in the arena of international trade. Workers also perceive that on the whole the British ruling class is against protectionism, and that since it doesn't give a damn about workers' living standards, the introduction of import controls (which is what Labour promises to do if re-elected) must bring gains for them.

Nevertheless, the argument is both wrong and dangerous. Wrong, because it can be shown that import controls don't even do what they are supposed to do. And dangerous, because workers finish up, not fighting for their independent class interests, but lining up behind some capitalist priority — with dire consequences.

Protectionism

The truth is that however much the British government claims to be playing by the rules it is departing from the 'ideal' of 'free trade' just as much as other countries. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), set up after the last war to increase open international trading, is being flouted by all sorts of semi-secret protectionist deals. In this Britain is as guilty as any of the countries so frequently cited as offenders.

Along with the rest of the world, there has been increasing protectionism in Britain since the mid 70s. Nearly half her total trade is covered by restrictions, outside the agreed GATT tariffs. In manufacturing goods, the rise has been from virtually nothing to 13 per cent since 1974, a figure which compares with the EEC average of 14 percent, and overall industrial nations average of 15 percent.

Britain is behaving no differently from other countries. The reason for this world-wide creeping protectionism is, of course, quite simple. As the world recession becomes prolonged, markets continue to shrink and competition becomes ever fiercer. No country can resist the pressure to gain an 'unfair' advantage over its neighbours. The recent GATT negotiations, for all the 'free trade' talk, will not halt this process.

Hence the growth outside the GATT system of non-discriminatory tariffs, of semi-secret protectionist deals. The spectre of trade wars of the 1930s type now haunts all governments. Of course, 'free trade' never meant equality of treatment between nations. The GATT agreement, like its United Nations sponsor, was designed to enshrine the post-war power system. Victorious American capital, together with its various junior partners (Britain amongst them), was to have free range over the 'non-communist' world.

Unemployment

When, therefore, the Tories talk of the desirability of free trade (while upholding all sorts of quotas, voluntary agreements, etc) what they really mean is the desirability of maintaining Britain's unequal advantages in the international competitive stakes. They are deeply worried that the very protectionism they themselves operate will upset the situation, if it gets out of control.

So much for Tory practice and principles. The important point to note as far as the argument about import controls is concerned, is that it has been practiced by

Britain for nearly a decade and that it has had no effect on pulling the upward curve of unemployment in a downward direction. If protectionism saved home markets, and so jobs, we would have expected some results already.

Of course, it could be argued that without these restrictions unemployment would have been even worse. But the experience of other countries suggests otherwise. Take Belgium, which together with Britain has the highest unemployment rate in the EEC. Between 1970 and 1979 it had the lowest growth of import shares of any EEC country (in fact, imports from developing countries *declined* by half a percent). That didn't slow down Belgium's unemployment growth rate.

The truth is, unemployment is not *caused* by import penetration. Increased unemployment and increased import penetration are both results of the international world crisis. The first is caused by the overall decline in demand (as measured by the capitalist priority of profit-making), the second by the ever increasing compulsion on each competing country to grab as much of the shrinking demand as possible.

The evidence is that import controls actually worsen the situation overall for each ruling class. The case of British textiles is particularly illuminating. The demand in this industry for import controls has a long history. As a result, there have been quotas on cheap clothing imports from Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea, among others. But the refusal in 1980 to enlarge textile quotas to £10m from Indonesia led to the loss of between £80m and £160m worth of British exports.

Retaliation

What may be to the advantage of one particular sector of the economy (usually an ailing one) is to the disadvantage of the economy overall. The price paid for protectionism is retaliation — or just less foreign exchange with which to buy British goods. No wonder the ruling class *as a whole* is wary of protectionism, however much individual members of it may be tempted by the immediate short term gains.

More importantly from our point of view, the situation is also worsened overall for the working class. Again, textiles is a case in point. As a result of restrictions, British consumers, the vast majority of whom are working class, pay between 15 and 40 percent more for their clothing. Whatever the advantages claimed for textile workers — and employment prospects do not seem to have improved substantially — they are gained at the expense of a general rise in the cost of living.

Any increase in protectionism is bound to add another upward twist to prices. Real wages will fall, as cheap imports are replaced by either more expensive imports or more expensive home-produced goods. Consequently, workers won't be able to buy as much, demand will decline, production will fall — and more jobs will be lost. So, far from *creating* jobs, import controls will contribute to the continuing fall in employment.

This is not to walk into the Tory trap of

The 'Triple Alliance' demonstration in Edinburgh, 23 October 1982

praising 'free trade' as the panacea for all evils. It is rather to point out that import controls are an alternative *capitalist* response to the crisis. It is true they are unpopular at the moment with the ruling class for reasons we have looked at. But the logic of international competition is *already* compelling them to resort to protectionism. And they may increasingly have to do so, if the trade wars hot up as a result of the continuing world recession.

Either way, the working class is the loser.

The immediate stimulus to the present round of calls for import controls arises from the performance of the British economy this year. Since 1981 (the trough of the

recession), demand has increased by some three percent. But industrial production has gone up by less than one percent, and if oil is excluded has actually fallen. So with consumer spending going up, and stagnation in output from British factories, imports have been sucked in to fill the gap.

The Treasury estimates that importers may take as much as 80 percent of any increase in demands. The result is mild panic among British manufacturers — how do they overcome their obvious lack of competitiveness? They talk of driving wages still further down (the CBI zero wage round), they talk of greater productivity (codeword for more redundancies), and they talk of bringing exchange rates down.

The purpose of all this is to cut costs, bring prices down and make British exports more competitive. There are problems, of course. Falling wages and rising unemployment will do nothing for home demand or home production. Cheaper sterling will make imports dearer (including raw materials), whatever the benefits claimed for cheaper exports. None of the choices for the British ruling class are palatable, and they all involve deterioration in workers' standards of living.

For some time, it has been haunted by the fear of losing out in terms of international trade. The new fear is that it is losing out on its own doorstep. Just when it could rejoice over a modest pick-up in demand as a stimulus to the economy, foreign imports rush in to scoop the pool.

Hence the strident demands all the way from Mrs Thatcher to the Co-Op to 'Buy British'. Hence, too, the increasing whine about unfair treatment by foreigners, who protect *their* markets but victimise ours. Nowhere has that been stronger than in the steel and motor industries, which are both exremely vulnerable in the cutthroat world of imports and exports.

Too much steel in stock

In all the major industrialised non-communist countries steel production has been declining for about a decade, despite the occasional slight upswing. Thousands of jobs have been axed as a result. Employment in the British steel industry has followed a typical pattern. In 1977 it stood at 239,000. By July 1981 it had dropped to 133,000. BSC currently employs 94,000 people. By next March it will be down to 92,000. And there are more redundancies to come.

Productivity up

The same decline is apparent in both the US and the rest of the EEC. Indeed, up to 70,000 jobs are at risk in the EEC over the next three months.

At the same time, the productivity of British steel workers has shot up. At Llanwern in South Wales, for example, production in the year ending last March stood at 1,885m tonnes (not far short of the 1971/72 record) despite having shed half the workforce over the last two years. In BSC as a whole, the number of man hours needed to make a tonne of steel came down from over 15 to less than nine. In some plants, it went as low as five.

Now, however, productivity is falling again because output is falling. The number of man hours per tonne has risen to eleven. The reason is the mismatch between the capacity of the market to consume steel and the capacity of the steel industry to produce.

The cost to the workforce in attempting to make British steel profitable has therefore not only been in terms of jobs. It has been in terms of abandoning restrictive practices, which, in a ntoriously dangerous industry, can only mean worsening conditions and safety.

This is not a British phenomenon. It is common to the EEC, the US, Japan, etc. Every major steel industry is running below capacity (Britain, for example, is running at 58 percent capacity). With the world economy in its present depressed state, there is just too much steel chasing too little demand.

It is against this background that the issue of imports must be judged. Bill Sirs, ISTC General Secretary, is never tired of pinning the blame on imports from other countries. Now, it is true that imports from Eastern European countries doubled to 100,000 tonnes a month this June as compared with the previous June. But that is not the determining factor in the problems besetting British Steel.

What has hit British Steel in particular is stagnant UK production. Strip products are affected by the declining UK vehicle market, tubes by the slump in oil exploration, general steels by the recession in engineering and construction.

The Government has got to step in and see a basic industry like this through the recession ... If they stopped the special steel imports ... we could cope.

Jack Illingworth, Chairman shop stewards, Firth Brown steelworks, Sheffield

In these circumstances, employers go for the cheapest steel products in order to offset their costs. In a *declining* market, cheap imports inevitably loom large. But it does not follow that if cheap imports were banned manufacturers would make good with more expensive home-produced steel. If their costs went up, their competitiveness would be threatened. Production would again decline, and so too would the demand for steel. It is a vicious circle.

BSC can only hope to break out of it by demanding yet more sacrifices of its workforce, in order to undercut competitors. And of course every other competitor does the same. The question of who imports what is a strictly secondary affair.

The point to emphasise, therefore, is that jobs are not necessarily saved. If we look at unemployment figures and import figures in the steel industry over a number of years, it is clear that there is no casual connection between the two. Between 1977 and 1981 unemployment increased at a fairly steady rate. Imports after a slight rise between 1977 and 1979, *fell* sharply in 1980 and 1981.

Steelworkers were forced even during the 'good' years when imports fell, to sacrifice jobs and conditions because the priority was profitability. To return to those 'good' years by persuading the government to ban third country imports doesn't alter that priority. It is a priority that becomes more savage as British Steel, like every other national steel industry, fights for a share in a shrinking market.

Special case?

In this dog-eat-dog world, what cheap imports are to the British steel industry, so British steel exports are to other national industries. Third country importers only do what British Steel itself does. It practises the same tricks as its competitors — and is subject to the same retaliatory pressures.

Dramatic proof of what it means to be on the receiving end of an imports curb came earlier this year. This time it was Britain's turn to be treated as a third country. The US filed petitions against UK steel producers (BSC in the main) on the grounds that roughly a third of British exports to the US (200,000 tons) competed unfairly with US products.

The accusations were of dumping (selling below domestic prices) and of government subsidising — exactly the same kind of accusations made against third country imports into Britain. Britain wasn't the only country accused. So was the rest of the EEC, Brazil, Romania, Spain and South Africa.

Only eleventh hour negotiations averted a trade war between the US and the EEC, ending with an agreement to limit European imports to the US. If the US had gone through with its petitions, Britain might have finished up paying duties of 40 percent on the steel in question. That would have shut BSC out of the market in the products concerned.

US petition

Bill Sirs' response to this 40 percent was to call for a consumer boycott of all things American, from Coca Cola to Kentucky Fried Chicken. But he had problems when it came to attacking *American* import controls, given his defence of their desirability for Britain. Britain, he argued, had to be a special case: government subsidies were entirely fair because they helped BSC 'shut down whole areas of steelmaking in Britain', not produce cheaply (and so unfairly).

A more peculiar defence it is difficult to imagine. It involves, apparently, *approving* of the wholescale redundancies in the industry. (No wonder Sirs was roundly abused by rank and file steelworkers as having 'no bloody right to sell our jobs out.') But that is the ultimate logic of the call to defend British Steel against foreign industries.

There is one other revealing anecdote about British steel exports to America. Earlier this year BSC fixed up a deal to sell steel slabs to a US firm, Kaiser. The advantage is that the deal gets round US moves against European steel imports because the slabs are semi-finished. Good news for Port Talbot steelworkers. The tinplate they produce can be exported in order to break into the lucrative fruit and vegetable packing industry of the American west coast.

Not such good news, however, for Kaiser steelworkers. Kaiser are shutting their own steelmaking facilities: BSC can supply steel slabs at a lower cost than they themselves can produce. In terms of protecting one's 'own' industry, US steel workers would be perfectly entitled to argue that 'their' industry is being ruined by cheap foreign substitutes.

Too many cars lying around

It could at least be claimed that there is such a thing as a *British* Steel industry (though membership of the EEC and the BSC/Kaiser link-up suggest a blurring at the edges). Increasingly, however, that is a meaningless concept applied to vehicle manufacturing in the UK.

Big foreign-based manufacturers, like Ford, and Vauxhall (owned by General Motors) view Britain as just one patch in the European 'playground' — the term comes from a GM executive — with bits made in one place, components in another, and the whole assembled in Britain. Borders are about as relevant as those between England and Wales, or England and Scotland.

For example, although Ford plans to reduce the imports of built-up cars next year, UK-assembled vehicles in 1983 will only amount to between 65 and 70 percent of total Ford sales. 50,000 Sierras and Escorts will come from overseas, rather than from the Dagenham and Halewood plants.

With Vauxhall, the same picture emerges. Only the Chevette is wholly produced in Britain (at Ellesmere Port). Other models — such as the Cavalier — are assembled here (Luton). But of the Cavaliers sold in Britain during the first ten months of this year, just under half (48 percent) came from outside this country. (For the Vauxhall Astra the figure was 55 percent).

Import levels (of foreign cars) have seriously undermined the fabric of the vehicle building industry ... We need to do something serious bout it.

Moss Evans, General Secretary, TGWU

Even British Leyland is not quite so British as the name implies, though it is the least international of the firms so far mentioned. Putting aside the BL/Honda collaboration on the Triumph Acclaim (with further plans on an executive car), there are Italian engines in the Rover, there will be Italian engines for the Jaguar, and Volkswagen gear boxes in the new LM next year.

The reasons for this internationalisation are quite obvious. In the highly competitive world car market, firms produce cars — or bits of cars — wherever it is cheapest to do so. Cheapness depends on a number of factors, one of which is productivity (ie screwing more out of workforce). It is because of increased productivity at Dagenham and Halewood that Ford proposes to reduce the number of import of built-up cars.

But screwing more out of a workforce is only effective if demand is buoyant (over-production of unsold cars adds to costs). Given only very slight growth in the world car market because of the recession, manufacturers have to find other ways of cheapening their products in order to undercut their rivals. Hence the search for new manufacturing bases, where all costs (including wages) are absolutely lower than in traditional bases such as Britain.

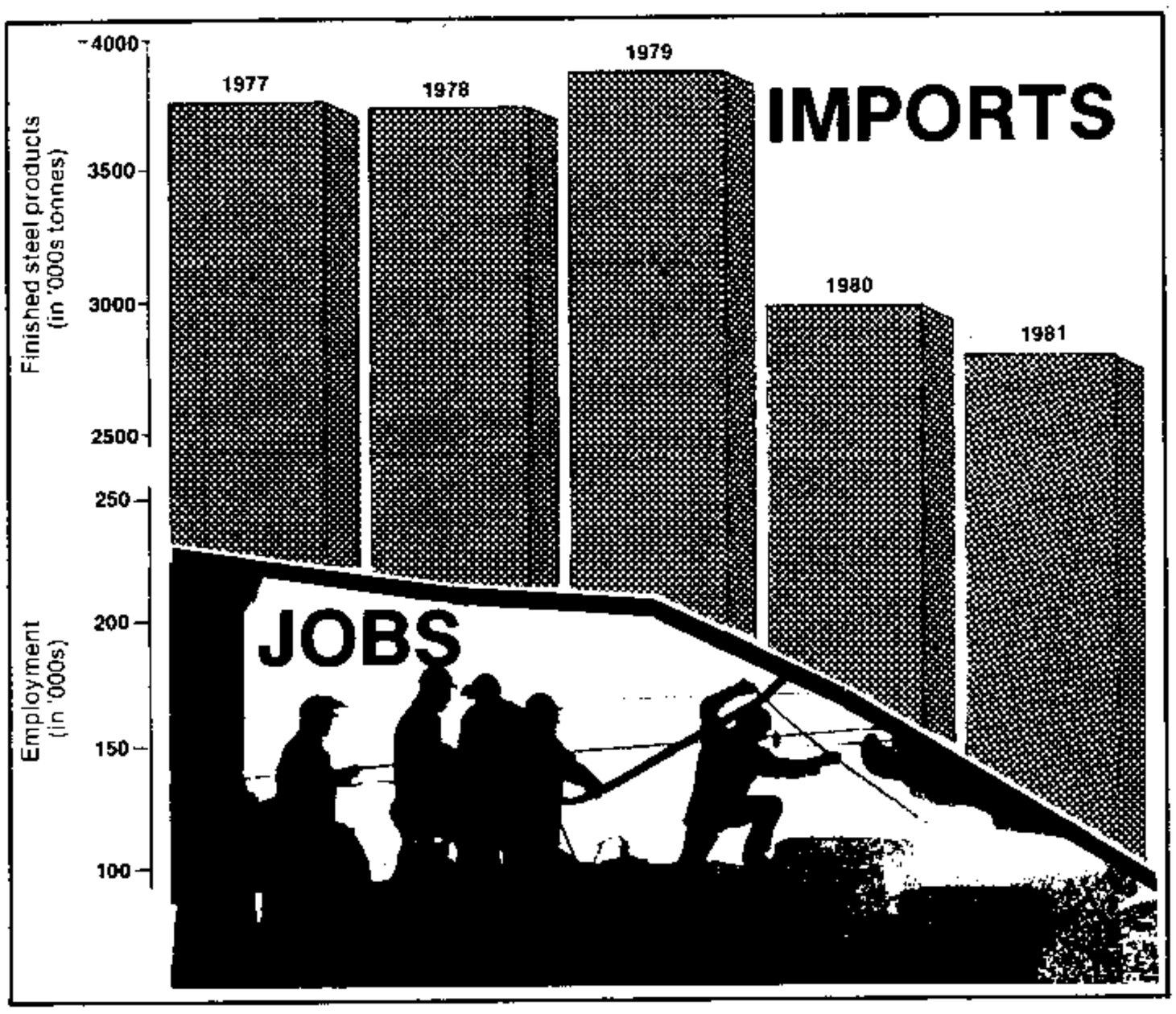
The 'S' Car

That brings us to the decision of GM (the owners of Vauxhall) to build its new 'S' car in Spain — a decision that has caused outrage on the board of BL, and calls for the blacking of imports of the 'S' car by Vauxhall workers unless the car is assembled in Britain.

GM's motives are easily explained. It desperately needs to reduce its giant debts by moving into the European small car market and crowding out its chief competitors in that field, Renault and Fiat. Spain offers the perfect opportunity. It is, in the jargon, a

Picture: JOHN SMITH (IFL)

Car workers from Vauxhall plants in Dunstable and Ellesmere Port picket the 1982 Birmingham Motor Show



low-cost country, which will give GM a price-cost advantage against its rivals. And operating within Spain means it will have access to the Spanish home market without having to pay Spain's 37 percent tariff.

BL's outrage is just as easily explained. The new 'S' will be a dangerous rival to the Metro, and the fact that it will cost approximately 30 percent less to produce it in Spain gives GM a considerable pricing advantage. BL is also excluded from 'fair' competition inside Spain by high tariff walls.

As far as Vauxhall workers are concerned, the threat would seem to be further job loss (the workforce has been cut in the last two years from 33,000 to 20,500), as GM consolidates a trend away from manufacturing operations in the UK. Blacking non-British GM products therefore seems sensible.

However, though the threat is very real, the action proposed is in reality not sensible at all.

Threat to jobs

First, what would be the effect of blacking? Quite apart from the question of the livelihoods of Spanish car workers, the threat to jobs among *British* car component makers would be considerable. There will be £20m worth of British components in the new 'S' car.

Secondly, having the 'S' car built in Britain doesn't alter the logic of competitiveness. There is already too much production chasing too little demand (which is why Vauxhall refuse to put on a second shift at its Luton plant — output would increase by 25 percent, way above what the UK market could absorb). Building the car here would increase costs, threaten its potential share of the market and so undercut GM's profits.

That in turn would lead GM's subsidiary, Vauxhall, to put the following ultimatum to its workforce: either moderate your wage claims and agree to further productivity deals, or we close operations in the UK altogether. (If the recession continues — as seems likely — it will probably be demanding more redundancies in any case).

This car (the Spanish-built 'S' car) is not going to come in — we have got to show the company that we are prepared to do our own fighting to save our own jobs.

John Farrell, TGWU Convenor, Vauxhall, Ellesmere Port

As for BL's complaint against Spain's high tariffs (as well as its complaints about the impenetrability of Comecon, South Korea, and Japan) that at least has the merit of showing how import controls operate to our disadvantage. But when they complain about the unfair advantages accruing to their chief home competitors (Ford and Vauxhall) because these companies operate increasingly from cheaper foreign bases, their arguments are traps for the unwary.

BL claims, for example, that the level of 'captive' imports (ie imports under British badge names, like Ford Capris, and Granadas, or roughly half Vauxhall's Astras and Cavaliers) is equivalent to just over 40,000 lost jobs in the UK. Not that BL is urging import controls; but does anyone tempted by the argument imagine that shutting out these imports, in order to 'create' British jobs, would not invite massive retaliation, involving much greater loss of jobs eventually?

Even more modest controls — ones that might avoid retaliation — would boomerang on British jobs. Banning the 50 percent of Ford Fiestas that are imported would have consequences for the 15 percent British components in the model. Controls on GM would inevitably have a knock-on effect on its components factories in Northern Ireland (seat belts and exterior mouldings) and England (steering columns and exhaust valves). The examples could be multiplied.

Cost of living

Finally, we have the case of the success of the Japanese car in capturing part of the UK market (steady at around 11 percent over the last two years). This, it is said, proves the need for protectionism. Nor is there any danger of retaliation since Japan is virtually a closed market to British goods.

The first point to note is that the 11 percent share of the market is already the product of a 'gentleman's agreement' to curb imports. It has not halted the decline in the British car industry, nor the steady haemorrhaging of jobs. Secondly, people buy Japanese cars not out of lack of patriotism but because they are cheaper. Eliminating a source of cheaper cars will not increase home demand — it will just add to the cost of living, with further depressing effects for the UK economy generally.

But most importantly, as far as British car workers' jobs and conditions are concerned, we must remind ourselves that international competitiveness places exactly the same strains on the workforce, whether or note the home market is protected (by tariffs, government subsidies, and the like).

BL already boasts of its improved productivity (ie the way Edwardes pushed through redundancies and forced deteriorations in working conditions). Further barriers against Japanese car imports are not going to reverse that. And continuing recession at home and abroad will accelerate it.

Japan

The ability to make the workforce pay for the price of international competitiveness also explains the success of the Japanese car on the world market. Contrary to the myths of the British ruling class (who would like to see British workers emulate Japanese workers, so that we can beat the foreigners at his own game), the Japanese car industry has gained its dominance at terrible cost to those employed by it.

It is true that the Japanese carworker earning £5 an hour is in real and comparative terms better paid than his English equivalent (at £2.40 an hour). But the comparison is not strictly valid because of the difference between the Japanese and the British car industries.

The Japanese car factory is less a *producer* than an *assembler* of cars. Manufacturers have access to a unique underworld of 32,000 small suppliers in components, whose employees are much less well paid and often work in appalling conditions. That makes the components bought by Nissan, for instance, 30 percent cheaper than those bought by BL and Ford.

A few components factories have wages

and hours which, although much lower than those worked in Nissan, are comparable with those in Britain. But that is in sharp contrast with the nearly four million Japanese who work in tiny family firms (between one and four people), producing vital components for cars and cycles. Here the money is bad, and there are none of the much vaunted jobs-for-life.

Underpinning these firms are between 10,000 and 20,000 people. These are day labourers, mostly single, sometimes living 20 to a room, with communal washstands and toilets.

As for the components' industry safety record, it is truly appalling. In 1979, 6,000 amputations, mostly parts of fingers, were reported on 140,000 power press machines. In Britain in the same year, there were 26 on about 100,000 machines.

With Ford launching a programme called 'After Japan' to persuade its workforce to emulate conditions in the Japanese car industry, workers should be warned about what faces them. Since protectionism doesn't challenge the *need* for employers' profitability (just the terms on which it is internationally pursued), there is no reason to expect that workers' conditions would improve.

Worker's Confidence

The evidence is that import controls, far from alleviating the crisis, contribute to it. The real danger is that the call for import controls *disarms* workers. They are drawn behind this or that section of the world ruling class in the struggle for markets, and invited to view their survival as bound up with the survival of their bosses.

Often this takes the form of extreme chauvinism and racism: the enemy is the Yanks, the Japs or the Dagoes. Sometimes (in its left-wing variant) it takes the naive form of arguing that *every* country should protect itself with import controls in order to weather the crisis. However preferable the sentiments, this argument is hopelessly utopian. It assumes, in a world governed by an international division of labour and subject to the over-riding dynamic of the competition between capitals, that the nation-state can somehow magically seal itself off from this pressure.

No nation-state, however protectionist, or statified, or left-wing, can do this. In the end it passes on the cost in terms of making the working class pay for the crisis — in higher prices, worse conditions and continuing unemployment. The argument is totally reformist, in that it accepts the need for capital to remain profitable (whether privately-owned or 'publicly' controlled) and therefore for exploitation to continue.

While workers remain trapped in that perspective, their chances of fighting back to defend their own interests are limited. The depressing record of steel and car workers accepting productivity deals (indeed, in the British Steel industry, actually offering to sacrifice jobs) is ample testimony to that fact. Until workers regain confidence in their own power, the import controls argument will, unfortunately, continue to cut with the grain. □

The whole truth

Brecht said that: 'I have never found anybody without a sense of humour who could understand dialectics.'
Ian Birchall has one, and explains this central idea of Marxism.

Between September and December 1914, the months immediately following the outbreak of the First World War and the collapse into patriotic treachery of most of the international labour movement, Lenin spent a good deal of his time in the reading hall of the library at Berne, in Switzerland. He was reading Hegel's *Science of Logic*, and judged it sufficiently important to fill several school exercise-books with notes and comments. These notes take up some 160 pages of Lenin's *Collected Works* (volume 38).

This episode has always puzzled Lenin's biographers, many of whom omit it entirely (including, it must be said, Tony Cliff, who skips from August 1914 to Zimmerwald in a single page. The name Hegel does not appear in the index to any of the four volumes of Cliff's *Lenin*.) And at first sight it is certainly perplexing that Lenin, the supreme organiser and man of action, should have been so fascinated by the most obscure and convoluted of all the German idealist philosophers.

Yet Lenin throughout his life insisted on the importance of Hegel and the dialectical method he initiated. He argued that it was impossible to understand Marx's *Capital* without having studied the whole of Hegel's *Logic*; and in his *Testament* notes that Bukharin has never understood the dialectic.

Lenin's interest

The reason why it is so difficult to explain Lenin's interest in dialectics is that in the last fifty years the whole question has got fouled up with a number of red herrings. Before any attempt to explain what dialectics *is*, it is necessary to clear the ground and explain what it *is not*.

Firstly, Stalinism transformed Marxism from a critical revolutionary theory into the ideology of the Russian ruling class. As part of this process, Stalin invented something called 'dialectical materialism' (snappily abbreviated to 'Diamat'), a set of quasi-religious formulae. (Marx never used the term 'dialectical materialism'; Stalin took it from Plekhanov.)

In the hands of a pig-ignorant bureaucrat like Stalin, dialectics was a gift for explaining away the barbarities of the new regime. In 1930 Stalin told the Sixteenth Party Congress:

> 'We are for the withering away of the state, and yet we also believe in the proletarian dictatorship which represents the strongest and mightiest form of state power that has existed up to now. To keep on developing state power in order to prepare conditions *for* the withering away of state power – that is the Marxist formula. Is it "contradictory"? Yes, "contradictory". But the contradiction is vital, and wholly reflects the Marxist dialectic.'

The Great Helmsman, Chairman Mao, added his contribution to the great tradition by inventing the concept of 'non-antagonistic contradiction', as a nice way of saying 'class collaboration' (the bourgeoisie are the class-enemy, but we won't fight them.)

The second problem that has dogged the argument is the famous debate about the 'dialectics of nature'. Engels was fond of illustrating his account of dialectics from quantity to quality by comparing it to the boiling or freezing or water; water gets progressively warmer or colder, then at a given point turns to ice or steam.

The Stalinists eagerly latched on to this method. The French philosopher Georges Politzer tells us that when a chicken comes out of an egg, it negates the egg; but then the chicken grows into a hen and negates itself. So here we have the 'negation of the negation'.

The trouble with all this is that it both oversimplifies and mystifies. Making a revolution is, after all, rather more complex than making a cup of tea – or even than breeding chickens. And for dialectics to claim to be rooted in the natural sciences allows it to bask in the reflected glory of 'Science', thus fudging the issue of what its true status is.

The question of the 'dialectics of nature' must be handled carefully. In his last year Engels, a keen but amateur student of natural science, wrote extensive notes on dialectics in relation to various branches of science. Since he rightly gave priority to working on Marx's unfinished *Capital*, Engels never completed these notes for publication. The posthumous volume that

By concentrating on the particular ...

appeared under the title *Dialectics of Nature* should be seen as no more and no less than the interesting but fragmentary speculations of a gifted thinker.

Since Engels' time many notable scientists, from J D Bernal to the French physicist J-P Vigier, have claimed that the dialectical method has helped them in their work. It would be foolish to claim that dialectics has no place in the study of natural science – but equally dangerous to claim that the validity of dialectics as a method of social enquiry depends on the correctness or incorrectness of a theory about nature.

After all, it is conservative, bourgeois thought that tries to see society as subject to the same laws as nature. We've all heard of the economic 'climate', something unchangeable, for which no-one is responsible. As Marx, quoting Vico, points out, 'human history differs from natural history in this, that we have made the former, but not the latter.' To derive the laws of dialectics from inanimate nature leads to denying the role of human agency in the historical process.

What, then, is dialectics? The term was first used by the Greek philosopher, Plato. For him it meant the process by which pure thought advances towards the achievement of coherent knowledge. Over two thousand years later, Hegel took up the term to refer to the movement of ideas which, for him, was the driving force of human history. For Marx and Engels, dialectics came to be the processes by which human history itself developed.

Since Marx's day, many people have tried to codify dialectics into a set of laws. However, no two seem to agree as to what the laws are, nor even whether there are three or four of them. Dialectics is, in fact, an extraordinarily slippery subject; attempts to explain it almost always end up in either incomprehensible jargon or banal platitudes.

Nothing sacred

So why bother? It is very easy to sympathise with socialists who say they are far too busy with the struggle to spend time on philosophy, and that they will rely simply on common sense. But unfortunately socialists cannot rely on common sense.

For common sense is the ideas shared by most people. And as Marx pointed out: 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.' Most people trust appearances. For thousands of years it was common sense that the sun went round the earth. Today Stalinists and Free-World fanatics will agree that it is obvious that Russia and the United States have totally different social systems. Only a study in depth will reveal that both are governed by the same laws. It is the common-sense view of our society that capitalism is a fair system in which everyone is free. It is precisely our job to undermine that common sense.

Dialectics, then, is the study of how things change. The imperative underlying all dialectical thought is Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to *change* it.' Or, as Engels was to put it:

> 'Just as the bourgeoisie by large-scale industry, competiton and the world market dissolves in practice all stable time-honoured institutions, so this dialectical philosophy dissolves all conceptions of final, absolute truth and of absolute states of humanity corresponding to it. For it (dialectical philosophy) nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher.'

This implies the need for a theory of history. There are, of course, a good number of theories of history already available, both in elaborated form, and embodied in the attitudes held by most people. Basically, they can be summed up under three headings: 'You can't really change things'; 'you can't stop Progress'; and 'things ain't what they used to be'. All of these are fundamentally reactionary; There is nothing progressive about 'Progress', as should be obvious in an age when millions of people are being thrown out of their jobs by machines. So revolutionary socialism needs an alternative view of history.

Hegel's problem

And this is where Hegel comes in. Hegel (1770-1831) was one of a group of German philosophers who lived through the period of the French Revolution. These philosophers had a problem. They were greatly inspired by the Revolution, but they lived in a country which was far less socially developed than France. They couldn't mobilise the masses to overthrow the kings, for there were no masses to mobilise. So they made revolution inside their own heads, translating the real changes of the French Revolution into philosphical abstractions.

What Hegel tried to show was that history was not a series of accidents, but had a logic running through it. As he put it: 'All that is real is rational; and all that is rational is real.' Now as Engels pointed out, this is a double-edged formulation. On the one hand it can be used to defend the *status quo*; but on the other it can be used to justify the forcible overthrow of that *status quo*. Hence the followers of Hegel rapidly split into left and right wings. For Marx and Engels the important thing was to reintegrate Hegel's insights into a materialist view of history. As Engels put it, Hegel's dialectic was standing on its head, and had to be put back on its feet.

One of the key categories that Marx takes from Hegel is that of totality. As the great Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács wrote (in the days before he became a Stalinist hack):

> 'It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel . . .'

As Lukács pointed out, bourgeois thought sees the organisation of social and economic life from the standpoint of competing capitalists, and hence cannot see it as a whole. Moreover, bourgeois ideology tries to force this fragmented view on the rest of us, precisely because it mystifies the process of change.

As Brecht put it, 'the decisions about the meat that is lacking in the kitchen are not taken in the kitchen.' The bourgeois social sciences will encourage us to spend our lives making the most rigorous, objective, detailed study of the kitchen – and as a result we shall never find what we are looking for. Raoul Vaneigem, a Situationist leader in the sixties, neatly summed up this pressure to fragmentation when he wrote that the prevailing ideology

> '. . . insists that everyone be for or against the Rolling Stones ... the Minivan, Chinese food, LSD, short skirts, the United Nations, pop art, nationalisation, thermonuclear war and hitch-hiking. Everyone is asked their opinion of every detail to stop them having one of the totality.'

So, rather than the whole being a simple sum of its parts, the parts can be understood only in the context of the whole. As Lenin points out, a hand is only really a hand if it is part of a body. Likewise, the working class is not produced by simply adding up individual workers. A worker is a worker only if she or he is part of the working class. (Hence the bourgeois enthusiasm for secret ballots, which add up individuals rather than taking the class as a collective.)

Similarly, failure to see every process as part of a totality leads to political errors in the movement. Trade union struggle is important, but if we fail to see it as part of the totality, we lapse into 'economism': Building the party is vital, but detached from the totality leads to sectarianism; and so on.

Contradictions

Now, if human society is perceived as a whole, the agency of change must be inside that whole. It cannot be something 'outside', like God, or a benevolent elite seen as standing outside society.

For once, an analogy with the natural sciences may be permissible. For many centuries it was assumed that the natural state of matter was immobility. This left an enormous problem – what made things move? One of the most intelligent thinkers of European Middle Ages, Dante, could find no qther explanation of how the sun, moon and stars moved than to assume that they were being pushed by angels. But once it is understood that motion is the natural state of matter, then the problem is transformed.

It was this question that Marx contronted in his Third Thesis on Feuerbach, one of the most profound passages he ever wrote:

> 'The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one is

superior to society.'

In other words, if we see society as a single whole, the dynamic for change must be contradictions within that single whole. The shortest, but probably the most accurate definition of dialectics I know is Raya Dunayevskaya's: 'development through contradiction'.

Thus Hegel insists that 'Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world'. The English poet Blake, writing at roughly the same time, declared that 'without Contraries is no progression'. (Hegel and Blake almost certainly knew nothing of each other; but both were deeply influenced by the French Revolution.)

Of course, to identify contradiction as the dynamic of change is only the beginning of the problem. Marx went on to spend the remaining thirty-eight years of his life studying the specific contradictions of capitalist society – capital and labour, use value and exchange value, and so on.

This argument also enables us to avoid another stumbling-block of bourgeois philosophy, the relation of 'is' and 'ought'. Bourgeois philosophy denies that we can ever get logically from 'is' to 'ought', from statements of fact to statements of value. But if society is transformed by contradictions internal to it, then it is no use looking for change unless that change can be identified with an agency already present in the social system. Likewise, it is no good trying to prefigure socialism on the basis of moral ideas. Capitalism will be destroyed only by the existing working class, with all its flaws and weaknesses. In Lenin's words: 'We have to build socialism with people who have been thoroughly spoiled by capitalism.'

Processes

As a result, in Engels' words, the dialectical approach means that 'the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made *things*, but as a complex of *processes*. This is crucial for an understanding of the historical role of clases. In looking at any class's place in history, we have to consider it, not in terms of its actual state at a given moment in time, but in terms of its potential for development. In Marx's words:

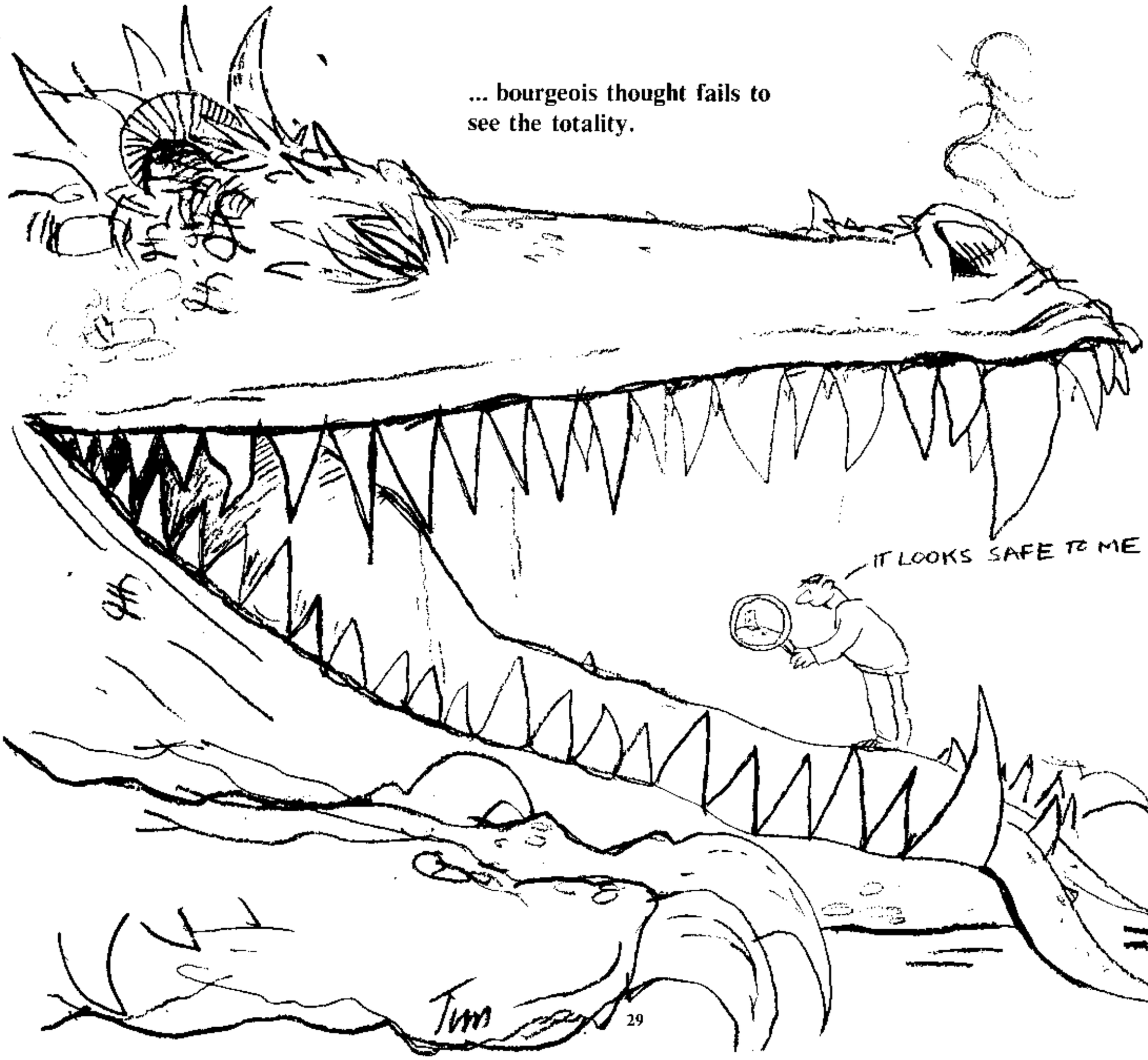
> 'The question is not what goal is *envisaged* for the time being by this or that member of the proletariat, or even by the proletariat as a whole. The question is *what is the proletariat* and what course of action will it be forced historically to take in conformity with its own *nature*.'

It was on this basis that Georg Lukács developed the concept of 'imputed consciousness', that is, the consciousness that a class is historically capable of achieving. Thus, for example, it is obvious to anyone operating in terms of common sense that Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher are far more united than the members of the NUR and ASLEF. It is only when we understand that class is not a thing but a process that we can continue to insist that working-class unity is a real possibility.

To take another example, it is clear that, in the light of what has been said so far, Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution is one of the supreme examples of the application of the dialectical method. Firstly, Trostky stresses that we must see the world as a single totality, and not as a collection of separate nation-states, each with its own history of class development.

Secondly, in looking at the role of the working class, in the coming Russian Revolution, Trotsky argues that we must go beyond the facts, such as the small size of the working class (smaller than in many Third World countries today) and its low level of organisation compared with Western Europe, and focus instead on the potential historical role of the class.

On the basis of the foregoing it is possible to see how the dialectical method can enable



us to overcome some of the dilemmas of bourgeois thought.

Firstly, the false alternative which bourgeois critics of Marxism often throw up: is Marxism a 'science' or a moral critique of society. As Lukács points out in his essay on 'The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg', this is a problem only if we see society as something outside ourselves, like the weather.

Ends and means

If we do, then there are two alternatives: either we look for technical means of manipulating immutable laws, or we can take a purely inward-directed moral attitude. Thus if we can't stop it raining, we can either respond technically (by using an umbrella) or morally (by deciding rain is good for us). But if we see society as a totality, then the false dichotomy evaporates; the historical process is not governed by immutable laws independent of us, but our actions are precisely part of that process. In the words of the old Sixties slogan: 'If you're not part of the problem, you must be part of the solution.'

Secondly, the relation between knowledge and action. Hegel tells the story of a philosopher who made the 'wise resolution ... not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim'. Once again, the dialectical approach sees this as a false dichotomy. The working class, in particular, is deprived of knowledge by capitalist society. It cannot educate itself before fighting for power. Even the cadre of the revolutionary party cannot be educated in advance of the struggle. Knowledge is achieved only in the course of participation in revolutionary practice.

Thirdly, there is the age-old problem of ends and means. Once again, the way the question is normally posed ('Does the end justify the means?') suggests that the two can be separated and balanced against each other.

Discussing this question in *Their Morals and Ours*, Trotsky quotes a passage from a play by Ferdinand Lassalle:

'Show not the *goal*
But show also the *path*. So closely
interwoven
Are path and goal that each with other
Ever changes, and other *paths* forthwith
Another *goal* set up.

Ends and means cannot be separated, for both are part of the same process. Thus, for example, the ultimate reason why there can be no parliamentary road to socialism is that socialism is, by definition, the self-emancipation of working people, and one cannot delegate one's own emancipation to a parliamentary representative.

Finally, a few words on two of the famous laws of dialectics.

The famous laws

Firstly, the transition from quantity to quality. It was argued above that boiling kettles don't have much to do with revolution. None the less, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative change is an important one for understanding the process of historical development. Just because history is driven along by contradictions, its progress is not smooth and in a straight line, but rather through sudden jolts and upheavals. Just because society is a totality, it can't be changed bit by bit. As R H Tawney pointed out, you can't skin a tiger claw by claw; you must do it in one go, or you will be the victim.

The same thing applies to the progress of revolutionary organisations. These too do not grow in a smooth upward ascent. On the contrary, they stagnate or even decline for years, and then at a moment of crisis expand rapidly. But it is no good simply waiting for the qualitative leap. It is slow quantitative growth that decides whether the qualitative leap will be possible. Thus, at the beginning of 1968, the International Socialists (forerunners of the SWP) had some 450 members. During the massive upheavals of that year we grew to one thousand. But if we had had only two hundred at the start of the year, it is quite probable we should have been too thinly spread to intervene anywhere, and we might have come out of the year no bigger than we began it. (In that case Britain would probably have seen the flowering of 'soft' Maoism in the German or Italian style).

Secondly, the negation of the negation. In chapter XXXII of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx describes how the growth of capitalist property destroys individual private property, and replaces it by a more developed form of co-operative labour. But at the same time capitalist exploitation produces a discontented working class which will eventually destroy the whole system.

> 'The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era; *i.e.* on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production.'

Human activity

To this Marx might have added another dialectical twist. For when the working class destroys capitalism, the source of its exploitation, it also negates itself. The aim of socialist revolution is not the triumph of the working class, but its abolition.

This, incidentally, is an easily comprehensible proposition to most workers, who didn't choose to be members of the working class, and would be quite happy to change their status. It is, however, quite incomprehensible to the bureaucracy of the Labour movement whose whole status as mediators depends on the continued existence of an exploited class and hence of exploitation.

To conclude: dialectics is not a set of 'laws' independent of human will. It is simply a means of describing how human beings make their own history. In Marx's words:

> 'History does nothing; it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles. It is mean, real living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not "history" which uses men as a means of achieving – as if it were an individual person – its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.'

Erin Pizzey outside the Chiswick Women's Aid. Built to house thirty-six it often accommodated up to one hundred and fifty.

The face of charity

Prone to Violence
Erin Pizzey and Jeff Shapiro
Hamlyn, £1.75.

This book is a sequel to Erin Pizzey's earlier work *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear*, in which she records her efforts to establish and then run Chiswick Women's Aid, the first refuge for battered women and their children in Britain. Whereas the former book blew the lid off a major social problem, the existence of which was little known and frequently denied, *Prone to Violence* attempts to account for the violence in personal relationships.

Objectionable

Given such an important subject, it is regrettable that Erin Pizzey and her co-author have produced a perfectly abominable book. Not only is it badly written, with chunk after chunk of indigestible and often harrowing case histories, devoid of any real analysis, but its conclusion is both unwarranted and politically objectionable.

The authors' claim that people who were brought up within violent relationships are addicted to pain from childhood and as adults, are 'violence-prone', doomed to seek out violent relationships of their own to satisfy their addiction and therefore, to reproduce their addiction in the next generation. When stripped of the pseudo-scientific psychological jargon this is just the very familiar sexist notion that if a woman gets knocked about a bit (battered) she must have 'asked for it' and probably 'got a kick out of it'.

The women's movement, through the Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE), have heavily criticised the work, both in print and by organising pickets where Erin Pizzey has been present to launch it. But neither Pizzey nor WAFE have ever grasped the fact that under capitalism, which forces women into dependent relationships with men, the effect of refuges will be extremely limited. Women's Aid has undoubtedly provided a great many women with a much needed escape route from a violent domestic situation, but while the nuclear family persists, so will violence within it.

For Pizzey, violence against women has always been a matter of individual psychology, not a social problem. For WAFE the problem has essentially been men. Both treat the consequences of capitalism, whilst leaving the cause untouched.

Pizzey talks about the psychological methods to transform women (and men) as individuals. WAFE's 'solution', which is utterly utopian for its working class clientele, is to try and create tiny enclaves, where men do not exist. Both are dealing with women at their most oppressed and therefore, at their most powerless. These women desperately need help—but they are not in a position to change the circumstances which caused their oppresssion in the first place.

Dustbin treatment

What then is the evidence for the 'violence-prone' theory? For the authors it is transparent in the case histories of the women who left Chiswick Refuge to return to violent men, some of them to be murdered. If they were 'genuine battered wives' (sic), rather than 'violence-prone' women, they would have stayed. Indeed, so confident are they in the infallibility of this test that they go so far as to argue the majority of women who went to Chiswick were 'violence-prone'.

This is utter nonsense. It is impossible to explain the development of Women's Aid refuges in terms of the addiction of the women in them to violence. And to try to do so is as absurd as trying to account for the membership of the SWP in terms of their

love of capitalism. Only the contrary theses work.

But if the women who went into Chiswick Women's Aid did so because they hated being punched, knifed, or whatever, why did so many of them later return to their former partners? Pizzey and Shapiro cannot even ask this question, let alone provide an answer to it, because they assume that anything, no matter how bad, was preferable to living with a violent man. And things *were* bad in Chiswick. A woman who was in Chiswick for three months in 1975/6 says 'Erin's favourite expression when I was there was "if you're that desperate to leave a violent man, you'd live anywhere, even in a dustbin"'.

Now, if you were to infer from this that living in Chiswick was comparable to living in a dustbin, you would be absolutely correct. In three years, five thousand women and children took refuge there. At any one time, one hundred and fifty people were crowded into a house designed to accommodate a maximum of thirty-six. A previous resident recalls: 'In our room there were five or six families, one to each bunk bed level. Me and my daughter shared the bottom bunk and there was another family, a woman with one or two children, in the bed above us. It was a small room. You could lean across and touch the next set of bunks.' So acute was the overcrowding in Chiswick that a shed was even erected in the garden for the boys to sleep in.

No re-housing

Such overcrowding had several important consequences. Privacy was impossible and hygiene nearly so. Moreover, it meant little was done to re-house women, a fact which is also no doubt parity explained by the theory of violence-proneness. So, unless women took themselves and their children out of the Refuge, they ran a strong risk of becoming permanently institutionalised there and seeing their children grow there—as many women did.

Women's Aid, in general, caters overwhelmingly for working class women. More specificially, it caters for young unskilled working class women who, tied down by the demands of childrearing from an early age themselves, have little experience of work and therefore, little chance of ever being able to bring home a decent wage.

women with economic power are not only in a better position to maintain a degree of control within their domestic relationships, but, if they do get battered, they are usually able to rely on their own earning capacity, relatives and friends to help them escape and start life anew, rather than go to Women's Aid. So, in all Refuges, the bleak prospect of being an impoverished single parent for the rest of their lives weakens the resolve of many women, who return to their former partners.

In the particular case of Chiswick Women's Aid women could see no future for themselves and their children, only squalid Refuge conditions: women came and went in their thousands. They left not by choice, as Pizzey and Shapiro claim, but because of the circumstances at Chiswick. Chiswick could have done what other Refuges do when they are full—refer women on to Refuges that have space. But Pizzey and her staff were more interested in publicity and experiments in social engineering (which made a virtue out of overcrowding), than they were in giving the women there any hope for the future.

If the overcrowding and squalor was insufficient to force most women to leave Chiswick pretty fast, two other related factors, again peculiar to the regime there, worked to finish the job. They were male and female violence. Pizzey and Shapiro write: 'Not only were we dealing with some of the most violent men in the country on our very doorstep, but we had some equally violent women on the inside too.'

There were violent women in the refuge. Some abused their children, some attacked other women and workers. Even killers were not unknown. The authors would have us believe that at Chiswick all were pacified by the 'highly trained and very experienced staff', and above all by the ineffable Erin Pizzey herself, whose hugs and caresses appear to possess the strange power to reduce homicidal maniacs to floods of tears. But the book contains ample evidence that violence was common at the refuge. We are told

'Soon it became a daily routine. Poppy would burst in, the other mothers would clear out, then she would go for Mike.'

'Jo had been a vicious animal when she first arrived.'

'"I'll knife you, you fat cunt" was Judy Scott's way of saying good morning.'

'Marge lashed out at anyone and everthing.'

And so on.

The large number of violent women in Chiswick was the product of the theory of violence-proneness. From its beginning, Chiswick Women's Aid focussed on violent people. Social referral agencies soon began to send their violent cases there, knowing that they would be accepted and tolerated. Once in Chiswick such women made it difficult for non-violent women to stick it out, unless they too became aggressive as a matter of survival.

Finally, there is the overcrowding in Chiswick. Pizzey and Shapiro write sceptically of research which tends to show that violence increases with overcrowding. Their work in the refuge leads them to the opposite conclusion—'positive overcrowding', as they call it reduced aggression among residents. This idea is just plain daft. Imagine the effect of having to share a toilet with seventy five other people on your own aggression level.

Chiswick refuge was in fact anything but a refuge from violence. Often it was not even a refuge from male violence. The publicity surrounding Pizzey's good works, which she positively encouraged, meant that there was a stready stream of angry men banging on the front door. The refuge was easy to find, its address has always been in the telephone directory. Pizzey's two books about Chiswick contain it, and the refuge has a large sign outside its doors.

The effect this had on women in Chiswick can be gauged by this sickening quote form the book:

'We were also fascinated to watch the reactions of the mothers if they heard that a very violent man was on his way to the Refuge. Those who abhorred violence would retreat down into the basement or up to the top of the house.'

It does not seem to have occurred to our humane observers that such visits might have so terrified women that they began to question the value of remaining in Chiswick.

Economic power

For some women there was no choice to be made.

'My husband turned up at Chiswick one day and Erin sat chatting and smoking with him for hours. She said she could help him and that he was going to the house they ran for men. Soon he was seeing our daughter regularly, because Erin thought it was O.K. and I felt bamboozled into it. Then, in the end, he kidnapped her and started phoning up saying he was going to kill her. Erin said "leave him, he'll never do anything". She was gambling with my girl's life. She shouldn't have done that. So after a week I went back to him.'

She entered the records at Chiswick as being one of the thousand of women who returned home because of her addiction to violence.

Refuges for battered women and their children are an extremely important social service and one we should be as ready to defend as hospitals or schools. But we should be careful not to fall into the trap of believing them to be anything other than devices to mop up the human wreckage caused by capitalism.

A successful fight against women's oppression can only come from women who have economic power. Those who see Women's Aid either as a political movement in its own right or as a psychotherapy organisation have opted out of this fight.

J Smith

The collective hero

Midnight in the Century,
by Victor Serge
Writers and Readers £6.95

The revolutionary tradition runs through Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trostky. It would not be bending it too far to include Victory Serge in that list.

This ex-anarchist, won to Bolshevism by the experience of the Russian revolution, determined opponent of the rise of Stalinism and dedicated revolutionary, is most definitely one of the major working-class fighters of the century.

Unlike the better-known figures on our tradition, Serge also wrote excellent fiction. The publication of his novel *Midnight in the Century*, in English for the first time, is a major political and literary event.

Serge confronts one of the major political problems of our times: the consolidation of the Stalinist regime in post-revolutionary Russia. There is a torrent of books on this. Many are by open enemies of the working class like Solzhenitsyn. Serge writes from our side.

This gives him a unique insight. It is one thing for hardened counter-revolutionaries to whine on about the crimes of Stalin. What they are quite unable to even think about is what we can call the central moral dilemma it posed.

The people who were crushed by Stalin were the people whose conscious actions had led to his rise to power. Many of the people who persecuted them were from the same mold. In many cases persecutor and persecuted had fought together in the revolution and civil war.

Serge's heroes and heroine are Oppositionists. The older generation are the people who led the revolution. One of them, Ryzhik, exercises his right to send a letter to Party Central Control Commission protesting at his arrest. He writes to Stalin: 'Will you answer me at last? Who brought you food and ammunition at the eleventh hour?' He is referring to how he once got Stalin out of a jam in the civil war.

The younger ones are workers who have come face to face with the fact that under the new regime workers are starved and exploited as in any capitalist state. They have tried to draw this to the attention of the supposedly-Communist party and been thrown into jail.

Serge follows them as they wrestle with the problem of what has happened to the revolution. They struggle to explain to themselves how a monstrous tyranny has grown out of the years of freedom. They cannot abandon Marxism because they have seen it alive in the actions of the workers. They are forced to use Marx's ideas to explain the defeat of Marxism.

They argue over whether the new regime is state capitalist or something else. They argue about whether the Communist Party can be reformed or whether it is necesary to build a new party.

Serge never writes from the point of view of just one person. His literary style was designed for the 'collective hero' of the working class, so he presents all of the viewpoints. But it is the young worker Rodion who ends the book.

Rodion is the man who, even though he is about to be jailed, looks at the film poster of the sailors of 1917 and regrets that he was born a decade too late. He is also the one who argues for a new party and a new revolution. He is the only one who has the will to escape from prison. The book ends with him beginning the long and difficult task of agitating for a new revolution.

Every socialist should read this book. It would make a fine Christmas present, but if you don't trust your friends to have the right idea, then treat yourself.

Colin Sparks.

Heart of the party

On the eve of 1917
Alexander Shlyapnikov
Alison & Busby. £4.95

Most of the histories of the Russian Revolution have been written by intellectuals and professional historians. From Trotsky to Deutcher to E.H. Carr and the various bourgeois sovietologists, however brilliant and correct their analysis and descriptions of the revolution and the events leading up to it, there exists a real gap between the historian and the maker of history. In Trotsky's case this was more complicated since he was both a leader of the revolution and its best historian although he was not a member nor a builder of the Bolshevik Party until immediately before the October Revolution. In none of them does the day to day life of the party militant in Russia figure as the main theme.

For Alexander Shlyapnikov there could be no other way of writing history. For a period of three crucial years he was the Russian bureau of the Bolshevik Party. A Social Democrat from 1901 he gained his baptism of revolutionary fire as an engineering worker in St. Petersburg in the period leading up to the great struggles of 1905, his experience in those years drew him in to the Bolshevik camp. Forced into exile by the repression following the defeat of 1905 he earned his living in the engineering shops of France, England and Germany.

In 1914 just before the outbreak of the first world war he decided to return to Russia to help co-ordinate party work and improve communications with the centre in Switzerland. Arriving in 'Peter' he immediately set out to find for himself a job in engineering. In his words,

> 'I went round the working class districts, the plants and factories, the same old walls and hooters which involuntarily aroused memories of the heroic period of the Petersburg proletariat's struggle between 1905 and 07. I was drawn towards my native bench, and wanted to submerge myself in those toothed, cranked, noisy surroundings, so I decided to turn down an honourable and distinguished post as a party official "at the centre" and go to a plant'.

For the Bolsheviks this period was one of semi-legality, there were after all 6 Bolshevik deputies in the Duma, the Party was deeply involved in the Workers Insurance schemes and sales of the party papers were increasing. Nevertheless organisers like Shlyapnikov maintained their semi-legal status, events over the next few months were to prove the correctness of this strategy.

The declaration of war was accompanied by a wave of chauvanism, particularly among the intellectuals, the Bolshevik deputies led by Kamanev prevaricated on their attitude to the war. Notwithstanding, they were deported to Siberia. Shlyapnikov continued his activities. Using a variety of aliases and spending each night in a different hiding place he managed to co-ordinate the activities of the party in St. Petersburg for several months before it became impossible for him to move without being shadowed by secret policemen.

In this period the Bolshevik party had been heavily infiltrated by police agents (mainly from the ranks of the intelligentsia as Shlyapnikov takes great pleasure in telling us) and the average political 'lifetime' of a Bolshevik 'illegal' was three months. In view of this he decided again to travel to western Europe in the process setting up safe houses along the Finnish border and engaging in a variety of escapades with the border police.

From 1914 to 17 he travelled throughout Europe and even to America. In London he worked as a turner and joined the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. He was to use his A.S.E. card as a passport in returning from the U.S.A., a suitable comment on the immigration laws of the time, and for a period lived in Wembley with Bukharin. He could not however stay away from Russia for long and the months immediately before the February revolution were to find this implacable revolutionary back in St Petersburg continuing his fight against reformism and building the party.

Worker—revolutionaries like Shlyapnikov are the core of any revolutionary party. For them the revolution is not an intellectual choice but necessity to end the oppression and exploitation of their class. To change society means the

building of a revolutionary party. The history of Bolshevism shows the most consistent element in this struggle was the worker members of the party. One concluding point, the translator seems to put some faith in a statement by Leopold Trepper, the famous Russian spy, that he met Shlyapnikov in 1945 returning to Russia after working as a metal worker in France throughout the thirties. This story is extremely unlikely, undoubtably Shlyapnikov, joint leader of the Workers Opposition, perished in Stalin's camps. Read this book.

Jim Scott

Boring rightwards

The Unequal Struggle? British Socialism and the Capitalist Enterprise. *Jim Tomlinson, University Paperbacks £3.95.*

This is a horrible little book, and a boring one at that. In it Tomlinson criticizes socialist theories from the viewpoint of the enterprise. In other words, his term of reference is the capitalist form and from this he attacks socialists from Marxists to Gaitskell. This is like trying to understand the workings of a river by studying a glass of water.

There are so many criticisms and weaknesses in the book that it would be both tedious and space consuming to mention them all, but it includes an attack on the notion that the capitalist firm's prime function is to maximise profit, profit being too crude a concept (which will probably come as rather a surprise to most boards of directors).

One of the main aims of the book is to attack the Alternative Economic Strategy and he is able to make one or two good points, but they are used not from a left viewpoint but from the right. Tomlinson is against the AES because it is utopian (which it is), but wants to replace it by a less drastic manipulation of capitalist firms. Socialism becomes not the seizing of power by the working class (the notion of power is 'problematic') but tinkering with company law and alternative accountancy schemes! In fact socialism as such is rejected (he has nothing to say for example of the ideas of exploitation or alienation or oppression):

> 'Socialist politics are dominated by such notions, with the implication that there will be a day upon which something called 'socialism' will arrive. But this is clearly in danger of reverting back to those general theories of social relations...'

I doubt if he has ever read it, but Tomlinson is restating Bernstein's gradualism in a boring semi-structuralist form. Though he uses, and even quotes, some Marx he is more akin to the SDP or the 'radical' Liberal government of 1906. It would seem that Sue Slipman is not the only one who can move from CP to SDP politics without noticing any difference.

As the Bennite left decline continues I suspect many of their academic friends will swing right, suddenly discovering that ideas of class, struggle, exploitation etc. are too crude, and evolve neo-liberal theories to prove this. It is unfortunate for the students of the 80s that they seem, judging by this book, to be doing so via the use of French influenced post-structuralism This book is certainly of this type, and perhaps the one effect of such efforts might be to spur on a student revolt against such awfully boring books as happened in Paris in 1968. You can but hope.

Noel Halifax

Peasant rebellion

The Telengana Movement
Barry Pavier,
Vikas/Bookmarks £3

Bookmarks have done well to make this book, normally only available in India, available to British readers through their Winter 1982 Bookmarx Club Selection.

Barry Pavier has recovered an important struggle in the history of India. The Telengana movement:

> 'not only managed to expel the landlords from hundreds of villages but also fought the forces of the state and the gangs of the (landlords) to a standstill.'

The story of this peasant rising between 1944 and 1951, in what is now the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, is rich in lessons for revolutionaries.

What is more:

> 'This is not an "objective", neutral work, as understood in orthodox academic terms. As a revolutionary socialist and a member of the Socialist Workers Party I unconditionally identify with the self-activity of workers and peasants. Therefore I take it as understood that international capitalism exploits and oppresses workers and peasants and so the Telengana movement does not have to be "justified". As an authentic movement of workers and peasants to control their own lives it justifies itself.'

The book shows how the impact of British rule and the world market altered the social relations of Telengana. More and more peasants were driven into debt and the landlords held more and more of the best land. The slump of the thirties and the second world war both accelerated this process until the conditions of the mass of the rural poor was desperate.

Although these conditions were common in many parts of India there was one respect in which Telengana was rather different. In most of India the Communist Party (CPI) was following a line of collaborating with the 'national bourgeoisie' and discouraging self-activity. In parts of Telengana they lost control of their own members, who proceeded to develop mass agitation.

The struggle which developed after 1945 was aided by the fact that the local ruler, the Nizam of Hyderabad, tried to declare UDI when India won independence in 1947. This meant that the local state was particularly weak and the workers and peasants could win major victories.

In the end, however, those victories could only be consolidated by the winning of power, and here the overall position of the CPI was crucial. The peasants and workers Telengana were isolated and crushed.

This book is an important contribution to the history of the international workers' movement. It suffers a bit from its academic origins, but is nevertheless both an interesting and a valuable study. It is highly recommended.

Colin Sparks

FILM

Truth within limits

Another Way
Hungary, 1981

Another Way is the story of a love affair between two women, Eva and Livia, who work together on a magazine in Budapest in the late 1950s. Its combination of sex and politics will probably get it a fair number of 'art cinema' bookings, and it is worth seeing. The fact that such a film can be made in Hungary at all is of some interest—especially as the sex goes much further than the politics.

The love scenes are beautiful, tender and explicit. Where sex meets politics, the film is brilliant: caught kissing in a park by the police, Livia is sent home to her army officer husband but Eva is arrested. The pig who interrogates Eva later gives her a hard time—because he wants to know what lesbians do in bed together.

Eva is an angry peasant girl who has been able to study, but not to get a job until the editor of *Truth* takes an interest. She wants to tell the truth about the Hungarian regime. The editor, a middle-aged liberal who has learned to live with Stalinism, thinks the magazine can tell the truth, but only within certain limits. 'Don't you think,' screams Eva, 'there's a limit to the *lies* you can tell?'

On a visit to an agricultural collective, Eva discovers a bit of truth about the regime, for which she is soon sacked. Livia by now cannot live without her, and leaves her husband for an idyllic weekend on Eva's family farm.

The love affair ends tragically, and the truth is suppressed. But what is this truth that Eva was so anxious to reveal? Simply that collectivisation was carried out in this village by locking up the peasant landowners in a Budapest hotel with as much food and drink as they wanted until they agreed, and that the chairman of the collective is a self-seeking swine of an ex-kulak.

It may be possible to tell the truth in Hungary nowadays—but only within limits. About collectivisation, and about love between women, yes. It is is even possible to refer to the *revolution* of 1956, and to people being imprisoned 'for their politics'. Just so long as there are no strikes, no Workers' Councils, and no tanks mentioned —above all, no mention of the working class.

Far from being an attack on the Hungarian regime, this film is an interesting indication of liberalisation and its limits. (At the same time, I've no doubt many old-style bureaucrats loathe it.) Unlike the brilliant Polish film *Man of Marble*, made in 1980, it deals with censorship only in the past. No one is prevented from making this film, as we see the heroine of *Man of Marble* being prevented from making her film about the past.

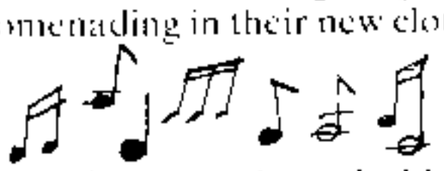
Is it ever possible to tell the truth about censorship *of* the media *through* the media? By definition, there would seem to be a problem—except, perhaps, when the state is on the verge of breaking down, as it was in 1980 in Poland. *Another Way* suggests that this is still a long way from happening in Hungary.

Norah Carlin

Saturday Night Fervour

Packing out the dancehalls on a Saturday night has always been the way to hold off Monday morning. **Marta Wohrle** shows that disco is no different.

Eleven o'clock on a Saturday night and hip kids are getting into gear. The boulevard cruising is over and the doors of the disco are open. Join the queue, lay out the notes, bump cautiously past the gorillas on the door and join the milling throng on the dancefloor. Blaring music, pulsating with the are lights, deafens the strutting bright young things promenading in their new clothes.



This is the pleasure palace, the high street disco, the image popularised by *Saturday Night Fever* and a disapproving press. Socialists are no less disapproving of discos and disco music. The music is seen as 'mindless' and the whole concept as hedonistic, irresponsible and a diversion from more important political innovations in music. There is an overwhelming anti-dance attitude from most of the left. Reactions to other music fashions and youth rebellions have been guided by hostility or wild enthusiasm. For a long time punk was seen as the only real political expression through the medium of music. Actually, most of the time punk isn't political and when it is you can't hear the words anyway. Disco, simply because it is fun, has been ignored.

Although there are no figures, I suspect that more kids go to discos than go to cinemas or even to football matches. Strange then, that there is no sociological study (that I know of) that looks at this important youth activity. Sociologists have, in the main, concentrated on skins, mods and punks which are seen in terms of white working class males. But disco is one area where popular culture can be looked at – at least it is an opportunity to look at a sub-culture where women have a central role. There is a strong element of political calvinism in the refusal to consider disco as worthy of attention.

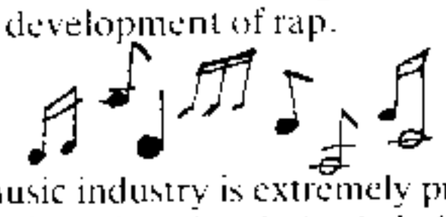
The high street disco is somewhere to go to escape the daily grind, dress up, drink and dance. The disco is where the shopfloor and the office are forgotten for the weekend, where a new identity is projected and where belonging to the crowd is the most important thing. The basic idea is to put oneself on show, to be identified as part of a distinct fashion and to be seen at the right place at the right time.

With the threat of unemployment the right to choose where you work and who with is an unaffordable luxury. But youth cults are self-choosing and often they are the only opportunity kids get to choose how they look and speak and who their friends are. And the disco is a place where all those elements can be focussed and their own social 'atmosphere' can be created.

But music and fashion separates kids from other kids, dividing skins from new romantics, punks from mods and so on. And the identification with a style or fashion is ultimately escapist. This is no less true of disco. Disco music romanticises sex, love and courtship.

The emphasis is on the rhythm and on dancing. Enjoying disco music means getting lost in it and the rhythm is deliberately hypnotic. The singers are usually outrageously dressed, a mixture of high fashion and cabaret, the lyrics are vaguely erotic, sometimes sentimental but usually concerned with simply having a good time.

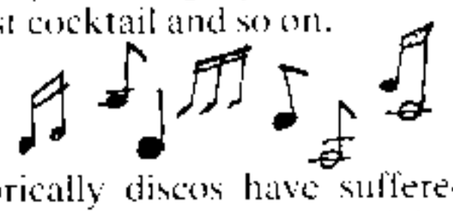
It is also true that disco has done a lot to make black music and black singers respectable, but its effect has largely been to gloss over the real social position of blacks. Few black disco singers sing about the experience of being black. The role of the DJ has developed from black music, the patter over the record has grown up alongside the development of rap.



The music industry is extremely profitable and disco has played a vital role in boosting music imports. British music, a huge slice of which is disco music, has an annual trading activity valued at £1,500 million throughout the world.

But it is not just the music industry that has a stake in disco. The raison d'etre of discos is that they are a place where young people with a large disposable income are encouraged to spend money. To this end, men are perceived as the spenders and women are an encouragement to do so. Discos project an image to attract girls, providing them with a place where they can can get dressed up. The theory is that the men will follow and spend money at the bar. So there is a periphery of related industries, including the fashion trade and breweries all making money out of disco.

In a disco social intercourse is taken beyond the everyday into the realms of ritual. Partly because of the noise and partly because everyone is extremely self-conscious, conversation ranks very low on the discophile agenda. Courtship in a disco is a self-conscious and contrived procedure with all the social impact made visually. This is done by dressing up, dancing, drinking the latest cocktail and so on.



Historically discos have suffered a bad press. They are seen by most of the tabloids as synonymous with sex, drugs, knifings, muggings, the loss of virginity etc... In reality they are fairly tame. The emphasis is on escapism, not on rebellion, on consumerism rather than challenging the system.

Discos divide the participants into gender roles and stereotypes dictated by fashion. Ultimately they inhibit any possibilities to change their everyday circumstances by providing them with a weekend escape and by separating working class kids from other working class kids.

But this does not mean that they should be ignored. Disco music has been trivialised out of existence. Like it or not, it is a form through which hundreds of working class kids express themselves. Anyway, some of our comrades should try it – it's quite good fun. □

On 6 December 1905 the Moscow Soviet issued a call for a political general strike, and to 'strive to transform the strike into an armed rising.' The climax of the 1905 Russian Revolution was about to unfold.

11 months before, on 9 January, 200,000 Petersburg workers, led by the priest and police agent Father Gapon, had marched peacefully to the Tsar's Winter Palace to petition humbly for better conditions and a Constituent Assembly. The 'Little Father' closed his gates to them and ordered his police to open fire. More than 1000 men, women and children died. The first Russian Revolution had begun.

The months which followed saw waves of strikes, land seizures, mutinies in the armed forces and concessions from the Tsar. Faced with the irresistible power of the masses the ancient tyranny was forced to retreat. Its power began to crumble.

The great strikes also saw the birth of a new power. In October the printers of Moscow struck for better wages, including payment for punctuation marks. Their strike quickly spread throughout the country and became a focus of militancy. On 10 October, the Menshevik organisation in Petersburg called a meeting of around 30 delegates. This was the birth of Soviet organisation.

The tiny meeting called for a political general strike. It touched the mood of the masses and within 5 days the 'Council of Workers' Deputies' commanded mass support. The second meeting, on 14 October, was attended by delegates from 40 large plants, two factories and three trade unions.

From the start the Soviet was concerned with both the economic and political struggles of the working class. Unlike the parties, it represented the mass of the workers. Unlike the trade unions, it represented the general interests of all workers. It quickly proved itself a powerful instrument of struggle.

The existence of two powers inside one country cannot last for very long. Throughout October and November mass unrest continued and it was obvious that sooner or later either the power of the Tsar or the power of the Soviet would triumph.

In Petersburg the Tsar had enough loyal troops to cow the workers and the Soviet was arrested on 3 December. Moscow was a different matter. Here the garrison was smaller and much less reliable. The leaders hoped that a victory here would shift the balance in Petersburg. Moscow could become the signal for a general rising.

Even in Moscow, the leaders of the Soviet were not at all clear as to what they were doing. Although they organised the strike well enough, the call to armed insurrection was not carried through. They still thought of the rising as taking place at some distant future date.

It was the logic of the strike and the initiative of the masses that pushed things forwared to an insurrection. 7 and 8 December saw peaceful strikes. On the 9th dragoons attacked an unarmed crowd. The workers built barricades. The next day the government responded with artillery fire. Only at this point were the armed workers organisations drawn into the battle. For the next seven days there was an increasingly bitter struggle for the control of Moscow.

The total armed strength on the workers' side was less than 2000 yet they were able to pin down a garrison ten times as large. It was only with the arrival of fresh re-inforcements on the 15th that the tide finally turned in favour of the army.

This long resistance was only possible because the revolutionaries had the support of the mass of the workers and the bulk of the soldiers had no heart for a fight. In Presnya, the last district to surrender, captured soldiers were taken to factory canteens, fed and lectured, and then released to go back to their regiments to agitate.

The agents of the regime suffered a different fate. The chief of the secret police, Voyloshnikov, was arrested in his home, condemned to death and shot in the courtyard of the Prokhorov factory.

In the end, the revolutionaries failed to win over enough soldiers. The officers were able to arrest troublemakers and lock doubtful regiments in their barracks. Despite the military courage of the armed organisations and the efforts at fraternisation by the mass of the workers, the Tsar's army, though discontented, was not yet at the point of disintegration.

As Trotsky put it:

> 'When the struggle for state power became the immediate issue, the solution was found to lie in the hands of the armed *muzhik*, the nucleus of the Russian infantry. The Russian proletariat in December 1905 foundered not on its own mistakes, but on a more real force: the bayonets of the peasant army.'

The Moscow rising was drowned in blood. More than 1000 were killed and the same number wounded. The revolutionary organisations survived and had to draw the lessons. There were some, like Plekhanov of the Mensheviks, who concluded that because the rising was defeated the workers 'should not have taken up arms.'

Against this Trotsky argued that the development of the 1905 revolution led directly to a struggle for power. It was the actions of the masses fighting for bread and freedom that made the rising both necessary and inevitable. Once the process was underway, it was only possible to find out in the course of the struggle whether the army would crack. Left to itself, the army would have remained solid and the defeat would have been even more bloody.

Lenin went further. He accepted that the struggle was inevitable but pointed to the mistakes of the revolutionaries which had aided their own defeat:

> 'We should have taken to arms more resolutely, energetically and aggressively: we should have explained to the masses that it was impossible to confine things to a peaceful strike and that a fearless and relentless armed fight was necessary.'

The battles of 1905 meant that thousands of workers learned through their experiences that Lenin and Trotsky were right. 12 years later, in 1917, they put those lessons into practice.

Colin Sparks