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Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party

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THE RISE OF THE US DOLLAR

'The Reagan and Thatcher governments have screwed up the whole world's monetary system and I'm in the middle of it.' These harsh words come from Sir Freddie Laker, airline operator and 'entrepreneur', whose exploits have in the past provided the lady and gentlemen in question with a key example of the benefits of economic individualism and government non-interference. Apparently Sir Freddie feels that you can have too much of a good thing. Since he added that if necessary he would 'cry all the way to the bloody bank', we can afford to be restrained in our expressions of sympathy.

The troubles of Laker Airways are only one minor example of the consequences of the latest twist in the long story of international monetary disorder — the dramatic rise of the US dollar. The weakness of the US economy and balance of payments was the main reason for the final break-up, some ten years ago, of the international monetary system, based on the dollar, which had operated since World War II. Throughout the seventies the dollar remained a 'sick' currency. But in recent months the price of dollars has soared on the foreign exchange markets.

The reason is not any recovery in the US economy, which is still plagued by unemployment and low rates of investment. Rather, funds have been attracted to New York by a huge rise in US interest rates. These are now around 20% for 'prime' borrowers (that is, large companies who can put up very good security for the loans). For families and small businesses the cost of borrowing is even higher.

Already the pressure of high US interest rates and a rising dollar is adding to the

problems of other economies. Canada, which imports huge amounts of US goods, has resorted to an unprecedented credit squeeze to protect its own dollar; West European countries with massive oil bills, such as West Germany, are faced either with big rises in energy costs — since the price of oil is still set in dollars — or with interest rate increases at home to prevent the Deutschmark falling too far. That is, either another bout of oil-price inflation or a tighter credit squeeze, worsening the depression in European industry.

These international repercussions, with aggrieved complaints from virtually every western government, have had little effect on the US monetary authorities (the Federal Reserve Board or 'Fed', roughly equivalent to the Bank of England). As events in the past have shown the Fed can be remarkably insensitive to the 'international financial community' when it is preoccupied with US matters. Right now the Fed is enthusiastically pursuing a policy of very high interest rates for domestic reasons and paying little attention to voices from abroad.

Why has the Federal Reserve pushed up interest rates? The most common explanation is in terms of ideology. Monetarist Milton Friedman, it is alleged, has finally become a prophet in his own country. In the new mood of conservatism signalled by Ronald Reagan's election, tight money and high interest rates have become the favoured solution to inflation and all other economic problems.

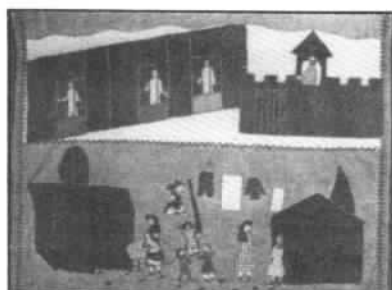
If this were the true explanation, it would be a remarkable conversion indeed. The Federal Reserve Board had, in the past, been very wary of using interest rates as a means of economic control. For thirty years, private

US banks have rapidly extended their activities at home and abroad, creating a huge, and by now very vulnerable, network of dollar loans. The Fed has been intensely reluctant to intervene by jacking up interest rates — and for a very good reason: as experienced central bankers, Federal Reserve officials have always been sceptical towards monetarist solutions. That sort of thing is fine for after-dinner speeches to businessmen, but in practice monetary restriction is the clumsiest of economic weapons.

As one US financial commentator put it — 'the only kill is overkill'. The Fed was well aware that a credit squeeze applied for any long period of time risked bringing down the whole house of cards, with banks failing and widespread defaults on dollar loans. With the US economy never far from depression at any time since the end of the Second World War, a monetarist credit squeeze was just too dangerous to contemplate.

If the Fed is not using monetarist measures to 'control inflation' a more plausible explanation might be that it is using them in an attempt to control — Ronald Reagan. In fact, the response of the Federal Reserve Board is one sign that important US interests — financial and industrial companies — are very concerned at the direction of Reagan's economic policy. (Another sign is the slump in the US stock market.)

Reagan has made savage cuts in welfare spending. That is very unlikely to alarm conservative financial groups. What does worry them is that Reagan is making huge tax cuts, amounting to several times the reduction in government spending, and at the same time spending billions more dollars he doesn't have on armaments. Reagan, it seems, is not a monetarist either. His administration is simply plundering the public treasury and handing out weapons contracts to all and sundry. The consequence is likely to be more rapid inflation and a serious destabilisation of government



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finances. More sober right-wingers, many of them with considerable economic weight, are appalled at the crudity of this adventure.

The Federal Reserve's credit squeeze is a key element in the resistance to Reagan's 'cowboy' economics. The real squeeze is aimed not at 'the money supply' but at the government in Washington. Every dollar handed out to Reagan's supporters in tax-breaks must be financed, the Fed insists, at 20% or more. The aim is also to undermine support for Reagan among small businessmen, who will be unimpressed by tax cuts if high interest rates cut deep into their taxable profits.

Already there is evidence that the Fed may be winning. David Stockman (Reagan's budget director) recently modified his position on arms spending, admitting that the government simply could not afford the increases proposed. Perhaps as a reward, the Federal Reserve very slightly relaxed the squeeze.

The whole power struggle may eventually curb some of the wildest excesses of the Reagan administration and limit the inflationary impact of 'Reaganomics'. It remains a terrifying exercise in brinkmanship which has already further dislocated the international economy and brought closer the possibility of another slump in the US. The real victims of that would not be Reagan's campaign promises but unemployed workers in the US and every other capitalist economy.

THE BY-ELECTION IN Fermanagh-South Tyrone

The result of the second by-election in Fermanagh-South Tyrone may well prove to be more significant than the first. In the first, hunger striker Bobby Sands fighting the election from the Maze prison obtained 30,492 votes and had a majority of 1,446 over his only rival, Harry West of the Official Unionist Party. Since the change in the electoral regulations made it impossible for another hunger striker to stand following the death of Sands, Owen Carron fought the seat describing himself as an 'Anti H-Block' candidate, and won a victory with 31,378 votes. His majority over his strongest opponent, Ken Maginnis of the Official Unionist Party, was 2,230. Thus he exceeded both the vote and the majority gained by Sands in an election field of 6 rather than 2 candidates. Carron was able to represent himself as a surrogate hunger striker and was successful in translating the tremendous mobilisation around the demands of the hunger striker into another election victory. The attempt by the British government to prevent hunger strikers standing for election

by changing the electoral law has rebounded in its face. Moreover since Carron is not in prison, he will continue to hold the seat and though he has declared he will not be attending parliament, he will nevertheless be a constant political irritant to the Government.

The long term significance of the result will depend on how the political forces of which Carron is a representative capitalise on this success. The local government elections in Northern Ireland and indeed the general election in the Irish Republic saw considerable success for 'Anti H-Block' candidates. Clearly the hunger strike, like no other issue, has tapped the latent emotional resources of Irish nationalism and in some areas at least has created a virtually unstoppable momentum. If the anti H-Block movement and in particular its core, the Provisionals, take this opportunity to develop an enhanced political role then it will be an important electoral challenge in any area where there is a sizeable nationalist community. This has grave implications for a whole variety of other political forces especially those who oppose repression but reject the political strategy of the Provisionals.

Of course Fermanagh-South Tyrone cannot be regarded as a typical constituency even in Northern Ireland. Twice in the past it has elected republican candidates. Currently the area has seen considerable polarisation within the community. On one side Catholics remember the coercive discriminatory Unionist state which was controlled by the Unionist Party, while currently experiencing the repression of the British state. On the other Protestants perceive the IRA campaign as being directed against them; as a kind of religious genocide along the Border. The IRA insists that it is engaged in a legitimate armed struggle against the forces of the 'British War Machine' though increasingly this has become flimsy in the face of thinly disguised sectarian assassination. Finally the spectacle of men prepared to starve themselves to death, with awesome determination to carry on despite 10 deaths, has evoked an enormous response. All of these together with the actions of the British government which, if anything, have exacerbated the crisis, combined to make Carron the victor.

His success was no doubt also helped by his capacity to reduce the entire election to a single issue, the hunger strikers' five demands. He disclaimed the relevance of his membership of Sinn Fein and refused to comment on his attitude to the military campaign of the Provisional IRA. Yet as other candidates pointed out membership of Sinn Fein demands a support for that

campaign. His definition of the election issue was the one that prevailed. However once the result was declared his own political organisation took an enlarged view of its significance. The vice-president of Provisional Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams, issued a statement declaring, 'The election of Owen Carron, MP, is more than a victory for the political prisoners and a repudiation of the British government's death policy in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh. It is a reassertion, once again, by nationalist people of our right to a future free from British interference.' Carron's repeated assertion about the election being only about the hunger strike was thus denied by his own political organisation.

Of the other candidates Ken Maginnis was an archetypal representative of Official Unionism. A school principal and ex major in the Ulster Defence Regiment, he was able to obtain the endorsement of all the Unionist parties. In any case it proved to be insufficient. He described Carron's victory as the result of 'massive intimidation and personation'. Certainly there was personation but equally there were more than just Carron supporters engaged in it. Together the Peace Lover and General Amnesty candidates obtained 339 votes which was no more than a testament to the affection held by some of the Irish for English eccentrics. The Alliance Party ploughed its usual territory with its candidate, Seamus Close, making moralistic exhortations about the need for peace and communal reconciliation. He managed to secure third place with 1,930 votes, almost 900 more than the last Alliance candidate in the constituency.

Tom Moore of the Workers Party-Republican Clubs obtained 1,132 votes and declared himself satisfied. Tom Moore was personally an outstanding candidate with impeccable credentials gained in the trade union movement and community groups. Even his party's bitterest opponents acknowledge his integrity, hard work and commitment to working class politics. Yet the Workers Party-Republican Clubs has been vigorously criticised for fielding a candidate. It has been suggested that they presented themselves as the only legitimate working class voice as a *fait accompli* with no prior consultation with other left forces and then with a kind of political arrogance demanded total support for their stand. They have also been accused of being equivocal about the whole issue of repression, on one hand opposing the campaign for political status while their own members accepted and enjoyed the 'special category status' that applies to 'crimes' committed before 1975, and on the other offering qualified support

for the Northern Ireland Police Authority despite its impotence to contain or restrict the activities of the RUC. Finally they have been described as giving covert support to Unionism since their intervention in Fermanagh-South Tyrone could never hope to do more than detract enough votes from Owen Carron to give Maginnis a victory.

All of these are serious criticisms though it has been proved that they (WP-RC) could not sufficiently split the vote to prevent Carron winning. Tom Moore fought the election on the slogan 'Peace, Jobs, Democracy', and while there is an element of attempting to transpose the old Bolshevik slogan of 'Peace, Bread and Land' to Irish circumstances, nevertheless these demands are an attempt to articulate a strategy whose essence is the notion of a political accommodation between the divided sections of the working class. Carron rightly focused the attention of the electorate on the question of repression but in doing so he has reinforced division and helped to reproduce both nationalist and loyalist blocs. There is the very strong argument that the precondition to the solution of the Northern Ireland crisis is the democratic accommodation within the working class. Carron, like Maginnis, can never contribute to that process. Should therefore an arena of popular politics be handed over to forces whose effect in the final analysis is to foster working class divisions? Alternatively it might be decided to use that arena to propagate an alternative politics.

In any case the Thatcher government has once more to face the dilemma of an 'Anti H-Block' MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone. To date it has dealt with the problem with a degree of ineptitude and intransigence astonishing even for a government with its record. It remains to be seen whether it will take this opportunity to resolve the crisis or will merely blunder on incapable of understanding the forces that it confronts.

SDP

The Social Democrats have managed to maintain their momentum since their remarkably successful launch in March, and their hopes of continuing to do so, at least until next summer, look secure.

Roy Jenkins did so well at Warrington that even Labour leaders have to be alert to avoid referring to Doug Hoyle's election as a 'defeat'. The SDP's rating in the opinion polls has not so far faded, as it seemed at one time that it might. There have been and will be downs as well as ups, but the August Gallup poll showed support of 19% compared with 12% in July — partly no doubt the effect of Warrington.

In August there was the defection of eight prominent Tory ex-students, including three recent ex-chairmen of the Federation of Conservative Students from the period of co-operation with the left.

With rather rabid Thatcherites now in control of the FCS, the large minority of Tory students who voted for one of the defectors, Anna Soubry, for the post of chairman (sic) last year — she only lost by 119 votes to 128 — will be tempted to follow them. The defecting wets had planned to make a bigger splash at the beginning of this academic year, but their plans were leaked, and they had to go early.

The Tory right accuses them of never having really been Tories at all, and they will accept, when pressed, that they were 'not perfectly at home' with the core of conservatism despite their seniority in the party. That does not mean that others will not follow them. *Daily Telegraph* leaders (they had one headed 'Steady the Buffs' after Norman St. John Stevas's warning of the dangers of the SDP) are not likely to stem the flow.

The SDP's student organiser, ex-Young Communist John Mumford (it is two years since he left the YCL) will be trying to capitalise on this and his own success last May in being elected as full-time student union official at the London School of Economics on an SDP ticket.

Mumford estimates that there are 1,200 SDP students at the moment, and hopes for 2,500 by Christmas, after a publicity campaign including a speaking tour by SDP leaders.

But he won't necessarily accept the leaders' line. He expects the students to act as a left within the party, moving closer to the community politics wing of the Liberals and aiming to work in a similar way in localities, as well as in colleges.

Relations between the SDP students and the left alliance, a grouping of Labour, Liberal, Communist and non-aligned students, are so far rather cautious, on both sides, but it is likely that many SDP activists — including ex-Tories — will want to contest next summer's elections for sabbatical posts as Left Alliance candidates, though some of those who have come in with no political background may be keener to stand alone.

Outside the student world, the next batch of Labour defectors is planned for this autumn, and, as well as a number of MPs, is expected to include even more councillors. The reselection process in those areas where elections are due next May will concentrate the minds of a lot of Labour councillors over the next few weeks.

Those elections will probably produce the

next major publicity boost. All councillors in the London boroughs are up for re-election, as well as a third in the boroughs in the metropolitan counties, a third in some non-metropolitan districts, and all seats in the Scottish regional councils.

Already the SDP has reached agreements locally with the Liberals in Birmingham (where all seats are being contested because of redrawing of boundaries) and Sheffield to share the seats 50-50, to the fury of the community activists in the Association of Liberal Councillors who believe the two parties should plough their own furrows.

The prospect of an SDP/Liberal majority on Birmingham city council must be making SDP publicists' mouths water, though what they would actually do with it remains an open question. Grand conclusions would be drawn, based on Birmingham's position at the border of the Labour north and the Tory south. It is often argued that the Midlands is where the last election was won and lost.

After that the crystal ball fades, though there is no doubt the SDP will be looking for further coups to maintain momentum.

This almost American concern with 'the big mo' is perhaps partly a matter of style. But it is not just style. For the SDP the 1983/84 general election will be, to use an inappropriately vulgar phrase, shit or bust.

It is a party which is not yet dug in to political life. So far its now 60,000 membership — growing, but perhaps not quite as fast as expected — shows little sign of engaging in continuous political activity directed towards the public at large in the localities. It is involved in policy formation and thrashing out a constitution (though some of that will be quite interesting, for example various proposals to keep a minimum number of seats for women on leading bodies).

That may change, though there are undoubtedly many in the party who do not see what one might call 'micro-political' activity as important, thinking that pulling the levers at the 'macro' level will do.

For such a party, each election is crucial; and its first general election, if it does not bring great success, could herald a serious crisis.

TABLOID WAR

A sage once remarked that to face each day with equanimity it was necessary to eat a live toad for breakfast. This surly philosophy appears to be shared by about 12 million people in these islands — the regular purchasers of our three most uninhibited tabloids.

Admittedly, their daily dose of bile is nicely balanced with pabulum, and thus, the

Fleet Street theory goes, the popular punters don't notice it. You can, in other words, fool all of the people all of the time — if you're as clever as a Fleet Street proprietor.

However, like most Fleet Street theories, this one steadfastly refuses to work. The statistics that even journalists believe, circulation figures, are resolutely and perceptibly changing the policies of the *Sun*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Star*. The readers are, in the only way open to them, exerting their influence.

The *Daily Star*, from the Trafalgar House stable of Express Newspapers, is gaining readers. The *Mirror* is losing them slowly. Rupert Murdoch's *Sun*, Fleet Street's smutty pacesetter, is haemorrhaging heavily.

Over the past year the *Star* has moved from 1,033,000 daily sales to 1,116,000. The *Mirror* has slipped from 3,569,000 to 3,527,000, although its Scottish-based partner, the *Daily Record*, has increased sales slightly from 720,000 to 732,000. The *Sun* circulation has dropped from 3,837,000 to 3,627,000, giving it a marginal 100,000 advantage over the *Mirror* and endangering its boast as the country's best-selling daily.

Undoubtedly the growth of the *Star* has had an impact on its two established rivals, but it cannot account for the aggregate loss. Arithmetic alone tells us that. The politics of the papers and their readers' perceptions must provide the answer. Certainly, that is where the proprietors are looking.

The steadiness of the *Record* also provides a clue. Its readers are the Labour Party voters in Scotland, among the most loyal there are. It is also fair to say that the *Record* reflects their more atavistic political attitudes in a way in which the *Mirror* does not. The *Record* is blunter, less equivocal.

The *Star's* advance provides more evidence. It is printed and circulates largely in the North of England, again a region more loyally and less timorously Labour than the South. It has deliberately set out to satisfy that market, and appears to be doing so with reasonable, if not spectacular success.

The *Sun's* slide is clearly worrying the panjandrums of Bouverie Street. The sex and sport mixture needs an added ingredient. The *Sun* is now putting in a pinch of social conscience. Thus it produced a front page story on August 28 under the headline DOLE BOYS IN DEATH PACT which began: 'Two young pals died in a suicide pact . . . because they saw no future in jobless Britain.'

This emphasis on working class despair is not the sort of stuff which wins knighthoods from grateful Tory leaders, but it is symptomatic of the *Sun's* recognition that its brash and adoring support for undiluted



Thatcherism is costing it readers.

Even its sports pages reflect a desperate desire to ingratiate the paper with northerners. The same issue carried the 'soccer scoop of the century', a limp page of recollections by goalkeeper Harry Gregg of the Manchester United Munich air disaster of 1958.

The *Mirror* and the *Star* also led with the 'dole boys' tragedy. Predictable enough! The *Star's* partner, the *Daily Express*, chose something more to Tory tastes, the Coventry vote in favour of cuts in local services rather than increases in rates. The 'dole boys' were relegated to Page 7 in the *Express*, while the Coventry rates story earned merely a paragraph in the *Star*, five paragraphs in the *Sun* and was ignored by the *Mirror*.

The *Mirror* has also ignored its rivals' bingo games gimmick and seems bent on keeping such editorial dignity as it has. The *Mirror* is still recognisably a newspaper and has stood aloof from the bingo capers as the *Sun* and *Star* have offered escalating prizes. Its concession to readers' gaming instincts has been a shame-faced offer of cash to random car registration plate owners.

Despite the recent twist in its political attitudes, the *Sun* is definitely not 'wet', merely cautiously moist, and when the chips are down at election time one can expect it to revert to its natural character and endorse Thatcherism in all its forms. It will happily risk a jolt to its efforts to woo her victims.

The *Mirror* will cling to its position of support for the Labour establishment, doing its best to ensure that Labour politics retain the label of socialism while having nothing to do with it in practice.

The most outspoken socialist position will be adopted by the *Star*, which will represent the crudest irony, as well as the crudest expression of radical values. Lord Mathews (peerage by courtesy of Mrs Thatcher) has his political reputation tied firmly to the Prime Minister and his financial reputation equally tightly staked to the *Star's* success. He can face the prospect of the paper's political and social volte face only at the expense of a readership which recognises the realities it has so unerringly tuned. But that way lies humiliating defeat in the battle for circulation.

The *Mirror*, wedded to the opportunism of Callaghan, and new to Foot's acquiescence to the right, is bound to tread the wellworn path of Labour moderation, offering the pretence but not the substance of socialism.

If each paper were a separate company, and we had to invest hard cash in one or the other, a capitalist would give only one piece of advice.

'Put your money on the *Star*, baby!'

But invest your trust in none.

Contributors:

John Grahl, Mike Morrissey,
Paul Olive, Ron Knowles



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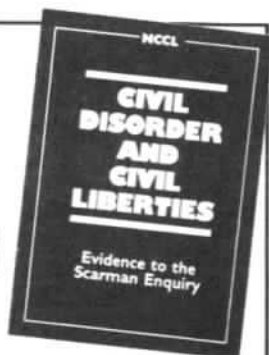
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POLAND: CO-OPERATION OR CONFRONTATION?

Interview with Mieczyslaw Rakowski

Interview conducted by Monty Johnstone

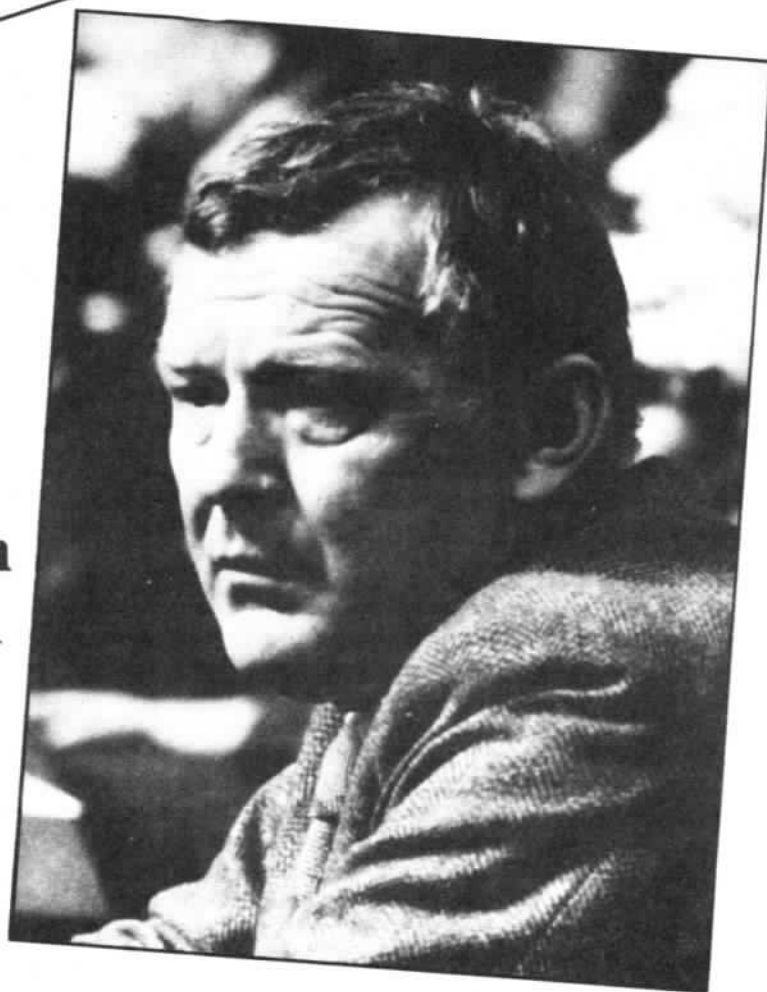


photo: Camera Press

Poland has dominated the headlines for over a year. The formation of Solidarity was a quite new phenomenon in Eastern Europe. Since then, economic crisis and social strife have persisted. Can a solution be found to Poland's acute dilemma?

Mieczyslaw Rakowski, aged 55, editor and author. Member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party since 1964. A figure strongly associated with the struggle for democratic renewal. As Deputy Prime Minister since February he has led governmental negotiations with Solidarity.

May I start by asking how far you feel that the recent Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party made a positive contribution to tackling Poland's present crisis? Do you think that since the congress the Party has been overcoming its failure to initiate sufficiently bold and deep reforms, which you yourself criticised there?

One has to bear in mind the conditions of crisis in which the Congress was convened. Further, the Party was still in the process of drawing up the balance sheet of its past. This influenced the progress of the congress itself. In practice it meant that the programmatic speeches were of less importance for the delegates. Thus my speech, although it was much applauded and recognised as important, did not induce the delegates to go into discussion on those problems. They did not concentrate very much on what is ahead of us, not only in terms of overcoming the crisis but of considering the democratic changes in the structure of the Polish state in the 1980s.

However the congress did restore to a number of party members their faith and self-confidence and made them more credible in the eyes of the general public. The shaping of the future in terms of the programme continues to be the number one problem for the Party today and tomorrow. There is the final document — very important and very interesting — you could call it a programme. But it is only a starting point.

The leading committees of the Party at many levels are populated, so to speak, by new people, who still have to learn how to lead. They have gained their positions as a result of criticism of the former establishment. Now they themselves are experiencing criticism from the same people who hoisted them into these positions. This in its essence is one of the guarantees for the reconstruction of the political strength of the Party. The majority of the Central Committee is composed of workers and peasants and they are not going to make political careers in the sense of gaining new positions. For instance, a

If we don't carry through deep-seated structural modifications there will be a great catastrophe for socialism in Poland.

I believe that an entire decade in Poland is going to be taken up in the reconstruction of the political and economic system, provided that political forces keen on destroying everything do not gain ground.

railwayman who belongs to the Central Committee will continue to be a railwayman in four years' time. He's not going to be put on the track that formerly led to the emergence of a ruling elite, which lost its contact with the rank and file, because he is stuck with the rank and file. When he comes back from the Central Committee he has to explain himself to his colleagues.

This is obviously a very positive development. But similar positive developments also took place after the Polish October in 1956, as well as after December 1970. How do you see the position now as being different in the sense of ensuring that this is not something that develops for a period and then slides back towards such a ruling elite out of touch with the working people, as happened under Gomulka after 1956 and Gierek after 1970?

First of all, the developments in 1956 took place in a completely different situation politically, socially and economically. Please remember that it was only eleven years after the end of the Second World War. Two and a half decades of People's Poland were moulded by the inter-war generation. As late as 1970, the changes were still the work of that generation. Even after those great developments on the Baltic coast in 1970 it was easy for them to relapse into the old ways because they had been moulded by the old structures and conceptions of power. They had at their disposal only the experience of real socialism known till then.

In 1981 the situation is completely different, because the epoch constituted by the interwar and wartime generation of Poland is over. Onto the political scene has walked a new generation free from the fears that my generation had coded in its brain. A liberated generation is making an assessment of the developments in Poland ever since 1945. This is one of those great guarantees that this time the process of renewal will not be shunted into a blind alley. This generation now has a completely different idea of what democracy is and of how to participate in governing the country.

The enlightened part of the Party, regardless of age, knows that you cannot this time stop and feel satisfied with cosmetic changes. At the turn of the seventies and eighties the old structures had outlived their time, and everybody knows it. This is another guarantee. If we don't carry through deep-seated structural modifications there will be a great catastrophe for socialism in Poland.

In a book that I wrote in the seventies but which has only now been able to appear, I stated that Polish socialism required wise reforms carefully thought over and consistently implemented. The economic situation of the country required that they should be initiated from the top. I postulated controlled evolutionary development in which every step would be carefully weighed. In that I was wrong. Gierek, who himself belonged to the interwar generation, was not in a position to understand the need for such reform. Therefore the reforms did not come from the top but from the bottom. Of course, as a consequence, there are better guarantees that they will be implemented, but also a political situation full of dangers, which we describe as a deep crisis.

What specifically do you see as the most important feature of the deep-set structural modifications that you favour in the political system?

First of all the way that power is wielded. The system in which only one party is ruling broke down. Now the principal strategic aim in Poland, as I see it, is to create a political system, in which the representatives of individual social groups and classes are deeply convinced that they are really participating in exercising authority.

Poland is in a fortunate position because it does have a multi-party system. For instance, the Peasant Party is a very strong party and is going to remain so. There is the Democratic Party that could be strong. Both parties have a very strong and very broad tradition in Poland. The main point is to create a partnership or coalition arrangement on the basis of these parties and also of the lay grouping of Catholics. I have used the formula of a partnership also with the trade unions, but Solidarity has so far not been very willing. In the light of the experience that I have gained over recent months, I am reaching the conclusion that we should base ourselves on those political parties rather than on the trade unions. I may say that I am speaking publicly on this for the first time. As far as the parties are concerned they are ready. For many years they have been our allies, although I must admit that very often we did not treat them as equal partners.

But the objective conditions for the creation of a situation in which they would be real partners do exist. Of course, this will not be easy because the ruling party, the party which was in fact ruling alone for 35 years, has created for itself a psychological background in which it feels at ease as the only force.

the political and social situation has changed so much that the communists simply cannot rule by themselves . . . in a one-party system not only an angel but an archangel is exposed to the danger that in the process of ruling he will grow conceited.

However the political and social situation has changed so much that the communists simply cannot rule by themselves. Besides, they shouldn't because to my mind in a one-party system not only an angel but an archangel is exposed to the danger that in the process of ruling he will grow conceited, taking the first step that leads towards crisis. So, even if it were only for self-control, an arrangement is necessary under which the communists have to take into account the opinions of others, because we are not living in a world in which everybody is a communist. We have to build up an arrangement in which neither political parties nor social groups would have a sense of being led by the hand by us.

How does this fit in with the conception of the leading role of the Party, and in particular with structures such as the nomenklatura,¹ which are associated with rigid forms of party domination?

The consciousness of the need for a different view of the leading role of the Party is already deep-rooted in the minds of the leading group in the Party. But how to go about it? The concrete answer is still not there. But it's a question of practice, and involved in this is the question of the nomenklatura. Of course the ruling party wishes to keep its right to control the principal nerve of political and social life. But one should agree on what is the principal nerve and what is not.

Certainly there is a need to modify the nomenklatura which is now held in such bad repute. Should I increase the number of positions in which I have a say or should I reduce them? This is connected with the

In Poland the Party has disappointed the people — the Party, not socialism.

confidence that I place in people and it involves giving up a way of thinking that only I am able to safeguard the interests of socialism. Perhaps other people would also like to do so, even if they go and pray in church.

We need time to reconstruct the notion of the leading role of the Party. The drama, the dilemma of the Polish communists consists in the fact that history has not equipped us with sufficient time. We haven't got the time because society demands the things now. The people at large would wish those structures which are hardly outlined in our minds to function already. And this is one of the reasons for the prolonged crisis in Poland.

When I was here last in June, I read in the Warsaw weekly, Kulisy, a public opinion poll which showed the lack of confidence in the Party. 32% of the population expressed confidence, 60% lack of confidence, with 8% don't knows. Two questions arising from this. Firstly, do you see this position changing in favour of a greater confidence in the Party? But secondly the question that I have heard from various critics and especially from Solidarity: in so far as the Party only has the support of a minority of the population, what right has it got to enjoy a privileged position in control of the state, in control of the media and so on?

On the first part of the question; in my evaluation, after the Congress the situation started to change in this matter. But essentially you cannot speak yet of a breakthrough having taken place in society's attitude to the Party. To put it differently, the Party is still facing a long determined struggle to win back the confidence of each Pole. But it should be added that a substantial change has taken place. Nowadays, authority or power is equated most frequently in the minds of the people with the government. Authority or rulers equal government, as if people were forgetting that we are also members of the Party. Until August last year, however, authority meant two buildings. One was the building of the provincial committee of the Party, and the other the Central Committee in Warsaw.

Nowadays, it's different and if in that poll the question was put 'What is your attitude to authority?' not to the Party, the outcome would be different and it would be more favourable. If I recall, in that poll the army ranked third and what is the army, isn't it authority as well? So here as far as the attitude towards authority is concerned, changes are at work and, as I understand them, favourable ones.

These are interesting social processes. On the one hand, people are utterly dissatisfied with the economic situation, and they have got accustomed to the idea that authority is responsible for everything. This is one side of the matter. And the second side is that the people are so fatigued in Poland, so very much tired by strikes, demonstrations, that ever more frequently they turn to us with a grudge on the basis of a longing for order. So the moods of the society, and the views of the society do undergo changes. This is a part of the phenomenon of renewal, or the creation of new structures. Life has created a situation — thank God, if I may do so as a Marxist — in which there is a political role assigned to the Party.

Government in our country until August last year was, in the essence of things, a formal administration. It used to transmit the decisions adopted in the central committee building. And the decisions were made there not by the top people but by officials who, in fact, had no mandate at all to govern. Nowadays, the government, headed by General Jaruzelski, while in effect governing, has to be a team of people who think in a political way, and who think independently. My function is a new function in government. I am



what has been described as the political deputy prime minister, who is concerned with the entire sphere of the political superstructure.

Generally, I feel that the situation in Poland, apart from the dangers that exist about which we shall probably speak a little bit, is fascinating for everyone who does not approach socialism as a formation that has been determined and described once and for all. And I regret that I am as old as 55 because I believe that an entire decade in Poland is going to be taken up in the reconstruction of the political and economic system, provided that political forces keen on destroying everything do not gain ground.

Now I come to the second part of the question — by what right is the authority which has so little support the leading force? That was the question wasn't it?

Yes, this is the point that I have heard from various quarters and I'd be interested to know how you answer it.

Such a question arises from the temporary dissatisfaction with the Party's policy — the policy that has led to such crisis. Very often it is not the result of deep thinking. This unfriendliness to the Party is a result simply of the difficult living conditions that the Party, as a result of its policy, has created. It is not the questioning of the Party as such, or of the concept of the system represented by the Party. And that is why I do not feel that this criticism can be equated with the criticism of the programmatic objectives of the Party.

I will try to explain the point by the example of the attitude toward Gierek. In December 1970 Gierek took over as First Secretary of the Party. He was received very positively. His programme was a reasonable programme. So even in the late 1970s when people started to fare worse, he continued to be a god. The explosion of unfriendliness, I would say hatred, in August 1980 was a result of being angry, being cross with Gierek, that he had abused the confidence of the people, that he had, so to speak, led them into the wilderness, and deceived them.

In Poland the Party has disappointed the people — the Party, not socialism. Therefore I myself feel that the Party has to modify itself so that confidence is regained. And that can be done.

But why do we continue to be determined, to insist stubbornly that we are going to play the leading role in the political life of the country?

¹ The system under which appointments to a wide range of posts in the state and society can only be filled by people approved by the Party.

Because we are convinced — and we believe that on this matter many Poles adopt the same attitude — that there is no alternative to socialism, and so far life has proved that socialism can't be built by a bourgeois party. This is impossible. I think that everything depends on how my Party will, over the next months and years, understand and comprehend its ancillary or subservient position with regard to society. There is no doubt that until August last year the Party and its practical activity were stricken with the frightful sickness of conceit. Conceit has proved the undoing of our Party. And what is at stake is to convince the people at large that we are not conceited.

On the relation of the Party to society, I have often heard the question raised: will the Party be prepared to allow the control of the people to express itself in elections, which will be different from the style of the elections before and in which people will be able to choose between different parties?

It's a very important question. No doubt now we are facing the situation when emotions take the upper hand over common sense. Emotions, I will say, are created by definite individuals today, by the radical wing of Solidarity. A wing that is very active now. The wing that is engaged in a fierce anti-communist campaign. This whipping up of emotion is very easy to achieve, especially in the present economic situation, when people are extremely dissatisfied. That is to say in Poland now, if you had an election to the Sejm (parliament), an anti-communist front would have the upper hand. Therefore I personally think that elections can only happen in a situation where a certain political calming down has taken place.

And, specifically, would you envisage a change in the electoral system?

Certainly, we have to change the electoral system. We are going to change, we are going to change a lot. A lot of habits, ways of governing, we are facing this, it is still ahead of us. That is what goes under the heading 'modernisation of structures', which applies both to the economic and the political spheres. Contained in this is also the electoral system, but please get me right, it all requires time.

The position of Solidarity is obviously crucial to this whole perspective. How far would you accept the statement made on television by Lech Walesa that Solidarity wants to serve society and not to take power?

I do not believe Walesa in this matter. I would say that I know quite well what is the thinking of the leaders of Solidarity, and how it relates to what they write. There is within Solidarity a very strong tendency aiming at a takeover of power, no doubt for me at all. This is a tendency that has come up during recent months — March, April, thereabouts. Initially, true, they really wanted to be just a trade union, nothing more. But the motor that they had put in motion put them on a track which they are still on today. Walesa said in an earlier interview that the union, Solidarity, is now at the crossroads and it has to choose either the trade union concept or the political concept. In fact there are numerous people in this leading group of Solidarity who are not interested at all in trade union activity, they are interested in political activity and therefore to create a partnership arrangement with them is extremely difficult. Perhaps it is unattainable in view of the overblown political ambitions of some of them.

What Walesa said yesterday he keeps repeating almost every day. Generally, I would say that the team of leaders is composed of politically very inexperienced people. It is so difficult to arrive at a common language with them, because first they treat authority as something hateful, communist authority of course, and at the same time they themselves have ambitions to arrange things in Poland



photo: Polska Agencja Interpress

I do not believe Walesa in this matter . . . There is within Solidarity a very strong tendency aiming at a takeover of power

according to their own thinking. During the famous get-together that ended up in the breakdown of the talks between us,² Walesa protested against criticism in the mass media of their idea of self-management. One of my advisors, a very intelligent boy, said to him: 'Sir, how should it be done, should it be the censorship that should ban such criticism?' Walesa replied 'Yes'! Besides, since they themselves are so uncompromising, if they came to rule they would create such a totalitarian system that not only the communists would have no place in the social system. I am positive about it.

We face an exceedingly important theoretical and practical problem: how can you fit into the socialist system an independent force that will be conscious of its limits? The present leaders of Solidarity are not aware of those limits. And we ourselves are quite often not able to define them too strictly, because the entire concept of a system, based on the existence of such independent trade unions, fell on all of us unexpectedly, including on the activists of Solidarity who do not harbour any political ambitions, but who would be eager to control the authorities, to control the government. As for us, to my mind, we do not need any Western admiration, any admiration from Western Communist Parties. What we require is their understanding that this is a completely novel situation and that in this situation we are also apt to make mistakes. Not because we wish to go back to the past but because this conception of the role of trade unions is a leap into the unknown. There is neither wizard nor wise man who could answer the question how the new arrangement should function.

What about the specific points that Solidarity makes with regard to co-operation with the government on the economic reform and the fact that, for instance, they're urging the miners to work on eight free Saturdays? Is this not positive?

Yes, it is positive. But to my mind it is a tactical position. Walesa is aware that Solidarity has been losing out in the eyes of the public because it adopted a 'no' programme exclusively. Over the past 12

We face an exceedingly important theoretical and practical problem: how can you fit into the socialist system an independent force that will be conscious of its limits? The present leaders of Solidarity are not aware of those limits.

months Solidarity did not on one single occasion accept the government's positive proposals or measures. Solidarity has now been forced to change tactics. From this comes their appeal for working on eight free Saturdays. Of course we welcome this as a positive turn of events, but we are going to see what the results are. For instance, in coal-mining, after their appeal to work on Saturdays, coal extraction was less than when we offered extra payments to the miners for working on free Saturdays — those additional payments which we were forced to withdraw because of pressure from Solidarity. One should remember that in Solidarity there is also a lot of demagoguery. I told them that they are a chip off the old block. They have learnt intolerance and sloganising from us. They even keep talking on behalf of the entire nation. I stopped doing that quite a time ago.

But if your assessment of Solidarity is as negative as you've indicated, what are the prospects for the partnership of which you are so much in favour?

This is the 64,000 dollar question. It seems that there are several possibilities here. First, that moderate elements will gain the upper hand in Solidarity, that's the first possibility. And those elements might accept the partnership arrangement, which does not exclude criticism, does not even exclude tensions, but includes joint responsibility for the country. This is one possibility. Second possibility, the struggle will go on, as it is doing now, between the radical wing and the moderate wing. The effect of this struggle will be a departure of radicals from Solidarity because man in general sticks to extreme positions for comparatively brief periods — only during revolutions, during major changes. So it may happen that the radical wing of Solidarity will leave Solidarity and turn into a provocative political grouping. It may proceed to form a political party, an opposition political party and then a clash, a collision will come about between us and the organisers of such an opposition.

A Polish Labour Party such as Jerzy Milewski³ from Gdansk is arguing for?

Yes.

Such a party would not be legal?

That's correct. The end effect of such a collision is clear. It's well known who will be the victor. But in any case, my understanding is that the radicals do not enjoy the support of the majority of the members of Solidarity. Here daily I am getting 30-50 letters addressed to me. For the first time now since last August people write to me supporting my point of view. They sign themselves, and add 'member of Solidarity'. And I have started receiving copies of letters addressed to Walesa, and accusing the leadership of Solidarity of adventurism.

These phenomena of course do not authorise one to make a generalisation, but one cannot ignore them as they are something new. People's patience is not only tried by the economic situation, but also by Solidarity. And Solidarity's leaders have not noticed this. That there is a very delicate line which can easily be crossed, and they have

crossed it. And therein consists their error. In addition Poles are guided by emotions, so from admiration to condemnation there is but one step.

Do you see the Catholic Church, the Catholic hierarchy in particular, as exercising a moderating influence on Solidarity, and playing a generally positive role?

That's correct. The church is playing a moderating role, only let's have no illusions. The biggest gainer from the changes taking place in Poland is the church. Nobody else, not Solidarity. The church as a result of those changes has become an extremely important factor in Polish politics. The new primate, Glemp, has political views which leave no doubt as to the wish of the church to be a third political force.

However, a very large portion of Catholic clergy in Poland are steeped in patriotic feelings. They are not adversaries of the socialist system. There are those who do support John Paul II in his search for a proper place for the Catholic church in socialist society. They are not just black cassocks that one should combat. You may disagree with them in terms of world outlook, philosophy, but not from the point of view of national interest. Nor from the point of view of the interest of socialism. Any haughty or contemptuous attitude to them would be a manifestation of political stupidity, or even for that matter of simple human stupidity.

Leszek Kolakowski,⁴ who is as well known to you as he is to us, has written: 'Marxism is not a theme anymore in Poland. People hardly discuss it; it is a dead cause . . . The ideology is only there now to legitimise the monopoly of power'. I wonder if you'd like to comment on this statement of Kolakowski's. And more broadly on the state of Marxism in Poland and the perspectives for its development.

My opinion of Leszek Kolakowski is that he has crossed over to the other side of the barricades. I regret this deeply because I studied with him at the same faculty in the same institute.

As far as Leszek's assessment goes, I do not agree with him. It is not true that Marxism is dead in Poland. A certain type of Marxism is dead, right. It is absurd to think that one hundred years of Polish Marxist thinking is going to be cut short. A schematic Marxism is dead, as are notions that grew out of it. But Marxism as an ideology, as a set of philosophic ideas and historic and economic views, is not at all dead. And in Poland new truths, new adherents of Marxism are bound to appear. Marxists in Poland at the present moment are on the defensive, that is true. But I do not see this as a major disaster, not at all. This simply is a phase, a stage that couldn't have been avoided under the conditions of the major earthquake that is happening in Poland ideologically.

But the future of Marxism in Poland is looming quite clearly. It will have to be a militant Marxism and that's what it should be. Not a court Marxism. It used to be like that and it's good that it floundered, because it was not moving things forward anymore. It limited itself to putting up shrines and Marxism is not in need of such things. The future of Polish socialism, the future of Polish Marxism is still a promising one, because it is only in a process of struggle that something good may be created. □

²This refers to the breakdown in negotiations between the government and Solidarity at the beginning of August over Solidarity's access to the media.

³Scientist; expert advising Solidarity; author of draft statutes for a Polish Labour Party, for the establishment of which he is publicly seeking to win support.

⁴Former philosophy professor in Warsaw. Since 1970 at All Souls College Oxford. Author of works on Marxism and philosophy.

POLAND: CO-OPERATION OR CONFRONTATION?

Interview with Lech Walesa

Interview conducted by
Monty Johnstone and Andreas Westphal

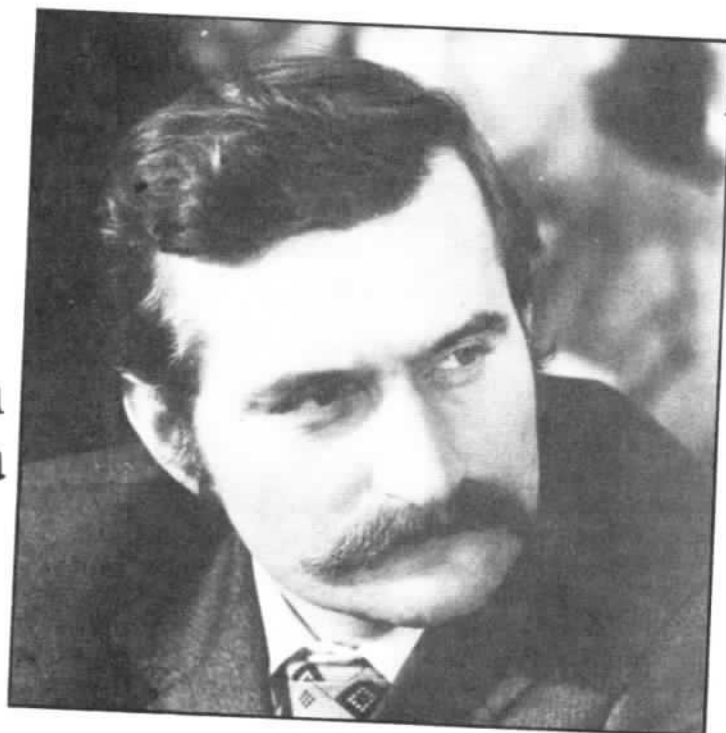


photo: Rex Features

Lech Walesa, aged 38, former electrician, who led the August 1980 strike in the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk. Today heads the 9½ million-strong trade union Solidarity, on whose behalf he has conducted negotiations with Rakowski. Associated with the moderate wing of Solidarity.

Two days ago I spent two and a half hours with Vice-Premier Rakowski and he expressed very strong views about Solidarity. Now we are anxious to hear your side of the story.

What did he say? What did he say?

He doesn't believe you when you say you don't want to take power. He considers that this is a tactical position that you are taking up in order to cover up longer term aims. Would you like to comment on this?

We are not aiming to take over power, unless he means that we want to see a power that would serve us. We don't want to take over power directly, but we would like the authorities to serve society. And if Rakowski meant by taking over power this kind of power, OK, I agree. But we don't want to take over power personally. If power is subordinated, and the authorities are subordinated to the nation, in fact this is a kind of taking over power because that power would serve the interests of the nation. Previously the authorities were uncontrolled, but now they are in a different position.

Is Solidarity content in the longer term to leave power in the hands of the Party?

Solidarity is not organised everywhere in Poland. There is no Solidarity in the army or the police, for instance. There must be someone who will steer the country as a whole. So we acknowledge the leading role of the Party in the state — but not in the union (Solidarity). Our great union is self-governing and independent and will not join any alliances. Of course, the union will introduce corrections in the policies of the country, but it will not be selfish and

blind. It will take other forces into account. There can't be two states in one state — on this there is agreement between us. But we'll always say what we want as regards a better economy, better living standards and freedom of speech.

Yes, but don't you think that your conceptions of self-management and of local self-government¹ would lead to a situation in which a kind of dual power in society would become a reality?

Even now the enterprises have been working on their own, but badly of course, so we've ended up with debts, shortages, trouble. We want to use our influence to control the enterprises so that they will produce and market their products more efficiently. At the same time we know that control will be exercised through bank rates, loan schemes, bank accounts.

Would you like to see changes in the political system? What kind of socialism would you like to see in Poland?

I am not a good politician. I am first of all a consumer and I want something to consume. So I want to tell the truth. I want to have more than you have in your country. I want to be happier than you are. I want to adjust everything so as to reach these aims. But at the same time I don't want power.

How far do you want Solidarity to concern itself with political questions? Since you now describe it as a social movement and not a purely trade union movement, does that not involve you in taking up political questions?

There isn't a catalogue which lists what's political and what's not. I was taken to court for laughing politically, walking politically², so you can't divide things into political and non-political so easily. It depends on your personal viewpoint. We think we are not a political group because we don't want to take over power.

At a recent Solidarity press conference in Gdansk you said that the concept of self-management offers the main hope for coming out of the crisis, but this concept also means that local self-government has to be developed. Do you

We are not aiming to take over power . . . but we would like the authorities to serve society.

*think it necessary in the local elections at the turn of the year to have independent candidates, perhaps sponsored by Solidarity, and not only the candidates of the National Unity Front?*²³

This is not precise yet. I look at it in a different way. You can't arrange everything on a territorial basis. For example, a car, a Fiat. A Warsaw plant produces the final product, but engines are made here in Gdansk, and they make the metal in Cracow. So self-management should be interested in the total production, regardless of the location of particular products. Industry must be run on a consortium basis and on this basis there must be self-management. If we think about self-management, for instance, in the communications system within a city, then you have to think of part of this self-management as territorial. So there are different kinds of solution, different links within the overall system. I have my own solutions but I can't develop them now. At present it is important to attain self-management in the workplace, and then in the wider consortium. What applies to industrial self-management in particular plants, applies to the functioning of cities. We shall be able to solve the terrible problems only after we are able to control the situation in the enterprises. These wider issues will evolve only after looking at the problems at plant level. The basic resolutions or acts of parliament should be passed now, but later on we should be conscious that we shall have to introduce some amendments and corrections. The basic problems need solving first and then the amendments will evolve from the

experience of life. So the enterprises should be given the opportunity to run their economy on a separate basis. They should be given bank accounts, foreign currency accounts. They should be able to trade with firms abroad. And life will introduce other elements necessary for proper functioning. Of course everything has to be watched carefully, but I think that common sense and social demand will introduce corrections.

In June you said that Solidarity needed to concentrate on being a trade union and should shed activities of a non-trade union type. Why has your present position moved from that? How do you see the role of Solidarity now?

I would like Solidarity to be a trade union movement. But life introduces corrections. If suddenly the problem of political prisoners appears, or food queues get longer and longer, and people are dissatisfied, I can't stay in an enterprise, limit myself to the enterprise and forget about these problems. I can't wait for the state to provide protective gloves, or reduce the pollution levels in the enterprise. As a union I can wait, but as a Pole I would die. So life has introduced several changes and I have had to solve the problems of self-

¹ Differing proposals have been made by the government and by Solidarity for self-management in industry and for territorial self-government. Solidarity has called for immediate changes to be made without waiting for the parliamentary legislation being prepared. These include the election by employees of directors of enterprises and changes in local government bodies.

² Walesa was prosecuted in the 1970s for allegedly holding the state system up to ridicule by such behaviour.

³ Alliance of parties and organisations led by the Polish United Workers' Party. Candidates in elections have to stand under its auspices.



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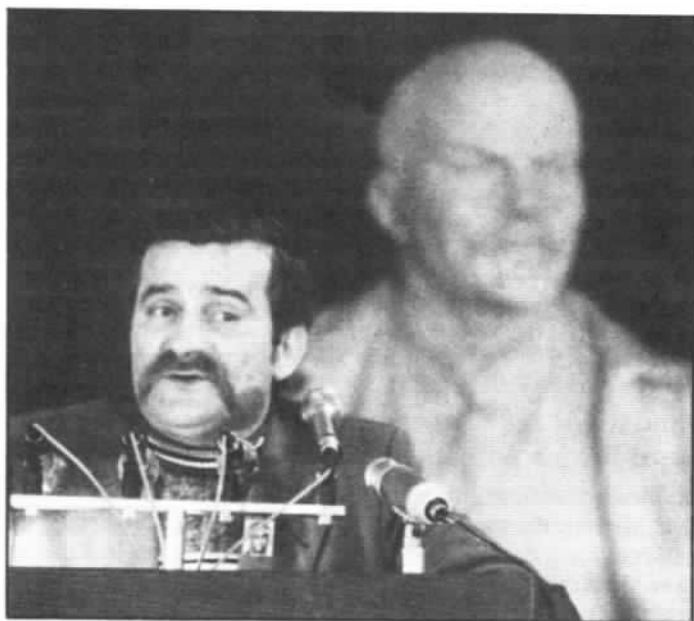
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I want us to win, but I want to pay the least price for it.

There won't be any political changes if we get access to the mass media, if I get the chance to explain everything to the people. People know the things but they aren't explained on a broad basis.

Hasn't the government in fact already shown some readiness to compromise by granting television time, as for instance with the recent programme on which you appeared and the information programme on the Solidarity congress which preceded it? Aren't there concessions which Solidarity could make to meet the government halfway on this issue?

That's all true but it's all been forced on the government. If I had regular access to television I should be able to plan my activities and explain everything at the right time.

You said recently that if you had access to the media you wouldn't attack government and Party leaders. But at the same press conference your colleague Mr Jurczyk attacked Rakowski and said he should be removed from the government. How do you reconcile this?

I don't agree with Jurczyk. You have to know a lot of things if you want to speak badly or well about the government. If he had heard how Rakowski has been attacked by other people, he wouldn't say that. But this is caused by the fact that we don't know a lot of things. I don't speak about people unless I know all the facts. That's why I talked to him about this later. He moves too fast. I use the principle, judge not and be not judged. I have different views about Rakowski. I wouldn't have criticised him so much. I know that he is pushed from the other side as well. So Rakowski hasn't deserved this despite my objections to him.

On television, Mr Waliszewski, from Silesia, who appeared with you said that the greatest success of Solidarity was that it had existed for a year under a totalitarian system. Can Poland today really be described as a totalitarian system when, for instance, such statements can be made with impunity on TV?

These are young men with ardent minds and hearts. At the same time we can't feed ourselves with slogans. We have to do more and speak less. This Poland is quite different from that before August (1980), as everybody has seen.

But is there not a danger that such young men and others, the 'radical' element in Solidarity, will in fact block the perspective of co-operation with the government and substitute a policy of confrontation? For instance there were ten votes on your National Council against its Appeal⁴. Doesn't this represent a significant force in Solidarity which disagrees with this perspective?

There are misunderstandings. I shall have to fight for the authorities to grant me access for frequent appearances on TV. I can understand the problems, all the different variants of a situation, and I could explain them on television. I am a radical man, but I can see reason. I want us to win, but I want to pay the least price for it. I can take part in an open struggle, but in a reasoned and thoughtful way. □

⁴Adopted in August and calling for workers' control over production and distribution, and participation in voluntary Saturday working in the mines. Cathy Townsend typed the transcript and Ela Piotrowska checked the translations.

management, for instance, and help deal with the political prisoners. I don't know if this is being a pure trade union. But, of course, I should like to be a trade union, it would be more convenient for us. Yes, and I think, well, a self-management scheme is a disadvantage to a trade union because sooner or later we'll have to fight with the self-management bodies. But as a Pole I have to get support to promote self-management because this is the only solution to get the country on its feet. So as a citizen I have to deal with the problem out of sheer necessity even if I didn't want to.

It is suggested that Solidarity's interest in these questions is liable to lead Solidarity either to become a political party or, alternatively, to favour the setting up of a separate political party, a labour party. Would you like to comment on this?

It's really happening like that. If our members see that there is Solidarity but the queues are getting longer, that we signed a lot of agreements which are not carried out, society looks for other solutions, for other organisations in order to change the existing situation. There is a trend to set up political parties because the state is trying to defend itself. But if we are able to tackle the other problems, we won't have to deal with these ones.

What do you think about the suggestion that there is a danger of Soviet intervention if such a great change in the political system were to take place?

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The Riots of '81

Jeff Rodrigues

The riots this summer took Britain by surprise. Left and Right alike are confronted with a totally new problem which will profoundly influence the course of British politics for the foreseeable future.

'If you always look over your shoulder, how can you be a human being?'

Solzhenitzyn, *The First Circle*.

When the battle between police and black people took place in St Pauls, Bristol, last year, some warned that similar conditions existed in other cities in the country and that further disturbances could be expected. Others hoped it was a 'one-off' phenomenon.

Brixton in April 1981, and the ten consecutive days of disturbances in other English cities in July 1981, have confirmed the former warning. For a large number of people, therefore, the riots of 1981 will have added a new dimension to their political memories.

The perception of the riots has to a significant extent been influenced by the national press and media, and although the media coverage of the riots has included their essential components, the coverage is such that it has inhibited a sympathetic understanding of the riots and the conditions in which they occurred. Indeed, this perception varied with geographical and with social distance, and it is a particular problem for the Left that it is difficult for the white working-class, both within and outside the inner city areas, to relate positively to what happened in Brixton, Toxteth and other cities.

This article sets out, firstly, to challenge some aspects of the media projection of the riots by situating the 1981 disturbances in an historical context.

Because the riots took place in the inner cities, are bound up with racism and involved major confrontations with the police, the article, secondly, examines these three areas — the inner city, racism and policing — as essential and continuing components of the conditions in which rioting occurred.

Finally, this article looks at some of the consequences of the riots: the conclusions are necessarily tentative, however, because of the range and complexity of the issues, and the way in which they involve multiple, inter-related elements. The conclusions are tentative also because the riots raise new questions which require further examination and discussion by the Left, and for which the Left needs to develop specific and realistic alternative policies and a new style of left wing politics. The article only offers a preliminary discussion of some of these issues.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically, riots are a well established part of the political process, and acknowledged as such both by rulers and ruled. No social historian would have much difficulty in drafting a substantial bibliography of riots covering the period from the mid-18th century to the late 19th century.¹ But in placing the 1981 riots in an historical continuum, from the outset one qualification about the term 'riot' itself has to be noted.

The very use of the term 'riot' is problematic: the term has become

criminalised both by public order legislation and by popular usage. In fact, after the Brixton disturbances of April, the Defence Committee and community activists deliberately replaced the term 'riot' by the term 'revolt' or 'uprising', which removes the criminal context and introduces a political context.

This is an important reversal because the media and the police and government authorities, seek to introduce a political element to their assessment of the riots only when the element is seen as being conspiratorial and 'alien' to the communities in which rioting took place. The representation of rioting as a conscious expression of social and political discontent on a mass basis in the inner cities is studiously avoided by government spokespersons and the 'establishment' press.

Repression as the only policy, the conspiracy theories, the related implication that masses do not have their own political ideas and motives, the criminalisation of the riots, and the 'crowd as rabble' idea contained in the term 'mobs', are illustrated by the following headlines from the *Daily Telegraph*:

July 4: '80 hurt in "race riot"' [Southall].

July 6: 'Police face mobs again'.

July 7: 'More police riot gear'.

July 8: 'London looting campaign — imitation riots'.

July 9: 'Mobs on rampage again'. 'Thatcher plea to parents'.

July 10: 'Tougher riot laws ahead'.

July 11: 'Britain's night of anarchy'.

'Hunt for the Four Horsemen . . . Special Branch detectives are trying to identify the 'Four Horsemen' of the rioting epidemic — the four hooded men who it has been established (author's emphasis) were present at major incidents in Southall, Liverpool and Manchester'.

July 13: 'Anti-riot laws to be renewed'.

July 14: 'Army camps for rioters'.

July 15: 'Riot drill assistance from RUC'.

The characterisation of the crowd as 'rabble' or 'mob' is stereo-typical among conservative commentators, from Edmund Burke in the 18th century down to today's headlines in the *Daily Telegraph*. In consequence, 'the mob in question, having no ideas or honourable impulses of its own, is liable to be presented as the "passive instrument of outside agents" — "dangerous" or "foreigners" — and as being prompted by motives of loot, lucre, free drinks, bloodlust or merely the need to satisfy some lurking criminal instinct.'² One recalls that television news items of riots record and transmit disdainful images of looters and, in particular, of the working class Liverpool mother wheeling home a fridge.

In fact, far from not having political ideas of their own, many of the 'front-line' youths involved in the Brixton riots in April referred to themselves as Marxists or revolutionaries and consciously regarded the police as a repressive part of a hostile state. The term 'Marxist'

here does not imply a considered commitment to a particular political strategy or party but nevertheless indicates some form of political consciousness, whose roots lie in the anti-imperialist and Marxist elements in the tradition of black consciousness and in left wing ideas.

The attempt to explain rioting as the effect of a (probably left wing) conspiracy is on the one hand an attempt to disguise the political and social conditions to which rioting was a response, and, on the other, it was mainly a temporary tactic: whatever, indeed, happened to the conspirators?

Another important observation is linked to Rudé's concept of 'collective bargaining by riot'.³ He argues, in analysing the 18th Century riots in England, that the lack of access to political channels of expression and the absence of a means of redress of grievance resulted, at critical junctures, in a resort to the traditional riot, one function of which was to gain concessions, such as a reduction in bread prices. Without committing the error of trying to draw too close a parallel with events so distant in time, it is nevertheless valid to observe that the failure of local populations to obtain access to effective channels of political expression, particularly of black people, and the absence of a means of redress in connection with police harassment and policing policy, are characteristic of our inner cities. The April riots in Brixton and the July riots elsewhere brought to national attention the issues of major concern: policing policies and methods, unemployment (particularly among youth, and, especially, black youth), inner city decay and racial oppression. The point can be illustrated again by looking at some newspaper headlines:

July 11: 'Fresh disturbances as Thatcher seeks to reassure Asians'. — *Financial Times*.

July 13: 'Riots put pressure on Cabinet to review economic strategy'. — *Financial Times*.

July 15: 'Government to delay aid to riot areas until order restored'. — *Financial Times*.

What the headlines indicate is that at the time the disturbances took place, the riots created the circumstances in which, on the one hand, access to the highest political authorities became possible, and on the other, the major sources of discontent could be given an, albeit temporary, hearing.

THE INNER CITY

One effect of the riots has been the 'rediscovery' of the inner city problem by the media. Media treatment of 'the inner city problem', however, tends to deal with the inner city as a phenomenon without causes, without development and without a history. Whereas in fact the opposite is true, 'the inner city problem' being the specific consequence of a number of shortsighted and ineffective planning policies, as well as structural changes in the economy. Nor are the inner cities in a situation of stasis: serious, further deterioration is probable and could well face society with a critically disruptive situation.

What is 'the inner city problem'? There are really two parts to the answer. The first is that structural changes in the UK economy have combined with the economic policies of successive governments to create a dislocation or fracture within a number of British cities. And the second is that social and political problems have been created by the way in which these changes have effected the human landscape of inner city areas.

In taking London as an example of a city containing inner areas in a fairly advanced state of decay, some details will differ from other inner cities of the country (including those thirteen defined as such by the Department of the Environment), but the pattern of change and effect will be similar.

The inner city population

The first and most obvious factor is the decline of manufacturing industry. Although in the 1971 Census, London showed the lowest proportion of manufacturing compared to service⁴ employment, London was still the largest manufacturing centre in the UK: in 1971 there were just over 1 million manufacturing jobs in the capital. By 1976 (the latest figures available), London had lost ¼ million jobs overall, and over 300,000 jobs in manufacturing. Moreover, the decline in manufacturing in London over the last two years appears to have accelerated. Unemployment, previously lagging behind the

the Defence Committee and community activists deliberately replaced the term 'riot' by the term 'revolt'

national average, began to catch up at an alarming rate in a very short space of time. And because unemployment was unevenly spread throughout the metropolis, 'pockets' of unemployment, like Hackney for example, have experienced a rise of over 100% in unemployment registers since May 1980.

Combined with the decline in manufacturing industry in the seventies was the effect of dispersal planning. Industries were attracted out to 'new towns', which developed along four corridors fanning out from London in the direction of the four motorways (themselves an essential part of the planning process). These industries took with them their skilled personnel, leaving behind the semi and unskilled workers who became part of an inner area workforce which itself became structured into a pattern of intermittent working, and subsequently with very large sections not working at all.

What happened, therefore, was that the decline in manufacturing, and the dispersal policies of the early seventies produced a pool of unemployed, unskilled people in the inner city areas. The growth of the service sector, and in particular the office 'industries', in the mid seventies produced work for which the type of unskilled worker available locally was unsuitable. As a consequence, employment offices were faced with the classical 'mis-match' problem which has become characteristic of the inner city areas. And the unemployed workers and their families, faced with a structured deterioration of their material lives, began to be caught up in the downward poverty spiral.

The most disturbing aspect of inner city decay is the problem of multi-deprivation. This would mean that the family which has unemployed members, or which has experienced intermittent employment for some years (and is therefore poor) is also likely to live in homes of a very poor standard, to have poor educational achievement in current and future school generations and to have suffered domestic disorder and violence. The one person or family could suffer from a multiplicity of deprivation. In inner city areas the incidence of multi-deprivation is alarmingly high: in the Stockwell area of Lambeth the rate is now estimated to be at least one in five families.

Local authorities

Inner city local authorities, facing a decline in rate receipts from

¹ Readers may be interested in two books by George Rudé: *Paris and London in the 18th Century*, Fontana, and *The Crowd in History, 1730-1848*, Lawrence & Wishart.

² Rudé, *The Crowd in History*.

³ Rudé, *Paris and London in the 18th Century*, pps 17-34.

⁴ One fifth of the country's jobs in government, public services, banking, insurance etc, were concentrated in London.

business premises and a major decline in local economic activity, were in a weak financial position to maintain services for a large population. This was particularly the case with housing, which absorbs a substantial element of revenue expenditure and an even larger part of capital expenditure. GLC inter war estates, for example, suffered from a lack of repair and maintenance, became inhabited by low income families and transient residents.

All inner city boroughs in London have very large housing waiting lists, but also possess a quantity of unoccupied property which is in a poor state of repair and for which the costs of rehabilitation are enormous. In Lambeth in 1978 the cost of rehabilitation of the

what is happening is the growing isolation of the inner city populations from society

properties on the Brixton 'front-line' was some £30,000 a unit. With the advent of the Tories in the last two years, the administration of inner city areas has become, as Ted Knight has said, a form of crisis management. This has been the result both of Tory cuts in public expenditure and the increasing legislative controls on local authority 'autonomy'.

The restriction of funding has also meant that those local authorities with progressive policies on participation, community development and youth work are unable to expand these services at precisely the time they are most needed. One effect is that the ability of people to organise themselves in their place of living and to organise their time if unemployed is effectively reduced by lack of support.

Thatcher's contention after the riots that funding would not solve the inner city crisis disguises the fact that even Tory councillors agree that *some* extra funding of inner city areas is necessary. In fact funding must be one major element in any positive strategy to solve the crisis in the riot areas.

It is therefore regressive that the guidelines on formulating policy on urban aid grants, recently sent to local authorities by Michael Heseltine,⁵ further restrict the scope of local authorities to establish and decide on priorities of need in inner city areas — on the basis of their local knowledge and experience rather than the increasingly recurrent use of standard formulas by Heseltine.

The guidelines, indeed, involve a further shift in policy: for the criteria for grant aiding are now focused on those projects that contribute to the development of 'a flourishing economy' locally. This rather unrealistic concentration on economic schemes is an attempt to tie local government policy to local market forces. In fact, the guidelines give local business an enhanced role in determining local government policy by insisting on 'detailed consultation' between the local authority and the local chamber of commerce.

This remarkable act of faith in local market forces not only ignores the way in which national economic developments have penetrated and dislocated local economies. It also aims to close off a channel of political agitation in the riot areas by a policy of excluding all projects which show a 'political' interest: 'projects which show a party political bias or would involve political propaganda will not therefore be approved for grant aid'. Some projects are made 'subject to specific ministerial consideration and separate approval' and these will be 'for the present, proposals for projects run by community groups — in particular proposals for advice centres and resource centres or newspapers'. The fact of the matter is that community groups, especially the rigorous and active ones, do have a political ambience. This is especially true of those areas that have experienced riots. Furthermore, political struggle in the community is slowly coming to be recognised by the Left (particularly the Labour Party and the



Communist Party⁶) as an increasingly important and valid area of attention, and will increasingly figure in any socialist strategy for change. The guidelines' intention to 'depoliticise' is therefore a clear attempt to shift the initiative in the community to local capital and the Right.

IT DREAD INNA INGLAN

Structural changes in the economy, the effects of Tory policy on the funding of 'high-spending' inner cities and the fiscal and legislative attack on the capacity of local authorities to shift resources to the inner city areas have resulted in a further and drastic deterioration in the life of the inner city populations.

The situation is extremely serious and dangerous, because what is happening is the growing isolation of the inner city populations from society and its social and political mechanisms. This isolation is not only characterised by a disaffection with traditional means of redress and political expression, but also by an inability effectively to formulate protest and opposition through self-generated local organisation. The isolation is almost completed by the difficulties hitherto experienced by the labour movement in building organised and continuous links with the inner city populations. The riots and street crime have to be considered in that context.

Spliced into every component of the inner city problem is the deep-seated practice of racism. Because at the bottom of this pile are black people, who form a substantial minority proportion of inner-city populations, and whose pattern of migration and residence into the inner city areas have most been determined by the location of manufacturing industry and ancillary services. Yet in much of the discussion around the recent disturbances, the experience of racism as an essential factor is frequently disguised, simplified or just ignored.

The vast majority of black people know that Britain is thoroughly saturated with varying forms of racism and racial chauvinism. It is experienced in housing, in employment, in education (more so for West Indians); it is experienced in the way you talk to a policeman and it is experienced in the fear and suspicion in your mind when you cross a road to avoid a group of skinheads; it is experienced from young children on a bus. It is experienced in trade unions. It is primarily and ultimately *experiential*, it is a relationship between you and everything around you.

It is therefore impossible to divorce the recent riots from black peoples' experience of racism. Housing, for example, forms an important backdrop to the years of racism experienced by black people. In Lambeth, prior to the election of the present leftwing administration, the worst (particularly inter war GLC) estates had a high proportion of black people, whereas on a high quality estate like

Cressingham Gardens the allocation was 93% white and 7% black, and on two other similarly good quality estates only two and nine families respectively were black.⁷ In unemployment, the most recent figures for Brixton Careers Office showed 957 young people registered as unemployed, chasing 5 registered vacancies. It is estimated that just over 50% of the registrants are black and that it is three to four times more likely to place a white rather than a black youth in employment. It is also estimated that there are as many black non-registrants as there are black registrants. And the situation is evidently compounded by the educational under-achievement by West Indian children.

The experience of racism is therefore cumulative: it is dynamic and it grows. But the more immediately intimate experience of racism is its experience on the street. And the authority on the street is the police. Policing is discussed separately in this article, but the point being made here is that the specific way in which policing policy and method is experienced by a considerable number of black people occurs within a context of racism. It is very difficult to assess racism within the police except to do so in an experiential way. The lack of accountability of the police, especially the Metropolitan Police Force, to any but themselves and the Home Secretary is a major obstacle in making a more acceptable and credible assessment. It is nevertheless widely felt among black people that in certain critical circumstances *the police are racist*. Subjective accounts are becoming well documented, and readers will find a rich source in the Report of the Lambeth Enquiry into Police-Community Relations. Newspaper reports of the recent riots also carried accounts of verbal abuse and physical violence, but the suspicion of conspiracy tends to inhibit their ability to convince.

HARDLINE POLICING

There now appears to be a consensus that central to an assessment of the riots is a consideration of policing. In the case of St Pauls, Bristol; Brixton, London; Toxteth, Liverpool, the revolts were sparked off by relatively minor events which occurred within the context of a long-standing inability by the respective communities to 'negotiate' methods of police procedure which could command popular acquiescence. It is clear, therefore that the police provide one thread throughout all of the disturbances.

John Alderson, the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall, said in a BBC Radio News item on 3 September: 'Police are not responsible for the conditions in which rioting takes place, but hardline policing can be a detonator'.

One can agree that the police are not responsible for the social and economic conditions which have been described above. And the statement correctly implies that it is the police, as the 'law and order' authority, which has to 'manage' aspects of the crisis in the inner cities. But the issue which the statement evades is that policing method and policy are *themselves* an essential component of 'the conditions in which rioting takes place'. To situate the police in this way necessitates an assessment of the tradition of policing in Britain, and the changes of direction which have taken place.

Recent developments in police organisation and policy threaten to reverse the trajectory which has been followed in the 150 years since the first Peelers walked the streets of London. With characteristic forthrightness Sir Robert Mark once summed up the traditional crowd control strategy of the Metropolitan Police: 'the real art of policing a free society or a democracy is to win by appearing to lose'. Their secret weapon was not water cannon, tear gas or rubber bullets, but public sympathy. To this end, for example, Metropolitan Police trained an especially comely horse — the 'Brigitte Bardot' of police

horses — to collapse, feigning death, at a word of command. This was apparently guaranteed to win the support of the animal-loving British public.

This careful and calculated concern with appearances as a means of maintaining public sympathy and order goes back to the very start of modern British policing. Moreover, although they have never acted with kid gloves, there is no doubt that the British police have maintained a tradition of containing demonstrations with minimum force as compared with the experience of other countries. During the worldwide student and anti-Vietnam war marches of the 1960s, for

The vast majority of black people know that Britain is thoroughly saturated with varying forms of racism and racial chauvinism

example, when riot-helmeted police backed up by water cannon, tear gas and armour appeared in most capital cities, the famous October 27 1968 Grosvenor Square demonstration seemed to confirm the virtues of the relatively benign British approach.

The new direction

This tradition of relatively mild control as a means of legitimating the police force, guardians of the state's monopoly of the means of violence, however, has been increasingly threatened and abandoned in the last 15 years. During the 1970s the police capacity to handle public order disturbances has been both expanded and refined. Between 1972-74, while the Heath government was facing up to the implications of its defeats in the 1972 miners' strike, there was much debate about the need for a CRS-style 'third force', intermediate between police and army, to cope with demonstrations, strikes and terrorists. The police succeeded in scotching the idea, but have in effect created 'third forces' within their own organisations.⁸

Most forces now have SPG-style units which, although performing a variety of tasks (from rescue work to saturation policing of 'high crime' areas) are specially trained for riot control and have become *de facto* riot squads. Since 1974 there has also been a proliferation of 'police support units', comprised by ordinary uniformed patrol officers who are trained and available for rapid mobilisation to help out neighbouring forces in emergencies. In addition during the last few years training in riot control for all officers has expanded, and the police have become better equipped, with strengthened helmets and riot shields.

Since the police failure to contain the 1980 Bristol riots and their lack of success in preventing widespread damage and police injuries in Brixton in April and in the July riots, police preparations for riot-control have redoubled with Home Office support.⁹ During the riots themselves, of course, there was an evident intensification of police tactics, notably the first use of CS gas in riot control in mainland Britain and the aggressive high-speed driving of police vehicles to disperse crowds.

Response to the riots

The general response of government and police has been to call for

⁵ 'Guidelines for a Simplified Approach to Formulating and Approving Inner Area Programmes', July 1981.

⁶ See Jeff Rodrigues, 'Fighting the Cuts in Lambeth', *Marxism Today*, May 1980.

⁷ Black people are about 20% of the Brixton population.

⁸ 'Riots and the Police', *Marxism Today*, August 1981, p6.

⁹ The riots as well as police tactics are described in some detail in *State Research Bulletin*, No 25, August/September 1981.

tougher repressive tactics, equipment and legal powers for the police. Eldon Griffiths, the Conservative MP who represents the Police Federation, declared in the *Daily Express*, 6 July: 'The time has come to set up specially trained squads of men with all the support of helmets, fireproof uniforms, armoured cars — yes, and even guns if necessary.' Sir David McNee, the Metropolitan Commissioner, called for a mini Riot Act to empower police to arrest anyone in a crowd who did not obey a police order to disperse. The majority of chief constables seemed to have reservations about the rapid pace of

Most forces now have SPG-style units which, although performing a variety of tasks have become *de facto* riot squads

change, fearing the long term consequences for 'consensus' policing. A deputation from the Association of Chief Police Officers met Whitelaw on 15 July and voiced anxieties about the detrimental effects on the traditional police image and policy of the introduction of too much offensive hardware.

However, despite these dissenting voices within the police force itself, the overwhelming momentum has been towards a more hardline approach to the policing of crowds and riots.

CONCLUSIONS

At the same time as opting for a strengthening of the repressive apparatus (which it has done in a major way), the Government's response to the crisis of public order has been twofold. First, it has made only a very limited review of local authority budgets *vis à vis* inner city areas, and certainly has not budged on the general question of the reduction of local authority expenditure. Second, it has promised Scarman type enquiries, whose function appears to be to provide some sort of *catharsis*, but to make no further material changes to the riot areas. The enquiry provided a theatre, where, in a controlled and structured situation, the action and protagonists can be examined, but with no immediate resolution of crisis. What the riots have not achieved — and this would normally be remarkable — is to get the cabinet seriously to question the direction of their strategy, and, in particular, their economic policies. The contrary may well be the case and it could be argued that one effect of the riots has been to reinforce the basic direction of Thatcherism, especially on the law and order issue, and Thatcherism's appeal in particular to sections of the white working class. Even in the areas in which rioting occurred, opinion is polarised, and there is no doubt that among some sections of the white population there is substantial support for the hardline approach to policing that is currently developing. This polarisation occurs essentially around the perceived criminalisation of riots, and specifically in the attack on private property — looting. This may well be based on a very real fear of a breakdown of public order and should cause the Left to be extremely cautious in seeing the riots simply as a form of 'peoples' action'.

The Left

The riots have clearly marginalised the Left. One reason may be the absence of a tradition of alternative concrete policies on the Left to deal with new situations such as those developing in the inner cities.

Another is that what is significant about the riots is that they have taken place *outside* the milieu in which the Left feels most comfortable. In other words, they have taken place in the community and not in the other main area where 'public order' has been an issue, in industrial relations, in the workplace. The labour movement's effective mobilisation in the Grunwick dispute, for example, is in

sharp contrast with its total absence and virtual silence on the recent disturbances. This can only deepen the isolation of the Left and the labour movement from the inner cities and black people, whereas a tradition of labour movement demonstration of support on such issues as the Deptford fire, Southall, Toxteth, Brixton etc, would have the opposite effect. In addition, we need to accelerate the development of a newer type of trade unionist whose trade union practice constantly tackles the separation of community from workplace, and who consistently pushes her or his branch to build links with black people and the community organisations through cross-affiliations and the trades councils.

When some parts of the Left have got involved, much as the Labour Party Young Socialists or WRP, the approach has been patronising and has caused considerable irritation in the various defence committees. In the first meeting of the Brixton Defence Committee, rather than listen to the views and ideas of the black people, a call from some white left wing activists for the defeat of the Tory government, nationalisation of the banks etc, led to the exclusion of all white people from subsequent meetings. Not only was the Left marginalised, but the Left was regarded very much as the *white* Left, and in some way as alien to black people, if not as a part of the very establishment which should be the common target.

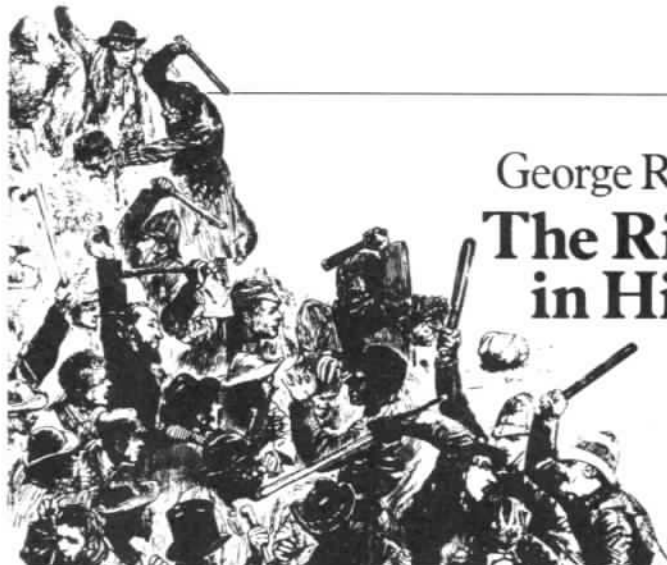
The inability of some sections of the Left to ally themselves with black people on the basis of the autonomy and validity of black peoples' organisations (however weak) and experiences is based on their assumption of a 'natural' right to lead and a 'natural' hegemony of ideas for socialist change. This very fundamental weakness leads the Left either to pontificate or to 'tail' movements, campaigns or issues that do not fall easily within their normal ambit of trade union and workplace situations; what it does not allow the Left to do is to develop a complex, instructive and critical relationship, which is precisely what is needed.

This problem is made more difficult by the lack of access of black people, and especially youth (both black and white), to the traditional political institutions of the country and of the Left. And this is compounded by the absence of continuous, durable and national political organisations: there are in fact organisations at various levels. Among West Indians there are, at one level, church organisations, domino clubs etc, which provide important and socially cohesive structures; at another there are the Standing Conferences of Caribbean and Asian people; there are also political organisations. But none, as far as I know, that command recognisable support on a widespread national basis. And the absence of these political organisations of black peoples makes more difficult the realisation of effective alliances with the Left.

We have identified the inner city as an area of serious concern. A great deal of work has to be carried out by the Left, if only because of the multiplicity of elements that compose the inner city. The danger to society and politics lies not just in possible developments within the inner city populations but perhaps more so in the attitude and politics of those outside it: the danger lies especially in its political isolation.

A brief word on the police. What the strategies of the police and their growing politicisation underlines is the need for the Left to take very much more seriously the democratisation of the police force, its greater accountability and the fostering of a more progressive police culture. This is now one of the central issues facing the labour movement. The riots were symptomatic of the crisis of the inner city areas, but were also the consequence of specific factors discussed in this article. In my view nothing has *substantially* changed since in favour of black peoples and the inner city communities.

My thanks are due to Tony Lane and Robert Reiner for invaluable help and assistance at all stages in the writing of this article.



George Rudé The Riots in History

To reactionaries and conservatives, riots are all basically the same. Criminal elements and social riffraff come out of their holes and start playing mayhem with public property and the properties of the rich; and without any deeper motivation than to loot or destroy. In the French Revolution, both old-style conservatives and new-style conservative revolutionaries thought something of the kind; and even a democrat like Robespierre — hardly a reactionary but a bourgeois conscious of private property rights — believed that the Parisian bands that forced grocers to lower their prices must be agents of the aristocracy or counter-revolution. A hundred years later, Gustave Lebon, once called the father of crowd psychology, described rioters and revolutionaries in the most lurid and pejorative terms; and, following him, such epithets as 'mobs', 'social riffraff' or 'dregs from the gutter' have served generations of conservative historians and social scientists and served to foster the illusion that, regardless of time and place, 'a mob is a mob is a mob'. And our own Mrs Thatcher, when recently explaining why her Government would not have any dealings with Irish H-Block prisoners, delivered herself of the sonorous phrase that 'a crime is a crime is a crime'; which showed not so much that the Prime Minister has taken a course in Gertrude Stein as that she shared the anti-popular sentiments expressed by Gustave Lebon a couple of generations before.

There is no question, of course, but that riots, whether today's or those of pre-industrial times, have much in common. A riot is not, and has never been, something that happens out of the blue. Riots have causes, even though these vary widely between different nations and places and generations. The two main features to be looked for — common to all popular disturbances — are the social, economic and political conditions under which it takes place and the sort of people that take part. Where such conditions are bad or appear to the mass of

the people to be so, riots, or a muted form of protest, are liable to follow; for, to borrow an expression from Charles Tilly, the American sociologist: riots [in such cases], as in Clausewitz's theory of warfare, are 'an extension of politics by other means'. In other words, unless the economic hardship or political crisis had been there, there would have been no riot. The corollary does not necessarily follow, that riots take place in times of rising prices and falling wages: the Gordon Riots of 1780, for example, the most costly and destructive in Britain's modern history, took place at a time when bread prices were remarkably stable. Moreover, as is well known, bad economic conditions, while driving some people to active protest, drive others to despair: as witness the recent case of the two Merseyside youths who took their lives rather than face a future of unemployment.

The second factor, important to an understanding of all riots, is the nature and composition of those taking part. To those who, like Gustave Lebon or Margaret Thatcher, assume that all such people are riffraff prompted by the basest of motives, there is of course no problem; and if politics enter into it, these are politics injected from outside by professional agitators or persons dishing out handfuls of 'Moscow gold'. But serious students of such situations, or for that matter thoughtful people blessed with a modicum of goodwill, know better. It is now fairly common knowledge among historians and others that the Parisians — both men and women — who stormed the Bastille in 1789 were typically drawn not from criminal elements or social riffraff but from a multiplicity of trades and crafts. Much the same is true — though here the students also played a part — of the rioters who inaugurated the revolutions of 1848 in the streets of Berlin, Paris and Vienna; and when young blacks rioted in Washington DC on hearing the news of the assassination of Martin Luther King a dozen years ago, those arrested, the *Washington Post* reported, were

in the majority former High School students of good grades and reputations, none of whom had been in jail before.

The differences

But, of course, there are important differences between today's riots and those of a hundred or two hundred years ago. One is today's background of a capitalism that, in Western Europe, is not only universal, but overgrown and in an advanced stage of degeneration: witness the greater number of unemployed proletarians (both white and black) among those arrested or injured in these disturbances; the prevailing worker-employer conflict, almost non-existent in the riots of the eighteenth century; and the decay of city centres, as noted by all observers. Another factor is the widespread hatred of the police, a major issue in all today's disturbances and one that only began to emerge — and only tentatively at first — with the creation of Sir Robert Peel's 'New' Police in British cities after 1830: witness the fairly common 'police-bashing' in England's northern cities in the 1850s and 1860s.

Another comparatively recent development has been the emergence of political parties with roots within the common people. There were no political parties, properly speaking, at the time of the French Revolution and, in Western Europe, they were only beginning to seek and to build popular support a hundred years later. This factor has obviously since had some influence in the preparation and shaping of riots, tending as it has to remove the relative spontaneity of earlier popular outbreaks. But, of course, such an intrusion could work in one of two ways. It might win the people who rioted for more positive and democratic solutions, as happened in Paris, Vienna and Berlin in 1848, in Petrograd in 1917 and in Cairo, Delhi and Havana on either side of the Second World War. But the opposite might happen and popular disturbance become the prelude to fascist systems, as in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. It all depends on the ability of the democratic and labour movements to educate and organise the masses. If they fail, either through disunity (as in Germany in 1932) or through indifference to or contempt for the rioting youth (as in present-day England), the democratic solution — which today means the early overthrow of the Thatcher government — will fail by default. Let us be warned. If the labour and democratic forces fail, the National Front and other similar racist and reactionary bodies will be ready to step into the breach, as was attempted at Southall a couple of months ago.



Jean Gardiner
and Sheila Smith

Feminism and the Alternative Economic Strategy

Despite a growing recognition of the failure of the alternative economic strategy (AES) in its different formulations to have anything specific to offer women, hardly any discussion has yet taken place on how this major weakness can be rectified. The main reason for this is that amongst socialists it has been easier to focus on the mechanisms for securing a shift in the balance of power from capital to labour than to confront problems associated with the distribution of resources and relations within the working population. This article is an attempt to raise some of the most difficult issues in this area with the intention of encouraging a wider discussion out of which hopefully some answers will begin to emerge.

In a period of recession and mass unemployment the problem of divisions emerging between employed and unemployed, women and men, black and white people, becomes considerably more acute and apparent than in a period of boom. Inability or unwillingness on the part of the Left and the labour movement to confront and tackle

divisions as they arise is one of the main reasons why such periods of capitalist crisis do not automatically lead to a leftward shift in political mass consciousness. It is, therefore, crucial that a government that came to power committed to implementing the AES in a context of severe economic and social problems is as prepared to tackle potential conflicts and divisions amongst the mass of the population as it is to deal with economic sabotage on the part of multinationals. A left government that failed to develop mass support amongst women and men for its policies would stand little chance of withstanding political opposition from its major enemies.

The specific problems of women

Most versions of the AES involve a more or less detailed set of policy proposals for expanding the economy, increasing democratic control and planning, increasing the social wage, reshaping the welfare system and increasing control over international trade. These are all vital elements of an economic strategy which can begin both to provide genuine benefits for the mass of women and men and to raise political consciousness around a socialist alternative. However, such policies only begin to change the economic context in which some of the specific problems faced by women can be tackled. Let us remind ourselves of the major economic problems women face: low pay at work; unequal access to jobs and training; hidden unemployment; financial dependence on men; excessive share of unpaid work. All these problems require a twofold attack. On the one hand, social policies are required that expand and transform employment opportunities and social, educational and health services. On the other hand, men have to accept a loss in the relative economic privileges they have enjoyed. For example, if women's pay is to improve relative to men's, men's pay will inevitably be less in relation to women's. It is the Left's unwillingness to face up to the implications for men of women's demands that so often reduces these to a meaningless shopping list tacked on to the end of a policy statement. A feminist approach to the AES must instead concern itself with the question of how to achieve a more equitable way of sharing between men and women society's resources on the one hand and its paid and unpaid work on the other.

Here we will focus on three areas which must be tackled if the AES is to become a meaningful strategy for women. These are access to jobs, working hours and equalising pay. Many other important issues are left out or only referred to briefly because they cannot all be satisfactorily discussed in the space of one article. We have chosen to focus on how to tackle the unequal relationship of men and women in the world of work and how to make the world of work more responsive to people's domestic lives because this must be the starting point for challenging the sexual division of labour in the home and women's financial dependence on men.

Decline of the stereotype

It may be useful to begin with a brief summary of some of the changes that have taken place in recent years in the relative position of men and women in the economy. These changes mean that traditional assumptions about a clear-cut division in family responsibilities between men and women in the workforce (ie, men working to support a family, women temporarily working to support themselves or for 'pin-money') are increasingly untenable. The big rise in the proportion of the labour force who are women (40% by the end of the 1970s) has been accompanied by major changes in the family responsibilities of women at work.

Because of the contraction in family size and childbearing period, the proportion of married couples with dependent children has declined. Only 58% of married men under 65 now have dependent children. Within the male labour force as a whole, including single

men, only about 40% now have dependent children. Within the female labour force about 33% are now married women with children. Another 5% roughly are non-married mothers with dependent children. Thus almost the same proportion of women (38%) as men (40%) in the labour force now have responsibility for dependent children. Because of the rise in the proportion of mothers in paid work a declining proportion of male workers are sole family breadwinners.

fewer than one in five male workers now conform to the traditional stereotype and growing numbers of women make a crucial contribution to family support

Only about 18% of all men in the labour force now provide sole financial support for a wife and dependent child or children.¹

Yet much of men's relative economic privilege, despite all the talk of equal pay and equal opportunity, continues to rest on the assumption that men as a group are entitled to a family wage, because of their financial responsibilities. If fewer than one in five male workers now conform to the traditional stereotype and growing numbers of women make a crucial contribution to family support, a complete reappraisal of the way in which jobs and income are allocated between men and women is needed, on grounds of family needs as well as equal opportunities.²

ACCESS TO JOBS

Whilst different discussions of the AES have put forward varying estimates of the level of registered unemployment that would be acceptable as a first round full employment target (varying from 300,000 to 700,000), all accept that returning to full employment should be a first priority of the strategy. However, the problems that a left government would incur in carrying out that commitment, given the mass unemployment and industrial decline it would inherit, are increasingly being recognised. As every month goes by with its toll not just of lost jobs but also of depleted productive capacity, the prospect of a left government securing a return of registered unemployment below the one million mark even within a relatively smooth five year term of office appears harder and harder to achieve. Even if a government committed to the AES were elected tomorrow, it would be faced with an unemployment level of approaching four million (including unregistered unemployed but excluding another half million on temporary government employment creation schemes or on short time working) as well as the prospect of a further expansion in the labour force over the next five years of about 0.8 million.

It has been estimated that about 2.2 million new jobs could be created in five years under the AES, assuming that policies could secure a 3% per annum average growth rate for the economy.³ Given the time it would take to rebuild the seriously depleted productive capacity of British industry, it is unlikely that growth rates above this figure could be achieved. It is not difficult, therefore, to see the scale of the problem that returning to full employment implies.

Whilst it is important to recognise the advance that policies designed to create over two million new jobs in a five year period would represent over policies pursued by British governments throughout the last decade, it is also crucial to tackle the genuine fears that women have that full employment for them will be postponed for a much longer period. After a steady rise in the labour force participation rates of women for some thirty years, there has been an abrupt reversal recently. About half a million women appear to have dropped out of the labour force between 1977 and 1980, discouraged by the lack of job opportunities available.⁴ The impact of

unemployment on women is considerably less visible than its impact on men, not only because more women than men are discouraged from seeking work by the lack of job opportunities but also because many more women who are seeking work do not register as unemployed because they are not entitled to benefit. Moreover, women are more vulnerable to unemployment than men because of their concentration in relatively unskilled and part-time jobs and their more frequent movement into and out of the labour force.⁵ This greater vulnerability is reinforced by the revival of divisive attitudes about women's jobs being of secondary importance, which a recession such as the present one encourages. The vigour with which such attitudes have re-emerged demonstrates how fragile and superficial a concept equal opportunity remains in terms of mass consciousness.

If women's aspirations are to be met, the AES must embody a strategy not only for increasing employment, but also for beginning to tackle the acute job segregation that works so much to women's disadvantage at present. The current development of positive action policies within the TUC is therefore very much to be welcomed. Such policies must have a crucial role to play within the AES from its inception.

Positive action

The growing recognition within the trade union movement of the need for positive action stems from an acknowledgement of the limits of what has been achieved by existing equal rights legislation. Positive action is concerned primarily with opening up employment opportunities for women in areas from which they have traditionally been largely excluded and with getting employers, unions, and bodies responsible for education and training to take necessary action to facilitate this: eg, the adoption by each employer of an equal opportunity programme based on a review of patterns of discrimination and job segregation in the existing workforce and incorporating negotiated targets and timetables for eliminating discrimination.⁶

Despite growing support for positive action in unions at a national level, there is still widespread uncertainty and considerable opposition to the idea in the trade union movement as a whole. This is partly due to a lack of understanding of the meaning of positive action and an unjustified fear that men will now be the victims of discrimination. However, opposition is also based on the recognition that positive action confronts existing male privilege more directly and effectively than previous approaches to equalising opportunity have done. Thus, whilst positive action merely aims to provide women with the positive support and encouragement that will enable them to have equal access with men to employment and training, it does mean a challenge to preferential treatment for men. One of the problems in winning acceptance of these changes is that because of the subtle and often indirect ways in which sex discrimination has operated in the past, many men do not yet recognise the relative advantages they have enjoyed. The priority that has been given to men's access to jobs and to men's pay has been seen as natural rather than preferential. There is a deepseated belief that women are by nature less able to perform the jobs from which they have been

¹ Figures are derived from the *General Household Survey*, 1978 and *Social Trends*, 1981.

² For more discussion, see J Coussins and A Coote, *The Family in the Firing Line*, NCCL/JCPAG, 1981, and H Land, *The Family Wage*, *Feminist Review*, No 6, 1980.

³ S Aaronovitch, *The Road from Thatcherism*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1981.

⁴ *Cambridge Economic Policy Review*, April 1981, p41.

⁵ See J Gardiner, 'Women and the Recession', *Marxism Today*, March 1981.

⁶ For further details and discussion, see 1981 TUC *Women's Conference Report*, and S Roberts with A Coote and E Ball *Positive Action for Women*, NCCL, 1981.

excluded in the past. Mass acceptance of positive action will therefore be hard to achieve and will depend on a major ideological campaign to raise men's awareness. High levels of unemployment also make these changes in attitudes that much harder to bring about. It is therefore crucial that these problems are explicitly recognised and discussed.

Discussions of positive action programmes have also emphasised the need to incorporate within them special provision for employees with parental responsibility. Such provision should include the provision of nursery and school holiday childcare facilities, an extended period of parental leave following the birth of a child, part of

women are more vulnerable to unemployment because of their concentration in relatively unskilled and part-time jobs

which could be taken by the father or the mother, paid time off work to look after sick children, greater flexibility in working hours, part-time jobs at all levels of pay and seniority, including traditionally male jobs, and equal employment rights for part-time workers.

Education and training

If such policies are not adopted and fought for, the relative position of women in terms of access to jobs could continue to deteriorate even under an expansionary AES. Without major changes in the present systems of education and training, women would be unable to take advantage of the requirements for skilled manpower in high technology industry or the need for engineers, designers and planners stimulated by economic reconstruction. Given the scale of the unemployment problem, women's right to work could still be treated as secondary and they could continue to be segregated into whatever low-paid jobs remained.

Since positive action will only be effective in the long term if attitudes towards the role of men and women in the economy change, the trade union movement must play a central role in its implementation. However, government policies would also be needed to supplement what could be achieved through collective bargaining. This could involve positive action policies being required of all public sector employers, and all private sector employers engaged on government contracts or involved in planning agreements with the government. Some changes in legislation would also be required. The Sex Discrimination Act and Equal Pay Act should be strengthened and amalgamated and the Employment Act amended. A comprehensive policy to tackle sex stereotyping and discrimination in education and training will also be required.⁷ Finally a major drive to expand nursery and school holiday provision should be given the highest possible priority within the expanded social programme.

WORKING HOURS

Given the importance attached by many women with children to short and flexible working hours and the recent growth of support within the trade union movement for reducing working hours in order to expand employment opportunities, it is worth giving particular attention to this issue.

If it is the case that reducing working hours would create additional jobs, then it would appear to be a policy with a dual benefit for women. On the one hand, it would have the effect of reducing unemployment more rapidly than the expansionary policies of the AES could otherwise achieve, thus improving overall employment opportunities, including those for women. On the other hand, it might open up more specific areas of work to women with domestic

commitments from which previously excessive hours excluded them. Moreover, it could also increase the availability of men to take a greater share of domestic labour.

It is, therefore, important to examine the implications of changing working hours. First, let us examine the conditions under which a reduction in working hours would create more jobs, by looking at the example of cutting overtime. Excessive overtime is the major factor pushing up the average full-time weekly hours worked in Britain to a figure considerably in excess of those worked in the other industrial countries. Britain is the only West European country apart from Portugal with no legal restrictions on the amount of overtime worked. The main reason why attempts to reduce overtime in the past have failed is its close association with low pay. 'Overtime is worked in Britain largely as a method of ensuring adequate earnings for many groups of male manual workers whose current basic rates are too low to ensure reasonable living standards.'⁸ These workers are concentrated in the public sector (eg, railways and postal workers) and in a range of private industries, (eg, banking and textiles).

The elimination of overtime would therefore require substantial increases in the basic pay of most workers for whom it has represented a major component of earnings in the past. It would also incidentally benefit those women whose pay is at present adversely affected by the fact that they work in industries where men supplement their earnings by means of overtime. Women are less likely to be able or willing to work overtime and therefore have their earnings depressed by the lowness of basic rates.

Its limitations

To what extent would the elimination of overtime also increase the number of jobs? If it led to an increase in output per hour worked and no increase in labour costs, there would be no need to hire additional workers and so no new jobs would be created. If on the other hand, productivity did not rise in this way or the nature of the job was such that total hours worked could not be reduced without damage to the service provided (eg. public transport), then the number of jobs would increase but so would labour costs.

The financial implications of creating jobs through the elimination of overtime must therefore be recognised. It is true that a large part of the increased labour costs would arise in the public sector where they would be partially offset by the reduction in the cost of maintaining people unemployed. However, some extra finance would have to be found.

In the private sector, the financing of increased labour costs arising from shorter working hours would have to be tackled in the context of the government's economic strategy for those industries affected. Otherwise private firms might respond by putting up prices or cutting investment and the original boost to employment provided by reduced working hours would be negated.

Reducing working hours could therefore lead to the creation of additional jobs, although the extent to which this would occur would be limited by the financial constraints within which the AES would be operating and the productivity gains resulting from shorter working hours. Eliminating overtime would, however, have other benefits for women in terms both of improving the pay of women working in the industries affected and increasing the time available for men to spend with their families. These other benefits should be taken into account to a greater extent than is generally the case at present within trade unions.

However, it is likely that the process of reducing working hours would have to go well beyond the elimination of overtime to a working week of thirty hours or less for many jobs to become attractive to women with children or for men to take a considerably greater share of domestic responsibilities.

Flexible working hours

Since it is unrealistic to assume, given the problems of economic reconstruction, that working hours could be reduced under the AES to a point where the division between full-time and part-time work (officially thirty hours or less) was eliminated, it is important to consider both ways of making full-time hours more flexible and responsive to the domestic commitments of workers, and also ways of extending and enhancing the status of part-time employment.

Systems of flexible working hours which began to appear in the UK in the 1970s, particularly amongst non-manual workers, could be adopted more widely in many more jobs. Flexible working hours is an arrangement whereby, within set limits, employees may begin and end work at times of their own choice, provided that they are all present at certain 'core-time' periods of the day and that within a specified time — usually a week or a month — they work the total number of hours agreed. If the 'core-time' period coincided with school hours, and the maximum possible flexibility was built into the system, flexible working hours would open up many more jobs to working mothers and would enable many more fathers to take more responsibility for childcare. It is crucial, however, that unions and workplace representatives, including women, are involved in the formulation of such systems, which has not always been the case.

Because it is possible to gear flexible working hours to the daily timetable of domestic commitments, it is probably a more attractive working arrangement for most mothers than the compressed work week which is the other major recent innovation in working arrangements. Here the working week is compressed into 4 or 4½ days instead of 5. The problem with this arrangement is that, in the absence of any significant reduction in hours, the four full days worked consist of very long hours to offset the extra day or half-day of 'leisure'.

Considerably more thought, therefore, needs to be given to the question of how working hours should be made more flexible, in the context of specific industries and occupations, if this is to provide genuine benefits for parents in general and mothers in particular.

Part-time employment

Trade unions, socialists and feminists have all expressed reservations about part-time employment for a number of different reasons. However, part-time employment is likely to have an important role to play long after the inception of the AES, both in terms of increasing the number of job opportunities available and in terms of improving access to jobs for those with major domestic commitments. It is important also for the Left to recognise that many women at present opt for part-time work as a positive choice, despite all the disadvantages at present attached to it in terms of lower pay and fewer rights. It is true that some women work part-time at present because adequate childcare facilities to enable them to work full-time do not exist and so much of the burden of housework falls upon them. However, others value the time they spend on activities which working full-time would preclude, eg, time spent with children and time involved on a voluntary basis in the community. We must, therefore, recognise that unless and until full-time hours worked can be substantially reduced, part-time work will continue to be favoured by many employees even if there is a massive expansion of childcare provision and a major increase in men's share of domestic labour.

Once we recognise that part-time jobs are a necessary and positive feature of the economy, a number of steps need to be taken both to make part-time workers a fully integrated section of the labour force and trade union movement and to extend part-time employment opportunities to men. Part-time employment should be available at all levels of pay and should be covered by the same promotion opportunities and employment rights as full-time work and

comparable social security entitlements. Specifically, all parents could be entitled to temporary periods of part-time employment while their children were young with a guaranteed option of returning to full-time employment at a subsequent stage.

These changes would depend on trade unions extending the unionisation of part-time workers and incorporating these policies into the collective bargaining process. There would also be a need for the government to give backing to the collective bargaining process through legislation and other means such as those described above in the section on positive action.

Women are less likely to be able or willing to work overtime and therefore have their earnings depressed by the lowness of basic rates

If these changes were carried out and if some of the steps, discussed elsewhere in this article, were taken to raise women's pay, to eradicate men's low pay and to increase state support for the cost of children, the conditions would be created for increasing numbers of men, especially fathers, to recognise the advantages for them in trading money for hours by means of part-time employment. This would represent a major contribution towards a more equitable sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women.

EQUALISING PAY

As far as jobs and pay are concerned, women remain trapped in a vicious circle that can only be broken by a major and comprehensive set of initiatives on the part of a government committed to ending women's financial dependence on men. As long as women's pay remains so much lower than men's, men's jobs will continue to be treated as of primary importance. And because men's jobs are treated as primary, women continue to be expected to accept low pay. Raising women's pay relative to men's must be an essential part of a strategy to end the sexual division of labour and establish a partnership between men and women in which each takes responsibility for their own financial support and that of their dependents, and each takes an equal share in domestic labour. As long as men's wages remain a lot higher than women's, it is impractical to assume that many men will opt for part-time employment or full-time childcare to enable wives to work full time. The large gap in earnings between men and women perpetuates the traditional assumption that a man's major contribution to a family is financial whilst a woman is primarily expected to perform the unpaid work.

In 1980 women's hourly earnings were on average only 73.5% of men's.⁹ And this figure somewhat overstates women's actual relative pay since it excludes both overtime payments, which accrue to many more men than women, and part-time workers, mostly women, whose hourly earnings are less than full-time workers. Between 1970 and 1977 there was an improvement in women's pay relative to men's from 63.1% to 75.5%. Since 1977, however, this improvement has begun to be eroded. Most of the limited progress that took place up to 1977 can be attributed to the implementation of the Equal Pay Act. Neither collective bargaining nor government pay policies as they have operated have provided a systematic means of raising women's relative pay.

⁷For more detailed recommendations, see TUC *Women's Conference Report*, 1981, and S Roberts, 1981.

⁸*Labour Research*, May 1981.

⁹*Department of Employment Gazette*, October 1980.

The limits of collective bargaining

In the 80 years between 1888 when the first TUC resolution calling for equal pay was passed and the late 1960s when the recent movement for equal pay developed among women trade unionists, there had been no overall improvement in the relative earnings of women workers. It is not difficult to identify some of the reasons why collective bargaining had failed to achieve any progress. Women had remained a minority, albeit a growing one, within union membership. Even in unions representing largely female memberships, eg, some textile unions, women were rarely involved in the organisation and leading positions. Trade unionists generally acquiesced in the dominant view of society that men should be paid more than women because they were the family breadwinner and were, therefore, entitled to a family wage.

Even if attitudes were different, there are limits to what could be achieved through collective bargaining because part of the problem of women's low pay has always been their concentration in low paid and poorly organised industries where collective bargaining has not achieved much for men either (eg, retail distribution). The other party to collective bargaining, the employers, have always been committed to unequal pay for women because of the growing number of industries which have depended on cheap female labour.

Moreover, collective bargaining is primarily concerned with improving the overall level of wages and conditions and defending the rate for the job. Reducing differentials between groups of workers has not been a consistent goal of the trade union movement as a whole. Within particular unions, wages strategy has varied in accordance with the balance of power between different occupational groups amongst the membership which, in turn, has been affected by changing labour market conditions. Pressure for greater egalitarianism at certain times in certain industries has been balanced at other times and elsewhere by pressure for restoration of relativities and differentials. The overall effect of these pressures is a remarkable stability in the distribution of wages amongst male workers as well as between men and women. In 1886 the lowest paid 10% of male manual workers earned 68% of average earnings. This differential was exactly the same in 1980.¹⁰

Incomes policy and equal pay

The improvement in women's relative pay between 1970 and 1977 was the direct result of the 1970 Equal Pay Act and not of government incomes policies, despite the inclusion in those policies of flat rate elements which were supposed to favour the low paid. The years when a flat rate incomes policy was operating, eg, the £6 limit for all workers earning less than £8,500 in 1975-76, were not years in which particularly rapid progress in women's pay took place. The biggest increase in women's relative pay occurred in 1974-75, the first year of the 'Social Contract' when a percentage rather than flat rate policy was in operation. This was the last year for employers to bring women's pay in line with the Equal Pay Act which would account for a bunching of equal pay settlements at that time.

Government incomes policies in the 1970s were an attempt to redistribute income from wages to profits. No serious onslaught on pay inequalities was ever intended although flat rate elements were introduced to make the policies appear fairer to those in greatest need. In practice many lower paid workers, including many women, did not receive the increases to which they were entitled under specific incomes policies eg, the £6 limit.¹¹ Overall flat rate policies appear to have done nothing to improve the relative pay of the low paid.¹² This may have been because steadily rising unemployment was already affecting available job opportunities, particularly for the lowest-paid workers, women, young people and the unskilled. Higher paid workers were probably better placed, not only to secure their flat rate entitlements but also even larger wage increases by means of

promotion and job changes. Pay policies of this kind are therefore not a method to adopt in order to bring about improvements in women's relative pay overall. The limited improvements that have taken place have resulted from government intervention aimed specifically at women's pay in the form of equal pay legislation.

Since the scope for improvement under this legislation has been exhausted, the most important factors now perpetuating unequal pay have become increasingly apparent. These are the way in which

and give 'male' elements such as strength a higher value than 'female' elements such as dexterity

women are segregated into women only jobs and the way in which jobs done by women are systematically undervalued. Inequality in pay is, therefore, closely linked to the question of access to jobs. To a great extent, women's low pay is now the result of their concentration in a narrow range of low-paid jobs. There is also evidence that this segregation has intensified since the Equal Pay Act came into force as a means of reducing the scope for comparability between men's and women's work: '... employers have reacted to the legislation by setting up "women-only" grades and ... have not been adequately challenged by the trade union movement'.¹³

Thus the allocation of jobs between men and women has in turn been influenced by the deepseated assumption amongst both employers and employees that men's relatively high pay must be maintained. This assumption continues to be perpetuated by the view that men as a group are entitled to a wage that enables them to support a wife and family. Yet, as we have seen, the concept of male breadwinner and family wage is quite inapplicable today to the existing labour force and patterns of family financial support. Even in the past, it is unlikely that many working class families were able to survive permanently and exclusively on a father's wage. Certainly, today there are relatively few families that can manage adequately for long periods on the basis of one male wage alone. All the notion of a family wage serves to do is to maintain the low pay of women workers and to make it harder for women to contribute towards a decent standard of living for their families.¹⁴

Tackling the main causes

The downgrading of women's status in the labour force which such attitudes foster is expressed in the method used to evaluate predominantly female jobs. For example, job evaluation schemes sometimes reinforce the differential between men's and women's pay and give 'male' elements such as strength a higher value than 'female' elements such as dexterity. However, it is also important to point out that skill is not a purely technical issue and it is, therefore, very difficult to measure it in an objective way. Low pay is generally associated with a lack of bargaining power among groups of workers and an inability to project their skill and the value of their jobs. Because women have been less well organised than men and concentrated in jobs with lower bargaining power, women's skills have been systematically undervalued.

Much more progress on women's pay could therefore be achieved in particular workplaces and sectors of the economy if the trade union movement at all levels took up the ideas associated with positive action and were supported in this by stronger equal opportunities legislation. What is needed is a campaign both to open up women's access to training and jobs from which they are largely excluded and to eradicate sexual bias in the methods by which work is evaluated and pay is calculated. Such a campaign will only succeed if it is backed by a concerted effort to challenge the traditional deepseated attitudes

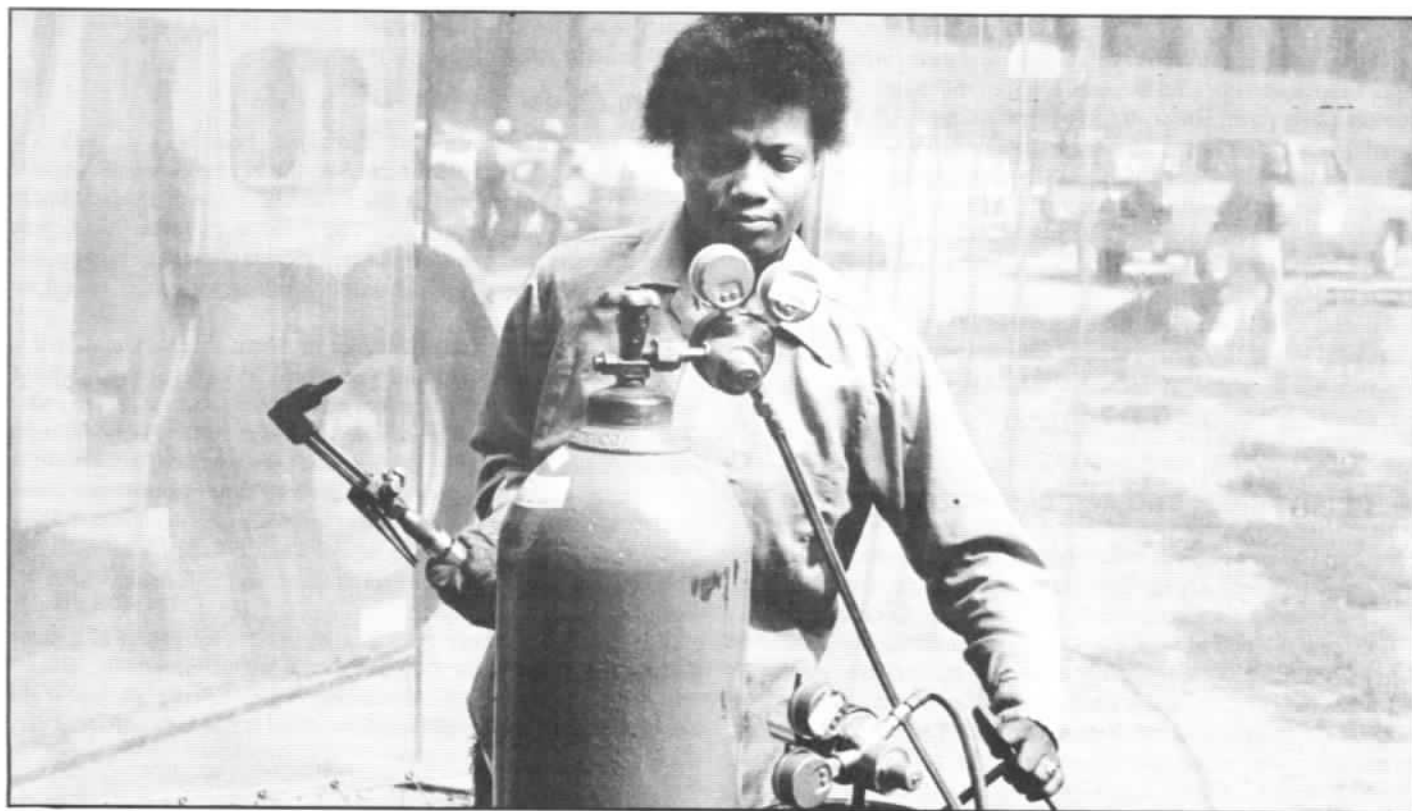


photo: Richard & Sally Greenhill

which perpetuate women's low pay and to strengthen the bargaining power of women inside union structures.¹⁵

However, positive action by specific employers and unions can only deal with part of the problem of job segregation and unequal pay because of the way in which women are also concentrated in low paid sectors of the economy. This is one reason why women's low pay represents such an intractable problem in a capitalist economy and cannot be tackled by collective bargaining alone. On the one hand low pay may be associated with industrial decline and low productivity and profitability as in some manufacturing industries like textiles and clothing. On the other hand it is often the result of a poorly organised workforce or one that is lacking in bargaining power. This tends to be the case amongst the many women working in service industries. Profits may be high but the small scale and isolated nature of the workforce, low levels of unionisation and the excess supply of workers available to the employer keep pay levels depressed. Service workers in the public sector, eg, nurses, are more often unionised but lack effective means of industrial action and therefore have very little bargaining power.

A substantial narrowing in the differential between men's and women's pay will only be achieved therefore if policies are adopted by government and trade unions which begin to tackle some of these fundamental causes of low pay. In the context of the AES we have to consider what steps could be taken to make it possible for the earnings of workers in low paid sectors to rise faster than those in relatively high paid sectors.

In the case of declining manufacturing industries low pay should be tackled as part of the strategy for industrial regeneration. Import controls and employment subsidies, combined with expansionary policies for the economy as a whole, would not only be a means of maintaining and expanding production and employment, raising profitability and generating finance for investment. They should also be seen as a means of improving the relative pay and conditions of the workforce.

Where women's low pay is associated with low levels of unionisa-

tion much will depend on intensified efforts on the part of the unions themselves to tackle the problems. Such efforts would be greatly assisted by involving more women with direct work experience in the relevant areas, in full-time official and leadership positions. As far as the government is concerned minimum wage legislation might be the most effective means of supporting union efforts to improve women's pay in low paid service industries. In the public sector the government would be in a much more powerful position to improve the relative pay of the lowest paid service workers. This in time would have beneficial effects for private sector workers in comparable jobs by setting new pay standards.

Changes in collective bargaining

It is crucial however not to underestimate the problems the AES would face in tackling low pay and to be aware of the limits of what could be achieved in the short run. Pay will go on being closely linked to the bargaining power of groups of workers, both because of the anarchic and unplanned way in which a still primarily capitalist economy will be operating and also because of the collective bargaining traditions the trade union movement has evolved. By encouraging debate on these issues now however we can be hopeful that the AES will begin to challenge some of the limits imposed by capitalist economics and to open up space for socialist and feminist ideas and greater egalitarianism to flourish. This would mean major

¹⁰ *Department of Employment Gazette*, October 1980.

¹¹ See C Pond, *Low Pay Paper*, No 15, May 1977, 'For Whom the Pips Squeak'.

¹² See A J H Dean, 'Income Policies and Differentials', *National Institute Economic Review*, Aug 1978, No 85.

¹³ *TUC Women's Conference Report*, 1981. See also M W Snell, P Glucklich and M Povall, 'Equal Pay and Opportunities', *Department of Employment Research Paper*, No 20, 1981.

¹⁴ See J Coussins, 1981.

¹⁵ For more detailed discussion, see *TUC Women's Conference Report*, 1981, and S Roberts, 1981.

changes in the nature and scope of collective bargaining. On the one hand the benefits of collective bargaining need to be extended to many more women and low paid workers. On the other hand the bargaining power of those men whose organisational strength has enabled them to enjoy relative economic advantages *vis à vis* other workers will need to be channelled in more political directions from which working people who lack industrial strength will also benefit. Isolated incidents in the past such as the action taken by miners in support of striking nurses several years back indicate what could be achieved in this respect.

There is a vital final element in a strategy for tackling unequal pay. That is reform of the system of state financial support for children via

The notion of men as family breadwinners remains central to the existing tax and social security system

the tax and social security system. In recent years the state has made a very small and declining contribution to the financial costs of bearing and raising children. Because maternity and child benefits represent only a small fraction of these costs women's financial dependence on men is reinforced. The notion of men as family breadwinners remains central to the existing tax and social security system and will only be effectively challenged when maternity and child benefits are raised to levels that more closely correspond with the actual cost of having children. A first step towards this would be to use tax revenue saved by the abolition of the married man's allowance, worth £4.44 a week to all married men regardless of whether or not they have dependent children, to raise child benefit. It has been estimated that, if this

policy was adopted, child benefit could rise by £3 and £1¼ billion would still be left for other purposes.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Under present government economic policies and with the continuation of the present recession, the vicious economic circle in which women are trapped is likely not only to be maintained but to become even more oppressive. The AES on the other hand could begin to create the conditions for that vicious circle to be broken, and could therefore be developed into a strategy with mass appeal for women.

But can the AES tackle the major problems that a commitment to genuine economic equality for women would involve? Can it take on board the major ideological task of getting men to accept that an end to discrimination against women means a loss of relative advantages for them? Will it be able to increase employment opportunities sufficiently rapidly to prevent divisive attitudes from taking over? Will it incorporate a commitment towards improving the relative position of the low paid in general and women in particular? Will it be able to assert the kind of control over the capitalist sector which will begin to make this possible?

The answers to these questions will only emerge out of a much wider discussion on the Left and in the labour movement. What is certain is that unless this discussion begins to take place now the chances of the AES fulfilling the potential it has for women are very slim.

¹⁶J. Coussins, 1981.

A revised version of this article will appear in the *Socialist Economic Review* to be published in 1982.

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Dave Priscott

Can Labour Succeed?

The Left has won great victories: but there is a long way to go and the electoral situation is ominous.

At a time when media attention is focused on events inside the Labour Party, I want to attempt some kind of assessment of how those changes in the Labour Party relate to the broad political problem that all on the Left must face today; a problem which I would define as follows:

In conditions of capitalist crisis and disillusionment with right wing Labour rule, a shift to the right in British politics returned an extremely right wing Tory Government, which is now engaged in an all-round attack — economic, political and ideological — on the living standards, democratic rights and prospects for national survival of the British people. Can Labour defeat this Government at the next general election? — and can it do so in circumstances that will prevent a repetition of the 1974-1979 debacle and instead open up the possibility of taking a different, democratic, anti-monopoly road forward?

Most sections of the Left rightly see the current changes taking place inside the Labour Party as being of great significance in finding a solution to that problem.¹ I write from a standpoint that very much welcomes the advances of the Left in the Labour Party. Indeed, I would claim that the Communist Party has made an essential contribution to those advances.

What I want to do is to argue that, however important and significant the changes in the Labour Party may be, neither the policy victories won by the Left nor the democratic assertion of the authority of the party as a whole over the parliamentarians are at this time, on their own, a sufficient guarantee of a solution to the problem as I posed it in opening this article. I want to examine what more is needed.

WHAT THE LEFT HAS WON

First let us consider (in general, not in detail; space and time forbid) what are the main advances made by the Left in the Labour Party in recent years. The list is quite impressive.

In the first place, the Labour left that has

developed in recent years is, in some important respects, more advanced in its political thinking than has been the case with many earlier left trends and groupings. Not all of the Left, of course. It is in fact somewhat misleading to speak of the 'Labour Left' — in reality there are several different left groupings and organisations with quite serious divisions between them. But within what one might consider the mainstream of Left Labour opinion there is now broad agreement on a fairly coherent alternative economic and political programme. (There are still weaknesses — on the important question of the attitude to the wages struggle, for example, there is still lack of clarity amongst some on the Left). Sections of the Left are also moving towards a position of recognising the importance of extra-parliamentary action, and the need to come closer to democratic movements that have developed outside the traditional framework of the labour movement.

Many key organisations of the labour movement have now been won to support

much, if not yet all, of the Left's political and economic programme. The whole movement has not yet been won for left policies, but important advances have been made.

No less significant are the advances being made by the Left in the field of democratising the Labour Party in order to ensure that the party as a whole controls the parliamentarians. Compulsory re-selection of candidates, NEC involvement in the election manifesto, election of the leader by a process involving the trade unions and constituency parties as well as the Parliamentary Labour Party — the hysterical reaction of the right wing and the press to these changes is evidence enough of their potential importance.

THE PROBLEMS THAT REMAIN

The picture of left advance is an impressive one and those who seek to discount its importance and possible future consequences are seriously mistaken. And yet, without underrating what has been achieved or pouring cold water on the continuing efforts of the Labour Left, it is necessary to ask certain questions about how those changes relate to the initial problem that I posed in opening this article. The questions in my mind are these:

1. Just how far to the left is Labour's alternative to the Tories likely to be at the next general election (probably within the

¹ The SWP is virtually alone in arguing that '... whatever left wing policies are adopted by the Labour Party in opposition and whatever advances are made by left wingers within the Party hierarchy, it is out of the question for the Labour Party even to attempt to transform society when in office ... In no case do we give any credence to the repeatedly disproved fantasy that the Labour Party leopard can change its spots. A new party has to be built on a different basis.' (Duncan Hallas, *The Labour Party: Myth and Reality*). One wonders why they bothered to attend in some force the recent Labour Coordinating Committee Conference — which was devoted entirely to an objective the SWP considers impossible of achievement!



next two years)? — and, what can we do to ensure that it is well to the left of anything seen in the past?

2. Even with substantial left victories within the Labour Party, can Labour win the next general election? — and, what is needed to ensure that it does?

3. If the next general election is won by Labour, on a platform expressing those left policies that are at present widely accepted in the movement, would it carry through its programme in face of inevitable concerted opposition from the monopolies, the media, and reactionary opposition in the state apparatus itself? — and, what is needed to ensure that it does?

I now want to examine these questions and suggest some answers.

Taking the first question, I think a bit of sobriety is needed. The Left has not won all its battles yet by a long way; and even those that have been won are not secure for ever against right wing attempts to recover lost ground.

I think, too, that we should recognise that, even with compulsory re-selection, it may well take more than a couple of years to decisively change the political complexion of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The safest Labour seats do not always have the most left-wing CLPs!

So while the Labour Parliamentary leadership at the next general election may very well be better than anything we have had in the past, it seems at the moment unlikely that it will be what might be described as a 'Benn government'.

A false assumption

But perhaps I am over-cautious. Let us suppose that Labour enters the next general election led by a splendid team of consistent left wingers. Does that mean that Labour is bound to win the election? Let us consider Warrington. Labour had a candidate who was, I think, well to the left of previous candidates in that constituency. The Labour vote dropped by over 5,000. Some people have argued that Hoyle did not campaign vigorously enough for left policies; others say that he did; I was not in the constituency and cannot judge. But what is certain is that the media assiduously presented the image of Hoyle as a 'man of the left' — and it didn't bring home the voting bacon.

One thing that I think can be said with reasonable certainty about the current political climate in Britain is this: there is growing evidence of mounting concern and anger at some of the consequences of Thatcher government policies — but little evidence that most people even understand, let alone support, the Left's alternative

policies. In these circumstances numbers of people, still disillusioned by their experiences under the last Labour government, can be misled by such phoney alternatives as the SDP/Liberal alliance. We need also to consider that it is by no means certain that the Tories will be campaigning under Thatcher at the next general election. They are quite capable of ditching her in favour of some more 'progressive' Tory if they think it serves their interests.

The undoubted fact that right-wing policies have proved electorally disastrous for Labour does not mean that the adoption of left policies will *automatically* bring the lost voters flocking back.

Nevertheless, throwing caution totally to the winds, let us assume the best of all possible circumstances — left advance in the Labour Party and a Labour general election victory. My third question still remains: is this sufficient to ensure that there is no repetition of anything like the 1974-1979 debacle? Inherent in the Communist view and clearly expressed in our programme is the attitude that it is not. Powerful forces will seek to prevent the carrying out of a left programme. They cannot be defeated by parliamentary majorities alone, but only by even more powerful forces *outside* Parliament — a working class movement, allied to wide sections of the people, that is prepared to strike, demonstrate, occupy etc, in order to ensure that the programme is carried through.

WINNING THE LABOUR MOVEMENT FOR THE LEFT

How can we help to ensure far-reaching left victories that cannot be reversed within the

**does not mean that the
adoption of left policies
will automatically bring
the lost voters flocking
back**

main forums of the labour movement?

All past and present experience shows that the Left in the CLPs and the PLP, no matter how sincere and eloquent, always take a hammering in Labour Party Conferences if major trade unions vote against them. You cannot solve that problem by wishing that our Labour Party had a different structure to that given it by history. And to suggest that the problem should be tackled by a left campaign to reduce the voting strength of trade unions at Conference, relative to the voting strength of the CLPs, means to open

up damaging antagonisms between the Left and the trade union movement, just at a time when the most important task for the Left is to strengthen its links with the trade unions.

What we have to do is start with the realities of our labour movement, and analyse them carefully in order to understand the real dynamics of change in the trade unions and Labour Party.

In attempting to do this, I will start with actual experience. I want to argue that the *essential starting point* for the impressive left advances of the past decade was that major clash that took place between 1966 and 1969 between the trade union movement and the Labour Government — over incomes policy, and over trade union legislation. Without those traumatic mass struggles in which organised workers clashed with a Labour government, and defeated it, the left advances that followed would not have been possible.

I am not, of course, arguing that all those workers, or all their trade union leaders, had been won for the policies of the Left. But those struggles created a new climate — of breakdown of traditional loyalties, of rupture of traditional relationships, of questioning of traditional attitudes. In that new climate it became both more urgent for the Left to formulate alternative policies, and more possible for it to win support for them. Thousands of mostly anonymous left-inclined trade union activists at all levels (including many Communists), who had battled in the movement for their policies with little success prior to 1966, began — as a result of the 1966-69 struggles — to make advances. It is in no sense a denial of Benn's important contribution to point out that *they* laid the base on which *he* has been able to build — not the other way round!

Starting from that actual experience, I want to suggest an analysis of our labour movement on the following lines: given the structure of the Labour Party, its main internal contradiction is the conflict between the basic class interests of the millions of workers in the trade union movement and the anti-working class policies of Labour's right wing and of all previous Labour governments. That contradiction is often latent, unexpressed; but at times it can become a tremendous force for change, as in the example quoted.

These 'basic class interests' have to find expression through a dense network of ideological and institutional obstacles (most workers, most of the time, are not fully conscious of what their 'basic class interests' are!). Trade unions need to organise *all* workers in a given occupation or industry, regardless of their politics, regardless of

ideology. There is therefore always great ideological diversity in the trade union movement, which is inevitably to some degree also projected into the Labour Party to which many trade unions are affiliated.

Trade unions and politics

However, because of the nature of trade unions as *class* organisations, within that ideological diversity there is scope for left, socialist, Marxist ideas to gain ground. There is an important relationship between trade unionism and the development of working class political consciousness. Because trade unions are formed on a class basis; because they struggle against individual employers and on occasion against the employing class as a whole — then, even though they have to organise *all* workers, including those at the lowest political level, they are at the same time an arena within which working class political attitudes develop, take shape, find expression. When individual workers, or groups of workers, are influenced by socialist ideas, they generally express that political understanding within the trade union movement as, to them, the 'natural' arena within which to fight for such ideas. Consequently, as Hobsbawm points out in 'Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement'², '... Marxist organisations formed and still form by far the most important school for the militants and activists of the labour movement... taking account of their relatively modest size, the Marxist organisations... have had a disproportionately large influence among the union activists'.

Activists and the membership

Given all these factors, a recurring problem in the movement is the difference between the political positions of the activists and the level of understanding of the mass of the membership.

In considering this problem, the simplistic 'model' which proposes that the movement consists of a leadership (invariably treacherous) and a rank and file (invariably militant) is so remote from reality as to be positively misleading. It would be nearer the truth, though still an over-simplification, to suggest that the movement could be considered as consisting of the activists at all levels, and a membership (to which the activists are more or less closely related depending on circumstances) which is relatively inactive. Capable of great determination and indeed heroism when once involved in action, nevertheless the great majority of trade union members (and Labour Party members) play little part in the *regular* life of the organisation of which they are members, in terms of attendance at

meetings etc. Conference decisions therefore tend to reflect the political balance amongst the activists; and that does not always correspond to the political balance amongst the mass of the membership.

This is why any approach on the Left that tends to over-emphasise work within the 'apparatus' of the movement at the expense of mass political work is wrong. It opens up the danger that the right wing, defeated amongst the activists, may yet make a comeback by appealing 'over the heads' of the activists so to speak, to the 'rank and file' — an appeal usually well supported by the media. Surely this is the lesson of recent events in the AUEW. Why has its top leadership moved from left to right? To say that it is due to the postal ballot is begging the question. The postal ballot did not produce a shift to the right in the thinking of AUEW members; it simply permitted the more effective mobilisation and expression of right wing ideas that were already there.

The conclusion I would draw from all this is that the trade union movement can only realise its full potential as a driving force for left changes in the Labour Party if the Left recognises that it is not enough to organise to get resolutions through conferences and to get Lefts elected to positions — it is also necessary to *organise to change the political thinking of masses of people*.

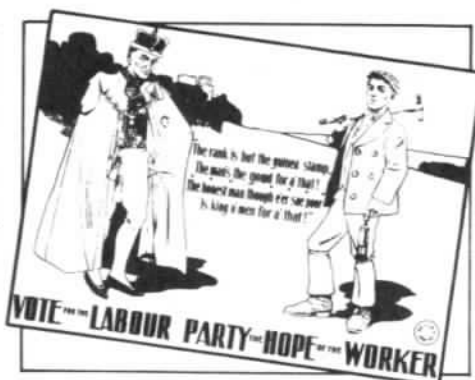
The Communist Party is organised with that purpose in view, and has consistently rejected tendencies that have sought to reduce it to a mere 'ginger group' functioning within the apparatus of the movement. Some of the various left groups are very much more inward looking in their approach and seem to see the main battlefield as lying 'within the apparatus'. It is encouraging therefore to see

the great majority of trade union members play little part in the *regular* life of the organisation of which they are members

the Labour Co-ordinating Committee arguing, in their pamphlet on *Trade Unions and Socialism*, a case very similar to that which I argue here:

'... left policies and leaders will only be sustained if there is a mass base of left wing support in the unions involved, and even in some "left" unions this is not the case at present'.

To sum up my argument so far: given a situation of struggle involving masses of organised workers; given a Communist Party and Left that not only participate in those



struggles, that not only work to shift 'official' policy to the left, but which also work effectively to change political thinking amongst the working class as a whole — in these circumstances, the trade union movement can be the most important driving force for left change within the Labour Party.

HOW CAN LABOUR WIN THE COUNTRY?

So far I have considered how we can strengthen the leftward trend within the Labour Party. My second question asked: if the Left wins the Labour Party, can the Labour Party win the country in a general election?

I have argued that groups and factions within the Labour Party apparatus (Tribune Group, Militant Group, ILP, etc) cannot even depend on winning a secure victory *inside* the Labour Party by a style of work that looks primarily inwards, into the apparatus, as its main field of work. Still less can this style of work win the masses — many of them not even members of trade unions — whose support is essential for an election victory. Nothing could be more fatal than to assume that if the Left won the Labour Party the lost voters would come floating back. Unless the labour movement turns outwards to champion the interests of the widest sections of the British people — not just by speeches in parliament but by action in the workplaces and on the streets — it will not win the support of those people. What the Left has to work to achieve is a change in political thinking, not just amongst trade unionists, but even wider; on a mass scale.

When did we last see, in Britain, a really profound change in political thinking on a mass scale, a widespread readiness for radical social change, including elements of a really *socialist* political consciousness amongst sections of the working class?

In my personal life and recollection, the most dramatic such change in mass political attitudes was that shown at the time of the

² E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Revolutionaries*.

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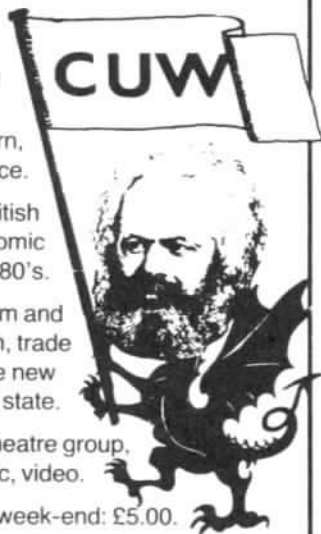
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1945 general election. It is worth recalling how leading Communists estimated the situation following that election. Palme Dutt described the results as a 'glorious political leap forward . . . the counterpart of the sweep to the left throughout Europe' (*Labour Monthly*, August 1945); while Pollitt attributed the victory to 'a basic political mental change in the outlook of millions'.³

What they were talking about was not simply Labour's landslide election victory in 1945. They were also talking about a widespread readiness for, and expectation of, radical social changes — not only amongst the working class but amongst professional people and in middle class circles.

Attempts to compare the 'political level' of the people at two such widely different periods as 1945 and 1981 are inevitably difficult — and contentious. In some respects, things have undoubtedly moved forward since 1945. The trade union movement is bigger, better organised, and has learnt from its struggles. The Left in the labour movement is more clearly defined, is clearer about its objectives, and is growing in strength. New streams of democratic struggle have entered political life — the women's movement, for example.

1945: a high point

And yet — there was a readiness for radical social change expressed at the time of the 1945 general election that has not, I think, been so clearly and strongly expressed since; and that mood in 1945 did include some elements of a *socialist* political consciousness amongst sections of the working class which, I think, have not been so clearly seen in more recent years.

I do not think this is mere personal subjective impressionism; there are some objective yardsticks. For instance, in 1945 Labour won a landslide victory; in 1979 it got the lowest percentage of the total poll since 1931. In 1945 the Communist Party had more than double its present membership, won two seats in parliament, got very respectable votes in a number of other constituencies, and enjoyed a great deal of support for its proposals for unity. Then, there was widespread support, amounting amongst some sections of the working class to real enthusiasm, for the Atlee government's initial nationalisation measures — today, nationalisation is the subject of a great deal of apathy and cynicism amongst many people. Then, friendship for the Soviet Union was widespread; not so today.

It is of course a complicated, mixed picture. I would put it this way. The undoubted advances that the movement has made since 1945 mean that, if we could once

again get that 'political mental change in the attitude of millions', if we could once again rekindle an enthusiasm for radical social change, if we could once again stir amongst considerable sectors of the working class a real *socialist* consciousness — then, I believe, we could avoid the pitfalls and setbacks that turned the 1945 victory sour and set the whole movement back for many years. We could, in fact, start off on the road to socialism.

So, what caused that 'basic political mental change in the outlook of millions' that Pollitt was talking about? It was certainly not the product of the 1945 general election campaign. General elections *register* changes that have taken place in political attitudes; in themselves they do little to *cause* the changes. General election campaigns usually have but a marginal effect on mass political attitudes. That margin can be decisive when the two main parties are finely balanced; but what really changes political attitudes, on a mass scale, is not the election campaign — it is the experiences people have had in the years

today, nationalisation is the subject of a great deal of apathy and cynicism amongst many people

leading up to the election, and the conclusions they have drawn from those experiences.

In assessing the period leading up to 1945, two things in particular stand out.

The first is that masses of British people underwent deep and prolonged experiences — experiences of struggle. Before the war much of this experience was of the struggle against mass unemployment, and this deeply influenced the political thinking of millions. Then there was the great democratic struggle to defeat fascism — a truly national struggle involving the whole of the British people excepting only a minority of fascist sympathisers, many of them in high places in British society.

But there is a second important feature of those years. They were years of struggle against unemployment, war and fascism; they were also years of vigorous ideological offensives by the Left. The propaganda work of the Communist Party itself reached higher levels in that period than it has generally done since; but it was not the Communist Party alone. The Left Book Club, for instance, helped to shape the political thinking of a whole generation.

The broad approach

Surely it was this combination — struggle on issues that transcended 'narrow' class issues,

issues that took in the whole question of national survival, *plus* what can truly be described as mass ideological work, that brought about the deep changes in political thinking that were expressed in 1945.

The conditions of an earlier historical period can never be recreated; but if we cannot learn lessons from them it is meaningless to speak of Marxism as a science.

So I consider that there are two priorities for the Left in Britain today. Neither of them can be accomplished without a battle for left policies *within the labour movement*, and Communists will always play a full part in that battle. But equally, neither of them can be accomplished if the battle is confined within the machinery of the movement; it has to be *taken outwards to the masses*; and Communists will be deeply involved in that, too. In the end the key battlefield is the workplace, the street, the community; it is there that the Left must focus its attention.

One of the two priorities is to bring people into struggle — especially around the two linked issues of peace and jobs. Between them, these issues spell more than just 'living standards' — they spell 'national survival'. The Left, the labour movement, must take on the role of leaders of a great national revolt against those who are destroying Britain's industrial base and threatening its very survival through their acceptance of American nuclear bases. Mass struggle around these issues is the key to defeating the Tories in the next general election.

The other priority — equal in importance — is for the Left as a whole to conduct far more effective, outward-looking, ideological work. The Communist Party, with branches organised for campaigning work in localities and workplaces, has a key role to play — as has also the *Morning Star*, which editorially expresses Communist policy while providing a platform for the Left as a whole. But the task of reaching out to masses of people in language they can understand, related to issues they feel deeply about, is one for the Left as a whole to grapple with. It is this that is the key, not just to a Tory election defeat, but to real possibilities of left advance for Britain.

If we can move forward on these lines we should have no worries about the third of the questions I posed earlier on — could a left Labour Government survive the pressures of the monopolies, the media and the state? A truly politically conscious working class will not only vote for a left government — it will be prepared to struggle to ensure it does the job for which it was elected!

³ Reply to Discussion, 18th Congress of Communist Party, November 1945.

BBC UNDER PRESSURE

Jonathan Coe

So, BBC television's Dimpleby lecture has been postponed because of a 'cock-up'. That is the official verdict given to the Edinburgh Television Festival by the Managing Director of Television Alasdair Milne. The BBC's own staff paper *Ariel* quoted Milne in rather more circumspect mood: 'The muddle which at present surrounds the choice of lecturer . . . would make it difficult for any speaker to do justice to the chosen subject and maintain the standing of the lecture.' This paragraph was tacked on the front page report of another television festival contribution, from the BBC's head of current affairs complaining that the 'freedom to report is being eroded'. What is happening to the BBC's senior management so that they produce 'muddle' and 'cock-ups'? What does this debacle have to tell us about the general health of the BBC?

The BBC is in a state of profound crisis. It is reflected in every aspect of the Corporation's activities. In the words of a poster which greets all who pass through Broadcasting House, 1981 is the most crucial year in the history of the BBC.

The components of this crisis can be traced to 1949, the year of the Beveridge Report, which in a highly idiosyncratic account of the Corporation's future saw the issues as: accountability, finance, and the Corporation's relationship to commercial broadcasting. Beveridge made a painstaking investigation into the case for commercial broadcasting, and found it wanting. The committee split. Selwyn Lloyd pressed for the introduction of commercial local television and radio. He won the day. It was a long struggle for commercial interests. And 1981 is their year. Having already won a network of television stations, they now have two new networks (breakfast television and the Fourth Television Channel) and a massive expansion in local radio up to a total of 69 stations.

The BBC still awaits guarantees for its future income. It has been mounting in a tentative way a campaign for a £50 licence fee. The Government is due to announce its intentions in the next parliamentary session.

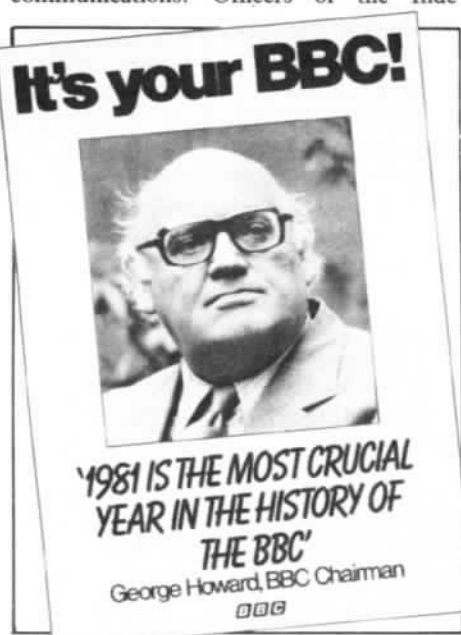
It is by no means certain that the Government will meet the BBC case. The present Conservative administration has made it clear on many occasions that it is by no means enamoured of an institution which does not seem to embrace its policies with sufficient enthusiasm. There is also a current within the administration which looks askance at public institutions and favours casting them adrift upon the currents of market competition. The Industry Department is showing growing enthusiasm for deregulating telecommunications. Officers of the Inde-

arrangements noted in passing that both the Treasury and Home Office showed an increasing tendency to inquire into not just future capital spending but programme expenditure. But most remarkably it put a strong case for the BBC to take advertising on a number of its services. The paper was thrown out by the Governors, and the mood is swinging in the opposite direction. Milne, for example, in a recent *Radio Times* interview categorically rejects advertising. But discussion of broadcasting policy in England takes place in something approaching a vacuum. There has been nothing remotely resembling the intense debate which so motivated the people of Wales and secured for them the remarkable and novel arrangements which will govern the introduction of the Welsh Fourth Channel television service. This is a struggle from which we in England have much to learn.

In June the BBC's Licence and Charter were debated and renewed. This could have been taken as a major opportunity for the labour movement to discuss the principles of the BBC. It was not. It almost passed unnoticed. The debate had low priority on the parliamentary timetable, took place at the rag end of the session, and the most the opposition benches could mount was five members. Parliament will not have a similar opportunity until 1996.

The labour movement can't wait that long. The broadcasting frequencies and the cables that distribute sound and picture signals are public property, and should not be available to commercial or private interests to parcel up and sell to the highest bidder. If we are to mount a rescue operation for them we need to start now. We can work on models for making the BBC more accountable. For a start the Governors could meet in public and publish their minutes and reports. The Local Advisory Councils on which the representatives of labour sit could be open to the public. Our representatives could be asked to account for what they do and say at such meetings. Within the broadcasting organisation the unions face major problems both in securing and defending working conditions and a general environment in which creative work can flourish. If only the spirit to achieve some of these aims exists a £50 fee would seem a small price to pay.

Some of the issues raised here will be discussed in a special session at the Communist University of Wales to be held at Cardiff University, October 23 to 25. In Birmingham the Birmingham Film Workshop is holding a series of debates on the Fourth Channel. The first session on Wed October 7 is given by Dafydd Elis Thomas, Plaid Cymru MP, who will discuss the battle for Sianel 4 Cymru.



pendent Broadcasting Authority, the body charged with regulating commercial broadcasting but discharging their responsibilities in such a way as to represent and advance those interests, have sensed the change in wind direction. Thus the IBA Radio Director John Thompson could say last year that 'the label "public service broadcasting" seems now to be a rather antiquated phrase, musty like a sticker on a well-preserved pot of home-made jam, long forgotten in the cupboard. The expression is now suspect . . .'

To challenge this political movement the BBC has to step outside the consensual ring it is supposed to share with the IBA. It has to declare that broadcasting in the public interest is different from a broadcasting system which has as its prime aim the selling of goods and services. The BBC has shown a marked reluctance to make any such move. But that is not to say its position has remained fixed. Some 18 months ago the BBC's Director of Finance, Paul Hughes, submitted a remarkable paper to the Governors on the question of securing the BBC's finances. A summary of the present

SPORTS CENTRES

Chris Lightbown

Whilst inner cities burned earlier this year, officials from the Sports Council were, coincidentally, meeting their Department of the Environment superiors who decide funding. Perhaps not surprisingly, hints of extra cash for sports projects in inner cities emerged by the hatful from that meeting.

Now, how are we to see that? As buying off the mob? As an absurd sticking plaster being stuck across complex problems of housing, economics and urban decay? As patronising of blacks — 'they're all good at sport, aren't they?' Or as just blind panic, because money spent on sport raises no political issues? Instinct suggests all those.

The truth is a little more embroiled. British sport is traditionally the absolute embodiment of the amateur principle. At its purest 19th century roots, a man — and strictly, only a man, of course — would train and play the game in his spare time, doing no more than was absolutely necessary to perform at his best. The principle held true throughout all classes, although obviously some classes had more spare time than others. Nonetheless, the attitude is not to be totally knocked: it kept sport in perspective, and had a humane side that lingers on in modern sport. But as with so much in Britain, the amateur principle was adhered to as much for the sake of adhering to it as for any merits.

Result? Britain slipped down the medals table in most sports, including even those that our amateurs had invented. While our facilities for public sport lagged far behind those of every country we like to be compared to. However, dissatisfaction from public and performers was a long time in brewing. Even now, we are only in the third of three very clear stages in doing something about sport for the 99% who are not medal winners.

Firstly, in 1972, came the Sports Council, set up primarily as a means of funneling government money to facility starved areas. Its money has always been limited — this year's £21 million, a record, compares to the conservative estimate of £50 million worth of sponsorship money afloat in sport. Critics charge that its 600-strong staff have become just an addition to general bureaucracy, and that it swims with economic and political currents. It has, though, a precarious

position to maintain, independent of government as far as any quango ever can be, but still relying totally on government money.

Secondly, an accident. The lurchings of economic policy in the late 60s and early 70s, plus a particularly absurd Anthony Barber budget, produced a wash of money in local authority hands at this time. Sports centres were the prestige items of the time, and they went up in droves, cutting across the political spectrum. The then Nottinghamshire

they never otherwise would have. That must be qualified by the growing adage that all a bad PE teacher has to do now is take his or her kids to the local centre, throw a ball in after them, and retire for coffee.

More fundamentally, it is now widely felt that most centres were built in the wrong place, and many were conceived or administered in a way that suggests sport need pay no heed to the rest of society.

Specifically, sports centres were built in middle class suburbs, already getting the prime end of the local authority spending on sport, currently hovering around the £400 million a year mark. By 1974, when the first major wave of centre building had finished, only two centres in England were in recognisably urban areas. One of these, the Sobell Centre in Islington, North London, has become a byword for insensitive use by moneyed non-locals.

Even those centres that later came to be built in more needy areas continued to be sports palaces for the already initiated. Few gave thought that vast centres are intimidating to children, who see sport as an extension of play, and thus expect to find it on a familiar scale. Few saw the need to sell centres or the idea of health, except when pure economics forced them to do so. Whilst the most common complaint has been the block booking of facilities by businesses or those already competent at a sport. Sports centres were usually too big or in the wrong place to serve as community centres, no matter how much space was spare.

So the hopes of community minded people in sport has switched from facilities to personnel. Two arguments keep socially aware individuals working in sport; firstly, that sport can work as a means of stimulating those, particularly young people, who are otherwise apathetic. And secondly, that once stimulated by sport, their awareness spreads into other areas.

The result of their arguments, and the apparent failure of a purely facility-based system, has been the third stage in our emergence from amateurism: employing people who are good at both sport and communication as motivators in inner city areas. The success of Sports Council pilot schemes had led to a rash of such projects, with motivators being given a free hand to match up facilities and local people, according to the needs of the latter. Employed by a mixture of agencies, many have worked particularly hard with minority groups, and are putting in long hours with youngsters written off by the rest of us.

A high number of such people see their work as being on the fringe of the system, and part of a progressive political framework.



County Council who pioneered sports centres, and who actually believed in them as a public service, was Tory, whilst the local authority most prominent in establishing a thorough network of centres was staunchly Labour — Torfaen in South Wales.

As sports centre mania receded, there grew a belief, now virtually unanimous, that with the notable exception of those two authorities, the centres were a mixed blessing. On the one hand, that they were there at all, was undeniably good. They offer, for instance, a range of sports far greater than any school can, and school children taken there for their PE lesson, experience sports

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The sudden arrival of more money, and much more official support, means that a lot of people, including sometimes themselves, are going to wonder if they are being put into a position of missionaries for the status quo.

WHAT'S ONE ODEON LESS ANYWAY?

John Ellis

commercial cinema to the fact of mass TV viewing.

Commercial cinema exhibition in Britain is effectively controlled by two companies. They are not companies noted for the



One of Rank's threatened cinemas — the Gaumont State in Kilburn, London.

desert. French municipalities try to ensure that local cinema exhibition continues, if necessary by providing subsidies for it. There is a developing circuit of cinemas *d'art et d'essai* (art and experiment) which are given tax rebates by the state. It comprises over 600 cinemas, some publicly subsidised, two-thirds outside the Paris region, in towns as small as 20,000 inhabitants. Coupled with relatively coherent state support for French film production, these measures produce a much wider range of films than can be seen in Britain. The difference can be measured by the number of 'exotic' films made available: some 128 films from outside USA and EEC were made available in France in 1979 alone; in Britain, the figure was only 36.

New forms of film exhibition are also being worked out in a small number of subsidised cinemas like the New Cinema in Nottingham and the Tyneside Theatre in Newcastle. They show films organised in seasons, so that the experience of one film is brought to another. This is supported by discussions and written material, and even some film production. This kind of cinema uses the public nature of film screenings to construct a critical and progressive audience.

However, the duopoly carry on treating films in the old way. They aim to show a new film each week. Films are treated as simple commodities, to be consumed and forgotten so that further consumption of similar commodities can take place. Patrons are treated as ticket and confectionery buyers, not as people with a genuine passion for the audio-visual. So no attempt is made to relate one film to another, to encourage debate and a deepening appreciation and criticism of the medium.

Such an attitude can equally well be served by domestic video viewing, and the development of the home video market will spell the end of cinema as the duopoly knows it. Already, large sections of the urban population are deprived of cinemas. And the remaining rump of film exhibition is nearing the point where its infrastructure of film print production and transport will collapse. Costs in these areas are rising faster than exhibition can cope with; each time exhibition contracts, the costs mount even higher for the cinemas that remain. However, there is no lack of film production around the world, no lack of new and vital ideas. If cinema is to continue as a means of airing these new ideas (ones which TV can hardly deal with), then it will have to change from being the simple arena for the consumption of images — how the duopoly perceive it — to being a public arena for exploration and discussion of alternatives and progressive forms of representation.

This month, 29 Odeon cinemas are being closed, including 13 screens in London and cinemas in places like Ashton and Sale (their last cinemas), and Bury, Cardiff, Chelmsford, Darlington, Lincoln, Rochester and Stafford. This is just another incident in a long history of closures that began when cinema felt the impact of mass TV viewing in the fifties. The number of cinema screens in Britain has dropped from 4,581 to around 1,500 in the last twenty years, leaving towns like Rugby with no cinema at all. Once Britain had the world's highest number of cinema attendances per head of population. Now the British market represents about 2% of the income of the American dominated international cinema.

These present closures are not simply the result of continued decline in audience numbers. These particular cinemas have been singled out because their overheads (staffing, heating, etc) can no longer be met by returns from the box-office. There has long been no consistent profit in showing films themselves: ticket sales only match a cinema's overheads, and profit is gained on the sales of sweets and hot dogs. So for a large sized auditorium, the cost of heating can mean the difference between overall profit and loss, even if its attendances are no lower than any other cinema's. This is the immediate reason why certain cinemas are being closed. The more general reason why so many cinemas have been lost in Britain can be found in the dismal response from the British

shrewdness of their commercial judgements either: Rank and ABC (taken over in the sixties by EMI, itself absorbed by Thorn last year). Rank has always been the dominant partner in this 'duopoly'. For both, cinema now represents an insignificant corner of their diversified activities that stretch throughout 'leisure' (including TV), property and electronics. Diversification has taken place partly at the expense of cinema. The duopoly have treated their cinemas as disposable prime high street properties. No long term strategy has been adopted for cinema, besides concentrating film exhibition into two or three screen complexes in city centres.

The idea of cinema as entertainment still dominates the duopoly's thinking. This entertainment cinema is internationalised and dominated by American finance. Britain's particular contribution is production facilities and skills (eg, for *Star Wars* and its sequels). This international cinema has concentrated on providing entertainment that TV currently cannot: big spectacles, controversial topics, pornography, violence, films for the youth market. To this extent only, entertainment cinema has reacted to TV's dominance in the area of entertainment. No real attempt has been made to break out of the 'Hollywood' mould.

Alternative forms of cinema are developing, however. In Paris, the range of films offered by specialist independent cinemas makes London look like a cinematic

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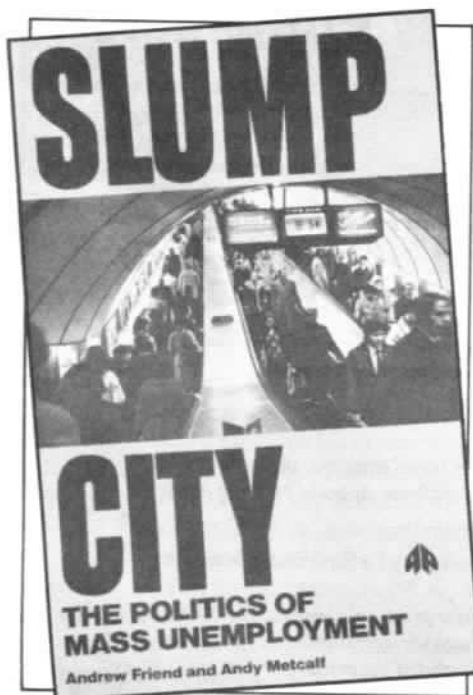
Reviews

SLUMP CITY, THE POLITICS OF MASS UNEMPLOYMENT

Andrew Friend & Andy Metcalf

Pluto Press 1981 pb £3.95

ISBN 0 86104 342 1



So many appeals to working class action gloss over the uncomfortable fact that the working class is divided against itself. If divisions are recognised — well, then, they are deplored and further appeals are made to solidarity and unity. But such appeals are doomed to failure so long as we ignore the historical depth and scope of the rifts, the way they are capable of being used against us and the way divisions are sustained by the oppression we visit upon each other. This book — though its title would not bring it immediately to mind — is about the construction of *difference* in the working class. As such it is a timely contribution to socialist thinking and strategy.

Slump City is a far ranging book which

takes events in the older working class areas as its starting point and proceeds from the perception that 'there is no inner-city problem that can be understood outside of the uneven development of the capitalist system as a whole'. Friend and Metcalf argue that with the return of mass unemployment 'the crisis of social control generated by concentrations of people living on the margins of society is set to become more widespread and more intense' and the book as a whole is an attempt to chart how and why these concentrations occur, their class composition and their significance for the working class on one hand and the state on the other. The main character in the story is that part of the working class — which the authors call 'the surplus population' — for which capitalist industry has little need and less regard, and which for the state is its main drain on public expenditure and its primary problem in terms of control.

The term 'surplus population' is derived from Marx. He used it to characterise paupers, the irregularly employed, inhabitants of rural areas underemployed on the land and the recently juvenile, who had outgrown their usefulness to the employers of cheap labour. The definition used by Friend and Metcalf is a 20th century adaptation. They see the permanent or intermittent unemployed, capital's industrial reserve army, as a large component of this surplus population. But there are others: 'Those participating in the bottom reaches of the "black economy" outside the tax system; all those who are totally dependent on state benefits or forms of charity (including the mass of pensioners, the chronically sick and disabled and single parent families on social security); and those people who, although in regular employment in labour intensive sweated occupations or the state service sector, earn wages significantly below the national average and who live in households where the standard of living only exceeds the minimum poverty level because of the receipt of means-tested benefits . . .' In other words the surplus population today includes both those who are super-exploited by capital and those who are technically free from capitalist exploitation but whose human potentialities are wasted by a society crucified on the law of value.

Slump City is notable for steadfastly holding to an international and gender-conscious analysis, and an early chapter demonstrates the way the working class was reconstituted during the post-Second World War period of prosperity with many more women and immigrants entering the paid labour force. The authors underline the now increasingly made point that the character-

istic member of the working class was for far too long assumed unthinkingly by socialists to be white, male and a worker. It is because so many trade unions, so many party branches, have operated in this belief in the past and ignored the different experiences of exploitation and oppression that there is such lack of confidence in them. 'Unity can only be achieved on the basis of a politics that addresses the needs of those groups who, divided from each other, are united in their alienation from labourism.'

The implications of this analysis for socialist strategy are quite important. The rifts between the different groups that comprise the working class are in part created, deepened and made use of by capital and the state. (The chapter on law and order, although written well before the riots, is of immediate relevance here in showing the way in which the divide between organised workers and groups in the surplus population was exploited throughout the seventies in order to restructure the state's repressive apparatus.) But because the rifts are also determined by the long history of capitalist development, of imperialism and of patriarchy, there are tangible differences of interest between the several worlds. Take for instance the relatively well-off and the relatively impoverished among the working class. Skilled groups have often reached their fairly secure and prestigious standing by curtailing the chances of the mass of their class to improve their position. They in turn are genuinely threatened with a deteriorating standard of living by the de-skilling of their jobs and the introduction of unorganised labour, women, casuals, 'temps'. And this is only one of the ways in which we affect each other, for good or ill. Men have an adverse effect upon the life chances of women. The white working class is not innocent, as we sometimes prefer to think, of the exploitation of the colonised populations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The higher standard of living of white workers in ex-imperial countries today stems in part from surplus value produced in the Third World. The divide between black and white in the working class in Britain today is caused by more than 'ideology' — and the same could be said of the divide between the in-work and the out-of-work, the 'industrious' and the 'scroungers', adults and school-leavers, men and women. Between mere prejudices lie material differences, power structures and struggles which any socialist strategy must pay close attention to if it is to be effective.

Friend and Metcalf's view of the crisis is a bleak one which carries with it a sense of urgency. For growth to be resumed on a capitalist basis in Britain they believe it will

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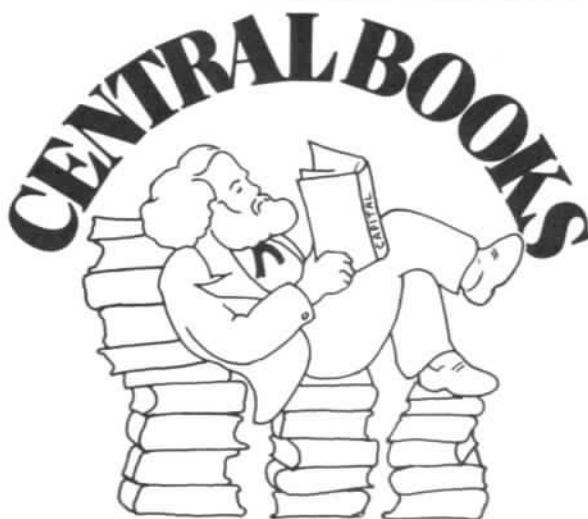
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be necessary for the state and the capitalist class to inflict major defeats on the organised working class on a scale far exceeding anything that has yet been approached. In this context, they see the divisions between the more prosperous layers of the working

class and the various groups that comprise the surplus population as being of crucial political importance. They see the struggle to create new unities and new alliances, to evolve an alternative political strategy rather than a purely economic one, as the major

priority for socialists today. The book does not seek to provide a detailed blueprint as to how this should be done, but it does raise major questions which will need to be widely debated if the task is to be attempted.

Cynthia Cockburn

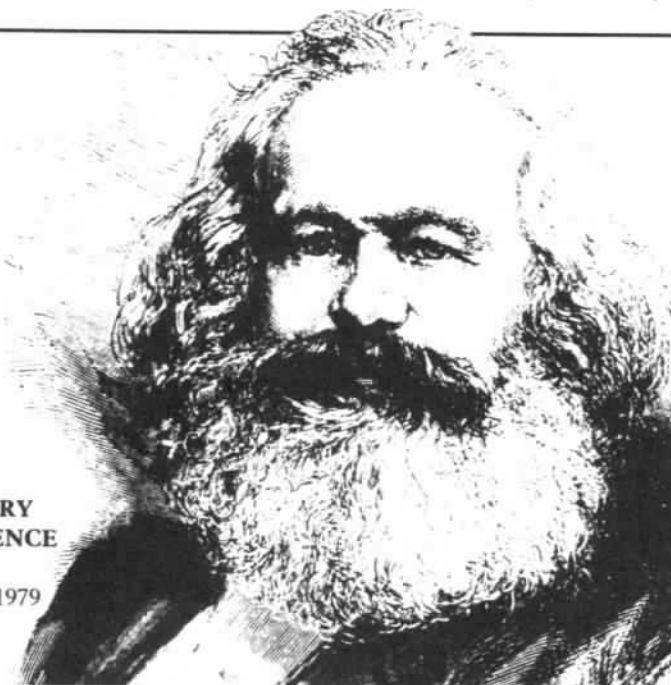
KARL MARX'S THEORY OF HISTORY: A DEFENCE

G A Cohen

Oxford University Press 1979

ISBN 019 827440 8

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In the two decades since Marx's works became academically respectable, his own arguments, the traditional formulations of historical materialism, have become progressively overlaid by a dense undergrowth of interpretation.

Many would-be students have no doubt drawn back as a result — unable to cope with the varied specialisms, Neo-Ricardian economics, Structuralism and Freudian psychology, which claim to validate particular versions. It is therefore welcome to find a treatment of Marx, recently reissued as a paperback, which, by and large, does the opposite, and brings us into direct encounter with Marx's own words.

GA Cohen's book presents itself as a defence. To quote the author: 'it is an old-fashioned historical materialism which I defend, in which history is, fundamentally, the growth of human productive power, and the forms of society rise and fall according as they enable or impede growth.'

Matched with this, and no less welcome, is the book's quest for clarity. The portentous imprecision of the French school of Althusser is repeatedly called to task. 'The Althusserian vogue', writes Cohen, 'could have unfortunate consequences for Marxism in Britain, where lucidity is a precious heritage, and where it is not generally supposed that a theoretical statement, to be one, must be hard to comprehend.'

Cohen's own theoretical commitment is to restore the concept of 'productive forces' to its central place in explaining human development.

Basing himself on a close examination of Marx's own usage, particularly in his 'most pregnant' text, the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, Cohen defines productive forces as including instruments of production, scientific knowledge, raw materials and labour power. These in their cumulative expansion, from generation to generation, ultimately and periodically lead human beings to the necessity of transforming the economic structure or relations of production.

It is, in turn, these relations — constituting, as Cohen cogently argues, alone and by themselves the economic 'base' — which explain the 'superstructure' of society, its ideology and legal institutions.

From this, therefore, it will be clear that Cohen champions what he himself describes as a 'technological' interpretation, that he relates superstructure, directly and causally, to the base, and that he defends a progressive view of the unfolding of qualitatively higher social systems.

At the same time, the point should be made that 'technological' does not, in Cohen's use, imply either literally or metaphorically that such an approach is mechanical. On the contrary, it places at the centre of any

explanation the continual and transforming relationship between human labour and nature (including human nature).

Moreover, Cohen approaches the task of *how* this explanation should be made with a subtlety and precision which, whatever its limitations, compares favourably with the 'in the last resort' evasions of the structuralist school. He advocates a theory of explanation that is functional (not functionalist) and within which, to use Cohen's initially somewhat bemusing terms, 'the character of what is explained is determined by its effect on what it explains'.

This may be simply illustrated by looking at the institutions of the early capitalist state.

A new class, the bourgeoisie, is brought into being. It is created by transformations in productive forces which made possible, through conscious action, the forging of new production relations in which wage labour is hired by capital. But to sustain these relations, for them not to be quickly destroyed, it will be necessary to create new legal institutions and ideology. Hence, the character of these institutions cannot be explained without reference to the specific development of productive forces and yet at the same time these same institutions are indispensable for the growth of the new relations and the further revolutionising of productive forces.

In arguing this case, and within it the primacy of the economic base, Cohen goes on to provide a valuable distinction between the basic (and pre-legal) 'powers' over property and labour power implicit in particular class relations and the legal rights that are created to endorse them.

This enables him to refute the accusations of critics like HB Acton that by making property 'rights' intrinsic components of production relations Marx himself abandoned the distinction between base and superstructure. At the same time Cohen also chides Perry Anderson for actually making this mistake by attempting to explain the rise of capitalism, at least in part, by the prior existence in Europe of absolute property rights stemming from Roman Law.

Again, in his definition of class, Cohen insists on a firm adherence to its structural base in production relations. On this score the historian EP Thompson is criticised for tackling the 'making' of the English working

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Stephen F. Cohen, director, programme in Russian studies at Princeton University.

October, 225 pp
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class in cultural and ideological terms which are strictly relevant to a quite different subject: the emergence of class consciousness.

Can we therefore conclude that the book does indeed live up to its subtitle as a defence of historical materialism?

Unfortunately, our answer has, up to a point, to be qualified. For as befits a book of rugged and uncompromising originality, it also leaves a number of question marks, and some of these are by no means small.

First, his defence is framed in terms which Cohen describes as 'those standards of clarity and rigour which distinguish twentieth century analytical philosophy'. It is accordingly a very English book by pedigree, and one which pays initial tribute to the heritage of logical positivism.

This may give Cohen added weight in his polemics with Acton and Plamenatz. But we are left guessing (because he does not tell us) about his standpoint on dialectical materialism. Much of what he writes is inherently dialectical (as in his functional mode of explanation), yet from some brief remarks on the concept of 'contradiction', it could be inferred that Cohen is unwilling to extend his defence to dialectical materialism itself.

And, if that is the case, it must reopen our assessment of his interpretation of historical materialism. For while, in some ways, the procedures of analytical philosophy are infinitely flexible, it is not easy to exempt logical positivism from the strictures which Politizer applied to the extension of formal logic beyond the domain of mathematics.

Cohen's position may or may not demand the assertion of principles of identity (that is, of unchanging categories) or of non-contradiction. But, until this has been made explicit, we are left with the suspicion that however brisk Cohen's rejection of idealism at the front door, it enters unchallenged through the back.

For it is the practice of *making* historical relations, of understanding the process of change, that is the real test. Cohen has elaborated a structure that is by formal declaration materialist and technological. It remains to ask ourselves whether or not this can be done in the absence of the procedures of materialist dialectics outlined, for example, by Lenin in his *Philosophical Notebooks*.

Second, and no less central, Cohen expounds but does not *defend* the labour theory of value. From his final chapter on contemporary capitalism one might infer that

he is unwilling to do so.

Here his position is not unlike that of Baran and Sweezy. These economists, in rejecting the labour theory of value, argued that in its monopoly stage capitalism's contradictions stem principally from a rising rate of surplus and the irrationality embodied in its consumption. Cohen appears to endorse a similar thesis although he focuses on the contradiction between production for exchange (ie, profit) and that for social use. He argues that advanced capitalism is only able to function by stimulating unreal needs and grotesquely wasting material and human resources.

Hence his immediate political prescription: that workers should use their bargaining power to seek more leisure time as *against* higher wages.

It is unfortunate that so serious a book should not confront a theory which Marx believed to be central. Its emphasis on unreal needs and leisure time serves to mask the politically most pregnant aspect of capitalism's crisis: its inability to make full use of its productive resources. Scientifically, this inability can only be understood as a consequence of its own necessary (labour) measure of value.

This omission, and the one-sided elevation

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Richard R Weiner *University of North Florida*

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of leisure time, is not unconnected with our final point of criticism.

In his section on the future communist society Cohen reinterprets, if he does not actually dispute, Marx's formulation that 'labour is no longer a means of life, but life's prime want'. Cohen takes this to mean that labour, being a means to live, *cannot* be wanted.

Elsewhere, discussing human nature, he argues that men do not naturally wish to labour but as rational beings will, in conditions of scarcity, do so, and use their uniquely developed mental powers to control their environment.

This separation of labour and rationality into (undialectically) distinct categories continues throughout the book. Can it be easily reconciled with Marx's concept of humanity's 'species-being'?

This gives human labour, as a specifically collective and social activity, a unique role in the development of rationality, of instrumental communication and language.

The coercive loss of its control, its alienation, the hallmark of any class society, inevitably transforms the individual's relationships to his labour and his own development. Conversely, as Marx wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, the test

of advance towards communist society would be how far labour did become 'life's prime want'.

The difference is a fundamental one, and relevant not just to the future but also to any understanding of class society.

However, our final note should not be one of criticism. Cohen has ventured on a most difficult task. His clarification of basic terms is of lasting importance. He has cleared away many academic absurdities. Most important, he has helped take a new generation of students back to the bright steel of Marx's own thought.

John Foster

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While *Marxism Today* has provided a forum for a growing number of contributors from outside the Communist Party to debate the key issues facing the Left, it has played an increasingly important role within the party as a focus of discussion, and continues to draw its strength from the support of party members. Without the active contribution of its readers *Marxism Today* could never have recorded the successes of the past two years; with continuing support, much more can still be achieved.

A SOCIALIST SOCIETY

Robin Blackburn writes: On June 20th an *ad hoc* Working Group convened a meeting in London to discuss the setting up of a new Society dedicated to socialist research,

education and polemic. The meeting was attended by some 200 socialists of diverse affiliations. It agreed on the desirability of a new non-party grouping that could pool the resources and experience of socialists active in different areas. It charged a Steering Committee with exploring the project further and preparing a founding conference in the autumn. The Steering Committee met in July and August. Sub committees have been formed to prepare proposals on: organisation and finance, publications, a charter of principles, and workshops on a number of policy areas (including the state, the inner-city crisis, arts policy, international priorities). A women's group has also been established. The reconvened conference is scheduled to take place on November 28th and 29th. Further details from: Working Group For A Socialist Society, 7 Carlisle St, London W1.

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Camden Town Hall
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Friday 6th November
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Saturday 7th November
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2 CO-OPERATIVES — A NEW APPROACH TO EMPLOYMENT

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A one day seminar to explore the different types of Co-operatives, and the opportunity they offer for job creation. Cost £10 including tea, coffee and lunch.

3 HOW TO RUN A WORKERS' CO-OPERATIVE 7th to 10th November

This four day intensive course will tackle the practical aspects of running a workers' co-operative and will include: book keeping, financial planning, employment law, co-op law, group decision making procedures, and organisation development. Cost £40 non residential, £67 residential.

4 CO-OPERATIVES AND COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES 9th to 27th November

This three week course has been designed for people employed as development workers for local authorities, voluntary groups or education establishments who are involved in assisting groups to create and maintain co-operative and community work enterprises. Cost £200 non-residential or £330 fully residential.

For further information on all the above please write or phone:
Beechwood College, Elmete Lane, Roundhay, Leeds LS8 2LQ.
Telephone: (0532) 720205

