



This is the third issue of a magazine we have been publishing out since October 1975. Originally it was confined to the university and colleges, but our old title 'Revolutionary Student' is now used strongly to reach the mass to produce the bridge between all those in Hull who feel concerned about the efforts of a brutal system, who are committed to some form of

RED HERRING

A magazine produced by members of the Hull branch of the International Marxist Group.

May 1976

Vol. 2 No. 3

Contents:

Introduction.
Alan Bruce. p. 4

Who Owns Your Mind? - The Media in Britain.
John Munson. p. 5

The Hull Docks - An interview with Alan Kirkby.
Alan Bruce. p. 10

Smashing the Ghetto - Gay Liberation and the Left.
Noel Hibbert. p. 15

What the Crisis is Really About...
Bert Joseph. p. 19

In this and future issues we will... we see them... We also help... through their own experience and involvement... interview a leading Hull dock... part's beliefs are provoking... to fight the classic employer's tactic of splitting workers... Divide and rule is not only an imperial tactic... really show how IV and the press... and obscure the issues... right of people to determine their own... questions posed by Gay liberation in recent years must be taken up by socialists not only in their organisations but in their own personal thinking and attitudes.

Although RED HERRING is produced by members of the Hull branch of the International Marxist Group, we welcome any contributions from others willing to argue or debate with us. In this way we hope to expand a channel of communication between socialists here as leading to common action for the objectives we all share.

Alan Bruce.
May 1976.

Cover design - special thanks to John Munday.

INTRODUCTION

This is the third issue of a magazine we have been bringing out since October 1975. Originally it was confined to the university and colleges, thus our old title 'Revolutionary Student'. We now feel strongly the need to broaden the initial idea. To reach out and act as a bridge between all those in Hull who feel concerned about the effects of a brutal system, who are committed to some form of socialist action and those who wish to debate the ways to achieve these aims.

RED HERRING is meant as a contribution to debate. As a stimulation. And as a connecting link for those on the left tired with sterile arguments and eager for action and analysis of our role as socialists. Our times are hard and difficult. Many are suffering the effects of cuts, unemployment, racialism and repression. Somehow we must hammer out some answers. We in RED HERRING also want to pose the old question: what is to be done?

We have felt the need for a socialist voice in Hull. We have an unemployment rate well above the national average. Redundancies and factory closures have been all too common. No amount of financial inducement or begging can get new industrial investment in or make it stay longer than to make a fast buck. Cutbacks in our health and education services can no longer be hushed up. Clinics are closing. Hospitals are being 'delayed'. Classrooms are overcrowded. Transport services are being 'streamlined'. Wages cut or held back. Teachers are on the dole.

In this and future issues we will attempt to offer our analysis of events as we see them. We will try to show the connexion between decaying standards and services and the capitalist system. We also hope to run regular interviews with people who are aware of this crisis through their own experience and involvement. In this issue we interview a leading Hull docks' shop steward. His comments on the port's decline are provoking. They are also a warning of the need to fight the classic employer's tactic of splitting workers. Divide and rule is not only an imperial trick. Our article on the media shows how TV and the press distort facts to split reality and obscure the issues. Finally we take up a crucial question - the right of people to determine their own sexuality. The serious questions posed by Gay Liberation in recent years must be taken up by socialists not only in their organizations but in their own personal thinking and attitudes.

Although RED HERRING is produced by members of the Hull branch of the International Marxist Group, we welcome any contributions from others willing to agree or debate with us. In this way we hope to expand a channel of communication between socialists here so leading to common action for the objectives we all desire.

Alan Bruce.
May 1976.

WHO OWNS YOUR MIND - The Media in Britain

by John Munson

We are all encouraged to believe that the British media is impartial and unbiased. It is seen by the great majority of people as a 'great British institution' providing factual information and sensible opinion. The independence that it supposedly enjoys is valued as the 'freedom of the press'. The recent attempts by the then Employment Minister, Michael Foot, to enforce the closed shop principle in the press, was rejected by the establishment as being an undemocratic encroachment upon this freedom.

But the impartiality and freedom of the press is clearly an illusion when looked at critically. The media reinforces reactionary middle-class attitudes. Far from being free it is firmly tied to the employing classes of this country and acts as their mouthpiece. The class nature of the media can be clearly seen when its coverage of specific groups and events is looked at.

First, trade unions. With the resurgence of the right-wing in trade and students' unions, the media have found a concrete issue around which to focus their propaganda. Left-wing candidates for union posts are seen as wreckers and are accused of not having the national interest at heart. Socialists are given a very small amount of space in the daily papers which lose no opportunity to picture strikers and demonstrating students as being in defiance of the Rule of Law. Journalists like Woodrow Wyatt urge their readers to vote for right-wing candidates. The Tory Party who actively campaign for union elections by postal ballot, clearly understand the persuasive influence the media has. The Tories know that when the power of the mass meeting is done away with the alienated individual trade unionist is a perfect target for the Woodrow Wyatts of the establishment.

The best example of media distortion in the field of the unions must be the case of the Shrewsbury pickets. Des Warren and Ricky Tomlinson were jailed under the retrograde conspiracy laws for conspiring to intimidate building workers in the 1972 building workers strike. No specific charges of violence were ever held against them but the media went to great pains to present the men as wreckers and thugs.

The newspapers did not say that Ricky and Des were not convicted of a single offence. They did not mention the many cases of violence by the employers and by black leg labour in the strike against the pickets. They did not mention the disgusting conditions and lack of safety standards that were found on many of the building sites.

Why were the media silent about these crucial aspects of the case? Simply because the flying pickets led by Des and Ricky were successful and threatened to make the employers do away with the profitable 'lump' and improve safety standards on their building sites.

Mc Alpines wrote to the police and even to Heath demanding that firm action be taken against the pickets. They wanted the right to picket to be abolished entirely. The newspapers backed them up with editorials demanding that the Rule of Law be upheld and that 'violent picketing' be firmly dealt with. Here the newspapers were clearly siding with employers against trade unionists. They were not impartial.

The biased nature of the media can be further investigated when one looks at their attitudes to oppressed groups in society such as blacks and women.

At best television and press treat black people merely as figures of fun. No serious analysis of the role of blacks in society is attempted. But at worst, the media depicts them as depraved criminals who are threatening our society with the alien ways. In both cases the media is being racist. Apart from a few obscure documentaries, articles relating true facts about the black population of this country are non-existent. Instead, the media merely connect blacks with violence. They ignore the appalling housing conditions that blacks have to endure. Ignore the exploitation they suffer at the workplace. Ignore the discrimination practised by the police against them. It is those social and political conditions that are responsible for what crime there is among the black sector of the population. They are the fault of society and not of the black psychological make-up. This attitude of the media leaves many working-class people in ignorance. It is this ignorance that allows racist groups such as the National Front to gain support among the working-class of this country.

The media's treatment of women is very similar. It reinforces the degrading idea that all women are fit to do is wait on men. The pin-ups that are to be found in the gutter press are a clear capitulation to chauvinism. The recent Equal Pay Act was greeted with a mass of ribald jokes from the papers because even this very weak act was seen as a threat to preconceived ideas on women's place in society. It was treated accordingly. All attempts by women to break out of the ideological strait-jacket imposed on them by society are presented as something 'strange'.

Further evidence of the biased nature of the media can be seen in its coverage of Ireland and Portugal.

Before the 1969 demonstrations, little mention was made in the press of the lack of basic civil rights in the fields of employment and voting which the catholic minority was forced to endure. When the British army was sent into the statelet it was pictured as a 'peace-keeping' force. They continue to peddle this myth, diligently glossing over the facts of the Army's violent deeds in Ireland. The struggle of Republicans for a united Ireland is seen simply as a terrorist campaign. Any demands that British troops be withdrawn are treated as surrender to British chauvinism and not as a necessity which will enable the Irish people to determine their own future.

The double standards of the media are in evidence over their treatment of Portugal. When Portugal was in the grips of the Salazarist dictatorship the press were silent about freedom and democracy. But when the April 10th '74 revolution overthrew the fascists, the media rediscovered these ideals and began to apply them to the situation. The workers and neighbourhood commissions were pictured as being dangerous ultra-left adventurers.

The fact that the working class needs these commissions to protect it against the onslaughts of the capitalists and the right is ignored. The adverse economic situation in Portugal is said to be the fault of the Revolution. No mention is made of the boycott on Portugal by the EEC countries (which was firmly advocated by 'Sir' Harold Wilson) in order to make the Portuguese people adopt the forms of government they wanted them to adopt. And that means capitalist forms.

These are merely random examples of distortion by the media. There are many more like with Chile and gays. But one thing is clear. The media always takes a conservative and middle class approach. Karl Marx said 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'. This brings us to another function of the media under capitalism. One that is more subtle than mere distortion but one that is just as dangerous. That is the function of the media as a conveyor of ruling class morals.

In most television plays and news features the morals and ideas of the middle class are seen as both universal and desirable. The middle class conception of the family is seen as the most natural for sexual relations and for child bearing. Homosexuality is seen as undesirable because it threatens this unit. The individual is exalted. The values of thrift and hard work are seen as good and natural. Unemployment is seen as unavoidable but not desirable. The view of British history as being one of imperialism is praised and extolled. The middle class through vocal Mary Whitehouses, attempts to control entirely what is shown on television. They force their standards on the writer and producer, inhibiting the emergence of new drama forms that seek to be realistic.

With all this in mind, the media is clearly not impartial. It performs a much more important function for the ruling class than just the presentation of information. A marxist analysis of the press shows that it gives a middle class slant to current events and pictures their values as desirable. Beaverbrook, founder of the Daily Express, told the 1948 Royal Commission on the press: 'the sole function of the Daily Express is to provide propaganda for the Tory party'. Many, reading this candid statement, may see a contradiction in the marxist view of the press since some national papers, like the Daily Mirror, openly support the Labour Party.

But this is to confuse support of party with support of class. To say that because a newspaper supports Labour and is bought by millions of working class men and women it is in some ways different from the overtly Tory press, is to judge in simplistic terms.

First, these papers all support one wing of the Labour Party, the right wing. All editorials in these papers clearly back the Callaghan government's cuts in social expenditure, which are clearly anti-working class. The left wing of the Labour Party is seen as being against the national interest.

Also, the Clay Cross councillors, Labour Party members who refused to implement the Tories' Rent Finance Act, were clearly acting in the interests of the working class. But they were pictured by the media as being in defiance of the Rule of Law.

It is perfectly true that millions of workers buy the Mirror. It is a purely voluntary act. But when social pressures are strong enough any act can be seen as voluntary like the amount of support given to the Nazi party in Germany in 1933.

The society in which we live is one that conditions the working class not to develop its own culture or its own view of the world outside of the narrow confines of the Labour Party. Popular dailies such as the Mirror, reinforce this conditioning by providing sensationalist entertainment. No serious political analysis is given and serious news items are given second place. When seen in this light popular dailies perform a vital function under capitalism.

The only alternative to this flood of ruling class ideas is to be found in the papers of the socialist left. Papers such as Red Weekly, Socialist Worker and the Morning Star are produced by political groups and have a two-fold function.

Their first function, due to the control that capitalism has over the media, is one of producing propaganda. This is not to say that they distort the truth in the way that the capitalist press does. They merely relate what the press has left out. Often this is enough to give a completely new angle to a problem such as Ireland. It is only in socialist papers that a clear account of the havoc wrecked by the British Army can be found.

Second, they try to show that there is a sensible alternative to capitalism - that of socialism. Through the accurate portrayal of issues such as Ireland and Portugal, the true nature of capitalism can be clearly seen. Capitalist values are seen as false. The individual that the middle-classes exalt is seen as someone alienated and warped by his job and his false social values.

The circulation of socialist papers is very small. Their resources are limited. They are also faced with attempts by the establishment to silence them. The editorial board of the old Daily Worker was often prosecuted. Another more recent example is that of the Paul Foot/Socialist Worker court case, which was a thinly disguised political attempt to stop the paper.

The socialist press attempts to counteract the distortion of the media by printing the true facts. A good example of this is the struggle for free and safe abortion. Anti-abortion demonstrations are given massive coverage, their actual size exaggerated and space given to their false emotional rantings. No mention is made of progressive groups like the National Abortion Campaign. They must rely on the socialist press for coverage. A recent local example is the Hull Daily Mail which refused to print advertisements for the local branches of the National Abortion Campaign and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. It was against their policy - and interests! Contrast this with the front-page treatment given to the recent anti-abortion - LIFE march through Hull.

The positive role that a socialist media can play can be seen in Portugal. The Republica newspaper was taken over by its staff when the boss tried to enforce redundancies. It quickly became a valuable organ of the working class, being a non-sectarian paper that was open to all the forces of the revolution. Its success scared the middle-class in Portugal and even helped Soares resign from the Government, with a lot of hypocritical talk about the 'freedom of the press' being in danger. The only freedom that was in danger was the freedom of the capitalists to divide and split the workers. Its takeover by troops was considered of the utmost importance by the government.

Revolutionary papers in this country and Republica in Portugal provide a glimpse of what the socialist alternative to our present middle-class, biased media is. In a socialist state the media would function as an open forum, where issues of importance that arose among the working class and their parties would be debated. There would be no censorship, but the old class interests and hatreds would not be allowed to surface and destroy the positive gains of the working class. But what is more important, the media would no longer be used to further the oppression of blacks, women and gays among many others. The struggles of oppressed peoples would no longer be distorted and twisted. Only until the media operates on a socialist basis, with both print workers and reporters deciding on the content of the paper, will it be a positive and not a negative force in society.

THE HULL DOCKS - An interview

by Alan Bruce

The life of dockers has never been an enviable one. It is a cruel and difficult existence. Although modified and improved over the past ten years, the cost has been enormous. Only after paying the price of appalling conditions, brutal standards, degradation, mutilation and even death and only after their own efforts through organization, solidarity and strike action have conditions changed. And even still the struggle is not over. Our ports continue to decline, thousands leave the industry every year and old communities face stagnation and decay.

The ultimate humiliation, before decasualization in 1967, was that of the battle to survive; to get work in the daily trial of the free call. Men were tightly crowded into undersized buildings. Here worker fought worker for the crumbs of work available to keep himself and his family alive. Elbowing each other, pushing and shoving, men fought to get an hour or two of work for a few miserable pence. This is no Dickens horror story. Only ten years ago.

But all of this is part of the ugly story of modern capitalism. The dockers have won victories. But the war is not over. Containerization and mechanization have vastly reduced numbers employed on the docks. Tonnages have increased. Employers have re-routed work to unregistered ports, often far inland, where part-time labour works for half the dockers' pay. Prices, of course, have not gone down. Profits have soared. A declining industry means dead communities but happy banks and owners.

Hull has been no exception. It highlights the sad trend of decades of capitalist greed. Tonnage dropped from 9.4 million in 1963 to 6.3 million in 1971 and is even worse today. Major closures have been common since 1971. Employers blame militancy. But profit is the key. In ten years the number of dockers has fallen from over 4,500 to 2,100 and is still declining. Many of those remaining are 'surplus to requirements' or underemployed. Large areas of dockland have been closed or demolished. No new development has occurred. All this in Humberside where unemployment is well above the national average. It is a sad and brutal story where the search for cheap unorganized labour and greater profits has led to the decline of one of the once great ports of the world.

Below we print an interview with Alan KIRKBY, vice-chairman of the Hull Docks ShopStewards Committee. His long experience of the docks and in fighting for the men he represents is evident below. We hope it provokes many into thought on the reasons for this decline and the answers that are possible.

Q. Could you give me an idea of when you started on the docks and what the conditions were like?

A. I began work on the docks in 1965, so I've been there for eleven years. But there was no steady work until decasualization in 1967. No secure work.

We were all allocated to an employer - there were some three hundred of them in Hull. One morning you might get work; the next, none. You were just sent to an employer and it depended on that. If there was no work you got sent home. 'Regular workers' got all the jobs - they worked for the same management all the time. They weren't the majority! Before 1967 you got £9 a week without work. If you could get work it was £10 1s. 8d. a week plus a small bonus.

There were two reasons for not getting work: you didn't work hard enough or if you opened your mouth. If you didn't buy the foreman beer or toffee up to him you got nothing. Work on the docks was hard, terribly hard. Conditions were outrageous. There were just no amenities. No showers, no restaurants, no canteens. You could do very dangerous jobs - shovelling sulphur and the like and with no health protections. If you asked for something like overalls you'd never get work again, if you asked for goggles or a face mask you were a 'trouble-maker'.

And there were lots of accidents - especially fatal ones if you worked ropes. There were many mutilations as well, losing fingers and arms on rope rigs. These devices seldom exist now. They were used only for speed. And these were used only in Hull. Men often didn't claim compensation after accidents - either they didn't know or would prefer to go for secure regular work with an employer.

All dockers started work through relations, fathers and sons. It's still the same now. Kids in this area (West Hull) either worked on fish docks or went on the commercial docks. In East Hull they worked in prop yards and went onto the commercial docks at twenty-one.

Q. What have conditions been like since 1967? Things like the Devlin Report and containerization?

A. No doubt about it, there was a big change in 1967. But there was a lot of opposition to Devlin. We said at the time it would split the labour force, and it has. We wanted one employer only and decasualization. And we still have different employers offering different conditions. At the time (1967) we struck against it in Hull for three or four days. But, remember, in Liverpool they struck for six weeks.

Decasualization meant you got to work on a roster. Even still we worked on piece-work from 1967-70. After 1970 it became day-work. Day work meant a shortening from a 40-hour to a 35-hour week. At the ferries in Hull they still work shifts. (7 a.m. to 2 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 9 p.m.)

Piece-work meant working very hard and very unsafe hours with almost no time for meals. It's going to make a big difference. Before day-work gangs worked against each other. One of the first ports in the U.K. to go on a standard wage was Hull. Rotterdam is still

on shift work, twenty-four hours a day. Same in Southampton.

All this started the one day strikes in 1965 - 66. You could work with the same men day after day and then not see them for years after. In the mornings foremen used to get on stands in the Alexandra Dock in a building which could hold 1000 men - 1500 to 2000 men would be in there, shoving and pushing, looking for work. It depended how many would get work on any morning - a few hundred might get work.

Unions? There's the 'blue' union, National Association of Stevedores and Dockers - my union. It's the oldest dock union in the country, 1872. We commemorated it by the strike! The 'white' union is the Transport and General. The difference? Anybody can be in the T&G. Everyone in our union has to be a registered dock worker. Docks aren't important to the T&G. There's been a reduction in dockers from 60,000 to 26,000 over the last ten years. For a union like the T&G with 1.8 million members it's a drop in the ocean. We're concerned only with dockers' welfare. Over the last few years there's been a shift from the blue to the white union. In the last few weeks this has been reversed somewhat. There are only two unions in the Hull docks and we've been the much more militant.

There's been a lot of mechanization since I joined. Containerization has even come too fast for the employers. Now we can even have a 5000 ton turnaround in one day. Roro ships (roll-on, roll-off) are even faster - forty tons in one go. These ships employ fourteen men for one day. It would have been five days work for 55 men ten years ago.

I can say that containerization - no, I mean mechanization - came so fast that nobody knew what was happening. Ten years ago you could work on the docks until you were 70 - 75. The average age on the docks today is 47. You get complete retirement at 65 but no one's retiring because they get severance pay. I think the people left are very concerned. There are getting to be more ancillary workers than registered dockers. Firms are split and so are the dockers. The docks are being run down. Young workers aren't being taken on.

They talk about 'apprenticeship'. We won't allow it. At least not on the terms employers want. They said they'd take apprentices as dockworkers. We rejected it because it would get in cheap labour and split the workforce.

Everything is mechanized now - we've got 110 forklifts for example. Twenty per cent of the workforce is off all the time - either holidays, sickness or just lack of work.

Q. What happened during the 1972 strike?

A. The '72 strike...everyone here was prepared for a strike. We knew there'd be one. No surprise. In 1972 we had over 300 men on the Temporary Unattached Register. In London it was 2000. But I knew after it that we had achieved nothing. We didn't gain anything. The only good thing was the abolition of the T.U.R. In 1972 we got people on the same wages but we didn't create employment. Today there are some 1500 less dockers and the tonnages are up. Just look at the decline 1972 to 1976.

There was very organised picketing. We bought a bus (Genevieve - it's still in the Albert dock!). We went everywhere, stopping at every port - like Scarborough. Every day there were a thousand police on the Trent. We were the first port in the country to come out. It was an official strike - a lot think it wasn't, but it was. We had flying pickets because of the mushrooming of other ports in unfair competition.

They got cheaper labour in Selby - but all it meant was vast and greater profits. They were working up the Trent for half the money we were but prices were no cheaper. It was all done for bigger profits. We objected to this.

The flying picket was very effective. The miners learnt it from us. We were the first to mobilize hundreds of men every day.

Selby ... we got to Selby at 10 a.m. All the police were waiting for us. At 12 we marched through the town in columns of four and closed the berths down. We got a bit of abuse but a lot of support. On the Trent we had sixty dockers arrested and each fined £50 in a kangaroo court. The police were very frightened. We were sending 700- 1200 men a day. Police stopped cars and took away our hand-hooks and bill-hooks. Those are the tools of our trade. They called them 'offensive weapons'.

Women and wives worked behind the scenes. We in the Blue Union got no strike pay. I got threatening and abusive 'phone calls the third week which worried me greatly - threats to my wife and family. My wife got a job to tide us over. The women weren't hostile. My wife had a typewriter here and did all the leaflets and bulletins.

It's still talked about. I think it's the last dock strike you'll see. Because when you go from £9 a week to higher wages and you get debt around you it's more different. You become, well, moderate. Then we had nothing to lose. Now some have got vested interests and they're more careful. We made a small step and we're afraid to lose it. We try to prepare men for stoppages. We stewards tell the men not to worry and be ready.

I think a lot of the dockers would even take wage cuts. We've gained respect but don't get the idea we're super-militant. We've a good solid core but a lot of bad ones. If the steward system ever went, the whole system would fall - the employers would annihilate us.

We haven't had so much success as organisation. We're a small port compared with London or Southampton. We can call a stewards' meeting in thirty minutes and stop the port in thirty minutes.

Q. Could you give some background to the recent troubles?

A. Last year there were forty riggers in Hull. Now it's suddenly increased to over a hundred. We've made it clear that rigging is our work. We do rigging. We've our own waiting lists. They want dockers' books. We say there are a lot of us on waiting lists already. The original forty can have jobs but not the rest. They lost support by picketing the gates. There's been a tripartite agreement between port employers, riggers' employers and the T & G against dockers. It's just an attempt to break the dockers up.

No doubt about it. And of course there's a lot of shit propaganda from the CBI that we want their jobs.

Q. How do you see the future?

A. The docks in Hull, in my opinion, are declining in a contracting industry. Mechanization means they can't get the big ships into Hull. We can't take a ship over 25,000 tons. The EEC has brought no work in - there are no French or Italian ships. Ironically, most of our trade is with the Eastern Bloc countries and the Persian Gulf.

Trade'll shift to other ports : Southampton and Felixstowe. They'll keep running us down. In ten years they'll run Hull with 800 men and more increased tonnages. You get gangs of seven men now where you once had twenty. Tonnages grow every day. The Common Market is rubbish for Hull. It's all going to the Trent.

We've done everything since 1972. We've bent over backwards. The same with Goolbs. We've had no strike since '72 and they're still running us down.

Men will still keep leaving. They're buying men out of the docks - and deliberately weakening them.

SMASHING THE GHETTO - Gay Liberation and the Left

by Noel Hibbert

In the February issue of Hullfire and more recently in Radical Drag, Steve Hodgson in a rather impressionistic and Burroughsesque article highlighted the oppression experienced by gay people in society. In doing so he rather inadvertently I think, exposed serious inadequacies on the left on this question. Very rarely on the left does any analysis of the meaning of being gay in capitalist society appear - and most gay people have to look for 'Dostoyevskian' type individualistic solutions to their predicament. But links between the revolutionary left, the labour movement and the Gay Liberation Movement can be beneficial to all three.

We are using the term gay to mean those people who want to relate sexually to members of their own sex (lesbians, homosexuals) and those who identify with the other sex, either by changing sex by surgery etc. (trans-sexuals) or by dressing in the clothes of the other sex (transvestites).

Homosexuality and trans-sexualism are almost universally defined in 'respectable' society and in the medical profession as a 'problem'. Once such a definition is accepted, then the way is open for endless pseudo-scientific studies explaining its 'origins' in terms of biology, chromosomes, early socialisation and so on. The gay person is labelled as a 'case' and investigated if possible with a view to curing him/her. Such labelling in fact represents an attempt to isolate gay people as far as possible and creates deep feelings of guilt in many. Even many so called revolutionaries accept this definition, only transferring the problems to capitalist society which 'distorts' people's sexual orientations so that some become fixated on members of their own sex. For such people, the socialist revolution will eliminate homosexuality along with prostitution.

For a revolutionary Marxist, gay people do not present a problem in themselves. The problem lies in explaining why they are treated as they are and how they can change that situation. Since we do not accept that sex was instituted by the Divine (or Society) in order that children might be produced - or that women are only in a natural state when in a subordinated relationship to men or vice-versa - there is absolutely no reason why people shouldn't relate sexually to people of the same sex if they want to any more than why they should not relate to people of the same sex. Such a position demystifies endless prejudices and learned tomes and it is one of the positive gains of the Gay Liberation Movement to have forcefully presented this analysis. Far from withering away, homosexuality will become much more common in a socialist society as the mystifications and prejudices surrounding sexual relationships are removed. Indeed this was the case in the early years of the Soviet Union when penal legislation against homosexuals was abolished. Only as the Stalinist bureaucracy tightened its hold over the whole of social life did the repression of homosexuals become once more the norm - under the cover of being 'agents of imperialism'.

If homosexuality in itself is not a problem, why then are homosexuals universally oppressed in bourgeois society? (the degree of oppression varies from time to time and country to country, of course). Why do many people, among them militant workers who are otherwise anti-capitalist, feel an unease and confusion in regard to gay people? Pakistanis, women and 'queers' are the stock in trade of working men's clubs.

No ruling group exists for long by means of naked force alone. For capitalism to continue to exist the bourgeoisie must dominate at every level in society - from the crucial realm of the state to the domain of the nuclear family. The continued existence of this class rule depends on mystifying the population as to the true central source of their oppression - the system of productive relations which extracts the wealth from those who produce and transfers it to those who own. On the one hand it is necessary to have institutions and symbols which are regarded as right and good by the oppressed so they may think the whole worthwhile. On the other it is necessary to have groups of people who are identifiable in some way as different so that people's frustrations can, if necessary, be turned against them. The family is one such important institution, gay people one such group.

Whether or not they see themselves as revolutionaries or even reformers as by no means all do, gay people who actually practise their homosexuality threaten the ideology of the family. Through the family, new generations of workers are produced. Ruling class ideas are passed on. Women are subordinated, isolated and divided from productive workers. So control of the family is very important for the ruling class and its state. By necessity gay people must make a clear divorce between sexuality and reproduction. By bourgeois laws they are forced to divide sexuality and marriage. By their very oppression their relationships tend to be fragile and transient, challenging the myth of permanence sanctified in the marriage ceremony. Gay people around the Gay Liberation Front have also consciously come to challenge and reject something of the dominance/subordination, activity/passivity, male/Female ideas about behaviour appropriate to each sex, ideas which help greatly to maintain the subordination of women in capitalist society. In all these ways the uncontested public activity of gay people is a threat.

Gay people are also useful symbols of 'moral decadence' in capitalism. All ills we feel can be attributed to permissiveness, moral laxity, Jews, blacks, gays etc. and the persecution of the minority and in some cases their actual extermination (as in Nazi Germany) can be a means of deflecting social tensions from their real source - the exploitative nature of the system itself.

The oppression of gay people is therefore both necessary and useful within the existing system. For that reason it becomes clear that there is only one way for gay people to remove their oppression. That is by linking up with all other oppressed groups, and centrally the working class - whose exploitation underlies every other - in order to overthrow the system itself. Of all homosexuals, only those around the Gay Liberation Front have begun to realise this basic fact. Other homosexuals have reacted either by retreat or attempts at reform.

Why retreat? Because they themselves often feel guilty and accept the ideological definitions propagated about them, many gay people go to the medical profession seeking to be 'cured'. At the hands of psychiatrists they will undergo many interrogations and/or physical agonies which may undermine their whole personalities. A small number, for fear of discovery, commit suicide or mutilate themselves. But most enter the 'Gay Ghetto'. The Gay Ghetto is that very restricted area of social life which at present is allowed to gay people by the police. Certain clubs, pubs and public lavatories ('cottages') are available to gay people. Even here they are not free from harassment, undertaken sporadically and indiscriminately with the purpose of keeping gay people insecure, restricted and out of the public eye.

Why reform? Some feelings of attraction to people of the same sex are to be found among those groups who in their general life-situation benefit from existing society (note Thorpe scandal). Numbers of people have hoped to gain a place for respectable homosexuals in respectable society. As with any other-interest group, at certain periods some reforms can be won from capitalism. These reforms are never secure, never give the group an equal status, never go far enough.

Why revolt? Both retreatist and the reformist response of gay people involve the general acceptance of the ideology of capitalist society. The GLF, like the women's liberation movement, stem from and contribute to the challenge to that ideology which has been developing in numerous ways among sections of youth - a challenge initiated in the sixties by the Anti-Vietnam war movement. GLF is a recent development. It only became significant in 1970, as young gay people - usually radicalised in other ways - began to challenge the basic definition of themselves presented by all responsible sources in our society. Thus they came into open conflict with them. Gay people began to 'come out' - be publicly identified as gay with slogans 'Proud to be Gay', 'I'm a homosexual Too'.

While a fairly explicit rejection of capitalism is part of the understanding of almost every GLF member the actual practice of the movement is very diffuse and subject to immense diversionary pressures. Because coming out itself represents such a big emotional step for most people, a part of the movement has given support to those doing this a priority - turning away from public activity. This position was argued for by the leading Gay militant, Don Milligan, in a recent women's liberation meeting in the university. Others have felt the prime task is to link up with reformist gay people in the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. In reality it represents a road back to the ghetto or even reformism.

Still others have become so involved with trying to create a new life-style in communes and in personal relationships that it has become an end in itself, and thus utopian. There are no solutions to problems of personal relationships in a capitalist system. Sometimes this can become a vicious new moral code as pressure is put on people to be bi-sexual or to have multiple relationships. New stereotypes and roles are created begging the questions of real liberation.

As with other oppressed groups, the distrust of authority among some members has spilled over into a refusal to organise meetings in any effective way. In some areas of Britain, gay women and transvestite/trans-sexuals have felt it necessary to organise separately from gay men.

Thus it cannot be said that Gay Liberation represents a coherent political movement anymore than the Women's Liberation movement does. But this in no way makes its existence as an autonomous movement less significant. First the left has consistently under-emphasised and neglected the analysis of revolutionary positions in relation to the family and sexual relationships. Gay Liberation Front is forcing us to make good this failing and providing some of the ideas to do it. Second, the Gay Liberation Front is exposing the reactionary nature of the psychiatric profession and the repressive legal system, sometimes in quite dramatic ways. Third, the more politicised members are moving out to challenge bourgeois ideology within sections of the working class.

But above all, if the gay movement does not continue to go forward, the reactionary tendencies symbolised by SPUC and the Festival of Light will move onto the offensive against gay people and begin to link up with the fascist, racist and anti-Irish movements into a really dangerous diversionary threat. Thus we need the Gay Liberation Front. Gay people also need the support of the revolutionary left and the wider labour movement. An introverted gay movement cannot resist serious attacks by the state. It is the job of revolutionaries and gay revolutionaries to intervene in Gay Liberation Front for a broader socialist perspective, away from introversion and gay nationalism, reformism and utopianism.

WHAT THE CRISIS IS REALLY ABOUT ...

by Bert Joseph

In our day to day lives we are able to see many empirical manifestations of the crisis. We see the long queues at the dole offices near the market place in Hull, we see the increase in the cost of living and are aware that our income, whether wages or grants, is inadequate to cope. We observe that vacancies occur on the shop floor, in the offices or in our university department, and there are no replacements. Added to our own observations we are daily beseiged by the mass media, informing us of the serious nature of the crisis, demonstrating with immaculate graphs the fact that if only the workers weren't so greedy then with a wave of the patriotic wand we could all join together in putting the 'Great' back into Great Britain.

Unfortunately too many people swallow all this 'objective' 'impartial' 'politically neutral' information of the British bourgeoisie. If the reader finds himself/herself at this point already disagreeing with the article then you obviously thought you were buying a magazine on angling and we're very sorry - but no you can't have your money back.

The modest aim of this article is to engage readers, who are radically critical of the present system, and who may or may not be politically active, in a debate on how to resolve the crisis. We are keen to discuss, whether it be in the Ploughman's Bar or the Polar Bear, whether you consider yourself as one of Hull's many 'unique individualistic' human beings, or you are a member of some political organisation, your views on the major issues of next period. Our aim will be to look for areas of agreement and hopefully areas of joint activity in fighting capitalism.

Having disposed of the formalities we move on to present our analysis of the crisis. We do not intend to deal in any depth with the specific manifestations of the crisis, in the sense that we are not going to tell you how many are out of work, how the welfare state is being attacked or how schools are not being built. We hope that you read the papers of the revolutionary left for this kind of information. Rather what we want to do is to place the crisis of British capitalism into a political context, not only in the historical sense. We also insist that as a fundamental axiom of the marxist method that the crisis in Britain be viewed not from within the green and pleasant boundaries of our own country but from an international perspective understanding British capitalism as an integrated part of the world capitalist economy. We hold that the epoch in which we live can be characterised, as the very first political thesis of the Third International stated, 'as an epoch of the disintegration and collapse of the entire capitalist world system, which will drag the whole of European civilisation down with it, if capitalism with its insoluble contradictions is not destroyed'.

It is this which is the objective basis of the view that the imperialist epoch is the epoch of proletarian revolutions. The economic basis of this epoch is created by the domination of the monopoly sectors of industrial production, the fusion of industrial and banking capital into finance capital, the division of the world into groups of great powers and a tendency to stagnation.

Now, having said that the nature of the epoch is one in which in an historical sense capitalism cannot even meet the immediate needs of the masses, we must be careful in what we are not saying. We are not saying that because the epoch is revolutionary this means that the conditions for revolution exist at any point in time nor are we saying that because at any point in time a situation is not revolutionary therefore the epoch is not revolutionary. These two parallel deviations are based on the confusion of the character of the entire epoch with the character of the objective situation at any given point in time.

Thus we believe today that, given the considerable impact of a synchronised international economic recession and the development of a pre-revolutionary crisis in Southern Europe hitting an imperialist system already weakened by its defeat in IndoChina there is created the most favourable international context for the struggle in every country in Europe, including Britain, since 1917-23. It would however be mechanical and wrong to conclude from this general trend that in every country in Europe the working class now proceeds in a straight line upward in offensive struggles.

On the contrary, the uneven development of the relationship of forces has been markedly accentuated since the beginning of the generalised economic recession in 1974 - 1975 in the different European capitalist countries. While the working classes' militancy and anti-capitalist struggles have been strengthened in several countries, they have been temporarily halted or even thrown back in various others, in the first place West Germany. We must stress that the further unfolding of the class struggle in Britain does not take place in an international vacuum. It will be strongly influenced by international developments, and in the first place what happens in the rest of capitalist Europe. Thus before looking more concretely at the crisis of British capitalism we must bear in mind the significance of possible developments in Spain, Portugal, Italy and France and the effect such developments would have not only on the politicised vanguard in Britain but also on the masses themselves. Equally the success or the failure of the British workers' struggles against the offensive unleashed by the bourgeoisie (with the assistance of the Labour Government) could greatly alter the social and political perspectives for the whole of Western Europe.

The Roots

British capitalism witnesses today the worst social crisis since its birth. We will state in a synthetic form the roots of this crisis: First, there is the long term decline of British imperialism - it has lost throughout the twentieth century its leading position and predominance on the world market, its military and financial supremacy and its empire. Britain, now a third-rate imperialist power, the peculiarities of its internal economic, political and social structure

became more and more incongruous in relation to the rapidly narrowing material basis of British imperialism.

Second, we note the peculiarities of the British economy and patterns of capital accumulation, especially the strong reliance on 'invisible exports' as a compensation for the growing inferiority of British industry compared with that of its main competitors, produced a dramatic gap in the rate of growth between British industry and that of Japan and the main Western European companies in the 50's and 60's, qualitatively modifying Britain's share of the world market and even threatening the capture of a growing share of the home market by foreign industry. Britain thereby became more vulnerable than any imperialist power except Italy to the worsening world economic situation in the late 60's and 70's. And with the inevitable parallel of sharply stepped-up imperialist competition.

Third, the British working class, being the only major sector of the world proletariat which has not suffered any grave defeat since the thirties, the basic relationship of forces between the main social classes in Britain was more favourable to Labour on a long term basis. (apart from specific limited situations like 1944-47 or 1968-69 in France and Italy) than in any other imperialist country. This imposed on the British bourgeoisie the political imperative of maintaining a high level of employment and of social services for two decades which in turn strengthened the bargaining position of the working class.

The combination of these three main forces has had, and continues to have, long term effects which for a certain time were obscured by the gradual using up of the tremendous resources accumulated by British capitalism after two centuries of impetuous growth and plundering of its own people, the Irish people and the peoples of the empire. Today these reserves have been largely used up. The decline of British capitalism begins to manifest itself clearly in a more and more dramatic way. The decline in the rate of profit of British capital, the decline of the pound as a world currency, the decline of British real wages, the decay of the 'welfare state' with its once 'model' social services, the massive reappearance of dire poverty are keen indicators of this crisis.

Society and Politics

The British crisis is dominated by two social and political aspects. On the one hand the gradual decline of British Imperialism had reached the point where the traditional economic, political and social structure of British capitalism cannot survive - it has to be thoroughly overhauled if capitalist rule is to survive in the country. On the other hand, the strength of the working class, which has been able to cling stubbornly to its acquired conquests, has been largely inhibited by the Labour bureaucracy from replacing the decaying capitalist order with a new worker power, oriented towards the Socialist United States of Europe which offers the only historically progressive way out of Britain's crisis.

Thus an historical stalemate has emerged since the late sixties, in which neither the capitalist class nor the working class have been able to apply their basic solutions to the social and economic crisis. This has led to a long drawn out political crisis, taking

more and more the form of a near paralysis government with regard to long-term strategic solutions.

The present stalemate in Britain cannot last for a further prolonged period. It threatens bourgeois society in Britain with collapse. Socialists, especially revolutionary marxists, must be conscious of the fact that a decisive test of strength is progressively approaching in Britain. We must make the British working class (and particularly its vanguard) conscious of the high stakes involved in this test of strength. The analysis we have given above reveals the depth of the crisis and before we go on to analyse the offensives of the ruling class, we feel it is absolutely vital to warn against those people who say capitalism is bound to collapse. This is mere revolutionary verbage. As we stated earlier, capitalism in its imperialist stage tends towards a stagnation of the productive forces: but note we are talking about a tendency of development and not an immediate and universal truth. Both Trotsky and Lenin warned time and time again against this kind of thinking. 'There are no absolutely hopeless situations.' 'The present unstable class equilibrium in the European countries cannot continue indefinitely precisely because of its instability.'

In coming to terms with the present situation, the immediate point to notice is that in a very short time the basic tide of the class struggle in Britain has been sharply reversed. Under the Heath government and in the beginning of the second Wilson government, the dynamic was one of a potential generalisation of mass struggles of a clearly offensive thrust - even if the starting point could be defensive (as was the case with the struggle against the Heath anti-union legislation). However, since the Spring of 1975 and the E.E.C., we have seen a series of encroaching defeats of the working class which has essentially been in a state of confusion. It appears that the class is now beginning to learn that fragmented struggles, however militant, will be less and less capable of achieving results and sustaining morale. If the ruling class are permitted to pick off at leisure any sectors of industry which were traditionally militant (like certain car plants, docks and print shops), impose a prolonged period of mass unemployment and a steady decline in real wages, then all this will lead to a further disarming and disarray of the working class. Militants are now beginning to realise that fighting isolated in the plant, in the hospital or on the campus is no use. If we are to fight back then we must see a spread of successful massive defensive struggles which could rapidly overturn the present trend and put again on the agenda the possibility of generalised struggles, even of a general strike with action committee potential.

The Role of Labour

It is no accident that the Labour government has been the organiser of the first successful offensive against the British workers' standard of living. Given the present social and political relationship of forces in Britain no other political form of a successful bourgeois offensive was possible. The dismal failure of Heath's anti-working class offensive fully confirmed that in the existing social relation of forces, any attempt to defeat the working class in open confrontation, without a previous attempt

to divide the class politically and gradually erode its tremendous strength, was doomed to failure. Given the defeat of the Tories in February and October 1974 we can see that under conditions where the needs of the bourgeoisie for a strong party of the ruling class capable of taking on a confrontation with the ruling class cannot at present be realised, there is no alternative for the bourgeoisie but to try and implement its immediate plans through a Labour government.

While constantly bullying and blackmailing this government, thereby helping the 'left' bureaucrats to justify in the eyes of the workers their 'lesser evil' policies, British capitalism hopes to have the working class divided and fragmented. As the results of the blows which the Labour government is inflicting upon it have effect, and the militancy of the vanguard sufficiently eroded, they hope to prepare the field for a further and more decisive onslaught - possibly after a crushing electoral defeat of Labour. At the moment the relatively small defeats suffered by the working class are not enough. The bosses must impose a much heavier defeat if they are to restore British capitalism. This plan is sufficiently realistic to consider completely irresponsible the cynical calculation of the Bennites who, reflecting their bureaucratic interests, refuse to break with the trade union bureaucracy and contemplate schemes such as beginning a challenge to the present leadership only after it has led the Labour party to a disastrous electoral defeat. While not reflecting bureaucratic interests but political confusion, likewise irresponsible is the attempt of those forces on the extreme left who minimise the present set-backs and their potential combined result. Thus they deny the need to prepare for a decisive test of strength in the short or medium term. They satisfy themselves with a 'business as usual' combination of fragmented and syndicalist militancy and mundane revolutionary propaganda. All these forces strongly underestimate the gravity of the situation and of the challenge it presents to the whole British working class.

In this way the combined crisis of British capitalism and the structure of bourgeois society in Britain transforms itself into a potential crisis of the traditional working class movement and of the British labour party. Any significant mass reaction of the working class against the Labour government's policies will translate itself into an explosive crisis of social democracy as an organisation at every level.

The whole future destiny of British capitalism, its possibility of pushing its anti-working class offensive through to a decisive success to push up the rate of profit and of internal capital accumulation, depends on the degree to which it will be able to use the Labour party leadership and bureaucracy to achieve the initial goals of its offensive. The whole possibility of maintaining its conquests of the last thirty years and transforming them into an 'unassailable' problem from which to launch the struggle for socialism in the short term depends for the working class, on the way in which it will be able to organise a powerful and massive defence of the bourgeoisie onslaught, in which it will reveal a new level of consciousness, a larger and better coordinated mass vanguard i.e. an ample recomposition of the organised Labour movement both inside and outside the Labour party.

From this analysis flows a clear projection of perspectives and a clear outline of political and organisational priorities for revolutionary marxists. The immediate task is to show within the working class that the fight is on here and now, that it is possible to fight the Healy measures under present circumstances without any specifically political preconditions being solved first. The message of the day is: Fight now to defend your standard of living. Fight immediately whoever you are. For these initial fights to be successful, they must be organised on the basis of the broadest possible unity of action of all forces actually involved and around the immediate defensive issues concretely raised.

In this article we have concentrated in some depth on the crisis of British capitalism. We believe that this is justified because it is only by us all understanding the nature and the problems of the crisis that we can develop and test out in practice a working class solution. In later issues of Red Herring we will try to spell out our ideas in terms of how to organise those forces willing to fight on an anti-capitalist dynamic, in what we hope will be a serious contribution to a growing debate within the Left on how we can launch a united fight against the capitalist policies of this Labour government.

WHO ARE WE?

The International Marxist Group is a small organization of the revolutionary left. It is the British section of the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. It struggles for an international socialist revolution as the only way to defeat capitalism and its imperialist network. In Britain the IMG is active around issues like Ireland, Spain, Portugal and solidarity with African liberation movements. The IMG also campaigns to defeat cuts in education and welfare services, to advance the liberation of women and for workers' control of industry among other issues.

In the past year the Hull branch of the IMG has been active both in the town and university. We are active in the Humberside Health Service Action Committee, formed to protect the health service in Hull from government cutbacks. In the Working Women's Charter campaign we argue for better conditions for women workers in fighting their double exploitation. In the National Abortion Campaign we fight for the basic right for a woman to control her own body.

In the university we are active in campaigns for better nursery facilities and for a sliding scale of grants. We believe it is vital for students to take an active interest in international issues and in support of labour movement activities in Hull.

We produce two regular publications in addition to books and pamphlets. One is our weekly paper RED WEEKLY, giving a detailed analysis of the struggle for socialism in Britain. And there is the fortnightly journal INPRECOR, an informational and factual review of world events and the rôle of the Fourth International.

If you'd like more information on our activities or publications contact us at 105 Princes Avenue, Hull or telephone 843917.