

THE MARKET OF MARRIAGE

Of Marriage and the Market, ed Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz & Roslyn McCullagh. CSE books. £4.95. and

The Hidden Face of Eve by Nawal El Saadawi. Zed Press. £3.95.

Of Marriage and the Market is a collection of papers by women 'scholars' (their word) — sociologists, economists and a good few anthropologists. Some continuity derives from their shared discussions at a workshop series and conference on the subordination of women. The main theme is that the subordination of women will not be ended by our moving into work outside the home because our position in the labour force is a function of the ideology which controls our domestic life. Each article explores the reasons for this investigating, for instance, the function of the 'household', and a number of general points emerge:

That the sort of work women get and the status and pay given to that work is not the same as for men because it is defined by the same ideology which operates at home;

That income and resources are not shared equally among women and men in a household, even if the woman is in waged work;

That women's share in these resources and therefore their independence, tends to decrease as a household moves from subsistence production of goods for itself into production or work for cash;

That new forms of sexual division of labour are created as women begin to work outside the home which can reinforce or exaggerate traditional patterns;

That there are similarities in their function for capitalism between the household in developed countries and subsistence producers in developing countries and that both forms of production and reproduction are essential if capitalism is to continue;

That women's inferiority in both work and domestic situations is a symptom, not a cause of their subordination and the 'domestic sphere' is the site where gender subordination is produced and 're-enacted';

That domestic relations need to be explored as part of extending our materialist analysis beyond the purely economic.

TOO ACADEMIC

All interesting stuff, important ideas that need to be brought together clearly, out of university libraries and into the hands of

women engaged in more practical struggles where it is difficult to see the wood for the trees. Here the ideas are too wrapped up in an academic language and style to make that likely. If you read a journal article you can expect to have to put up with constant reference to other articles: in a book I want to have the points at least summarised so that I can get some sense of the argument without beating off to find 15 other journals. I found the language of the early articles in particular quite unnecessarily academic — apart from the clear use of the term 'subordination' itself — and too generalised, lacking the concrete examples that could make the topics live. (Maybe they're hidden in those journal articles.) I was particularly disappointed by the fact that the international perspective is so reliant on anthropological case studies rather than on more direct experience. One of the articles, indeed, constantly refers to developing countries as 'peripheral' which may be good marxist economics but is not good international feminism.

SUBORDINATION UNIVERSAL

All of this got better towards the end of the book, where articles used more case studies to explore the themes. Here the ideas emerged more clearly and vividly. Especially chilling is the evidence that women's subordination is actually intensified by the development process and that the problem is not that women are ignored by development but that they are only too well integrated. Examples from Ghana, Morocco, UK, modern industries in Asia, show the wide range of arrangements under which the subordination functions — where women are confined to the home or urged out to earn a wage, where men and women buy and sell from each other within the household or where women are completely excluded from the cash economy.



That huge economic changes can take place without any fundamental change in the balance of power between men and women is illustrated time and again (but to get the point I'd rather go and see *Rosie the Riveter*).

I think the best example of a case study being used to illuminate a general problem is the survey of attitudes to fertility control amongst Yugoslav migrants. Mirjana Morokvasic uses lots of quotations from the women to show the reasons for their dislike of contraception and their preference for abortion. This chapter too is unusual in that it ends with constructive suggestions — for improved and simpler abortion techniques — while making it clear that new technology won't by itself overcome women's subordination: what is important is how women reassess their role and decide to use that technology.

But it was heavy going to get to these good bits. What a contrast with another book which really does put 'women's subordination in international perspective' in an immediate and powerful way. Nawal El Saadawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve* is a book about women in the Arab World. But her writing, based on her own experience in Egypt, on that of her women patients, and on her reading of Arabic religious writing and literature, says an awful lot to me about women in the Western world too.

NAKED VEIL

The book is written in fairly self-contained chapters and is good for choosing bits from. Throughout the book but particularly in the preface she makes sure that we don't lapse into patronising sympathy for the condition of our Arab sisters.

For instance, her very moving account of the effect clitorrectomy has on women is balanced by her pointing out that the mutilation of women's minds by western ideology which shackles women's sexuality is just as devastating and is certainly more difficult to fight. Women in the West can more easily believe themselves to be free. She speaks of 'the female who covers her mind with a thick, almost impenetrable veil, even though her thighs and shoulders are naked'.

An important theme of the book is, like that of *Of Marriage and the Market*, that getting a job is not going to liberate an Arab woman. But Nawal El Saadawi is really convincing: without suggesting that the experience of

Arab women is extreme or unique, she vividly describes the ways in which women are contained in every direction — physical, religious, psychological, education, legal, the ideologies of beauty, virginity, love. She gives me a real stimulus to look again at the ideas and institutions of the western christian/capitalist tradition I was brought up in and take for granted. In comparison with another society, I now see their effect more clearly.

SEXUAL REPRESSION

The book challenges the easy idea that Islam is itself responsible as she points out that at the level of ideas the Jewish and Christian religions are at least as oppressive to women. What matters is the context in which these operate. Arab rulers have been only too eager to modify Islamic teaching in the social and economic spheres: it's not an accident that by and large they interpret teaching on women and the family in the way that suits them best. And, what's more, extreme reactionary Islam is not accidental but is related to western imperialist interventions in the Middle East, often actively encouraged as a bulwark against socialism.



Throughout, Nawal El Saadawi is careful to show that the subordination of women is going on not only in a patriarchal but also a class society. Capitalism is heightening the contradictions for women as the import of films, make-up, advertising, increase concern with physical attractiveness, while the repression of sexuality is stepped up. A move to chosen marriages means only that the men get to choose while the women become objects of consumption.

For me, the book is a challenge to a lot of attitudes, though I'm sure that it speaks primarily to Arabic women. Nawal El Saadawi carries through the book a distinctive attitude to God, love, Islam which comes from a sensitive identification with Arabic culture. And she writes in a way that gives me much more sense of the relevance of studies of women in classical, pharonic or hebrew society than I've ever had before. Her writing gives a whole new boost to my confidence that the struggles of feminists have to be and can be international.

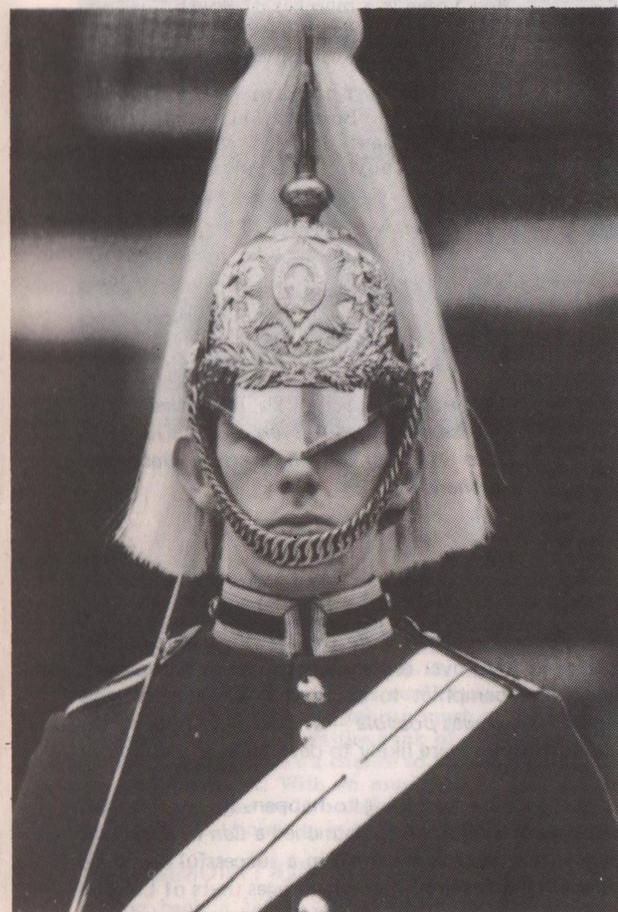
Annie Nelligan

Revolutionary Socialism

Big Flame Magazine No.9 Spring 1982 50p

THE MENS MOVEMENT
in Britain and the U.S.A.

GAY LIBERATION
and personal politics.



POLAND
resistance since the coup.

INSIDE THE G.L.C.
Val Wise interview.

WORKERS CO-OPS

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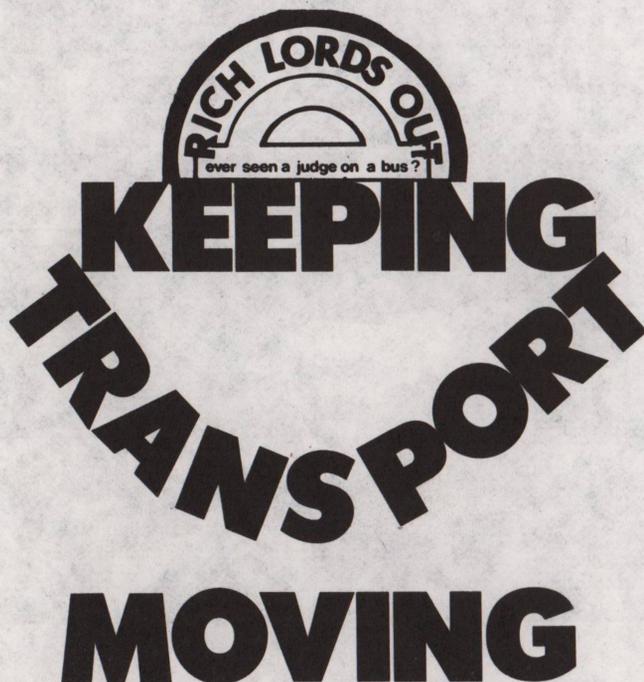
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In 1973, Big Flame published *Take Over the City*, a pamphlet about struggles in Italy over rents, rising prices and transport. We published the pamphlet to show that a wider struggle around popular needs was possible — we did not think at the time that such struggles were likely to develop in this country.

Now, strange things are beginning to happen. In London, left Labour members of the GLC have launched a *Can't Pay, Won't Pay* campaign (the name is taken from a successful Dario Fo play about the Italian events) that encourages users of London transport to refuse to pay the March fare increases (of over 100%) and instead to pay the new minimum (or old) fare. Hasty parallels between England today and Italy 1969-73 would be misleading. After all, the struggle for cheap transport here is geographically isolated (London and South Yorkshire) and is politically isolated — it is not part of a general working class offensive as it was in Italy. And as George Stephenson points out in his article, the crucial involvement of London Transport (LT) workers remains to be achieved. Even so, we are now in a position (at least in London and Sheffield) where an alliance between transport workers and users is on the agenda. As Stephenson points out, it is when redundancies are threatened that a mass movement of LT workers will become a possibility — and redundancies will not be long in coming. In the meantime, it is essential for user campaigns like Fare Fight to maintain a presence and to build links with rank and file LT workers. In his article, George Stephenson, a militant on the tube, gives his view as to how best this unity can be achieved.



'Ken Livingstone and the Labour controlled GLC were democratically elected on a manifesto to reduce fares. Yet it is deemed illegal, wasteful, irresponsible and unfair to the ordinary working man and woman. Freddie Laker, using working class people's money, appoints himself to reduce fares. He loses £270 million and consigns 2,000 workers (ununionised and underpaid) to the scrapheap. He's a hero.

The moral: as Solidarity in Poland have always requested (with the full support of Thatcher, Reagan and all) democratic workers control and management of industry cannot come soon enough.'

DEFENSIVE CAMPAIGN

Funnily enough, Fare Fight, which has tried to build a user/transport worker alliance, has played the part of the sort of mass campaign that should have launched a transport struggle in the first place. This is one of its weaknesses — as shown in the defensive slogan 'defend cheap fares'. It means that most workplace activists are faced with building a defensive struggle. I reckon its got a lot to do with the one-sidedness of the politics of reforms, in other words, the way reforming measures from the top down nearly always end up by pushing revolutionary activists into corners they can't get out of. In the end reformist practises get reflected in the way we organise around working class gains. If a mass transport campaign had set off the struggle, we might even be talking about real changes in how transport is run, to the benefit of both passengers and workers.

Fares do provide a thread linking users and workers at this time with some close contacts developing between local L.T. activists and Fare Fight supporters — on the buses in Hackney and South London for instance. How has this been done? Largely by rank and file busworkers making it their business to work in their own garages and in Fare Fight. In turn, fare fighters have visited workplaces and organised mass leafletting of tube stations and bus routes. It's meant putting over a case for mutual support as against a purely 'industrial' approach to the issues. People told me they had contradictory reports and views from L.T. staff about, say the call for 1 day strike action on March 10th. That's bound to happen. As I see it, it's better to have contradictory ideas coming from direct contact with rank and file workers than the uniform view put over by union officials. This reflects the politics of the workplace which, in the course of struggle is always shifting. On my line the unions' decision to call a one day strike has sparked off bitter arguments about the value of a token protest stoppage. At the same time, L.T. has brought in new roster (duty sheet) for traincrews which are in line with cuts in service (fewer trains — 64 less trains on the whole Underground during peak hours). Management insist that the rosters fall within existing agreements (8 hour day etc) so there's no way traincrews can refuse to work them. This is an opportunity for rank and file socialists to turn the tables — by arguing that the rosters should not be worked even if they do accord with agreements. In other words, challenge management's right to manage!



Credit : Roger Anderson.

So writes a guard at my depot on the Underground for our rank and file magazine. I think it's front page stuff! The GLC's Fares Fair policy has been dubbed the short cheap ticket but its still kicked up plenty of dust. A whole series of struggles and campaigns have sprung up both on L. T. and outside it in the wake of the Law Lords verdict on fares. Before all this started, I could have written up most of the politics of public transport in London on the back of a betting slip. Now it's all happening and there's a chance to build a mass popular struggle around transport. With so much dust flying around though, there's a danger we'll be blinded to some of the big political questions that come up in the course of these struggles.

NO AMMUNITION

Going back a bit to 1981. Many London Transport (L.T.) workers breathed a sigh of relief when Horace Cutler's Tory GLC empire was blown away. At the time, great play was made of Labour's fares policy and there's no doubt it got them a lot of votes. L.T. Building Department workers had just won a major victory over management's use of subbies and contractors and secured a no-redundancy pledge from Ken Livingstone. There were promises of substantial improvements in wages and conditions (including the 35 hour week), even talk of 'workers control'. There was a little tiff early on between Livingstone and the NUR's Sid Weighell over wages but it all blew over, as they say, boys will be boys. Then the government penalised the GLC to the tune of £93 million for over-spending. The GLC stuck to its guns and made the 36% fares cut. The trouble was the GLC had no ammunition in stock. This was made clear when the Law Lords decision came through. The GLC's transport policy was wrecked, all L.T. workers got was an increased workload and a backhanded guarantee that more passengers equalled job security. If the Law Lords gave the verdict, L.T. moved fast to come up with the sentence — huge cuts in services, 150% fare increases in two stages, threatened redundancies — a death sentence! No accident this, L.T. has been at it for about 4 years, trying to force economies on the workforce, increase productivity with speed ups and deskilling.



Users on the street - is there a way out for them?
Credit : Roger Anderson

POLITICS OF WORK

In the past, many bus and tube activists have despaired of the apathy and 'lack of consciousness' amongst the mass of L.T. workers. In my view, they've always underestimated the politics of work — the political currents that exist in any depot or garage. The fares struggle has set off a huge debate touching on how much transport workers are to decide the future of London Transport based on their ability to control the day to day running of the job. If this doesn't stick out a mile it's because independent rank and file organisation on L.T. is very weak. To my knowledge, there's been no strong rank and file voice on L.T. for at least 30 years.

The resentment against the GLC stems mainly from the fact that the mass of L.T. workers has never been consulted, nor has the Labour Party set out any sort of programme for improvements in wages, hours, shiftwork, conditions or new demands around 'social' issues like workplace creches or the banning of sexist advertising. I'm not putting any bets down about how these things can be achieved but we can learn alot about how rank and file socialists could be organising!

Fare Fight has also made clear some of the limits and problems of organising in the public sector. The 'hours' of a mass campaign, the priority we give to some tactics over others — such as the GLC's 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' campaign. Some time or other we'll have to assess where the politics of Fare Fight is going and ask how useful some of the usual stunts are — endless meetings, demonstrations or pickets. The Day of Action on March 1st was not a brilliant success even though some actions — like mass Fare Fight travel on the Circle Line, were a nice idea. In Dagenham, Fare Fight supporters have delivered leaflets to homes on a massive scale — as in most working class districts the leaflets have gone down well, but haven't triggered off a lot of new activity. Not surprising really when you think how people are being asked to defend a service they've never been consulted about before. You're asking users to bail out the system when things get rough — a bit cheeky really!

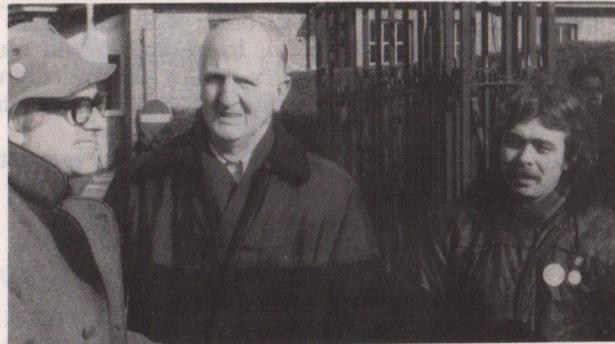


Credit : Roger Anderson.

Is he wondering if he can afford the fares in future?

SERVICES FOR WHOM?

So where do working class needs fit into all this? In the past, most 'radical' transport planning has been promoted by none other than your transport bureaucrats. Working class people need information but not of the kind that amounts to the administration of their lives. The question of subsidies comes to mind as a lot of stress has been put on them — how low they are in London compared to other cities. Endless calls for subsidies is all well and good but I get the feeling that many Fare Fight people think once you've got a fat subsidy everything will be alright. Subsidy or no subsidy, public transport will still be geared to the needs of capital — just think of the way bus services are routed to carry people to and from work. High subsidies don't equal socialised transport.



Credit : Roger Anderson.

Uncertain smiles and worried frowns on the picket line.

LIAISON DEVELOPS

How's the resistance on the transport? Not all of a piece, but it's been a treat to see so many bus drivers and conductors wearing Fare Fight badges and stickers. The fares struggle has given a new focus for the passengers usual moans about ropey services, but, for the time being has brought across some of the politics behind transport services instead of putting the blame on the people who are closest to home — the bus crews. Fare Fight has also thrown up new demands centred on a woman's right to travel in safety — 'Not Fair Game' as the poster proclaims. Moves towards some liaison between bus and underground sections across union lines have also got a boost despite the often chronic sectionalism. On the District Line, a group of socialist militants has been meeting for some 16 months around a rank and file magazine 'Close Encounters on the District Line'. This magazine follows in the footsteps of previous bulletins like 'Earthworm' and 'Picc Up On the East'. It's a sign of the times that we were able to call an unofficial meeting recently which attracted over 50 militants (men and women) from tubes and buses. So there is some scope for a modest co-ordination of socialists on the L.T. combine.

FLAT FARE SYSTEM

The scale of threatened cuts in services makes it obvious that L.T. staff will have to defend jobs and conditions — that includes white collar staff, many of whom are women. April to October will be the key period on which management will be carefully implementing its strategy but it will also be offering only 4% pay allied with some sort of flexi-rostering. Fare Fight has got to keep going if it takes seriously any claim to be fighting alongside transport workers. It may be that things will really take off only after the fare increase and service cuts happen. If that's so, then we have to look at how self-reduction of fares can be carried on — whether the growing popularity of the calls for passengers to pay the old fares (minimum fares) will work. What's more, if this does work, then we're near to the demand for a full flat fare system! For anything like this to have any success, L.T. workers must also be able to take the lead in canvassing passengers — it may be that regular selective wild-cat strikes or days of action will do the trick in allowing L.T. staff to organise themselves for this sort of job. Doesn't this mean taking over and running the services ourselves with the co-operation of users? This may not be as daft as it sounds when you think how much talk there's been lately about handing the control of L.T. over to a new, so-called independent body. If that ever happened we'd be on the road to privatisation, it could easily start by this new body putting out tenders to private bus operators in the London area.

USER-WORKER UNITY

When the dust settles what will be left of a struggle that takes up the urgent needs of today and tries to organise for a popular alternative? Is the fares fight a step towards a more political outlook on 'socialism on the transport'? Big Flame has always fought for the unity of users and workers in the public sector. It's perhaps now that we must ask whether the slogan is standing up to the test. From my point of view working on L.T., socialism on the transport will only ever be on the cards when an independent socialist rank and file power is built in the depots, garages, stations and offices. Popular struggle for the social needs linked with public transport, such as Fare Fight, must happen too. To do both you've got to have a good track record — on your marks!

George Stephenson

BANNERS & BABIES IN COUNTY HALL

interview with Val Wise

In January of this year Valerie Wise convened a meeting at County Hall to discuss the possibilities and priorities for a feminist input into GLC policies. It was attended by about 30 women, mainly in an individual capacity, but with a wide range of experience.

The discussions were tentative but one proposal that was put forward was for a women's committee within the GLC. It was felt that such a committee would enable a feminist input into a whole range of other committees such as industry and employment, training etc. It would however be quite a battle to set up such a committee, with opposition coming from within the GLC. It was felt therefore, that there was an immediate need to build up the case for such a committee, with some outside pressure. Some of the suggestions for this were to hold a conference on women and GLC policy, to produce a pamphlet on women in London and to take a full page written by and for women in the March issue of 'The Londoner'.

There were also however some immediate areas of possible intervention outlined, such as contract compliance systems (where the GLC has contracts with outside firms) and planning agreements (where the GLC gives some form of financial aid to firms or organisations). There were also suggestions that the GLC should be able to monitor the performance of firms on such issues as equal opportunity, provision of childcare, positive discrimination for women and more imaginative organisation of work to give women more opportunity to participate.

We went to talk to Valerie Wise to expand on some of the suggestions being discussed, and caught her in the middle of a debate in the council chamber on transport policy.

The interview highlights many of the problems of the move to the left at County Hall, not least of which is how to translate election ideals to tangible reality. There is great enthusiasm on the part of Valerie Wise, but the need to win the co-operation of workers has not been thought through, nor has there been sufficient co-ordination between the Can't Pay, Won't Pay and the Fares Fight campaigns.

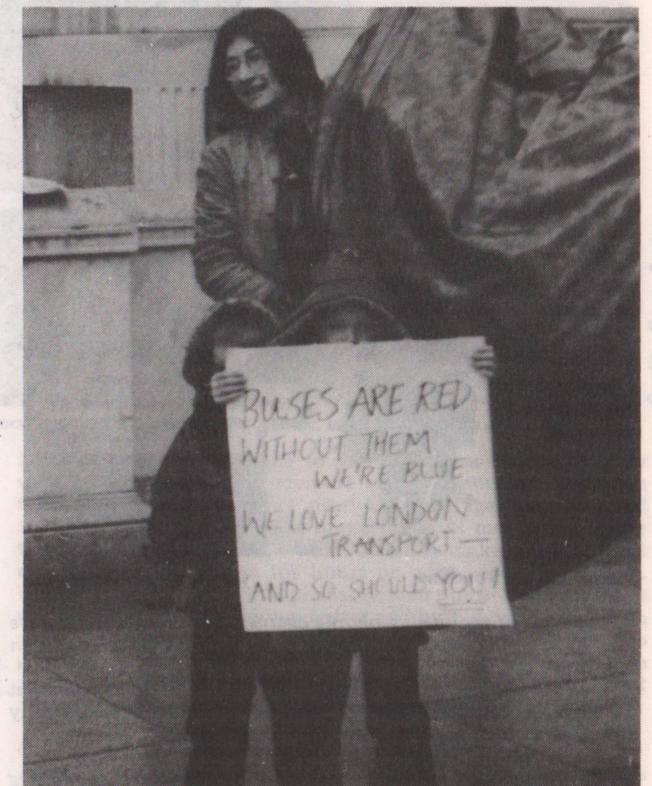
Some aspects of feminist criticism have been taken to heart, such as the need to take seriously the domestic details of childcare within the organisation. But other aspects of the critique are ignored or bypassed in the excitement of ambitious schemes. For instance, the safe transport scheme is seen almost as a side issue, although it clearly represents an alternative to municipal schemes, which although small has been developed out of women's needs.

There has also been a lack of thought in how to involve people in a democratic way, even within the structures of the Labour Party, despite the fact that a mobilisation of the grass roots would be County Hall's trump card in their fight for subsidised transport.

There is also not a serious questioning of changes in funding of local services. It seems not to be recognised that providing services and better opportunities for women costs real money — it's not just a question of shuffling around resources. Since this will inevitably lead to further confrontations with central government, the need to mobilise mass support from women at all levels should be a priority.

Q. We'd like to talk about the effects of the transport policy. Can you say how you think women will be affected by a defeat on the transport policy?

A. How it's going to effect women is that most families who do have a car only have one car and it's almost always the man in the family who uses it, especially during the day-time. So that means, the woman in the family is going to be left with having to resort to public transport. This is fine at the moment, but when the service deteriorates and the cost goes up, it means it's going to be very difficult for women taking their kids to school and collecting them, and also doing the shopping and just visiting friends. So I think women will be worse affected by this decision than men in that men in the end will just be able to use their motor-cars.



Children use buses too.

Credit : Roger Anderson

Q. In fact it's quite hard to use the public transport if you've got a child. It's difficult getting onto tubes and there's not much room on the buses.

A. That's one of the things we would have been looking at if we'd been able to maintain our transport policy, but I don't honestly think there's going to be much chance... Well, for a start it would come into the design of new buses and I think we're going to be buying very few new buses in the future. And the same would no doubt be true with tubes and tube stations. Alterations to tube stations are something that's put down to capital expenditure which is tightly controlled by central government. I wouldn't be too hopeful on that.

Q. Are you in the GLC trying to develop in any way more positive discrimination within transport to meet the particular needs of women? An example of this — and I'm not sure if I've got this right — I read that there's a pilot mini-bus scheme which is going to be started to provide a door-to-door service to women. Will you be developing schemes like that or will they be affected by the problems of capital expenditure?

A. The scheme you're talking about is Safe Women's Transport who have come to the GLC for a grant. The scheme they came with has not yet been fully worked out but there's no doubt that legally we can give them money for this particular project. However, I think it's going to be a tiny pin-prick in the problem because it's only going to operate in one area of London and it may well be too expensive for women to use. I don't know how much they're going to be charging but many people couldn't afford to get a taxi, so I'm not sure that it's going to provide a real solution to the problem. But it will be looked at sympathetically, yes. We are also considering bringing back or rather having for the first time women-only carriages on the tubes. There has been some feeling that this would aid the safety of women travelling late at night on the tube, but it's very difficult to assess . . . I have not got masses of ideas of what we could be doing specifically for women in transport apart from generally having a good transport system and a cheap transport system. If your readers have ideas they should get in touch with us.



Women on the front-line

Credit : Big Flame photo.

Q. In terms of mobilising people against the Lords' ruling, have you been doing something specifically around getting women involved?

A. Yes, what I said at the Socialist Society conference was that we have leaflets, posters and press advertisements specifically aimed at women and I'm pushing that as hard as I can here.

Q. You have also talked about some of the ways of making waged work more accessible to women. One of the things you refer to is grant allocation. I wonder what actual powers do you have to implement policies like positive discrimination, flexi-time and creches. Is it just a question of refusing grants to people who don't have these policies?

A. On industry and employment there's going to be several ways that we can help. We can either be giving money to women's employment projects, which we've already been doing, like we've given money to the Haringey Women's Employment Project to help women's employment and I'm sure we'll be supporting other similar projects in London or we can give specific help to feminist enterprises like Sheba. If an application comes from some project or enterprise that wants a loan or a grant from the GLC, I would like it that we

have some guide-lines about that enterprise on the number of women that that enterprise is employing, the question of part-time working, job-sharing and the question of providing adequate child-care facilities. That hasn't happened yet and that's one reason why I'm meeting with women from various parts of London and with expertise in different things so that together we can actually work out concrete proposals which I can then pursue on the industrial and employment committee. As long as I can get the support of the Labour group and the members vote according to what the Labour members have decided, then there won't be any problem.

Q. What do you see as the main limits or the main difficulties now in developing that sort of programme. Do you see them as administrative or political difficulties within the GLC, or limitations which come from the limited powers the GLC has to intervene within industry at a London level.

A. We can intervene when we're giving a grant or a loan, because we can impose conditions on giving or not giving a loan. So it depends . . . as I say, this is very early days, it depends in the end on what the industrial and employment committee decides. The committee has not yet decided this because I have not yet got concrete proposals about how this sort of thing would work. I don't want to have some vague discussion on the industry and employment committee about positive discrimination. I'd rather go with concrete proposals and hammer it out. Obviously the GLC is not going to solve the problem that women are discriminated against, the same as we're not going to give every unemployed person in London a job. All we can do is show a way it can be done. If I can start getting the industry and employment committee looking at the way women are discriminated against in employment and then we start to actually do something, that will be very important for a future Labour government.

Q. Can I ask you a factual question in relation to that. You said that your power in a sense is whether you actually allocate a grant or a loan. How many firms that come to London have to apply for grants to the GLC? Is it a high proportion or would the majority just get their money from somewhere else?

A. I don't know, but the other way we could intervene which again we're looking at is the fact that the GLC has a very big supplies department. It buys from about 10,000 firms all over the country, products for the GLC, for the ILEA and for most if not all of the London boroughs. We act as a sort of buying department and again we're looking at our clauses in the agreements we have and we are thinking of putting in some clauses that would specifically help women's employment. Possibly we could threaten that we would stop doing business with a particular firm unless they provided creche facilities etc. That's the sort of thing which would affect private industry in London. But we know most firms that come to London or are in London are not coming to the GLC for money. We provide a very small amount. The argument is that it isn't really the amount that's important, it's how we're allocating that money — the strategy that we're setting rather than the actual amounts.

Q. When you say you would not buy from supplies that did not have equal pay or whatever, there's the possibility that might rebound on the workers themselves. How would you deal with finding out what the workers want in the first place.

A. We're looking into the sort of clauses we could have and it's possible that these clauses may end up as guide-lines which would give us the option of not dealing with a firm. To find out if firms are doing what they're supposed to be doing we're going to be relying very much on the trade unions. Already I have supplied several trade unions in London with a list of the firms we deal with in their particular sector and also with the volume of business we do with them, so they can be looking from a trade union point of view at how good that firm is. Obviously we want to work in co-operation with the unions, but I suppose if it came to it, if there were some small firm we were dealing with who treated their workers very badly, but the workers wanted to carry on with them, then I don't think you can go on having slave labour even if the workers are saying that's what they want. Some workers are so down-trodden that they might be absolutely desperate. Maybe we would be having to provide alternative work for them, if that was the situation.

Q. Do you see the results coming out of the formation of a women's committee in the GLC as a consciousness-raising exercise which will create awareness of areas of discrimination.

A. What I personally would like is to see the GLC have a

proper women's committee like we've got an ethnic minorities committee. The ethnic minorities committee is given all major papers to look at from the point of view of racial discrimination and the race relations officer gets to put in a paragraph giving his views on the paper and suggesting changes. I want that to happen for women so that in fact we do intervene in every aspect of the GLC's life. That's one thing. Another thing would be as a campaigning committee. It's important that the GLC uses its resources to let people know what discrimination is taking place in London whether it's in a GLC field or whether it's in something like health.

Q. Are you the only feminist in the GLC? Is that part of the reason of having to have people from the outside to give you support.

A. No, I'm not the only feminist on the GLC — I think there's four of us, but we're all extremely overworked and also I don't believe that it's just a matter of sending people to the GLC or sending people to parliament and expecting them to know about everything and get on with everything on their own; it's very much a question of being part of a team. I happen to be a woman who has been elected to this building but that shouldn't stop me from working with people outside this place so that we can use the GLC to the best benefit for women. But I just think that we need a focus in this place and the women's committee could provide such a focus. Also women from outside would know where to come for advice or assistance.



Londoners voted for lower fares, but who voted for Lord Denning? Democracy means implementing decisions, as well as holding office.

Q. One of the problems I would imagine of working within the GLC is the problem of contact with the Labour party base and the maintaining of active relationships with the Greater London Labour Party. Now in the case of the women's committee of the GLC how do you see this working out?

A. Well, we all are elected from constituencies and I certainly have no problem in keeping my constituency members acquainted with what I am doing and asking for their advice. Now, the women's committee, if it ever gets off the ground, obviously would want a relationship with the local Labour parties but again I don't see any problem because most Labour parties now have active women's sections. The London Labour party does have a women's committee and again I'm sure we'd need a close relationship with them. As far as the South-East Regional TUC is concerned I regularly attend their Equal Opportunities Committee as an observer so I think it would be quite easy to have good links and we probably would co-opt some individuals onto the committee.

Q. Would you be in favour of developing a formal structure to relate out to local Labour parties.

A. That would be impossible. We haven't got formal structures relating to anybody outside this building.

Q. Would you just be co-opting onto the women's committee women from the Labour party or would you also co-opt other women, and if so, how would you decide?

A. I thought the first thing was to get the committee into

existence. We certainly wouldn't be looking at women to see whether they had membership of the Labour party or not. We'd be looking at women, at particular individuals as to what contribution they could make to the work of the women's committee. If they were members of the Labour party that would be an added bonus.

Q. What do you see as the main differences of promoting a feminist practice, both working in the GLC which is a bureaucratic organisation of local government and also working within the Labour party from a feminist position.

A. I think that the greatest difficulty is the lack of numbers, the lack of good women here, and the women's committee is not going to alter that much. However, if the women's committee can show that bodies like the GLC can be concerned and also campaign on women's issues, it will possibly encourage women to stand for the GLC in the future. Operating within the Labour Party is a lot easier now. For instance many women who were active in the women's liberation movement in the early 70's have now decided to join the Labour Party, so there's a lot of fairly young feminist women who are active in the Labour Party which is why many, many women's sections are extremely good and women's sections are seen as a positive thing and a way of ensuring that discussions that we want take place not only amongst ourselves but then within the wider Labour Party. I don't personally find it a problem, I suppose I've just got used to always going to meetings with men. In

CO-OPS

The Caring Sharing Cop-out?

At a time of crisis characterised by a major shake-out of labour, high levels of unemployment and cuts in the Welfare State, bourgeois interest in promoting solutions that might alleviate some of these unpleasant symptoms without cost to the state or challenge to capital is to be expected. The media coverage of worker co-operatives in recent months is a fairly good indicator of such interest.

More surprising is the rapidity with which co-operatives have found support also from elements of the labour movement, independent socialists, and community activists. This is surprising because historically the co-operative movement in Britain has never found much support from the various socialist currents in British politics. Clearly, this interest from the Left for co-operatives is very different from that of the bourgeoisie.

My concern is that under the present conditions of crisis such ideological differences will have little effect on the function that the growth of co-operatives may serve in practice in the restructuring of the economy in the interests of capital.

It would be misleading to suggest that this interest in co-operatives is in any way a major political force but it is significant given the apparent lack of any coherent socialist alternatives to the present Tory policies or any mass opposition to them. Within such a vacuum co-operatives become an attractive option because they seem to provide 'a way forward' which gives some rewards in the short term in terms of employment. The danger is that this way forward can easily become co-opted by Tory strategies to undermine working class resistance to the restructuring of industry and cuts in public expenditure. My intention in this article is to critically assess the utility of the development of co-operatives as a tactic during the present period of crisis by socialists who are trying to integrate co-operatives into a strategy for socialism.

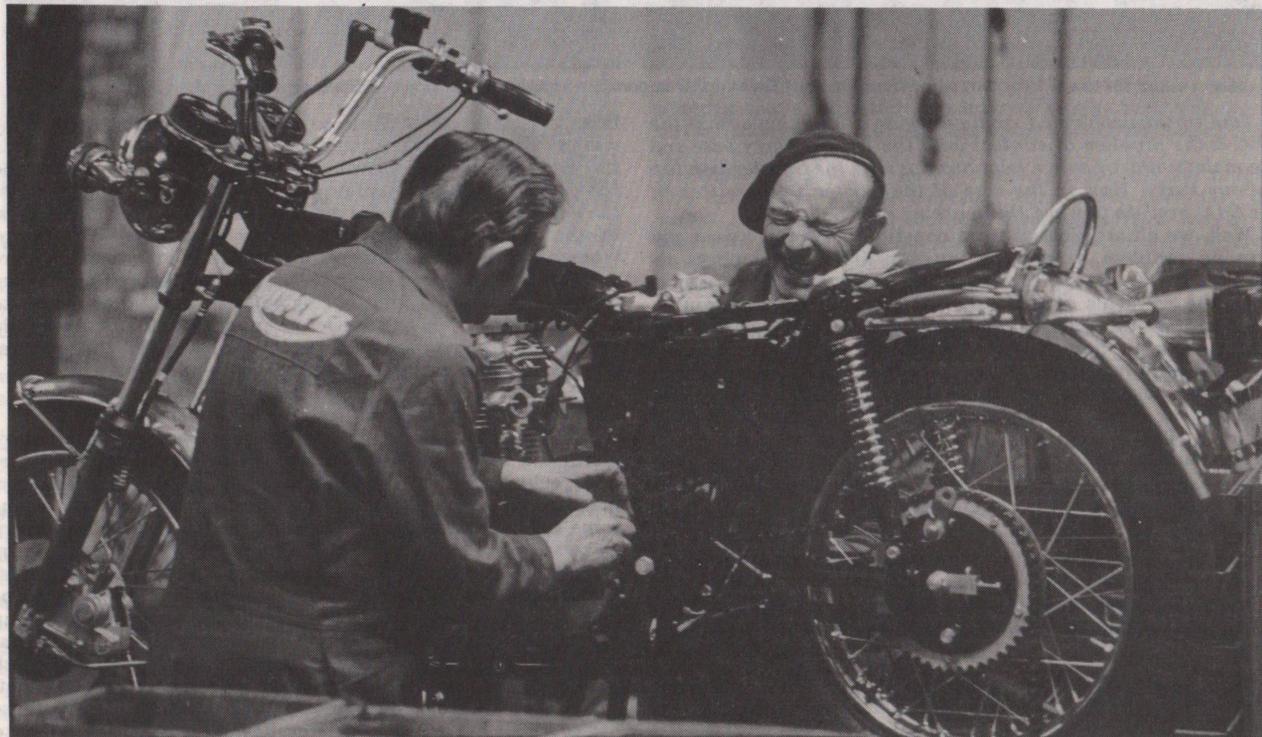
To understand the revival of co-operatives in the last decade it is worth looking at the development of the first wave of co-ops because there are some very noticeable similarities which gives us cause to question the potential of the 'new wave' of co-operatives.

THE OLD, OLD WAVE

Although co-operative initiatives occurred as far back as the 18th Century, they did not take on an identifiable form until the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers set up a co-operative store in 1844 and laid down the basic Principles of Co-operation. The central Principles were that the co-operative would be owned and democratically controlled by its members on the basis of one person one vote and that there would be a limited interest in the capital employed in its operations.

The aim of the Pioneers was not to promote consumer co-operation (which ironically is the way things turned out) but to generate enough funds through the store to be able to start producer co-operatives and thence 'co-operative communities'.

Producer co-operatives were set up and spread through the North of England but they never really established themselves. They were usually based in craft industries employing skilled workers and were never popular with the unskilled workers who identified their interests more with the emergent Trade



Production at the Meriden Co-op. To keep in business, fewer workers had to work harder

Credit: Network.

Union movement. The leaders of the co-operative movement also tended to be philanthropic members of the middle class whose idealistic commitment was not combined with a commercial pragmatism. These producer co-operatives suffered from the central problem of being undercapitalised and were wrought by internal disagreements stemming from the desire to maintain democratic principles in the face of keen market competition.

IMPORTANT DIVISIONS

There were other factors that contributed to the weakness of producer co-operation in this country. Serious divisions developed between the consumer and producer co-operatives which resulted in the consumer co-operatives establishing non-cooperative factories to produce the food they wanted to sell, sometimes in direct competition with existing producer co-operatives.

The Fabians later drew on these differences, with Beatrice Webb being particularly critical of producer co-operation, arguing that it was divisive, since it pitted groups of workers against each other, and that it had a built-in tendency to degenerate:

*'All such associations of producers that start as alternatives to the capitalist system either fail or cease to be democracies.'*¹

It was this perspective on co-operatives that came to predominate in the labour movement. With the formation of the Labour Party which was oriented towards furthering the interests of the working class through state intervention and the institutionalisation of the trade unions, producer co-operatives became isolated from the mainstream of the labour movement.

From that moment, around 1900, worker co-operatives were never anymore seriously supported by the labour movement. They declined in number from an all time high of 400 or so, to the half-dozen of these 'old' co-operatives, such as Equity Shoes of Leicester, which survive today.

This lack of clarity within the labour movement about the relationship of co-operation to its main economic and political activity, and the marginal position of producer co-operatives in the economy, are both characteristics of the old wave of co-operatives: — they are also present in the new wave.

THE NEW WAVE

The new wave of co-operatives, which really means all those established after 1960, is similar to the old wave in a number of ways — it has failed to attract support from organised labour, its main protagonists (and members now) are middle class and it is separated off from the consumer co-operative movement.

Membership of the new co-operatives has been drawn from two main sources. Firstly, from certain sections of the middle class which became disaffected with different aspects of life under industrialised capitalism in the 1960's and 70's and whose interest in developing alternatives led them to establish collectives based around housing, crafts, wholefoods, printing, etc. Secondly, from groups of workers whose industrial strength had been established in the years of post-war growth and who had to use that strength in defensive struggles with the onset of recession. Where the disputes were not ended by closure, takeover or nationalisation, worker co-operatives appeared as an attractive alternative based around the solidarity that was built up during the struggle. This was the background to those co-operatives which were established with state subsidies while Tony Benn was at the Department of Industry — KME. Meriden and the Scottish Daily News.

The most politically striking aspect of the new wave of co-operatives however, is not the numbers or class background of the co-operators themselves but the range of agencies that

have been promoting co-operatives. Although some of these are no more than vehicles for state intervention, most are autonomous and are worth a brief examination because they give a clue to the various political forces that have been pushing co-operatives.

Non-state agencies include:

The Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) ICOM has been central to the growth of the new wave mainly because they were the first group (from the early 1960's) to seriously support co-operatives by preparing simplified model rules under which co-ops could register and in pushing for parliamentary legislation to assist co-operatives — the Industrial Common Ownership Act. ICOM was established by Christian socialists who were interested, like the philanthropers prominent in the old wave, in overcoming the conflict and exploitation characteristic of private enterprise.

Job Ownership Limited (JOL). As its name implies JOL, which has always had strong Liberal backing, has sought to promote co-operatives as a solution to the problem of industrial conflict by ensuring that the members have a strong financial interest in the enterprise. They have rejected the socialist connotations of the concept of common ownership.

The private sector has also been connected with co-operatives, though less directly, through its support for various units assisting small businesses and community industries. A whole range of companies, such as Pilkingtons in St Helens, have sought to promote local industries both to lessen antagonism to the social effects of their rationalisations and to maintain the services that small firms can provide. The Action Resource Centre in London is an example of one of these units that is backed by private industry but has given assistance to co-operatives.

Co-operative Development Groups (CDG's). These groups which have only made an impact in the last few years often contain elements of all the interests concerned with promoting co-operatives. They have started as informal groups, usually with representatives of Local Authorities, the Co-operative Party, Trades Councils, ICOM, individual co-operators, voluntary bodies, etc. Where finance has been forthcoming, often from local Councils, these groups have established local Co-operative Development Agencies to assist existing co-operatives and promote new ones.

STATE INVOLVEMENT

State intervention in support of co-operatives has occurred at different levels:

The **Industrial Common Ownership Act** made a limited amount of state aid available to co-operatives.

A national **Co-operative Development Agency (CDA)** was set up. A true quango, the CDA could not provide direct help to co-operatives. It was limited in practice to promoting the idea of co-operation and advising local governments on the potential for establishing co-operatives in their areas.

The **Job Creation Programme** provided finance for 'Enterprise Workshops'. These were community projects which were supposed to gradually become commercially viable, autonomous co-operatives.

At a localised level Labour borough councils have played an important political role in the support of co-operatives by accepting them as legitimate forms of local industry. They have used the powers granted to them under certain legislation to give grants, loans and other forms of assistance to co-operatives, though it often amounts to very little and is a long time in coming. Co-operatives have become popular with local authorities who have been forced to intervene more directly in their local economies to promote industry and employment. Since most co-operatives are in general labour intensive in-

dustries they can provide employment without much capital expenditure.

LABOUR MOVEMENT INITIATIVES

More surprising is the rapidity with which co-operatives are being picked up by certain sections of the labour movement which historically have not been committed to producer co-operation.

In Skelmersdale, in 1976, massive redundancies were announced at Thorn and Courtauld's. With unemployment running at around 25% an action committee was formed of Courtauld's union representatives, members of the textile unions and county council members to assess the feasibility of establishing a textiles co-operative. This idea was turned down but a permanent committee was established to promote co-operatives which included representatives of the North West TUC, the North West Labour Party and the Co-op Union. They set up a holding company in order to foster a number of co-operatives such as Clogora Woodcraft which began by renovating school desks for Lancashire council.

Earlier this year the Wales TUC announced that it intended to promote common ownership enterprises in Wales in order to alleviate unemployment there. The Department of Industry provided them with £70,000 for a study of the feasibility of their proposal, to be carried out by Logica, a management consultancy firm. The intention is to set up a development resource centre which would provide the overall managerial and technical expertise for new co-operatives and a development fund to finance them.

These proposals were modelled on the structure of the co-operative movement in Mondragon in the Basque country to which the Wales TUC sent a delegation.

Great enthusiasm has also been shown for co-operatives by the Labour-controlled Greater London Council, which has established a Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB). The main function of the GLEB would be to direct investment 'to promote strategic or structural change, via industrial co-operatives, new public and municipal enterprise. These initiatives will be central to the London Industrial Strategy.' The main source of funds in this case would be through increased rates and through the cash flow to the GLC Superannuation Fund.

NO THREAT TO CAPITAL

Despite their different origins, these initiatives in Lancashire, Wales and London exhibit two common characteristics. The first is that although they present an aura of radical socialism through their references to democratic control, common ownership, the interests of the community, social needs and so on, they fail to come to terms with the root cause of the decline in industry and employment in these areas: that is the *removal of capital*, either by state, typified by British Steel's closure in Wales, or by private industry such as Staffa Products in London. Without the strategy or means to tackle this problem effectively their only option is to try and finance new industry by raising their own capital via the rates, redundancy payments and pension funds — sources of capital which are mainly derived from the working class.

The second common character of these initiatives is the emphasis they put on 'job creation at any cost' and co-operatives as a means to achieve it. In consequence the recent advocates of co-operatives have emphasised the size and importance of the worker co-operatives in Europe, particularly those in the Basque country (which JOL, the Wales TUC and Sheffield City Council are using as a model), in France and Italy.

Yet the relevance of these co-operative movements in Europe to the labour movement in Britain is seriously in question.

THE BASQUE EXPERIENCE

The Basque co-operatives were started in 1956 in Mondragon.

They were initiated by a local priest, (after he had read about the Rochdale Pioneers), and 5 young engineers who had been his pupils. They were motivated both by a desire to promote local industry and overcome the conflict between capital and labour which they regarded as inherent in private companies.

As such their aims were very similar to the early philanthropers and christian socialists who promoted producer co-operatives in Britain. But there the similarity ends because in the Basque country the co-operatives are by all accounts an economic success. Over the last twenty years they have created jobs at a steady rate of 1000 per year to the point where there are now over 20,000 jobs in 130 co-operatives with a turnover of £400 million. There are industrial co-operatives, consumer co-operatives and service co-operatives in the area of leisure, health and (Basque) education. A veritable co-operative community.

But, as many of the co-operators themselves have admitted, the economic achievements of the Basque co-operatives have often been to the detriment of other important elements of co-operatives, such as 'workers control'. In theory, the managers and executives are accountable to the members of the co-operative but, in practice, this self-management has deteriorated into technocracy leaving the general assemblies of the co-operatives with little more to do than rubber stamp plans put forward by management. Similarly, the labour process is firmly based on one which has evolved in private enterprises and uses 'scientific management' and manufacturing technologies which are designed to increase managerial control over labour, and not the reverse. Moreover, the capital stake which each co-operator has to invest in the co-operative acts as an effective method of social control.

As well as mentioning these problems relating to the internal organisation of the co-operatives, a couple of points need to be made about the political economy of the movement.

Firstly, as their advocates in this country have pointed out, they have been extremely effective in mobilising capital from the local community and in making commercially efficient use of it.

Secondly, there were external factors that contributed to the success of the co-operatives. The Basque co-operatives developed under Franco, under what amounted to an army of occupation. In this context the co-operatives were one way in which 'resistance' was channelled into economic reconstruction which was highly nationalistic in character. Moreover, the Spanish economy was undergoing changes that protected and stimulated the co-operatives. In the late 1950's Spain's economy was protected from the import of goods and capital by high tariff barriers. By generating its own capital and by licensing techniques from abroad, the co-operative movement built up a lead over its competitors which enabled it to blossom when the economy was expanded at the beginning of the 1960's; thereby boosting demand for the domestic appliances it was producing.

In France and Italy the co-operative movements have shown steady, if not as spectacular growth as the Basque co-operatives. The movements were probably less idealistic than the British but also were more actively encouraged by the state and the labour movements. For example, in France; local authorities were empowered to reserve a proportion of their contracts for co-operatives, whereas in Britain the prevailing socialist ideology looked to the establishment of municipal enterprises and Direct Labour Organisations of building workers.

So, in suggesting that the established co-operative movements on the continent provide a model for promoting employment through co-operatives in Britain, Labour councils or Trades Councils are ignoring the particular economic and political circumstances which encouraged them. The economic circumstances, such as the protected expanding economy of Spain in the 1960's, will not be duplicated in the older, industrial regions of the UK in the foreseeable future. And the Labour



It's possible, we produce, we sell, we pay ourselves : the Lip watch factory in France, still surviving as a co-op.

movement in the UK would have to undergo a major political re-orientation if it were to support the worker co-operative movement in the same manner that its counterparts in France or Italy have done.

THE 'OUTSIDE' LEFT

The interest amongst socialists in co-operatives is not merely an economic one centring on employment but has been prompted by a dissatisfaction with the labour movement's reliance on state intervention in the economy to implement socialist policies. This criticism has centred on the alienating, centralised and hierarchical structures that the state creates to provide goods, materials, transport, medicine, education, etc. Structures increase rather than relieve the oppression of the working class as workers within them or consumers of their services. From this perspective, it is argued that it is precisely the alienation of workers from the institutions of the state, such as the welfare state and the nationalised industries, that has been a major obstacle to the fight against public sector cuts in these areas. Any struggle should not have as its aim the re-creation of these institutions in their existing form but in a form that would better serve the interests of working people.

For socialists involved in campaigns around closures, cuts, housing, co-operatives might appear as one way in which certain areas of production and consumption could be brought under worker or community control without dependency on state intervention:

'Against this notion (of the beneficent nature of the state) we would pose the concept of the independence of the working class, not only in trade union terms, but also in the broader fields of welfare and education. With the development of local resource centres, unemployed workers centres, co-operative enterprises, childcare networks, such ideas are beginning to take shape on the ground'.²

But it is difficult to see quite *how* co-operative enterprises fit into such struggles.

Co-operatives are above all specific forms of enterprise that are *controlled* and *owned* by their members. To suggest that areas

of the public sector should be run as co-operatives, whether it be a co-operative to carry out work previously done by a Direct Works department or a co-operative to continue steel-making at Consett, would be to trade the gains to be derived from self-management off against the privatisation of assets previously publicly-owned.

If on the other hand we are talking about co-operatives outside, or as an adjunct to the Public sector, we return to the problem of how to make them part of an extension of working class control over production and not stop-gap solutions to unemployment. What is the base from which we can bargain with the state or capital for resources for co-operatives?

Co-operatives by themselves do not naturally form part of a struggle. In the past any conflict that has occurred between workers and capital or the state has taken place in occupations that preceded the establishment of co-operatives. Meriden, the Triumph motorcycle co-operative is an example. The workers' success in saving some, if not all of the jobs at the factory, was largely due to the length and obduracy of their occupation. The idea for the co-operative came after the occupation had been in progress for some time and it was realised through the unwilling intervention of the state at the prompting of Tony Benn. The conflict between the workers and capital was resolved but not at any cost to capital, and the effort of the workers who were kept on was applied to the problem of maintaining the viability of the enterprise within a highly competitive market.

This essentially is the problem facing any attempt to integrate co-operatives into a socialist strategy. The establishment of co-operatives does not challenge the power of capital, state intervention, and market relations nor does it appear to form a significant extension of working class control over production. So, what sort of progressive role can co-operatives play in class struggle?

CLASS CONFLICT AND CO-OPERATIVES

Since co-op members own the means of production, they have removed themselves from that arena of conflict between capital and labour that occurs where there is private, or for that matter, state ownership of the means of production. As a

co-operative they can only make an indirect contribution to the class struggle that revolves around labour and production. Thus Marx argued that co-operatives could contribute to the class struggle by demonstrating that there was an alternative to private ownership of industry:

*'We acknowledge that the co-operative movement is one of the transforming forces of the present society based on class antagonism. Its great merit is to show that the present pauperising and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers.'*³

But there is little evidence that the producer co-operative movement has had such an impact on people's awareness of socialist alternatives to the private ownership of production in Britain. Or for that matter in pre-revolutionary situations in other countries where different forms of social ownership might have proved relevant to the process of appropriation of industries. Co-operatives have not made a significant contribution to social transformation in these countries or acted even as 'models' of socialist forms of production.

INCORPORATION INTO THE STATE'S POLICIES

The difficulties of fitting the promotion of co-operatives into a socialist programme based around the needs of the working class would not be such a problem were it not for the fact that in isolation from such a programme they fit more easily into the planned restructuring of industry according to the needs of capital.

Worker co-operatives fulfil the requirements of two of the state's policies for facilitating this restructuring. Firstly, as commercial enterprises they are compatible with Tory plans to promote small businesses and secondly, as community-oriented, self-managed organisations they can facilitate the kind of 'self-help' response to the effects of their own policies that the Tories are advocating. In most of the metropolitan areas, firms of less than 50 employees now provide anything up to 90% of total employment and local authorities have become very reliant on attracting small businesses as a response to industrial decline. The Inner Urban Areas Act makes special allowances for worker co-operatives. For the state, small businesses help to ease the particularly heavy burden of unemployment that falls on the 'inner city'.

The small business sector also is of direct benefit to capital. It provides a source of cheap, non-unionised labour which is an important adjunct to the 'central' workers located in the larger factories and offices. It can undertake production which is not sufficiently profitable for larger, more highly capitalised companies or it can take on sub-contract work in periods of boom and bear the costs in times of recession.

Employers have recently been collaborating with the state via such bodies as the London Enterprise Agency to boost the growth of small firms. Although co-operatives have not received particular favour, in a number of cases where companies have wanted to 'hive off' certain plants, or close them down, management have suggested that the workforce could run them as co-operatives.

The other arm of state policy bearing on co-operatives is the initiative of 'self-help' projects in those communities that have borne the brunt of the rise in unemployment and the cuts in social services. By their nature, co-operatives have social, as well as commercial objectives, and these often take the form of a commitment to the local community either in terms of the nature of the goods and services they provide or provision for training. As such co-operatives form an ideal vehicle for the state to throw responsibility for coping with the results of its policies back onto the working class under the guise of self-management.

CO-OPERATIVES — THE 'EASY' ALTERNATIVE

The extraordinary convergence of interests within the new

wave of co-operatives is an indication of their contradictory nature. This makes it impossible to make a definitive statement about the 'inevitable role' of co-operatives. As with the old wave, the new wave of co-operatives has been drawn both from middle class idealism and defensive struggles of the working class. Superimposed on this has been support from the state which has seen a role for co-operatives as a way of promoting employment or as part of a socialist strategy that would be based around worker, rather than state control.

My argument is that to make a contribution to socialist struggle, co-operatives have to be integrated into a programme which is based on workers exercising their power at a time when they are strong enough to enforce its implementation. This integration has to take place because a co-operative is essentially 'non-conflictual' in class terms, and its role as a model of socialist enterprise is minimal.

The danger I perceive from promoting co-operatives during this period of crisis is that the working class is not strong enough to make them an effective part of the extension of control over industry and thus by default, rather than intent, co-operatives will fall into the overall process of the restructuring of the economy in the interests of capital. This is the problem confronting the co-operative proposals put forward by the Wales TUC, the Labour GLC and Sheffield Council.

These proposals for co-operatives shift the whole focus of the struggle from a fight over the actions of the Government and the employees which are producing unemployment to a fight with 'unemployment' or 'industrial decline' in isolation from the actions producing them. The fight then turns into a disillusioning series of attempts at job creation. In this way co-operatives become separated off from what were apparently radical industrial strategies because they end up being an easy option which does not tackle root causes of the problem.

This separation and isolation of co-operatives is the result of the present relations of power between capital and labour, and could be resisted if the relations were altered. In 1974, worker co-operatives could have formed one part of an aggressive socialist industrial strategy with strong support from the rank and file — Meriden might have been one of many co-operatives, controlled by workers, backed by the state and given over to production for social need.

Unfortunately, at the present time we are not dealing with a Labour government elected on a wave of militancy but a 'radical' Tory government intent on breaking working class resistance to the resolution of the crisis in capital's favour. That puts a different perspective on any moves to promote co-operatives.

While the establishment of worker co-operatives in certain European countries has been recognised as a legitimate area of labour movement activity and has formed a defined area of working class control over production, this is not the case in the UK. There is a very real danger that at a time when the labour movement in the UK is on the retreat in the face of concerted attacks by the employers and the state, it sees the promotion of worker co-operatives as a way to protect its interests. But in practice at this time such an approach rapidly becomes a substitute for confronting its failure to mobilise an aggressive fight back and its inability to develop mass radical, socialist forms of workers' control in the public sector.

Dave Pelly

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typesetters comment —

Great stuff! It's about time somebody took a hatchet to the co-operative movement and showed how they can be incorporated into a strategy and ideology of a government intent on wrecking the labour movement and introducing jungle mentality!

As the economic recession continues, there is a great temptation for socialists to turn their backs on personal politics and get back to the 'bread and butter' class issues we are more familiar with. This 'turn to the class' is not a strategy adopted by Big Flame — we remain committed to the politics of our youth. That is to an attempt to bring together the politics of the women's and black movement with the politics of the labour movement — to develop a political perspective that understands and can act against sex, race and class oppression.

The publication in this issue of *Revolutionary Socialism* of the articles on the US men's movement and the review-article on personal politics reflect our desire to continue a discussion begun by Gay Left (sadly, no longer with us) and Achilles Heel as to what socialist men should do to begin to develop an anti-sexist practice.

It is not enough for white socialists to offer support to the black movement — we must also find ways of developing an anti-racist politics amongst those sectors of the white working class we are in contact with. In the same way, it is not enough for socialist men to offer support to the women's movement

— we must also do something. It was to this end that Big Flame organised in London two meetings with Tom Jones to discuss the work of Emerge, a men's counselling group in Boston. At the end of his article, Tom Jones responds to some of the questions and criticisms voiced. As a result of these and other meetings, a wider initiative has got off the ground to discuss ways of carrying forward a men's anti-sexist politics. No doubt, such an enterprise is full of hazards: not the least being the danger of a men's movement becoming a reference point for a new style male supremacy (see Interrante's discussion of the ideas of the 'Free Men' (!)) However, as Interrante points out, the return to the home and the increasing level of male violence to women are clear signs that a male backlash is already underway — so a men's movement cannot be its cause.

The absence of a strong class politics in the United States means that movement politics are relatively more self-confident than in this country. But our good fortune in having a well organised labour movement should not be allowed to become an obstacle to developing a personal politics — after all, workers also have a personal life!

DIFFICULT CHOICES

The men's movement in the 80's

'A what? A men's movement? Organized for what? Men's liberation?! You've got to be kidding! What do they want, anyway, higher wages? Good grief, aren't there enough men's groups already — the government, General Motors, the American Medical Association... the list could go on and on. Isn't a conference on "Men and Masculinity" a bit like a conference on rich people and money?'

'Oh, those people. All they do is sit around and play touchy-feely. It's like being trapped in a crowd of gender moonies. No, I'm not going to the conference. I'm afraid of being hugged to death.'

Those are composites of reactions I received when I told friends that I was planning to attend the Seventh National Conference on Men and Masculinity, 'Reweaving Masculinity', at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, on June 12-16, 1981. They are, I believe, typical of the attitudes held by many people. Television, motion pictures, and best-selling novels have swamped us with stories about men: about the tribulations of men's lives (*Annie Hall*); about 'sensitive fathers' rescuing their families from, or deserted by, 'insensitive mothers' (*Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Ordinary People*); about the pleasures and dangers of heterosexual male bonding (*The Deer Hunter*, *Cutter's Way*, *Hill Street Blues*). In many cases, these presentations of 'new men' experiencing uncertainty, vulnerability, and sometimes emotional expressiveness have also communicated an antifeminist message, by making independent women part of the problem facing their male characters. Clearly, in such a context, one may be skeptical, if not openly suspicious, of a movement organized for 'men's liberation'.

BACKGROUND: MEN'S LIB DISCOVERS A FORK IN THE ROAD

Historically, the men's movement developed out of feminism. Many men who first joined men's 'consciousness raising' (CR) groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s did so out of conflicts with women — wives, lovers, friends, acquaintances — who had discovered feminism and begun to challenge men's sexist behavior.

'My full introduction to the women's movement came through a personal relationship.... I met and fell in love with a woman who was being politicized by women's liberation. As our relationship developed, I began to receive repeated criticism for being sexist. At first I responded... with anger and denial. In time, however, I began to recognize the validity of the accusation, and eventually to acknowledge the sexism in my denial of the accusation.'¹

Borrowing the consciousness-raising format of women's groups, men around the country began to form 'men's groups' to deal with the feelings of confusion, hurt, anger, defensiveness, and guilt which they were experiencing. For many men, these groups were a transformative experience in self-awareness:

'We did some 'guilt-tripping' at first — flagellating ourselves for the ways we were oppressing women — but we soon moved on to sharing other problems. We soon came to see that it wasn't just the women in our lives who were having problems and that we were having problems relating to, but that we also had problems within ourselves, and problems relating to each other. We discovered in some way that we had been dehumanized...'

During the seventies, the men's movement grew and diversified. Men continued to form CR groups and men's centers in order to recruit new men and to provide a source of ongoing support

for men already involved. Men also began to work politically on a range of issues. The broadest-based activity was support for the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment), embodied in groups like Men Allied Nationally (MAN) for ERA. (Indeed, the ERA remains a kind of 'bottom line' criterion for involvement in the movement.) Beyond that, however, political activity moved in two directions.

On the one hand, there were men who formed groups to support more radical feminist issues. These groups, such as the California Anti-Sexist Men's Political Caucus and OASIS in Boston, began to work on issues like abortion and lesbian and gay rights. Some organized men's childcare collectives to offer childcare at women's and (in some cases) Third World people's events. Men also formed counseling organizations, such as Boston's EMERGE, St. Louis's RAVEN, and Denver's AMEND, to combat rape, battering, and other forms of violence against women. These groups also saw fighting class and race privileges as part of their work to 'reweave' masculinity.

On the other hand, there were men who formed 'men's rights' and 'fathers' rights' organizations. The largest of these groups was and is Free Men, which is based in Columbia, Maryland, and has members in thirty-five states. They supported the ERA, and like the other groups, welcomed women members. But they focused on the revision of divorce and child custody laws, in order to give men 'equal rights' to alimony, child custody, and visitation. Their emphasis was on freeing men from the responsibilities of patriarchy.

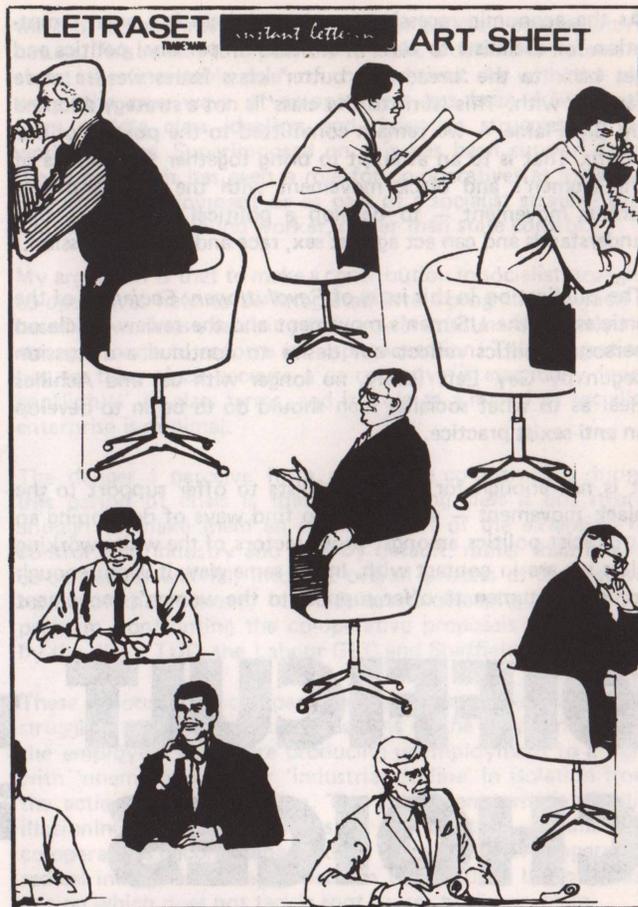
During the seventies, these groups continued to work as part of a loose network. Yet there were clear differences between the two tendencies. For the antisexist groups, male privilege was a social question, linked to a host of other issues such as reproductive rights, violence against women, lesbian and gay rights, racism, and imperialism — to the very structure of society. For the Free Men, it was more of an individual question. This was a crucial difference, because it brought to the surface the experiences which led these men to the men's movement in the first place. Those experiences were the *personal* conflicts which grew out of women's involvement with feminism. The last thing many men wanted to hear, once they became involved in the men's movement, was that they still enjoyed privileges as men. Clearly, this was a difference which questioned the very meaning of men's liberation. Could men be nonsexist in a sexist society, or could they be, at most, antisexist?

DOMESTIC INVESTMENT

The current economic crisis has both reduced work opportunities outside corporations and undermined the ethos of professionalism within the corporation. Men's responses to this erosion have been a withdrawal into cynicism about the rewards of work, and an increasing investment in the home as an emotional haven. Since domesticity is predicated upon women's subordinate position within it, however, the feminist movement has denied men this easy escape. The 'castle' itself has become a battleground. As already noted, men's response has often been anger, an anger fueled and focused by the media's misrepresentation of feminism-as-lifestyle. And it is this anger which finds expression in the intensified use of cultural, as opposed to legal, forms of male domination. As Easton notes, not only are men turning more to 'emotional withdrawal' as a weapon, but:

'As the older mechanisms of male control over women break down, the blatant efforts of some men to retain that control, through rape and other forms of violence, intensify.'²

The antisexist groups, particularly those like 'Emerge' and 'Raven', were attempting to deal with the intensified use of these forms. This work pushed them to confront issues of men's sexual and personal behavior, which highlight the ways men's very personalities are wrapped up in the structure of male dominance. It led them to take up issues like freedom of choice on abortion which conflicted with the demands of 'fathers' rights' groups. The conflict began to surface in debates over political resolutions at the national conferences. And it began to emerge



within local men's groups and centers, over the individual vs. social nature of men's oppression of women. Except for the ERA, the men's movement was in sharp disagreement over the nature of its relationship to feminism.

THE TWO MEN'S MOVEMENTS

'It is angering to hear feminists give lip-service to sexual equality while avoiding responsibility for their needs. Just ask yourself how many "assertive" women came up to meet you last year versus, if you are single, how many you had to approach. Also ask yourself how much you had to mask your loneliness and needs to be seen as attractive. Or even how it feels to be "evaluated" by the impression of your approach by someone who has never had to face or acknowledge the stress involved....'

'It is bad enough not to meet many assertive women. It is worse to meet so many the feminists never mention: insensitive and rude women who, far from being the "intuitive, feeling" beings we think all women are, act like emotional-bank examiners when they deal with the inner lives of men; who ignore or act crudely toward men who must approach them if anyone is to get their needs met; who dehumanize male feelings by calling them, clinically, "egos"; whose passivity necessarily causes them to respond to the very macho behavior they decry...; who don't care what pressures "privileged" men are under to earn money just so long as they spend it on them...; who are sexual only if prompted by booze-or-bennies to avoid responsibility and blame male sexuality (A.K.A. "lust") for taking advantage of them... All women are not like this, but few are truly acting like the New Woman they so often talk about.'

The above quotes are from a Free Men document 'On Male Oppression'. It is clear that the Free Men have bought the feminism-as-lifestyle version of the women's movement. They are responding to men's anger and violence within the confines of this 'you've come a long way baby' image of the ideal woman (which, I suspect, some of these professional men helped to create). Their response has been, 'Fine, if women want to be independent, then let them be self-dependent; if women have a right to their interests, men also have a right to their own.' As the name 'Free Men' suggests, it is a response to feminism within the confines of an individualistic 'free market' mentality. This is how they can support the ERA and in the same breath

attack other feminist issues as *women's* failure to 'act like the New Woman they so often talk about.' By focusing on civil-inequality and ignoring the existence of extra-legal forms of male dominance — by ignoring what has *not* changed — Free Men offers an ideology which absolves men of responsibility.

The antisexist men are aware of men's anger — one man on the conference's closing panel on 'The Men's Movement in the '80s' spoke of men's anger as a critical issue for grassroots organizing. But they obviously deal with that anger very differently. For example, a workshop on 'Men's Anger at Women' focused on men's expectations of women as the starting point for a critical self-examination of that anger. This workshop clearly distinguished between the confusing and often painful *personal* experiences of negotiating new, nonsexist relationships between men and women, and the *political* question of power and privilege. As one man told me, 'Sometimes individual women do abuse individual men, but that's not a political question. We shouldn't generalize from that to contend that women have privilege — which they [Free Men] do.'

WOMEN AND THE MEN'S MOVEMENT

The antisexist men's conferences have always welcomed and encouraged the participation of women. Women have always held key administrative positions at them. The women at the conference with whom I spoke expressed a variety of reasons for their attendance. Some came because their partners are active in this movement, and they wanted to share the experience of the conference. Others, who had attended past conferences for that reason, developed their own interests in the movement which they felt were related to their work in women's organizations.

Despite the sincere interest in having women participate in the movement, I sensed a certain ambivalence or awkwardness around the presence of women here. 'The presence of women and gays is and isn't an open issue,' one woman told me. Part of this discomfort seemed related to planning decisions: how to create a space in which women are welcome, while at the same time providing space for men to explore issues on their own. Providing such spaces raises issues of guilt about being exclusionary. But this awkwardness seemed to be handled fairly smoothly.

A deeper part of the ambivalence seemed to come from the way in which this conference perceived its relation to the women's movement. Many men told me that one of their personal goals is to become more like women in their behavior. Many felt that the best way to do this was to 'learn from' women. Behind this phrase (which I hear over and over again), I sensed a perception of women as the sources of 'political correctness': not only that women can show men how to change, but in many cases that men *need* women in order for men to do this. To put it in a slightly different way, I sensed a hope that, by copying the women's movement, this men's movement could avoid the 'mistakes' which are a part of any group's growth. If feminism was, historically, the 'mother' of the men's movement, some men at this conference seemed reluctant to give up the security of the relationship.

This perception seems a way for men to abdicate responsibility for taking chances that might not work out as intended. Male guilt and a fear of not appearing 'politically correct' surfaced

at moments when women spoke at a panel or workshop. Some men would suddenly become studiously attentive (the 'now we'll find out the answer' syndrome), others would shift positions uncomfortably (the 'oh no, I'm going to be criticized' syndrome), while the faces of others would tighten with resentment (possibly a reaction against either syndrome, or a reflection of the fact that some men at this conference seemed close to the Free Men in their views). This treatment of individual women as the guardians of political virtue must place a burden on the women who came to the conference. And it may be one reason why the number of women at these conferences has declined steadily.

Treating individual women in this way also assumes that there is something known as 'the women's movement,' which they can each represent in a holistic way. Ironically, this perspective bears similarity to the different view taken by Free Men. If the Free Men have bought the 'you've come a long way, baby' image of women, the antisexist men seem to take a 'they've got it all together' attitude toward the women's movement. With the exception of obvious groups like STOP ERA, the antisexist men tend to regard every statement made by a women's organization as *the* feminist position on that issue, one which they must uphold if they are to think of themselves as antisexist. There is a tendency here to reduce feminism to a set of commandments which men can follow. It avoids all the difficulties involved in using feminism — a woman-centered perspective — to understand the experiences of masculinity. And it simply doesn't work for some issues (like pornography, adult-minor relationships, and specific sexual practices), over which feminists are deeply divided.

A COMPREHENSIVE THEORY IS POSSIBLE

Both the Free Men and the antisexist men rely on a theory of men's liberation based on the sociological work on sex roles mentioned at the beginning of this article. This sociological work is largely ahistorical and generally liberal in its politics. To the degree that it does contain a historical perspective, it treats men's roles in terms of a linear progression, from restraint toward liberation. Men are beginning to question their dedication to work; they are beginning to take on domestic tasks in order to make their marriages more equal 'companionate' partnerships. As they do this, they are becoming more openly emotional. There is no question that these changes are good for men. But this literature does not discuss the social context in which these changes are occurring. While the sex-role literature assumes that social arrangements are in part maintained and reproduced by male socialization and male role identification, it does not examine in detail how this occurs. Thus, the fact that the male role is changing is taken as *prima facie* evidence that male domination is declining.

There are historical examples which would contribute to a different conclusion. Changes in the male role between 1860 and 1920, from an ethos of self-disciplined individual competition to an ideology of cooperative effort and loyalty to the corporation, did not change the substance of male privilege in the 'public sphere.' The rise of companionate marriage and suburban consumerism between 1900 and 1970, did not in itself challenge the social and sexual power of the husband and father in the home. The current sharing of housework by men and women may be less of a decline in male dominance and more a



Credit : Gay Left

response to 'stagflation' which requires both husband and wife to work to support a household. These changes can be used to reduce male dominance, but they do not reduce it by themselves. Indeed, as the example of Free Men suggests, the emotional liberation of men today may simply be 'purchased with new forms of women's subordination.

A comprehensive theory of men's liberation needs to move away from the sociological concept of 'sex role' toward a more complex analysis of 'gender' as a changing system of social relations.³ To do this, however, writers on the male role need to overcome their almost reflexive hostility to psychology. This hostility is an understandable reaction to the ways psychology has been used to prop up male dominance. But without a critical use of psychology (which feminists writers have shown to be possible), they will not be able to understand the social and cultural relations of dominance which are not easily or automatically affected by social reforms.⁴ This is one lesson to be learned from the intensified uses of 'nontraditional' forms of male dominance described previously. In short, a comprehensive theory of masculinity needs to treat masculinity as a cultural rather than a sex role.

If masculinity is a cultural role, then it includes class and race as well as sex distinctions. The fact that masculinity cuts across class and race lines does not mean that the male role is the same for all men. A working-class boy, for example, not only learns to relate to women as 'other' and inferior beings; he also learns to relate to some men as 'bosses', as superiors who will manage his work, give him orders, yet relate to him as another man. He faces, not the promise of future achievement in which domesticity is the fulfillment of that success, but a daily routine of hard alienating work in which his 'home life' is an expected compensation. This does not mean that working-class men or men of color are necessarily more sexist than white, middle-class men. It means, rather, that working-class men and men of color learn to wield at home the authority which they are denied at work — an authority which, in both places, is defined in terms of masculinity. Moreover, the ways in which these men are able to exercise authority in their families is itself shaped by the forms of household organization which families of different classes and races devise to meet their distinctive problems of day-to-day survival. These men's class/race experiences do not exist 'in addition to' their experiences as men; they are interwoven threads of a single masculine identity.

For working-class men and men of color, this masculine experience poses a unique problem. Masculinity is not only part of the ideology of class and racial oppression, which condemns them to the frustrations of the workplace or the back of the social bus. Masculinity has also been part of their cultures of resistance. A culture of male camaraderie has been a vital part of union 'brotherhood' and a source of flexibility and spontaneity in shop-floor politics. But to the extent that a masculine perspective has colored every aspect of working-class politics — a perspective based on men as 'breadwinners' — it is also a source of weakness and division. Customarily this weakness has been 'resolved' through forms of discrimination against working women: in the nineteenth century, for example, in the trade-unions complaint that women workers threatened a man's right to a decent 'family wage.' Today, the weakness appears in the dilemmas faced by unions in dealing with cases of sexual harassment. In similar ways, paternalism has been a source of strength and limitation in Afro-Americans' day-to-day resistance to slavery and racism, as well as a politics of black power.⁵ Thus, a critique of masculinity from the perspective of working-class and Third World men must be directed both at a system of capitalist exploitation and white supremacy, and at their traditional forms of opposition to that system.

A comprehensive analysis of masculinity can therefore offer much to traditional left groups, by enabling them to reexamine bases of class and race consciousness. The men's movement is in principle committed to that kind of analysis: the sixth national conference in Milwaukee endorsed a series of resolutions passed by the Third World Task Force which dealt with broadening the movement beyond its present white, middle-class

constituency, grappling with racism, and recognizing the distinctive styles of Third World and working-class manhood. But in practice, these remained future issues at the seventh conference. There were two workshops on racism, one on class, and



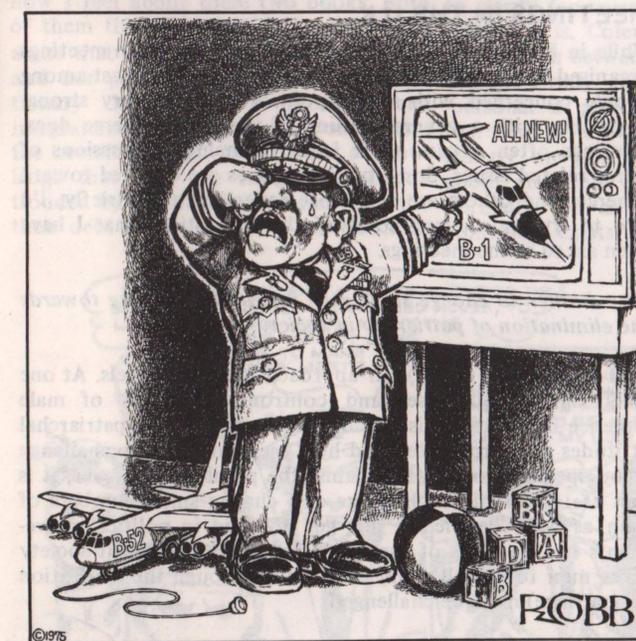
Credit :Network.

two that mentioned capitalism. The mixed workshops also ignored these issues, assuming a uniform male experience. The conference was pervaded by what one black man here called an atmosphere of white liberalism. Multi-issue politics became a way of avoiding hard issues of race and class. But these issues must be confronted substantively if the movement is to attract working-class men and men of color.

Similarly, if the movement intends to keep and attract more gay male members, it will have to examine critically the distinctive features of their experience of masculinity. Gay men cannot rely on the staple references of masculinity to build their identities as men. If the ultimate reward for adherence to the standards of masculine behavior is, as the literature of the male role argues, 'ownership' of a woman in marriage and family life, the bottom line of this reward is sexual possession. For men who acknowledge their sexual desire for other men, however, this 'reward' obviously has less 'value.' These men and boys are forced to deal with the issue of what being a man means to them. Of course, they can resolve this question in numerous

ways: outright acceptance of the standard; compensation for some perceived 'lack' in themselves; rejection of the standard; inversion of it; or redefinition of masculinity. But in all these cases, gay men are forced to think consciously about masculinity in a way heterosexual men are not. Gay men are forced to invent their identities as gay men.

The question is itself a historical one. In the colonial period of agrarian patriarchy, when all men were considered liable to sodomy, and marriage was an economic and religious necessity for all men, 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' men lived very similar lives. Difference was not a question of 'orientation' but a matter of 'sinfulness' which applied to 'unnatural' acts between persons of the opposite sex as well as persons of the same sex. Only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did a classification of these acts as different kinds of behavior emerge. It was in this period that singlehood and other forms of companionate living became options in industrial cities, that masculinity became a cluster of attitudes inculcated into boys during 'childhood' and 'adolescence', that proper sexual desire became a central aspect of the male role, and — perhaps most



important — that homosexuality and heterosexuality came to be seen as opposed conditions constituting the core of a man's being. As sexual 'orientation' became a question of gender (and vice-versa), growing up male became a fundamentally

different experience for gay and heterosexual men.⁶ The meaning of this difference needs to become part of a comprehensive analysis of masculinity and part of the antisexist political program.

Consideration of this difference seems crucial as the men's movement begins to deal with issues like pornography and with 'fringe' practices such as S/M and adult-minor relationships. 'Sexual objectification' seems to cover almost any kind of attraction. (If you look at someone you do not know and find yourself 'turned on,' you are objectifying that person.) I cannot categorize my own sexual experiences so neatly. Does this mean that all 'sex without feeling' (as if there were such a thing) is objectification? Could it be, rather, sexual play? As a gay man, I often experience being a sexual subject and a sexual object at the same time; and I experience this in a way which (in the best and, not coincidentally, most pleasurable instances) empowers both parties rather than one at the expense of the other. I do not think this experience is intrinsic or unique to same-sex relationships. I see it rather as a glimpse of what all 'sexual' interactions and relationships might be like in a society where women truly have power of sexual self-determination (including the right to be sexual), where sexual orientation is not a principal criterion of differentiation (this does not mean that sexual preference will not exist), and where power is not divided along class and race lines. If the men's movement wants to build a theory and political program toward these goals, then it will have to decouple a theory which does not connect sex and power in a knee-jerk way.

CONCLUSION

The need for a comprehensive analysis of masculinity which can inform antisexist politics seems the most pressing concern of the antisexist men's movement at this time. It gets a great deal of its importance from growing conflict between the antisexist men and the Free Men.

As one participant told me, the sensibility generated at this conference is threatening. Personal change, introspection, and play are important parts of this nontraditional sensibility. But sensibility alone cannot be the basis for an antisexist men's movement identity. For the network to grow as a movement for social change, it needs to deal with the political issues that have crystallized in the conflict with the Free Men. And it needs to do that in a comprehensive way, without backing off from the uncomfortable questions raised by differences of class, race, and sexual orientation. This is crucial if the movement expects to exist in anything other than a small enclave of American society.

An up-to-date bibliography is available from the Men's Studies Collection, Charles Hayden Humanities Library, MIT, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

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Joe Interrante

A SMALL STEP ON — men against male violence

The 7th National Conference on Men & Masculinity passed a resolution committing men's groups throughout the US to challenging men's violence against women. At present, men who actively oppose male violence against women are working in various organisations around the US. These groups include Emerge in Boston, RAVEN (Rape and Violence Ended Now) in St. Louis, and AMEND (Abusive Men Exploring New Directions) in Denver. These groups provide direct services for violent men, amongst other programmes. Other organisations, such as OASIS (Organised Against Sexism and Institutionalised Stereotyping) in Boston and the California Anti-Sexist Men's Political Caucus, are working in campaigns in support of feminist women. (They are also working to challenge traditional male role modelling.)

All of these organisations exist in the form they do because of the development of feminist analysis of male dominance in society and personal life. It is feminist women who have demanded that issues of sexual politics be confronted by men.

Emerge, with whom I have been involved for the past 3 years, began in 1977, at the request of women who worked in a shelter for battered women. They felt, as do the men in Emerge, that men must accept responsibility for men's violence against women. In part, we feel this violence manifests itself on two levels; societal and individual. Consequently, responsibility must be borne in both sets of circumstances.

In order to challenge this reality, Emerge works in both small and large group settings. We utilise both our counselling and community education programmes to this end. I shall outline both briefly and then discuss why they are inter-connected.

CONFRONTING VIOLENCE

Our counselling programme is focussed on challenging small groups (6-8) of men in a formal setting, on their reasons for battering. Two counsellors from Emerge work with each group. In the process of confronting their violence, we also encourage the men to begin to talk with and share feelings with one another about their attitudes. Frequently men have admitted being unable or unwilling to trust and respond to the needs of others. Especially the women in their lives. By confronting that ideology within them and within society, we are able to help men change the way they live their lives.

Through our community education programme, we are able to talk with a broad spectrum of people. Though we are able to speak with people for a relatively brief period of time, we continually emphasise the collective and individual responsibility of men for male violence against women. We actively pursue opportunities to talk with people from other groups that work with violent men. These include social workers and other crisis intervention organisations. We also attempt to reach school students and men from traditional men's organisations to challenge the role models they frequently adopt regarding gender relations.

The necessary integration of these two programmes occurs because male violence happens in both individual and societal circumstances. Far too often men have disregarded the personal political issues in pursuit of an all encompassing analysis which 'explains' the problem.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

In attempting to confront male violence, it is very important to talk with feminist women. Learning to *listen* to the exper-



Jack Rodden Studio, Tahota, Texas

iences of women is a major step toward understanding how to confront violence in men. Emerge's work with violent men has benefitted immeasurably from our relationship to the battered women refuges in the Boston area. I want to stress this point because there is a danger of men purporting to be 'experts' and thus devaluing the work feminist women have done and are doing to make male violence a public issue. For men, a strategy for change will develop from their understanding that male violence both exists for individual women in their personal relations with men and is mediated through social institutions (i.e. the use of pornography, legal 'tolerance' of rape, the pressure to perform sexually, etc.).

MEETINGS IN THE U.K.

While in England, I have spoken at various venues in meetings organised by Big Flame and local men's groups. Interest among people concerned with sexual politics has been very strong. Beginning with a general outline of the work Emerge does, meetings often expand their focus to include discussions of other related issues. Some of these issues are directed toward Emerge, and others are of a more general nature. Briefly, I'd like to try and address some of these questions that I have been asked at the meetings.

Why bother to change some men instead of working towards the elimination of patriarchy in society?

As I touched on above, our approach is on two levels. At one level Emerge publicises and confronts the issue of male violence in society. This includes an analysis of how patriarchal attitudes are perpetuated and how men can begin to challenge it by speaking and acting against the privilege. However, it is just as important to challenge and change small numbers of men as well. People do not get involved in political movements on the basis of rhetoric alone. The 'right' that society gives men to assault women (initially through the institution of marriage) must be challenged.

Are we not merely transforming men from crude dictators to sly democrats?

Whether as a result of choice or not, some men and women continue to be involved in heterosexual relationships. Since

they do, it is critically important for men to learn that violence against women is not to be tolerated. Violence must not be a quid pro quo for male-female relationships. By publicly raising this issue, and by taking responsibility for changing other men, we are challenging men to see how violence is conditioned and perpetuated by men — in society and in personal relationships with women.

Is it politically viable to be doing this work at all?

To say that the history of men working to challenge sexist violence is short is to offer no new information. However, many people acknowledge something must be done about male violence. Many women rightly argue working with men is not their job. *So whose job is it?* Talking about being anti-sexist only addresses part of the problem. It is also a classic way to avoid commitment.

A principled approach, based on a feminist analysis of male violence, and a conviction to put it into practice is necessary.

ORGANISATION NEEDED

These remarks in no way purport to be the final answer. The process of how organisations might develop and where to focus their energy is a lengthy and detailed one. But it is one that must not be avoided.

Britain now is a different time and place from Boston in the mid to late 1970s. Consequently, the experience of Emerge in Boston cannot be merely transformed to Britain. However, the emphasis on class politics that I've encountered in discussions here can be a way of blocking (even repressing) doing something on issues of personal politics. Whatever develops in Britain can only benefit from a sharing and open communication across the Atlantic.

Tom Jones

(Much of the information for this article is based on the experiences of Emerge. Thanks to Bernard Misrahi and Julie Gordon for discussions, comments and support.)

BUT A LONG WAY TO GO

Review article on personal politics

Review article on: *Continuous Excursions* by Marshall Coleman (Pluto), and *The Spiral Path: a gay contribution to human survival* by David Fernbach (Gay Men's Press). Both books £3.95.

I always get excited by what look like radical new inputs into that area we lump together as 'personal' or 'sexual politics'. I usually get rapidly disenchanted on closer inspection. That unfortunately is how I feel about these two books. Both of them fit into the general area — both argue that our vision of a socialist future and our practice in working for revolutionary change have to recognise and integrate sexual and personal politics into the overall strategy. Both books acknowledge that they are on ground already trodden by feminist writers and recognise their debt to the women's movement in

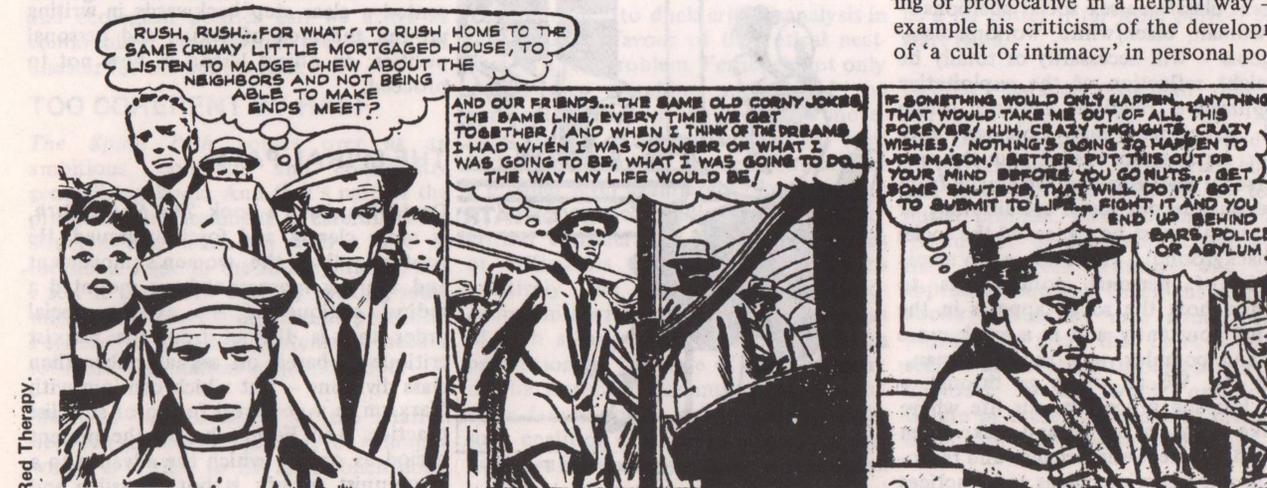
raising and developing the whole debate. Both Coleman and Fernbach seem to be offering complementary, new and distinct contributions; Fernbach in writing from the perspective of the gay movement and Coleman in trying to do a 'grand tour' of the whole notion of personal politics. So what goes wrong?

Let's look at *Continuous Excursions* first. I found it frankly confusing and confused and it's taken me a couple of stabs at setting down my criticisms of it to clarify for myself what the root of the confusion is. Coleman's aim is to clarify the relation between politics and personal life. He firmly defends the idea that the 'personal is political' but believes that there is total confusion about what exactly the politics of personal life are about and how they tie in to what we normally see as political activity. The confusion exists at the level of theory

and practice. As he puts it: 'Practical difficulties arise when one tries to apply the principles of personal politics. How much of the agenda of a political meeting, for instance, should personal matters take up? If they are as important as the big impersonal issues should they be permitted to push them out entirely? Should we analyse every attitude and action even if it seems relatively harmless? To what extent should feminists and socialists make the external details of their lives conform to their political ideals? Does it matter if they become eccentric and cliquy as a result.'

TUNNEL VISION

The first part of the book sets out to explore these and other related problems in the quest for an understanding of personal politics. Some of Coleman's insights and arguments I did find interesting or provocative in a helpful way — for example his criticism of the development of 'a cult of intimacy' in personal politics



Red Therapy.

and his comments on the 'tyranny of structurelessness' that can exist in 'democratic' groups for example. But these were odd moments of light in an otherwise obscure tunnel. Coleman seems to want to argue that personal politics is an autonomous area — that we must avoid personal relations being seen as fixed or swamped by social relations. But in doing so I felt that the weight of his position swung over to a very subjective view of personal politics. Despite clearly not wanting to argue a complete separation between social and personal factors, Coleman ends up in practice doing that time and time again. His attempts to build the links between the 'personal' and the 'social' fail because his approach does not seem to be adequate to the task of critical analysis in these areas. Assertion tends to replace analysis and the book in consequence is dotted with *stated* but not supported positions on the nature of personal politics and relations. Social and personal elements in the equation are not brought together in any dynamic or illuminating way. Look for example at these two quotes:

'Since gender relations are partly personal it is possible for men and women in their personal relationships, to escape their social conditioning. It is essential that they do so if there is to be any improvement in sexual relations. . . . We need to form civilised personal relations neither forgetting that they are set against a social background nor pretending that nothing can be done about them.'

'In theory . . . it is possible to distinguish between social relations and personal relations even to the extent of saying that much of one's personal life takes place outside of the social relations in which one finds oneself. In a sense we are persons outside social relations — inside them we are members of a particular class.'

What are we to make of these grand generalisations? If part of what Coleman is saying in the first quote is that we can't simply reduce personal relations to a neat mirror image of social ones then I would agree. I don't think for example that relationships between two people from different class/race/sex social positions — man/woman, black/white, working class/bourgeois — will necessarily or totally be a straight reflection of the exploitative or oppressive relations between those social structures. But Coleman goes further; he suggests that it is in the area of personal relations that we escape from or are outside our social conditioning or relations. At most he conceded the social as 'background'. However a dynamic analysis of personal politics has to recognise how the social appears in the personal constantly and in a much more fluid and complex way than Coleman allows for. We all of us go through a social learning process in our life where we take up social norms and make them our own, where we internalise and reproduce as our behaviour ideas and practices

from the dominant culture. It's a process we repeat daily with differing levels of awareness of its impact on our lives. We all do it in our own unique manner, but, as Coleman himself points out at one point, anyone who has spent time in a consciousness raising group will know how often there is a mutual recognition of patterns of behaviour when someone is talking about what they thought were her/his intimate problems and tendencies.

MISLEADING ESCAPE

I would argue that it is precisely in the area of intimate and sexual relations or in other areas of personal power relations that these socially learnt patterns and roles emerge in the 'personal' with most force and least conscious awareness. On that point I obviously would be miles apart from Coleman's view. And I think that to talk of escape is misleading and underestimates the problem. For most of us, awareness of this relation between the social and the personal would be a more realistic goal. On the left, we have learnt to recognise the grosser, impersonal, political myths that our present society tries to sneak in during our lives; learnt to recognise them and dump them. Respect for the system, the neutrality of the state and the law, the 'natural' existence of a capitalist economic structure are things we can reject with confidence. But how many of us left women and men have fully understood and come to terms with the more subtle myths and roles that years of exposure to social conditioning have given us as our feminine and masculine heritage. It seems to me that an understanding of this process — of how the social appears in the personal — needs to be at the heart of any revolutionary personal politics. We need an understanding of how our patterns of behaviour in both personal and impersonal relations have been critically shaped or distorted by our social past and our interaction



Credit: Red Therapy.

with it. Only with the awareness that we gain from that understanding can we be in a position to move on to think about challenging and changing our personal political practice (individually and collectively).

EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Coleman has very little to offer here because his crude view of how the social and the personal relate does not allow him to get inside things. He does attempt to put forward a position which avoids the two extremes of social determinism or pure subjectivism: 'Only connect but do not submerge — that should be our task' he argues and 'we have to avoid all oneness and fanaticism and make continuous excursions into either realm'. But it's an empty phrasing for Coleman doesn't have the tools to take us on excursions of this sort. There might be a number of ways in but two in particular have been developed successfully in feminist writings and practice in the last decade; the use of a radical and critical psychology or therapy to open up and analyse the experience of women, and the sensitive analysis of women's personal experiences in writing, either fictionalised or set in a theoretical setting. Unfortunately, *Continuous Excursions* is remarkably detached and distant in its style of presentation; of the author himself we never get a glimpse. This detached style of writing, married to an attempt to give historical 'overviews' in a very condensed form, gives an unfortunate feel to the book; at times it reads like a school textbook on personal relations, sparkling with helpful generalisations which collapse if you look at them too closely.

VAGUE CONCLUSIONS

This failure to find a way into the complexities of the interweaving of social and personal history is the root of the confusion in Coleman's book. It leaves him with little to put forward; the last part of *Continuous Excursions* is a disappointingly vague and general discussion of personal relations in history and woolly suggestions for a revitalisation of public life. In the end I felt that the book represented a clear step backwards in writing around the area of sexual and personal politics; an object lesson in how not to proceed.

THE SPIRAL PATH

David Fernbach's book *The Spiral Path*, is more clearly and forcibly argued. He contends that the women's movement and the gay movement have mounted a radical critique of the existing social order that is distinct from the Marxist critique — based on sexual rather than class divisions — but which can join with Marxism in a powerful fusion of socialist practice. And Fernbach sees the present period as one in which the advance to a communist society is both possible and

necessary given the state of crisis of our society. This crisis stems from 'a global contradiction between scientific technology and the system of social relations based on violence, its present form being the twin threats of nuclear war and ecological catastrophe'.

The book attempts to cover a very broad canvas and Fernbach's main focus is the political role of the gay movement in the struggle for a resolution of the crisis. For him the 'gay contribution to human survival' is rooted in the position that gays hold as a constant negation of the demands of the gender system. Fernbach argues for a cultural view of gender — seeing gender as historically rather than biologically determined — and concludes that it is both possible and necessary to work for an abolition of gender as part of an overall socialist strategy. For him this means dissolving the primary aspects of gender divisions — the male's specialisation in violence and warfare and the feminine specialisation in childcare. The gay movement presents a challenge to the gender system because it refuses to settle into the mold of the 'normal' relation — the heterosexual family, and because, in loving one another gay men provide a daily contrast to the dominant pattern of male competitiveness and emotional distance from each other. Gay men, Fernbach argues, are effeminate and take pride in their rejection of a masculine path through the world. He argues too that gayness is essential if men generally are to break through the gender trap:

'It is not enough for men to redefine themselves as non-violent and brothers. As long as the gender system is not abolished, and the heterosexual norm as part of it, they are only repressing the rival and warrior in themselves . . . the only place where the brotherhood proclaimed by the communist utopia has begun to take root therefore is in the gay liberation movement . . .'

Fernbach returns, at the end of the book, to tie this discussion in with an analysis of the present crisis of our society. His conclusion in the final chapter is that only through that fusion of socialist, feminist and ecological politics can we arrive at communism, and avoid the threat of disaster for the human race.

TOO COHERENT BY HALF

The Spiral Path comes over as an ambitious, coherent and confidently generalising book. And that's part of the problem. The argument is carefully constructed and leads on with a sort of inevitable logic to the final synthesis. But I felt it got there only by making some mighty leaps over thinly argued positions. Fernbach's confident statements need a lot more explanation or qualification.

Much of his discussion of the relation between gayness and gender, for example, which is critical to his later conclusions, treads too simple and clear a path



through what is a very difficult and contradictory area. Can gayness be so simply and totally equated with a rejection of the masculine gender and its roles? Fernbach argues that it can almost by definition; that the essence of gayness is precisely to have 'not learnt' the masculine social lessons that determine and perpetuate gender roles. He does touch on problem areas within the gay community and in its relation to society but only to dismiss them rather too hurriedly as 'appearances' or as stemming from a mistaken understanding of the problem. And he sticks to his point that gay men are, by definition of their gayness, in opposition to the gender system. The picture he paints of gay relations is idealistic; the political conclusions he draws far too crude. In the struggle against gender and sexual oppression gay men are he argues, logically, objectively in a progressive position, in a natural alliance with feminist politics and activists, by virtue of their standing in opposition to the gender system. Too neat a definitional solution which ignores all the problems that have arisen in the past around attempts to build alliances around sexual struggles and which suggests no new ways forward.

UNCRITICAL ALLIANCES

This tendency to duck critical analysis in the book, in favour of theoretical neatness, is a real problem. Fernbach not only avoids any searching analysis of the personal politics of the gay men's movement, or the relations between gay men and gay or feminist women, but also at a broader level again argues for a strategy of broad cross-class alliances without any critical consideration of the possibilities or difficulties this poses. He mentions positively the work done by Euro-communist writers in advancing the ideas of such alliances but appears to have no perception of the state of crisis of many of the European communist parties and their failure to be able to develop any such coalition of forces. The way that the book sails serenely through problems with its 'objective' appreciation of sexual

and class positions is both frustrating and irritating. The area of sexual politics is not as clear and uncontradictory as Fernbach would have us believe; by avoiding entrance into the key problems, he also has little to offer in a concrete or practical way about the here and now — and how we move the struggle forward. I suppose my disappointment with this book was all the more acute because it does have moments of insight and presents a number of clear challenges to non gay men about the importance of their relations with other men in trying to develop an anti-sexist practice in the broadest sense. I think Fernbach is right to point to the problems in these relations as being at the core of any struggle of men to break down gender roles. However his approach gives us no idea of any immediate way into that particular and very problematic area.

UNDERDEVELOPED WRITINGS

Writing about personal and sexual politics is still in many ways in its theoretical infancy despite the interest that has surrounded the area in recent years. It is still feminists who produce the most sensitive and incisive work on the subject. There is an urgency in having work produced by men about male experience and relations that can produce that same blend of self awareness, sensitivity and analysis as the best of the writings from the women's movement. But the two books reviewed here do not meet those demands. We need to work on a language and a method that allows us to enter deeply into the area of personal politics without separating us from our general political understanding and its Marxist basis. Mind you I think that means facing up to and working through the basic problems and omissions in Marxism that socialist feminists are already pointing out. I also think that we have to look to the whole area of critical psychology and radical psychoanalysis and therapy for some of the basis for developing our language, approach and practice. That doesn't simply mean wheeling out the old project for a reconciliation between Marx and Freud: over the last 20 years a radical if largely liberal critique of Freud has built up techniques and theories that give us a far better if far from perfect base to start from.

Neither Marshall Coleman nor David Fernbach really take us any further forward here. Their books are tied up in all too familiar and inappropriate language and structures and can't live up to their initial promise. Both go for a confident 'grand tour' of the theoretical area rather than the more tentative and critical approach required. Given the scarcity of books written by men about personal politics and given that there is so much still to do to break through into a radical approach to the whole question the failure of these two books to advance the discussion is doubly disappointing.

David Harding



Blockade of main streets in Warsaw when negotiations between Solidarity and government are called off.

Credit : Liberation.

NATO BANKS ON POLAND

The West's support for Solidarity in the weeks following Martial Law in Poland was nothing to do with human rights, 'freedom and democracy' or the Helsinki Agreement, as was loudly proclaimed. In fact, the rhetoric pouring forth from the mouths of Reagan, Thatcher et al had little to do with Solidarity (which they did not support any more than they do the trade unions in the West). Behind the sabre-rattling and tongue-wagging over Poland is an attempt by the Americans to reassert their authority within the Western Alliance, scupper the planned Soviet gas pipeline to Western Europe, and undermine the peace movement. What's more, the main forum the Americans are using to apply their tactics is NATO, supposedly a defensive alliance against the Soviets, but now being used as an offensive weapon against the 'Allies' within the Alliance.

THE BANKS

To some this will appear to ignore what was really at work in Poland. Let us begin, then, by detailing some of the key developments both prior to and following the declaration of Martial Law on December 13:

December 3: a high-powered delegation of western banks with substantial loans to Poland flies to Warsaw to deliver an ultimatum on Poland's debt crisis: the Polish Government is told that if it fails to pay the \$ 500 million interest still outstanding from 1981, the bankers will formally declare Poland to be bankrupt. The bankers later concede to western journalists that the threat of bankruptcy is only a bluff by which the banks hope to put pressure to bear on the Soviet Union to inject the necessary money into Poland

or to intervene.¹ A London stock-broker comments that Polish bankruptcy would cause such a crisis for the German banking system that the German government would have to take action in support of it. It comments further:

The Polish authorities have now recognised that the . . . system imposed on the country after the war can function no longer. Plans for far-reaching economic reform, with the abolition of central control over enterprises and the development of a market economy, were due to take effect in January 1982. Their finalisation has been bedevilled by conflicts with Solidarity, which has demanded that workers' self-management be introduced in reality and not just a slogan . . . (The

*authorities know as well as the country's economists that the system must be reformed if the country is to have an efficient economy that can tap its considerable resources of material and skilled labour.*²

December 7: an editorial in the Wall Street Journal notes: 'Foreign bankers are happy to lend to the communist government as to a family business. Happier. They've found in governments like Poland — and many others, incidentally — borrowers who will pay rates of interest Western industrial powers would scorn. And some bankers boast privately that even were they forced to write off their Polish loans now they might show a profit on their loans to the nation over the past decade, so lucrative have been the deals.'

December 14: the Financial Times reports that 'Western Governments yesterday generally sought to calm fears . . . They also avoided openly siding with Solidarity . . . In Brussels, Alexander Haig, the U.S. Secretary of State, said he saw no signs the Soviet Union was about to intervene . . .'

The same day, an American banker remarks: 'most bankers think authoritarian governments are good because they impose discipline. Every time there's a coup d'etat in Latin America, there's much rejoicing and knocking at the door offering credit.' While the Financial Times quotes a West German banker as saying 'I think the Polish Government was no longer in a position to govern the country. I now see a chance for Poland to return to a more normal working schedule and this could be a good thing for the banks.'

In these first days after the coup, there were no reports of disgruntled bankers, just as there were very few statements from western politicians. Overall, the feeling was one of relief. The banks had made huge profits on their Polish loans to date, but saw that the Government was finding it increasingly difficult to pay up. The banks wanted a mixture of authoritarian and reform government in Poland to guarantee their money for the future, and the coup seemed to offer that.

SLOW U.S. RESPONSE

In the days that followed, news began to filter through the blackout imposed by the Polish rulers, and we heard of the tremendous resistance to the coup from the people of Poland. The Americans began to object to the military coup. Pro-Solidarity statements slid smoothly out from the frog-filled throats of Reagan and friends, and there was talk of sanctions. At the same time, Reagan berated West Germany's Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, for being too soft on the Russians and not coming out in support of Solidarity. Schmidt, for his part, replied that if the Americans really supported Solidarity they would impose effective sanctions, — like stopping the shipments of grain.

Grain sanctions to the Soviet bloc were not considered, even though they had been introduced following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Instead the Americans concentrated on high technology sanctions, and a major effort was underway within NATO to impose them. The main target: the Siberian gas pipeline which, by the year 2000, is expected to supply West Germany with 30% of its energy needs, and France and Italy with around 5% of theirs. By blocking key technology, the Americans were preventing the completion of the project, thus hurting the West European countries as much as the Soviets.³

Using NATO to block the building of the pipeline has dramatic implications. It demolishes the myth that the alliance is about defending Europe's freedom and

democracy' from Soviet aggression. And, instead, it suggests that NATO is far more a sheep-pen in which America's allies are held in check and prevented from acting in any way that conflicts with American interests.

SPECIAL NATO MEETING

While the hardliners in Reagan's administration were effectively clubbing the West Europeans over the head with high technology sanctions, Secretary of State Haig was trying a different tack — again through NATO. He called a very special meeting of NATO's National Atlantic Council, and managed to persuade the other members of the western alliance to sign a joint statement condemning Martial Law and announcing their intention to impose sanctions. It is significant that the National Atlantic Council, the highest body in NATO and its governing council, is one of the few remaining forums in which American hegemony is undisputed and in which, therefore, the Americans could be confident of having their own way. Once again, NATO was being used to bring the European allies into line.

The tremendous symbolic importance of these American machinations become evident if we look at the main dynamics at work behind them:

According to the American Government, its opposition to the gas pipeline is based on a deep fear that such a degree of economic dependence on the Soviet Union will place West Germany, France and Italy in a hostage relationship to the Soviets, preventing them being critical of Soviet foreign policy. The Americans saw this view as confirmed by the unwillingness of the Germans to take a strong anti-Soviet stance on Poland.

WANING U.S. POWER

An equally important factor is the American fear that their long-held monopoly in the field of energy, already being whittled away by the growth of rival oil companies, OPEC and alternative sources of energy, will be undermined still further. Just ten years ago America ruled the roost in energy, and received 60% of profits repatriated from 'third World' oil investments.⁴ And though the oil companies enjoyed still greater prosperity following the oil price rise of 1973-4, the effect of ever-increasing profits in the late 1970's was to enable OPEC to gain more and more control over oil production and marketing, thus squeezing the oil companies' room for manoeuvre.⁵ On top of that, the higher prices gave a tremendous boost to national oil companies in France, Italy and elsewhere and made the development of alternative energy sources, especially nuclear power and gas, more economically viable. Despite attempts by the American companies to dominate these areas, they found they had to be satisfied with a minority share of the market.

With Soviet gas from the pipeline likely to come on tap in the late 1980's, the Europeans will become still greater rivals, and competition over energy markets will intensify. The act of political sabotage against the gas pipeline, touted to the public as an anti-Soviet exercise, was nothing less than an attempt by the Americans to retain their upper hand in energy so as to ensure themselves a profitable share of future markets.

While an aggressive stance was being taken on sanctions, the role of the Americans (here represented by Haig) in NATO's governing council was far more conciliatory. Haig's concern was for the unity of the alliance in a strong anti-Soviet stance over Poland, and this was achieved with the issuing of the long, wordy joint press statement on January 12. The catch: it was all rhetoric, with no substance.

Nevertheless, for the Americans, the exercise had tremendous symbolic importance: they had managed to pressurise the Germans and others into aligning themselves with a position in which anti-Sovietism dominated other considerations, such as detente and Ostpolitik (the opening to the East of the West Germans). Any why is this important? Because anti-Sovietism is central to the strategy by which the U.S.A. now seeks to return to its role as world leader and whip-cracker, and has particular urgency right now with respect to three areas: El Salvador, the Defence Budget and the European peace movement.

EL SALVADOR

The American Government has been rightly condemned for its policy in El Salvador. While it was playing St George, out to rescue the Polish princess from the Soviet dragon, its own dragon's tail protruded as it lashed out in El Salvador.

For the U.S. Government, the fight against guerillas in El Salvador is key to its drive for leadership credibility and status. After humiliations in Vietnam and Iran, and important setbacks to its interests in Southern Africa and Nicaragua, here is a chance to show once again that America rules the world.

The government 'dirty tricks' department has been working overtime manufacturing allegations claiming that not only are the Russians aiding the guerillas in El Salvador, but also the Cubans and the Nicaraguans. With each allegation, the U.S. regime had foolproof evidence which somehow disappeared as soon as it came to the test. But lies accumulate over time and achieve some legitimacy, and this is exactly how the alleged Soviet presence in Central America becomes ample justification for American support for the junta, gun-carrying U.S. advisers in the jungle and the U.S. supply of chemical weapons. It is only a short step from here to an intervention of U.S. troops . . .

The drive by Reagan's Government to push

through a big increase in U.S. Defense (a.k.a. 'Attack') expenditure both requires and encourages a certain level of anti-Soviet hysteria. At a time of massive cuts in welfare spending, adversely affecting some tens of millions of Americans, and with the prospect of America's worst ever budget deficit this year and next, the Government has to promote a considerable degree of blindness and chauvinism to get its budget through. Cold/hot war hysteria has both an external function and an internal one of bringing dissidents (including trade unionists) into line.

PEACE MOVEMENT

The principal immediate preoccupation of the U.S. Government was the European peace movement, which had brought a million people on to the streets in opposition to U.S. missiles in an atmosphere of growing anti-Americanism. The virulence of this movement posed a direct challenge to the U.S. military strategy in Europe, where 'theatre' nuclear forces were designed to 1) confirm the unity of the western Alliance, and 2) pressurise the Soviet Union into increasing its arms expenditure, thus heightening the tensions in its already frail economy.

The peace movement expressed in a mass way the widely felt horror at Reagan's strategy, and threatened to put enough pressure on the European Governments to jeopardize the whole military strategy. On top of that, it generated a trans-European unity outside of Governments

In so far as it developed simultaneously with Solidarity in Poland, the peace movement went further. For, however different were the political perspectives, the class background and the traditions within Solidarity and the peace movement, their effect on their respective Alliances had parallels. At one level, the two movements were challenging the lack

of democracy in contemporary state structures, East and West, at another, the whole post-War Alliance system, with its rigid East-West division and its common use of the aggressive ogre of 'the Other Side' as a means to control and weaken internal dissent.

To date, detente had involved interaction at the level of the state, commerce, finance and, to some extent, tourism and the reuniting of relatives. What Solidarity and the peace movement have done is to take things dramatically further by questioning the whole logic of the divisions of Europe.

'FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY'

It should now be possible to understand the context in which the various developments following the Polish coup occurred:

The Reagan regime, shaken by the European opposition to its military and foreign policy strategy, especially regarding nuclear missiles and El Salvador, was taking advantage of the Polish debacle to regain lost ground. The impression left is that the American response to martial law, with all its pomp, circumstance and showbizness, was designed to influence a western audience with minimum economic cost to the Americans. This impression is confirmed by the following comment from the Wall Street Journal, dated January 7, on deliberations in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over Poland's application for membership: 'the bureaucrats there are processing Poland's membership application . . . as though nothing had happened on December 13. The IMF had received hardly a frown from the Reagan administration.' It is also worth noting that the one critical weapon, a ban on grain sales to the Soviet Union, was deemed too costly by the U.S. Government.

The European members of the Alliance

have responded accordingly. Though they joined the Americans in a rhetorical condemnation, the only sanctions aside from the few petty restrictions imposed on the use of Soviet ships, airlines, etc. were restrictions on financial assistance. These restrictions were almost identical to those being threatened by western banks prior to martial law, and are simply designed to force the Poles to sort out their economy so that the interest payments on debts can continue flowing regularly into the banks' coffers. Instead, as we have seen, the banks generally welcomed martial law, and the economic reforms that either followed or were promised (price increases, more autonomy for enterprises etc), and are callously taking maximum advantage of it by demanding immediate payment of the interest payments due.

CONSISTENCY

For Western European countries, especially for Germany, there are not only the interests of the banks to be considered, there is the whole strategy of Ostpolitik whereby the Germans seek to generate closer ties with Eastern Europe not only financially, but also in terms of trade, culture, tourism, etc. They see a large market there for German goods, they see relatively stable state structures (Poland excluded) that guarantee steady and undisturbed profits, and they see the possibility of traditional ideological barriers being broken down to the extent that the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe loosens at the same time as the American grip on Western Europe - all of which could have dramatic implications for the existing alliances systems including Germany's relationship with the U.S.

The American response to the coup was consistent in its own way. It is evident that a deep consensus exists within the U.S. regime, whatever the apparent

divisions between Haig and Weinberger. Agreement exists on two things in particular: 1) that emphasising and re-emphasising the Soviet threat lies at the heart of U.S. foreign policy, and 2) that the Soviet Union and with it the Soviet Empire are crumbling from within as their internal contradictions intensify⁶.

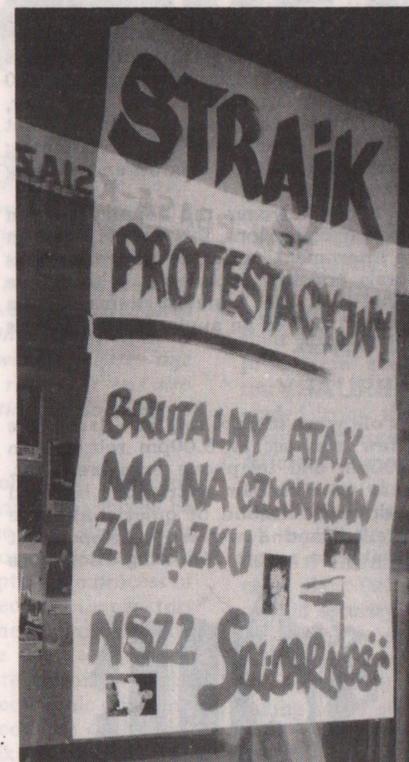
WHY BELIEVE REAGAN?

What is hard to understand is why so many people, including the tremendously hard-working people in the various Polish solidarity campaigns, took Reagan at his word because he appeared to be standing up to what they saw as the real enemy - the Soviet Union. On the same basis, they also welcomed support from such pro-Reagan cold war warriors as Tory MPs, the SDP and right-wing trade unionists such as Frank Chapple.

The Tories and their friends and the forces behind them need the threat of Soviet power to push through the wasting of £10,000 million on Trident missiles, the undermining of the power of the peace movement, and above all to improve their chances of substantially weakening the British trade union movement with the new Employment Bill. The peace movement and the trade union movement are the only genuine allies of Solidarity in the West. They are the only forces that stand in the same relationship to the British state as did Solidarity to the Polish state, and they are the only forces whose broad interests, like Solidarity's, lie in freedom and democracy. To deny these facts is to encourage the subservience of British workers to not only British capital but also American imperialism.

... WHY STAY IN NATO?

Equally misguided are those who favour Britain's retention of its membership of



Strike call in protest at physical assaults on Solidarity members in Bydgoszcz.

NATO⁷. Not only are these people naive in believing NATO's propaganda regarding Soviet aggression - a propaganda line that even most NATO generals don't believe - but also they blind themselves to the reality of NATO's role in preserving

American domination over Europe and American imperialism in the Third World. What the above analysis has shown is that NATO and democracy are incompatible, and that if the people of East and West are to win greater control over their lives and the possibility of a lasting peace, we need an end to both the repressive alliances of the last few decades, - to both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Ben Lowe

NOTES

1. London Sunday Times, Sunday Dec. 13.
2. Carr Sebag (Stockbrokers), International Supplement, Dec. 14.
3. As the February issue of NATO Review explains, the Americans carried out their sabotage attempt primarily within NATO's Coordinating Committee (CoCom), which is the official body in NATO for policy decisions on high technology exports to the Soviet bloc. For more evidence of the US strategy, see also Business Week February 22, 1982, p. 46, where a US official is quoted on the gas pipeline issue as saying: 'We have come to a crucial moment in European and West German history when Germany will finally be forced to choose between the alliance and Ostpolitik. It can no longer have it both ways.'
4. See Mary Kaldor: The Disintegrating West, Penguin, 1978, p. 113.
5. In 1973, OPEC controlled 20% of oil produced on its territory, and only 5% of the marketing/distribution of this oil. By 1980, its control of production had risen to 80%, marketing to over 50% (Petroleum Economist, August 1980, p. 329).
6. See for example Business Week, op. cit., which includes the following comment: 'Weinberger sees a forced default as a way of highlighting Communism's bankruptcy as an economic system and an ideological force. . . . Default would simply be the first weapon in an economic policy of active warfare against the East.' (our emphasis)
7. Dan Smith in New Socialist No. 3.

Credit: Ben Lowe.

RESISTANCE SINCE THE COUP

Information on the resistance in Poland is hard to come by - there is government censorship of the news. The following compilation covers December, January and February. Sources, indicated in brackets, are Western newspapers and magazines.

DECEMBER 13-20

- Strikes occur all over the country, most of them lasting only a day or two as leading activists are detained and the rest of the workforce is subject to intimidation.
- Mass occupations in Lenin shipyards in Gdansk, shipyards in Szczecin, collieries near Katowice, large steelworks near Katowice. At the steelworks, where 8000 occupy, the workers are able to extinguish a furnace before the occupation is smashed causing extensive damage. Dynamite is required to bring it back into use. At the Lenin shipyards, many workers regroup and occupy again after a first assault by the army and the occupation survives another two days.
- At railway works in Wroclaw, workers

- vote for strike action. When tanks and ZOMO (riot police) arrive, everyone sings the national anthem, drowning the voice of the ZOMO officer in charge. ZOMO attack and arrest known Solidarity activists as the singing gets louder and then dies. Work is resumed.
- Student demonstrations and occupations, notably in Warsaw.
- Mass demonstrations in Gdansk. Demonstrators assault military vehicle seen to be conveying food for army use. Once food is taken, vehicle is overturned and set alight. (Der Spiegel)
- Spontaneous 'refusal to work' at Ursus tractor factory outside Warsaw, only one tractor is produced in the first week after martial law.
- Initial attempts to set up underground

- leadership committees of Solidarity but arrests soon follow.
- Underground publications appear all over the country. In occupied factories, where printing presses are at hand, thousands are run off in the first few days.
- In Wroclaw Cathedral three priests celebrate a mass called by the regional strike committee. One preaches thus: 'Herod's people have gone through Poland armed with pistols, seizing from their homes the nation's best sons . . .' He was later questioned intensively by the military after which he suffered a heart attack. (Le Monde). He has since been given a 3-year prison sentence. Both Army and Party militia (Milicja) were used to crush this resistance with the Milicja generally used for the more brutal actions. Most of

the known deaths occurred in the first week.

- At the Wujek colliery near Katowice, seven workers are known to have died, with 39 injured, when the Milicja broke up the occupation. The deaths were officially announced after the miners took members of the Milicja hostage and threatened to hang them. (Le Monde). At the Lipcowy mine there are unconfirmed reports that 14 miners died in a similar incident. At Wujek, five ambulance drivers and four nurses were beaten when they came to take the dead and wounded away. They were dragged out from the ambulance, despite their white uniforms.
- On December 17, in Gdansk, ZOMO forces surrounded 100,000 people commemorating the erection of the monument to the dead workers of 1970. As the wreath was being laid, youths charged the ZOMO, who responded with tear gas and bullets, killing at least five and possibly ten people with 1000 injured. Local Solidarity activists suggested that the youths' attack had all the hallmarks of a set-up job, giving the ZOMO the excuse to attack. The commemoration had official approval. (Observer).
- At least 6000 people were detained in the first week, with up to 1200 released

within a few days.

DECEMBER 21-31

- The news is dominated by the occupation of Piast colliery by 1500 miners. These miners, along with a similar number at the nearby Ziemovit mine, had committed themselves to staying underground until martial law was lifted and all those interned had been released. Though local people attempt to maintain supplies of food and other essentials, food supplies to the area are reduced and less and less is available to the miners. The state then promises that there will be no repercussions and no arrests if the miners give up. As they do so, the known activists are detained, later to be tried and sentenced. In early February, eleven of the miners received sentences ranging from three to seven years.
- Campaign of 'passive resistance' gets underway, with mass distribution of a local leaflet calling for:
 - no-one takes responsibility. All decisions left to commissars.
 - non-response to decisions taken by commissars (act stupid).
 - 'work to rule' fanatically. Don't solve any problems that arise.

- make the commissar's life a misery. Complain, ask for all unusual orders to be put in writing, prolong the process to absurdity.
- take as much compassionate leave as you can.
- make the presence of Solidarity known without displaying it illegally (e.g. wearing Solidarity badge).
- there are no leaders, we are all involved.
- never forget the principle 'I know only what I should know'.

- In Szczecin, shipyard workers allow cargoes to go round in circles, causing tremendous congestion: few goods leave the docks. (Guardian)
- Thousands of workers refuse the verification campaign, whereby the regime seeks 'loyalty oaths' from workers that they will not undertake 'anti-socialist' activity, like organising a trade union (!). As refusal to sign constitutes grounds for sacking, plants are threatened with massive labour shortages. The 'verification' campaign is short lived.

JANUARY

- Passive resistance develops. Fiat works outside Warsaw manage to produce only 10 cars a day (normal output pre-

Solidarity: 350; pre-martial: 200). The main reason for the low production is the careful and painstaking production of slightly over-sized components, so that the parts don't fit.

● Beginning of hunger strikes for improved conditions in the internment camps, where 5000 are still detained. Strike starts at Bialolika camp near Warsaw when walks in the grounds are cut because relations between prisoners and warders are getting too friendly. (Le Monde). There are also reports that prisoners openly wear Solidarity badges, many with a barbed wire graphic scratched across the motif.

● Mass exodus from the Polish United Workers Party. According to *Le Monde*, out of 780 party members at one factory outside Warsaw, 740 leave. Other factories report whole basketfuls of party cards being handed in, and about 4000 members are thought to have resigned in Warsaw in the first four weeks of martial law.

● Underground leadership crystallises itself, with key members being Zbigniew Bujak of Warsaw and Bogdan Lis of Gdansk, both leading members of Solidarity before the coup. In an interview with the International Herald Tribune, Bujak tells of underground plans for a general strike, with the main demands being the ending of martial law and the release of Walesa.

● Underground bulletins continue to proliferate, despite the lack of tools and materials available to the underground. Many leaflets are headlined: 'Read! Copy! Pass On!', indicating the principle method by which they are duplicated and distributed. One leaflet; Weekly News of the War ('War' now being the byword for the post-coup situation) gives details on how to organise production slowdowns and confidently states; 'They have only tanks, rifles and clubs. We have Solidarity which is much more powerful.' (Time) Another leaflet says in bold: 'The real head of the Military Council is General Somoza!'

● Hundreds of actors and performers refuse to participate in the state media thus expressing their support for Solidarity.

● More and more people display their support for Solidarity by wearing badges depicting the Polish National Flag. In workplaces, Solidarity badges are kept hidden, ready for distribution (Newsweek).

● A message from Walesa is smuggled out at the end of January. On January 26, he had been handed an internment order written on December 12, 1981. He notes: 'these are methods of gradual elimination. I would not be surprised if they started blaming me for some absurdities, of course, prefabricated... (they have) never been and never will be honest. For this reason, no steps back. It is necessary not to let anyone be eliminated since this has become a method.'

SHOTS IN GDANSK

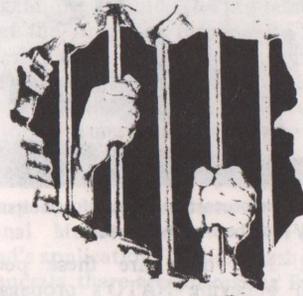
● On January 31st, the day before prices are due to go up to three or four times their previous level, the underground leaders of Solidarity call for a half hour strike. Underground bulletins report that the response in factories varies from 20% to 70%. In Gdansk, the shipyard workers decide to show their support for Solidarity by laying flowers and lighting candles at the monument to the dead workers of 1970. Whether the ZOMO riot police simply charged the gathering thus provoking riots (as some observers claim) or

whether students and other youths provoked them by chanting slogans and attempting to storm official buildings, is not clear. Either way there were six hours of rioting, with water cannons flooding the streets and tear gas spread everywhere. Contrary to claims by the regime, workers and students acted together and over 200 people were arrested. A few days later, the teenagers in Warsaw hold a silent protest in their schools, maintaining strict silence in the corridors and wearing dark clothes.

● Finally, all over the country women organise collections for the prisoners in the internment camps. It is a tremendous morale boosting experience, with people giving even the minutest items, like a piece of soap or an apple, just to express their support.

FEBRUARY

● Following the uprising in Gdansk, the curfew was set at 8.00pm rather than 11.00pm and telephone lines were cut. There were further restrictions imposed on driving. A mood of quiet confidence prevailed and a western correspondent was able to report, following discussions



with shipyard workers in early February: 'The great strength of Solidarity is not so much its fledgling underground organisation or its reviving propaganda. It lies more in the calm and sure way in which the shopfloor speaks of the fact that the union will be back.' (Financial Times). This is borne out by a number of events in mid-February:

● February 11: Schoolchildren are reported carrying in their schoolbags leaflets calling for resistance and demonstrations against the state. They are taken in for 'questioning'.

● Favourite slogans in several cities: 'The winter is yours but the spring will be ours.'

● February 12: At Swidnik, near Lublin, people put their televisions on the window-sill, turned to face the street. As the news starts at 7.00pm people go for a walk silently for an hour until the news is over. When the authorities impose a 7 o'clock curfew, ensuring people stay at home during the news, schoolchildren follow their parents' example and go for a walk during the 4.30 news. With people still at their places of work, the curfew cannot be brought forward.

● February 14: 194 people are arrested in Poznan when people make a peaceful protest commemorating two months of martial law and remembering 'Black Thursday' in the summer of 1956, when 38 were killed during a demonstration. This tragic day inspired future generations and brought Gomulka to power saying:

'The working class has recently given the Party leadership and Government a painful lesson. By taking strike action and by demonstrating on the streets on that dark Thursday last June, the

workers of Poznan have shouted aloud: "Enough! This cannot go on! The country is on the wrong path!"'

This time the regime is failing to learn the lesson and the repression continues.

● On February 11, the regime reports that investigations are under way against 964 people accused of martial law offences over the previous eight weeks. These offences include: continuing activities related to Solidarity — organising strikes and distributing leaflets. A further 2,727 people have already been tried in summary courts (no jury, no appeal), over a third of these having been accused of continuing Solidarity activities. The average sentence is 3-5 years. A majority are acquitted.

● On February 11 and 12, a massive police and military operation is launched to demonstrate the strength of the security units. 51,000 shops are checked as are 3,500 other premises and 60,000 vehicles. Some 99,000 are cautioned (no more than a ticking off) and a further 29,000 'reminded of their duties' (the same but a little stronger). 4000 cases go to a 'minor offences' court where 614 are accused of infringing martial law.

So Solidarity continues with both a small and a big 's'. A leadership has been established underground and there is a wealth of experience and a strong undercurrent of self-confidence to build on. A skeletal network survives which could be fleshed out and expanded within days, and a host of skilled propagandists, organisers, writers, lawyers and artists are around to assist.

As the Party and the regime discuss their trade union proposals these surviving elements of Solidarity will trouble them sorely. The regime wants a union that represents its members but is non-political. Yet in Poland, a regular diet is political, the desire for consumer goods is political, holding a union meeting is political, food prices are political...

The reformers in the government want to allow the right to strike, but only in the last resort when all the negotiating machinery is exhausted. Yet the very process of negotiation is political, as is the type of machinery used, how it is used and the decision as to when it is exhausted.

In discussing the revival of union structures, however well harnessed within the bureaucratic-cum-repressive machinery, the regime is playing with fire. This does not mean that Solidarity will quickly blossom and regain its former strength, easily overcoming the regime's attempt to restrict unions to a plant-wide basis, with no regional structures. But it does mean that, in the end, Solidarity will have a say in determining its own shape and form. 'This point is well expressed by a Polish woman scientist:

'It's like mushroom-growing. In the late Autumn the heads are cut off and throughout Winter and Spring the culture develops under the ground. Suddenly, in summer, the rain falls and the mushrooms are there again — even more than last year.'

You can decapitate mushrooms, remove them maybe for another year, but sooner or later they appear again... usually in the dark, when you're not looking.

Ben Lowe

THE ACTIVE STRIKE

The article published below consists of large extracts from a pamphlet called *The Tactic of the General Strike*, written by Zbigniew M. Kowalewski, member of the Lodz Regional Executive of Solidarity. He sums up the lengthy discussions which took place in the region after the first Regional Congress, regarding the means to be adopted by the Union to advance self-management in the work-place. The tactic of the active strike, which was first advocated in the electoral platform advanced by the "independent" tendency at the Lodz Regional Congress, was to become one of Solidarity's main weapons in the Lodz region. It was also put forward by the Lodz regional delegation at Solidarity's first National Congress.

The forms of struggle adopted by Solidarity, including (and above all) its ultimate weapon, the mass strike, should be seen in the light of their strategic aim. The sit-in strike, as it has been practised by Solidarity up until now — that is to say, passively — is a two-edged weapon. Interrupting the process of production may be an effective way of affecting other sectors of production, and always tends to put some kind of block on the production of material goods. By the same token, it is likely to result in a restriction of the satisfaction of social needs. Given the deepening of the present economic crisis and of food shortages, and given the dramatic collapse of the process of social reproduction, the mass strike is very much a two-edged weapon.

This is not to say that giving up strike action is the way to get out of the crisis. It will take more than 90, or even a thousand, days of social peace to bring our society out of its present crisis, because the crisis was not born from social unrest, but from the decomposition and decay of the bureaucracy's system of political and economic power. Furthermore, experience shows that, without a prolonged general strike, it is not at all clear that society will gain anything other than fragmentary concessions from the bureaucracy. In addition, the present level of social peace is only an appearance, and we must realise that it may be broken at any moment.

Solidarity cannot give up the strike as a form of action. However, given the present situation, the passive type of sit-in strike used hitherto — even though it cannot be written off — cannot be taken as our sole ultimate weapon. We must be prepared to go further: if the reactionary groups within the bureaucracy who still enjoy key positions in the power-apparatus show themselves strong enough and clever enough, in the near future, to force Solidarity to take up its ultimate weapon (this may be because of their attacks on the dignity, the rights and the interests of the working class and of society as a whole, or it may be necessitated by the growing social anger at the incompetence and impotence of the authorities), we should no longer think of limiting ourselves to passive strike action. We must prepare to make the transition from the passive sit-in strike, to the active sit-in strike.

CONTROL OVER PRODUCTION

During the passive sit-in strike, Solidarity's works commissions transform themselves into strike committees, and automatically take power within the enterprise. They will have to do the same during the active strike. The difference between these two forms of sit-in strike is that, after a brief stoppage of production, in an active strike the strike committees supervise the return to work, and exercise control over production, and, in general terms, over the whole activity of the enterprise. Furthermore, when the strike is over, unlike the situation after a passive strike, power in the enterprise no longer returns to those who exercised it previously, but is transferred to the organs of workers' self-management.

In continuous-production plants, the passive strike is an impossibility; however, this does not mean that these enterprises do not take strike action. In these places, the workers move directly into the active strike. The strike committees exercise full control over public services — that is to say, power stations, gas companies, water supplies, fire stations etc. The regional strike committee may decide to exclude some enterprises from the active strike — in other words to stop their production, in the light of the need to organise regional production according to available energy and raw material resources. However, this does not mean that enterprises excluded from the strike merely undertake passive strike action. Their workers should take part in the active strike, but in a different manner. Their task is to undertake a variety of socially useful activities: for example, overhauling plant and machinery, undertaking a complete audit of the enterprise as a whole, tidying up the workshops, beginning to set up a new internal organisation for the enterprise, and working on alternative plans (which we go into, below). They should also take part in security patrols, if these are organised, and should sign on for the work-teams which are organised to go out and help individual peasants in working their farms, etc.

In an industrial-type enterprise where the workers are taking active strike action, the fact that the strike committee is in power and controls the enterprise's production does not mean that it should take over direct management of the enterprise. This should be the task of specialists in organisation and management. Depending on the situation, the enterprise could be managed effectively either by its original management, or by a management committee, organised for the duration of the strike, and made up of management and technicians who are trained specialists, and who, at the same time, enjoy the confidence of the workers and the strike committee.

In order to guarantee good operational management for the enterprise, it is advisable, during the preparatory stages of active strike action, to nominate people in advance for management jobs such as director of technical affairs, chief technician, chief engineer, etc, as well as the positions of plant and departmental heads. If there is reason to suppose that people occupying important positions would be incapable of carrying out their functions properly during the active strike, or if there is suspicion that they might actively attempt to sabotage production during the strike, or may put up passive resistance, the workers should be prepared to replace them instantly with somebody else.

THE ROLE OF THE STRIKE COMMITTEE

The strike committee, in the name of the workers and of society as a whole, takes command of the national wealth entrusted to the enterprise, and makes all important business decisions during the course of the active strike. Basic decisions, whether they are taken by the director or by some other responsible party, are only valid if they have been approved by the strike committee. The management, or the management committee which replaces it, carries out the decisions taken by the strike committee, and is answerable solely to the strike committee and to the workers.

As in the case of the passive sit-in strike, the strike committee must organise a workers' security force, must ensure the cooperation of the factory security guards (or keep a check on them), must ensure the continuity of supplies to canteens, and, in particular, must protect the weapons depots. Furthermore, bearing in mind the specific characteristics of the action undertaken, the strike committee should supply special strike permits to warehouse firms, to suppliers and to the management, staff and drivers of transport enterprises.

The active strike must necessarily be accompanied by the workers proclaiming the "independence" of their enterprise:

this consists primarily of refusing to obey the Industrial Association, of refusing to accept orders from it, and of terminating financial contributions towards the maintenance of the head office of the Industrial Associations. In all the enterprises taking part in the active strike, for whom the Industrial Associations constitute useless and parasitic superstructures as regards the needs of production, it is advisable to follow the example of the workers of the ZBM combine "Bumar" as outlined in their proclamation of 19 March 1981. At the same time, the workers should refuse to join any Industrial Association imposed on them, if it does not appear socially and economically justified.

By declaring themselves independent from the Industrial Associations, the enterprises concerned are not likely to suffer from a lack of information about other cooperating enterprises, because they are obviously well aware of them. This is why the enterprise, knowing the firms by which it is served, and which it serves, must set up horizontal relations with them. However, the enterprise must continue to ensure deliveries from its obligatory suppliers, until such point as it finds voluntary suppliers. The enterprise should study the present state of interrelationships with other enterprises, and should examine the possibilities of bringing together the cooperating enterprises supplying final-assembly firms, in order to bring about substantial economies of scale as regards fuel, transportation, etc. Acting on the initiative of the workers, the enterprises should reach an understanding among themselves, and sign an agreement capable of breaking down administrative barriers.

All these measures must be undertaken within the framework of preparation for the active strike. The workers must also examine what possibilities exist for putting to use means and materials within the enterprise which have not been exploited (by reason of waste and misuse of plant, raw materials, and resources) or because of defective organisation of work. The enterprises must also encourage research and development centres, their own laboratories, and technological advancement departments, to conceive innovations with a view to replacing imports. For example, throughout the whole transportation sector, the results should be published of the saving of fuel and the reduction of vehicle wear and depreciation achieved by the experimental abolition (proposed by Katowice Solidarity) of piecework payment among the drivers of the "Budostal" transport enterprise. (...)

PREPARING THE ACTIVE STRIKE

We must begin at once to prepare the workers to take action in the event of Solidarity calling for active strike action, not only because one cannot predict in advance the explosion of such strike action, but also because the more time we have, the better we shall be able to prepare. Preparations should take two different directions: on the one hand, we must ensure the minimum conditions necessary for an active strike to be successful, and on the other we must do long-term preparatory work, over a period of several months. With these preparations we have in mind the analysis of the situation of each enterprise, and the drawing-up of reports on their present situation. This kind of preparation for active strike action not only guarantees the workers the best possible conditions for effective strike action, but also lays the ground for self-managed economic reforms within the enterprise, and offers possibilities for drawing up a programme for leading the enterprise out of crisis. This is what makes this preparatory work extremely interesting. It is not simply an activity which offers rewards in case of successful active strike action: it offers real advantages whether a strike takes place or not.

The report on the enterprise's situation may be drawn up by the workers themselves, in those places where there is a possibility of building up mixed teams composed of workers and technical management (in the best of cases these components would vie with each other). The workers might equally ask for the report to be drawn up by management, and then submitted for checking by experts appointed by Solidarity, or by research institutes and associations. (...)

It is important that the report contains, among other things, figures for the degree of utilisation of an enterprise's

productive potential, on the factors limiting production (as for example waste). It should also highlight bottlenecks arising from lack of raw materials, components, spare parts and energy resources. It should define the possibilities of remedying any shortcomings in production, supply of materials, etc, by exploring the possibilities of establishing a rational cooperation with energy-producing centres and component suppliers, as well as finding alternative production sources and improving the output of the enterprise by means of more economic methods.

The Solidarity regional strike committee has an extremely important role to play throughout the duration of the active strike. This role goes beyond merely organising and coordinating the strike, in addition to the responsibility which it bears towards each strike, it must also take on a role which is wholly new. Either on its own, or with the regional cooperation commission of workers' councils, or with the executive committee of the regional workers' council - to the extent that such a body does or does not exist - it will have to take over centralised control of the economic activity of certain sectors which are few in number, but which are extremely important: as, for example, supplying the population with basic foodstuffs and medicines; the production of essential raw materials and energy; transportation; and the preparation of key cooperation agreements abroad. In this area too, alongside the immediate preparations for active strike action, we shall have to undertake more extensive preparations, which, at the appropriate time, would enable Solidarity, together with the workers' council movement, not only to take control over the economic activity of the above-mentioned sectors, but also of going a lot further: establishing a centralised management system over these sectors, for the duration of the active strike, at least at a regional level. In the long term we could hope to establish a clear account of the needs and available resources of these sectors, keeping the account up to date and creating from it an independent system of economic data provision. (...)

THE TASKS OF THE REGIONAL STRIKE COMMITTEE

The regional organisation has another task, which is no less important. This is to exploit every available resource capable of guaranteeing the supply of foodstuffs to the cities, from the countryside, at a level sufficient to satisfy the basic needs of the urban population. It is possible, by cooperating with the independent trade union movement of individual peasants, to call for solidarity between peasants and workers. But there are also other means, as for example encouraging the production, or the improved output, of industrial products, including mechanical equipment, which the peasants desperately need. They could also be assisted in their farming work by sending worker-brigades from those enterprises whose production has been halted. In this light, it is also important to establish controls to prevent discrimination in supplies of fodder, of fuel, of fertilisers and of technical research assistance, as regards the workers who are also owners of small-holdings, the worker-peasants and the peasant-workers who live in the countryside, and who go to work in the cities, and who are important producers of foodstuffs in Poland. Measures of this kind will enable the cities to be supplied with basic food supplies during strike action. The distribution of necessary food supplies, as well as distribution of consumer products manufactured in the factories taking part in the active strike, must be tightly controlled by the strike committees, assisted by controllers authorised by the regional strike committees. Warehouses and wholesale markets must be protected by workers' or civilian security forces, and, as regards supply centres for raw materials which are in short supply, these will authorise deliveries along the lines of distribution patterns drawn up by the strike authorities. We must examine the advantages which may derive from setting up a direct distribution network for certain foodstuffs with a view to supplying workers on strike, as well as introducing "a people's breadbasket", to meet the needs of poorer sectors of the population.

Any decision by the State's administrative authorities, relating to socio-economic and organisational problems, or

related to the general situation of a region on active strike, must be authorised by the regional strike leadership.

It is possible that attempts will be made by the economic authorities to block delivery of raw materials, of spare parts, etc, to industrial enterprises and to those centres from which they get their supplies, with a view to breaking the active strike. But we must also bear in mind that, faced with such threats of sabotaging production, the workers of the enterprises on active strike can respond effectively by stopping their own deliveries, and paralysing those important economic sectors who are not on strike. Thus, the central bureaucracy would have no interest in sabotaging production which is under the control of the strike committees, and recourse to these methods seems improbable.

The slogan of the active strike must be: "Power to the workers in their enterprises!" The workers' principal intention with such strike action is to provide themselves with the means of setting up a proper system of self-management, and of leading their enterprises out of crisis. Thus, proposals that emerge during the active strike must relate, above all, to the constitution of bodies of workers' self-management and to the independence of enterprises. For example, one set of proposals should demand for the workers' councils the right to choose their managers by open examination, and for them to be recallable, as well as recognising the principle that the management is the executive body of the workers' council, and is answerable to it as the highest authority in the enterprise.

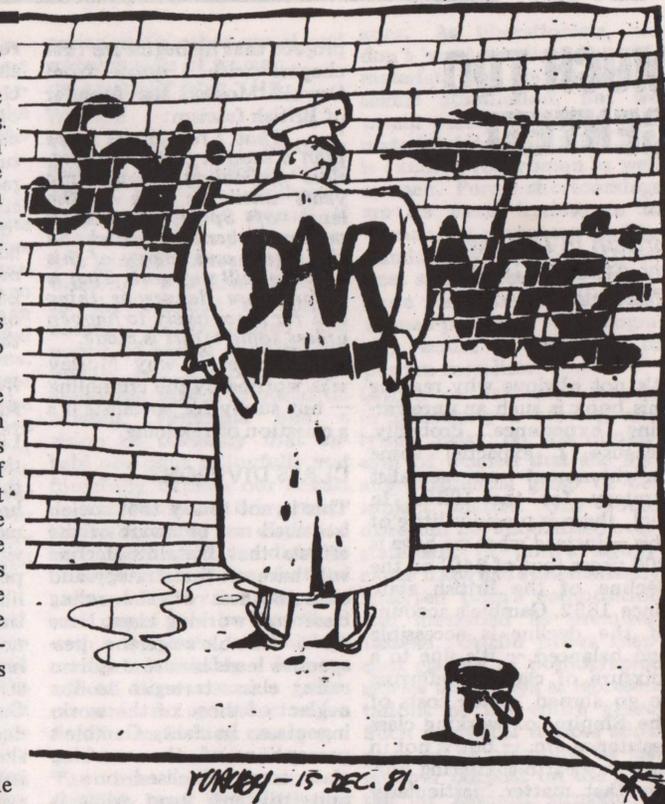
"POWER TO THE WORKERS IN THEIR ENTERPRISES!"

In addition to these institutional modifications of the power system within the enterprise, another proposition should be explored, regarding the abolition of useless and parasitic bodies, such as the combines, the majority of Industrial Associations, and the sectorised structuring of the economy, the administrative control systems imposed by certain enterprises on others (as, for example, coordination by sector). We must fight for the enterprises managed by workers' councils to have the right of free association.

The Bureaucracy must be forced to put an end to apparent structural changes passing for economic reform, as, for example, the transformation of the Industrial Associations into Industrial Unions, or the carving up and remodelling of ministries which - having destroyed the powerful inter-branch coordinations and having given the impression of a change - are aimed purely and simply at maintaining and "perfecting" the mechanism of authoritarian management. We must strive by every means possible for the enterprises to be given a juridical status capable of preventing the bureaucratic apparatus of the Industrial Associations from blocking the independent banking transactions, and the import/export trade of enterprises.

Among the proposals which would guarantee the workers and their representative bodies the right of deciding on a given enterprise's development, there must necessarily be a proposal aimed at guaranteeing self-management bodies the possibility of deciding on what is to be produced. This possibility is necessary in order to be able to adapt production to needs; and to encourage, within reasonable limits, competition between enterprises. It is particularly necessary for those enterprises which, because of the crisis, are facing manning cuts, or closure. Solidarity must take advantage of the active strike in order to demand that the workers in these enterprises are granted a delay of a period of six months in order to draw up an alternative plan, that is to say a programme for altering the pattern of what is produced, by exploiting domestic raw material resources and the existing machine capacity. Alternative plans, by virtue of organising a new, socially useful system of production, provide workers' self-management bodies with the means to save enterprises, and provide the union with the means of fighting the threat of unemployment.

As we have said above, at the end of the active strike, the Solidarity strike committee passes back power in the enterprise only to the workers' self-management bodies. This is why, during the strike, it is necessary to elect a constituent



committee for the workers' council, or a workers' council, if such does not already exist. Furthermore, during the active strike, work must begin on a new internal organisation of the enterprise, on a plan for independent financing, and on the question of workers' councils. Where possible, the workers' councils, during the active strike and with the support of the strike must not only lay the foundation of the enterprise's independence, but must also lead to the abolition of the present despotic work-regime.

During the active strike, the workers should elect a regional constituent committee of workers' councils. One result of the strike should be that this committee, or the regional cooperation committee between workers' councils, should be able to play a real role in regional economic policy-making, notably through its representatives having voting rights in the regional parliaments, and, by virtue of their right of veto, the committee should be in a position to control the socio-economic orientation of the local authorities.

CONCLUSION

During the years 1944-45, the workers themselves made good the factories that had been destroyed by war; they elected, on their own initiative, workers' councils, enterprise committees and factory committees. During the period 1956-57, enterprises affected by the crisis were got going again by the workers themselves, with the aid of elected workers' councils. Today, for the third time, we are seeing the rebirth of the workers' self-management movement in Poland. The specialist team from *Zycie i Nowoczesnosc* has stated: "Any enterprise that has highly qualified workers can be set back on its feet within a few months, perhaps in as little as three months. Let's try to do it!" This is something that we must try to do, because there is no other way out, and because a resolution of the crisis will certainly not be achieved via the central bureaucracy. So, let us begin by entrusting the principal means of production to society, and by setting up social enterprises, in line with the historic experience of the Polish working class. If Solidarity is forced to take recourse to its ultimate weapon of mass strike action, it should launch an active strike which will accelerate the process of self-organisation of society as the owner of the means of production, and will clear the way for us to deliver Poland from the crisis.

Zbigniew M. Kowalewski
Lodz, 9 August 1981.

MUCH TOO GENTEEL

Britain in Decline
by Andrew Gamble
(Macmillan £4.95)

It's not obvious why reading this book is such an unrewarding experience. Probably, because I expected some enlightenment on socialist strategy for the 1980s. In fact, there is precious little of this — instead what we have is 200 pages (out of 240) on the decline of the British state since 1832. Gamble's account of the decline is accessible and balanced — it's due to a mixture of capital preferring to go abroad, of the costs of the Empire, of working class resistance etc. — but is not in any way earth-shattering nor, for that matter, particularly socialist. Like E.P. Thompson, Gamble believes in the commitment of 'our' bourgeoisie to civil liberties — so one gets implausible, sweeping statements like:

'The English claimed the right to revolt against tyranny, the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and arbitrary search, the principle of equality before the law and the right to trial by jury. When these were added to a degree of freedom of publication, speech and conscience, and a much wider freedom to travel and trade, there was a body of rights which though often abused and infringed, provided a distinct sphere of legal equality, the basis of bourgeois order.'

Claims like this underestimate how frequent are suppressions of these liberties (i.e. in the north of Ireland today, the constant use of 'Sus' and its replacement laws to harass urban youth etc.) and how much these formal political equalities are a trade-off for the fundamental inequalities of property relations in a bourgeois democracy. The pace and content of Gamble's history is too genteel — the vicious behaviour of the ruling class is left out of the account. There is an assumption throughout Gamble's book that Britain's decline is something everybody (including socialists) should be upset by and preoccupied with — personally, I am warmed by the rapid decomposition of an imperial corpse: be it Spain, Portugal, the US or Britain. It is a sign of the bizarreness of Gamble's whole

project that he begins his first chapter with a quote from Oswald Mosley, the founder of British fascism:

'... What I fear much more than a sudden crisis is a long, slow crumbling through the years until we sink to the level of Spain, a gradual paralysis, beneath which all the vigour and energy of this country will succumb. That is a far more dangerous thing and far more likely to happen unless some effort is made.'

Well, it's clear why Mosley was worried by the crumbling — but surely for socialists it's a question of rejoicing.

CLASS DIVISIONS

This is not to say that socialists need not be aware of the effects that Britain's decline will have on the strategy and consciousness of the ruling class and working class. Here again Gamble's serene perspective leads him to dwell on ruling class strategies to the neglect of those of the working class. In fact, Gamble's perception of the working class is an idealised one — quite distant from what is actually happening to the working class. He writes:

'... the British working class in the 1970s was still as cohesive a social formation as it had ever been, in some respects more so. ... The industrial struggles of the 1960s and 1970s confirmed the independence of the working class. It has not only been private capital that has been suspicious of the state and any attempt by central government to incorporate groups outside it. The inability of governments to construct a genuine consensus around their modernisation strategy led to strong resistance by the unions because most of the costs of the strategy, in the shape of increased taxes and reduced living standards, were borne by their members and by the unorganised mass of welfare claimants.' (p. 228)

In fact, a key trump-card of the 1974-9 Labour government was its ability to incorporate trade union hierarchies in the machinery of government. And all evidence points to divisions in the working class (between men and women, between black and white, between unemployed and employed etc.) getting steadily worse in the recession (since 1975) — to call the working class a 'cohesive social formation' seems wishful thinking: a majority of the working class don't even vote Labour any more. In Gamble's idealised and economic analysis of the working class, there is no

room to assess the ability of the British (English?) ruling class to involve large sections of the working class in a chauvinist and imperial culture, of which working class racism is an important constituent. Far from having a 'confirmed independence', large sections of the labour movement are tied through Labourism and the nostalgia of Empire to the values of the political establishment.

INTERNATIONALISM ABSENT

Like its economic prospects, the prospects for socialism in this country depend on what happens *abroad*. Our socialist movement is and will be vitally affected by what happens in Poland, by the liberation struggle in Namibia, the outcome of the war in the north of Ireland. But this international dimension is strangely absent from Gamble's account of Britain's decline. *Britain in Decline* shows the hold of the British intellectual establishment even over socialists — the book is empiricist, parochial and fair — all establishment values that socialists should have dispensed with long ago.

Pete Ayrton

GUARDING THE WRONG FRONT

Pornography and Silence
Susan Griffin
The Women's Press Ltd,
£4.75p

Few critics would publish a 300 page treatise directed against an artist's work without including relevant photographs to support her/his arguments. By failing to offer such evidence, the writer avoids any independent appraisal of her/his own assertions and is therefore allowed to present personal reactions as if they were manifest truths.

Griffin's book is an example of such an approach — an approach which tries to convince the reader that pornography is evil by means of a persistent preoccupation with the more fulsome examples of porn, like the works of the Marquis de Sade. Because no pornographic images are presented, the average reader can proceed through the pages imagining that any pre-

conceived, possibly gut-level notions that she/he might hold are accurate judgements of porn. When pornography is evaluated in this manner, tentative, often superficial observations can become party doctrine.

THE PORNOGRAPHIC MIND

For Griffin, it is the pornographic mind which, harbouring a hatred of 'The Body' and perceiving women as a symbol of the natural joys of the flesh, is prompted to consume pornography. The enormous material incentives for being on the creating and selling end of the porn trade is not addressed by Griffin. Rather, the owners of a 'pornographic mind' seek solely to punish, shame and humiliate women. Via pornography, men express their rage at those who provoke their 'natural' sexual instinct which puritanical society seeks to inhibit.

Griffin appears to champion the cause of sexual freedom. The puritan restraints which shackle Natural Sex engender pornography, Griffin claims, and thus the fears that a feminist version of sexuality increasingly resembles a puritan vision are neatly sidestepped. In a round table discussion between Gayle Rubin, Dierdre English and Amber Hollibaugh entitled *Talking Sex* (published in the *US Socialist Review*), the participants question the millenarian view of sexuality that is the foundation of Griffin's denouncement of porn.

'... that idea, that sex will change if social reality changes, is confused in a peculiar and perhaps fundamentally Christian way. ... The idea of sex after the revolution is so removed from anything that we do now, that it transcends the flesh itself. It becomes an absence of anything we do now, all of which is contaminated by this earthy, fleshy existence. So "sex after the revolution" becomes a transcendent image of celestial delight.'

For Griffin, there is a paradigm of natural sexuality that none of us have even the slightest presentiment or memory of. Civilisation came along, eradicated the natural sex that woman symbolises and, wham, pornography was born. Misogynist images can then be focused on as though they were the totality rather than one aspect of pornography.

Griffin ignores the possibility that sexual arousal is a legitimate objective of literature and pictures. Periodically, Griffin's reaction to pornography seemed to be founded on a knee-jerk abhorrence of depictions of some sexual acts rather than a legitimate objection to the presentation of women in pornography. Several of her remarks pejoratively described pictures of oral sex without even a brief comment on how the female subjects were portrayed. There is a tacit unexamined assumption that oral, anal and vaginal penetration are phallogocentric activities between an eager man and a lustless woman. Assumptions like these can be dangerous fodder for the sex-equals-sin brigade.

PORN IS THE THEORY ...

If a condemnation of porn is to be more than a simple objection to displays of sex, the proof of physical harm to women ought to be offered. Recognising this necessity, Griffin maintains that the man who buys porn is encouraged to sexually abuse women. The counter-argument which claims that the consumption of pornography is neither easily nor forcibly translated

into practical activity is rejected by Griffin on the most feeble of grounds — since pornographers themselves make such a claim, well then, the claim must be false.

The counter-argument that is promoted by some feminists and civil libertarians states that pornography is less comparable to a DIY manual than to an American TV sitcom. In sitcoms, there are no financial worries or career problems. No-one is made redundant or suffers tragedy. Similarly, the subjects in pornography have no trouble with zippers or cramps in their calves. No-one is caught out in underwear with worn-out elastic. In short, the consumer is aware of the contrived and artificial nature of porn.

There can be no question that much of porn represents women as submissive and man-worshipping but such misrepresentation of women is hardly the exclusive province of porn. There was a time in the feminist movement when we were as preoccupied with the beauty queen and the cover girl because of the atrophied sexuality that such images represent. Surely we could gain a better understanding of porn's harmfulness by com-

paring it to other visual and verbal images of women.

CHANGING FOR THE WORSE

The practice of perusing material, call it porn or call it erotica, for the deliberate purpose of sexual arousal, is not misogynist any more than it is wicked. Like many other women, I was first attracted to the feminist movement because it challenged the norms of sexual chastity and fidelity and the Holy Virgin archetype that is imposed on women. Feminists had a vision of sexuality that upheld our right to joyfully and forcefully express our sexual desires. Somehow this perception of sexuality was displaced and once again we distance ourselves from the fact of physical lust by insisting that sex ought to be practised with a long-term, committed, official licence and a taboo on same sex partners and a familiar institution emerges.

The line of argument in Griffin's book is of little use to feminists. Not only is the attack on porn dubious, it also prejudices the public view of our movement. We do not want to be seen as guardians of the public morals but as liberationists and vision-

aries. As liberationists, we don't want to dispense with material that is aimed at sexual stimulation, but we would prefer to expand such material into something that is exciting for women as well as men. Porn's shortcomings are its usual irrelevance to women, its monotony and its standardisation of sexual practices and expectations. Surely more women-oriented and woman-produced pornography would be preferable to puritan moralism.

Griffin so exhausted herself in producing a moving and lyrical essay on the oppression of women that she lost any substantial grasp of her subject matter. One could disregard her unqualified overstatement of porn's significance if she had systematically analysed porn's composition and identified its premises. Instead, Griffin offers snapshot glances of pornographic stories and essays as representation of the entire genre. Such analytical devices allow porn to be presented as just another outpost on the frontier of feminist struggle. A more thorough debate about pornography and sexuality, however, might reveal that feminists such as Griffin are guarding the wrong front.

Maria Flores

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