

SOLIDARITY

Journal of the London Solidarity Group. Issue 8, Summer 1985. 60 Pence

Power and Sex

French philosopher meets American novelist



The Miners' Fight

The bureaucrats' kiss of death ?



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Publishing history. The present Solidarity Journal is the latest in a line of magazines produced by the Solidarity Group and stretching back to the early sixties. Solidarity for Workers Power, first in this sequence, was founded in 1960 and ran to 89 issues. This was succeeded by the nationally produced Solidarity for Social Revolution which ran to 16 issues and was in turn succeeded by the current journal. Our publishing history is complicated further by the existence in the sixties and early seventies of six or seven regional Solidarity magazines, among them those produced by the Scottish, South Wales, and North Western Solidarity groups; and by the publication of the shortlived, nationally produced, Solidarity for Self Management.

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Cover photo of Mick McGahey by John Sturrock/Network.

AS WE SEE IT

INDUSTRY



Myths and the miners

With each month that passes, the scale of the defeat of the miners' strike is becoming clearer. In this article Andy Brown explores the possibility that the left was responsible for its own defeat.

Photographs by John Sturrock and Laurie Sparham.

BY NOW most people on the left will be sick and tired of reading articles on 'The lessons of the miners' strike' whose main conclusion seems to be that the strike failed merely because it lacked the correct leadership. It is way past time that the left took a long hard look at itself, and asked whether its own mistrust of ordinary people and its own macho myths about the strength of industrial unions did not

contribute significantly to the defeat; asked, moreover, whether the bulk of the left has not spent the period since the strike ended trying very hard to avoid facing reality.

Much of the left has contented itself with tirades against Margaret Thatcher, the police, the press, and the TUC, which give the impression that these people have suddenly become especially evil.

But there is little point in blaming Thatcher for being a Tory, the police for being aggressive, the press for being propagandist, the TUC for trying to get workers to agree to things they don't really want, and still less the Labour Party for being more interested in the opinion polls than in the victory for the strikers. All these bodies have always acted in this way, and indeed the Labour Party in particular had a great deal to gain by the strike's defeat (no stropky unions staging 'winters of discontent' next time they get in). Nevertheless, despite the worst efforts of those who openly oppose them and those who are supposed to be on their side, strikes are often successful in achieving their objectives.

In my view this strike was defeated not because the

authorities were especially efficient, but rather because the whole approach of the left to the strike played into the government's hands.

Organised disaster

The first major mistake was largely one of tactics. The government wanted this strike, planned for it and provoked it - was it a good idea to give them what they wanted?

If someone wants to close down an industry, then strike action alone is most unlikely to prevent them. After all, striking is stopping work, which is what they want you to agree to do in the first place. Tactics which may work against the threatened closure of an industry are not easy to work out. However, in the appropriate circumstances they



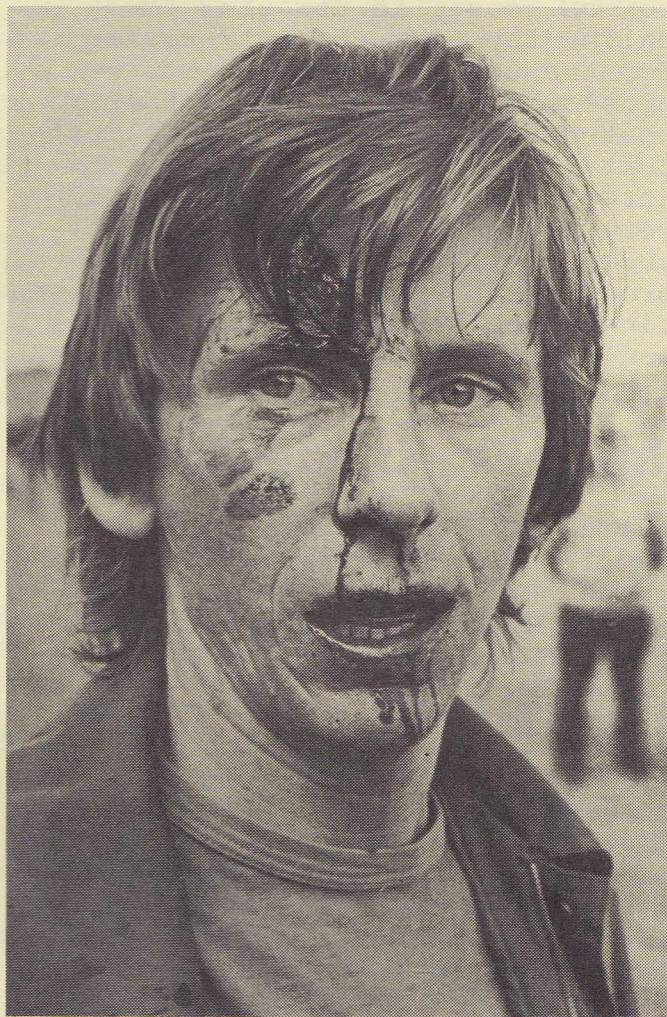
Unstoppable force meets immovable object — Eggborough pickets, April 1984. Previous page: graffiti at Easington, Durham, September 1984.

might include: firstly occupations; secondly the closure of other industries through solidarity action; and thirdly civil disruption, such as preventing cities from working by regularly blocking traffic, raising the level of violence to such a pitch that the government decides that it is safer to 'compromise', or by picketing and making life difficult for outside institutions such as newspapers and the courts, preventing the movement of trade supplies, if necessary by intimidating lorry or coach firms.

On several occasions strikers began to act along these lines (e.g. the blocking of motorways by strikers' cars which took place early on in the strike), but they were not encouraged to put their energy and initiative into such actions, and instead were mobilised for a series of set-piece battles with the police which had predictable outcomes.

It is no good arranging to turn up at a specified time and place for a mass confrontation against well-equipped police backed by the courts. Such rituals usually lead to arrests, beatings and imprisonment. For an action to be effective it usually needs to come as a surprise to the authorities, and to be difficult to forestall. The best way to achieve this is for the actions to be organised locally by word of mouth and the targets constantly changed.

The traditional left still believes in strong centralised leadership and in organising in a disciplined way. This strike should have taught a lot of people that such methods aren't practical. For example, all the clever financial manoeuvres of the NUM leadership did nothing to make its funds available to help its members - instead the money was seized by the courts. Miners were forced to organise financially themselves, and raised far more money as well as winning support



A foot soldier in the battle - one victim of a police truncheon attack at the Orgreave works, June 1984.

from many more ordinary members of the public; facts which came as no surprise to libertarians, who have always argued that the self-activity of people is more creative and effective than central direction. So far there is precious little evidence that this particular 'lesson' has been absorbed by those people who most need to learn it.

Systematic mistrust

The second mistake is that throughout the strike the left has shown a mistrust of ordinary people, and this has been one of the key causes of the strike's defeat.

There was no justification in union tradition, tactical gain or

common sense, in refusing to ballot the NUM. The only reason for the refusal to do so was president Arthur Scargill's fear that he would lose. He was almost certainly wrong. A ballot two or three weeks into the strike would very probably have been successful, and would thus have brought out enough Notts miners to tip the balance significantly. It would also have helped campaigns

Miners' hardship fund

Please send a donations to the Miners' Families Appeal, c/o 90 Fawe Park Road, London SW15. Cheques should be made payable to the appeal. The fund is being organised and distributed by Women Against Pit Closures.

for solidarity action among other workers (e.g. dockers) which failed by so narrow a margin. To some extent the reason these solidarity actions failed to get off the ground was because union leaders tried to manipulate workers into coming out rather than trying honest persuasion and a clear fair decision one way or the other.

If, on the other hand, the ballot had been unsuccessful, then it would have been clear from an early stage that the strike would not succeed and a lot of brave people would not have had to suffer as much and as long as they did. I have no desire to fetishise the formalities of constitutions, but for any strike to have a chance of success it must have the freely given support of the overwhelming majority of workers involved.

Most of the left seems frightened and suspicious of democracy, and this leaves it wide open to attack. The way to respond to the so-called 'moderate' campaigns for democracy in the unions is not to resist them, but instead to embrace them and take them further than their proposers intend. Truly

democratic organisations are far more of a threat to governments.

It may serve left-wingers' careers to get themselves appointed to positions of union power via manipulation, but it does no good at all if this means that the 'leadership' cannot carry its members with it. It is better to lose honestly than to win by devious means, and it prevents the government passing itself off as the defender of democracy. Workers do not like being conned or taken for mugs. The left has grown so used to the smug idea that it has a superior consciousness to the masses and therefore has a right to manipulate them in their own interests that it cannot see how damaging this has been in a real struggle.

Systematic mythology

Another serious illusion present on the left is that 'real' workers such as the miners are particularly powerful and should therefore be used as the shock troops in our battles.

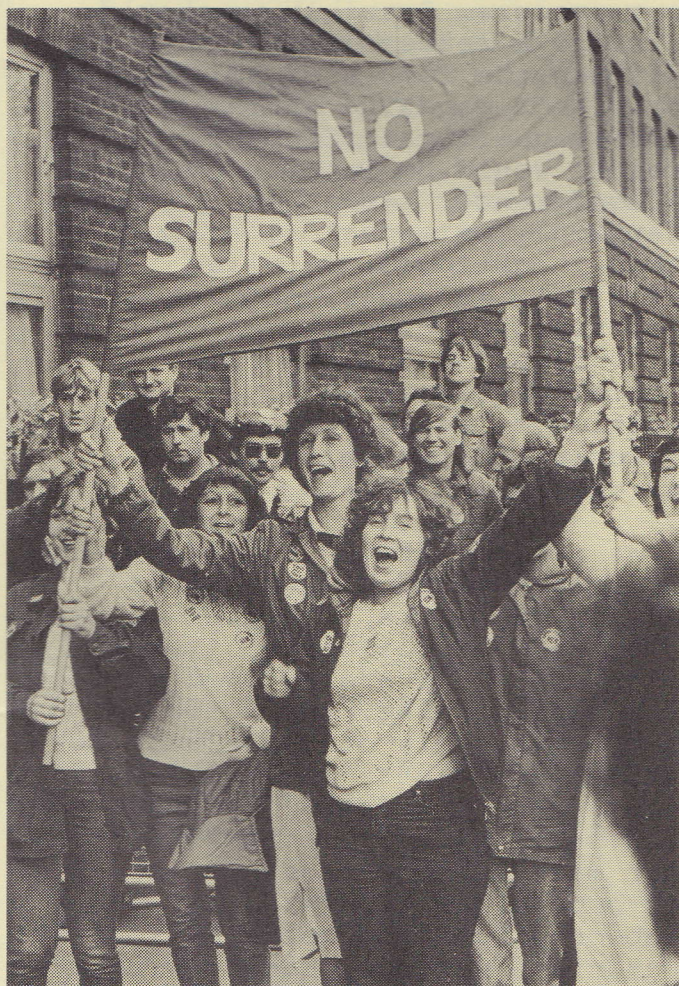
This idea is repulsive on a number of levels. First, there is the idea that other workers should do our fighting for us, while we cheer from the sidelines feeling comfortable because the bulk of us are not 'typical proletarians' (i.e. male unskilled manual workers) and therefore can't be expected to do much more than talk.

Next, there is the idea that struggles of manual labourers are somehow more important than struggles of women, or claimants, or white-collar workers, or blacks.

Finally, such thinking leaves us in a very defeatist mood now that the strike is over. If our best troops have been defeated what hope is there for the rest of us?

The truth is that the defeat of the NUM is a very serious blow to all groups on the left, but not a

terminal one. There are other groups of workers whose power is virtually untouched, and many of these groups have barely begun to tap their potential power. For instance, despite a very conservative ideology the Civil Service Union caused the government to lose millions of pounds during its last strike without actually causing its members that much hardship, and individual actions by civil servants have regularly exposed the government in the last year. Equally, the strength of the women's movement has probably increased as a result of this strike, and the possibility is beginning to emerge that work might cease to be the focus for the most visible manifestations of political struggle.



New forces in an old struggle — miners' wives demonstrating in London during talks between the NUM and NCB, May 1984.

Such theorising does not, unfortunately, help the miners any, and there is no getting away from the seriousness of the position for many of them in the aftermath of the strike.

Repairing the damage

Two images from recent demonstrations brought this home to me particularly clearly. On one, three children who might have been ten or eleven were walking around with collecting tins. Each had a notice around her neck. One such notice read "Dad jailed for 2½ years — please give generously".

On a different demonstration, the day after the return to work, I heard a miner telling someone why he wasn't back at work. He'd been sacked that morning and had been forced to sell his TV set in order to survive. "Still," he said, "I can always go home and watch the radio — they haven't taken that yet."

People like this need all the help we can muster. All too often the left cheers on a group of workers and then forgets them the second the strike is over, moving on to support the next cause of the week. We ought not to let this happen this time. Please send any money you can spare to the address published on the facing page and so help to alleviate at least the worst of their problems.

The way the ordinary strikers have behaved in this strike has been astonishing, as has been the enthusiasm of the women who fought alongside them. After a year of poverty none of us can dispute their courage and almost no-one is seriously blaming them for going back, not even those who cracked that two or three weeks before the general return.

Nevertheless, despite all this courage the government has gained from the dispute a sizable victory. If this victory is not to be repeated then it is way past

time we took careful note of the one true lesson of this dispute.

Most of the things which were organised by ordinary people and by miners and their families worked very well. Almost all the

clever manipulations of the leadership worked very badly. You can draw your own conclusions about who has the higher level of consciousness!

ANDY BROWN

EDITORIAL

About Solidarity

'Solidarity Journal' has come of age. John Cobbett comments on its current strengths and weaknesses.

IT IS NOW ROUGHLY two years since we re-launched Solidarity's magazine. In those two years we have achieved some successes. Our most important step forward has been the creation of a (relatively) stable editorial group which should, in future, guarantee the production of the magazine at fairly regular three-month intervals. But even after this two-year, seven-issue revival we still lack other people's contributions and participation.

At present Solidarity is produced by a small group of people, all living in London, all working, and all with other political commitments. Nearly all the material in the last six issues has been written by this group, and therefore has been largely based upon our experiences in London. Inevitably the scope of our articles has been at once too general and too narrow: too general, because most have taken the form of an abstract generalised commentary on events rather than a fully researched analysis; too narrow, because our material has too often been drawn solely from our personal experiences. We have also failed to publish enough material on feminist, industrial, ecological and cultural issues.

We feel that these weaknesses can be overcome through more participation in Solidarity from our readers. Possibly we should arrange a readers' conference to discuss the future of Solidarity both as a magazine and as an active political force. If any reader would be interested in such a conference, please let us know. Certainly we appeal to readers to send in articles, detailed critical responses, and letters, which will open new areas of discussion or develop debates which past articles have initiated. We especially need more material dealing with current struggles and events.

We are not afraid to acknowledge differences and disagreements within our ranks, mistakes we may have made or points we have overlooked. We are no more perfect than anyone else, and we do not have a monopoly of the truth. We would appreciate 'feedback' - letters (not necessarily intended for publication), commenting upon our material and presentation. And of course, as always, subscriptions and contributions to funds are welcome. Back copies of recent issues of Solidarity are still available. Finally a new Solidarity pamphlet on radicals and revolutionaries in the English Civil War is due out by mid-summer.

CONTROL AND UTOPIA

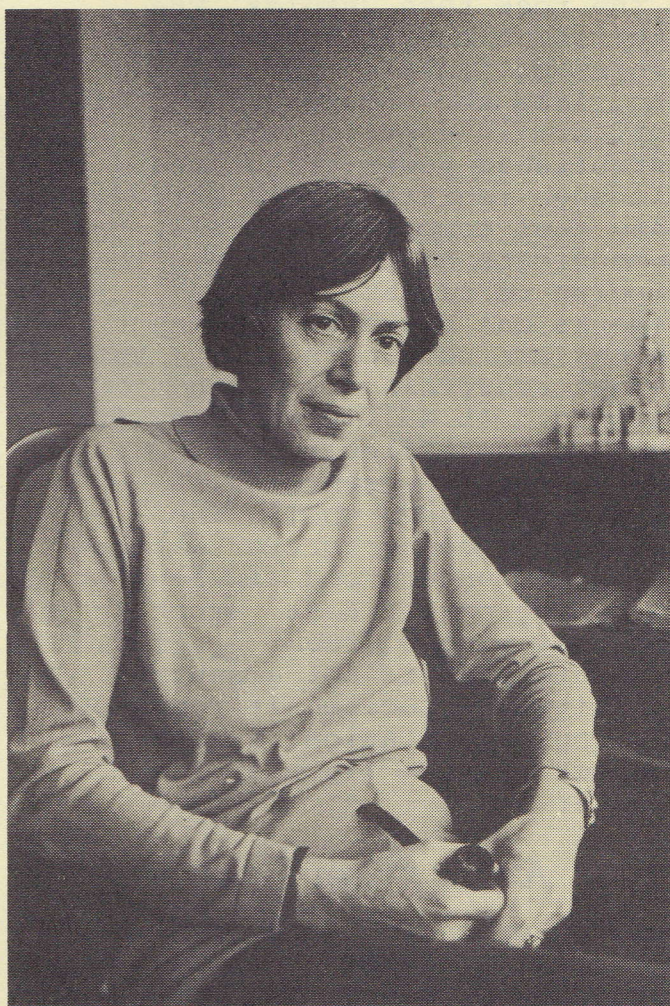
Questions of power

What is power? How does it work? In this article John Cobbett analyses ideas about the nature of power in Ursula le Guin's 'The Compass Rose' and Michel Foucault's 'The History of Sexuality'.

LEFT-WING GROUPS have always had confused and contradictory attitudes about power. Some have simply seen 'power' as an evil. Wilhelm Reich wrote that power "always means the subjection of others". This kind of thinking is usually based on the assumption that 'after the revolution' power, and problems associated with the construction and institution of power structures, will simply disappear. Yet other left-wing groups have shown a guilty fascination with power structures. While they have claimed that they will control or direct power structures towards the creation of a classless, stateless society, in practice they have established permanent structures of oppression and exploitation. Recent works by Ursula Le Guin and Michel Foucault question both these attitudes towards power.

Finding directions

The Compass Rose is a collection of short stories. Like all good science fiction, they are never truly escapist. Le Guin's stories take us out of present-day norms only to lead us back with new perceptions and ideas. Her writing is clear and stark, her stories are fables or parables rather than sagas. They contain no scenes of mass collective action: no riots, no orgies, no shoot-outs or car chases. Her work follows the classic Romantic tradition. It is focused on the individual, the individual's sensibility and



Ursula le Guin: gentle iconoclast.

perceptions and - most importantly - the individual's interaction with the surrounding environment.

These stories take the form of a journey through different emotional and political (or politico-emotional) states. The principal travellers are women;

the male characters remain curiously static. The journey starts on a whimsical note. The first stories talk of a solitary rebellious worker ant, of penguin-poets and of the possibilities of understanding the language of plants. Here Le Guin is posing a real problem: is it possible to understand others who not only speak a different language to ours, but who live their lives according to quite different rhythms and values from ours?

The rose then unfolds. The stories which follow usually centre on isolated individuals who, like the rebellious worker ant, are in conflict with established power structures. Although isolated, even exiled, they feel compelled to talk, to communicate or to confess. "The impulse to narrate remains", remarks one character, "many things are not worth doing, but almost everything is worth telling." (p.49). Often they find that it is difficult to communicate successfully. A nightmare haunts them: "the feeling of being forever watched yet never understood" (p.184) or of "being caught here, stuck in somebody else's dream" (p.219). Communication is not a neutral activity. To succeed it requires a willing co-operation, a mutual respect between listener and speaker.

Away from Utopia

Le Guin depicts a number of different societies: a utopia, a dystopia, primitive backwoods and advanced bureaucracies. Each society, each political and emotional state, is analysed as a system of communication. One story - 'the Pathways of Desire' - can be read as a satirical critique of feminists and socialist utopian thinking in general, and of Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time in particular. Le Guin's short story shares the same plot as Piercy's novel. Representatives of

'normal society' - Connie Ramos figures - are placed in a utopian society. Le Guin's utopia is named Yirdo. It is a typical utopia: a sunlit, perfumed, brightly-coloured jungle society inhabited by strong-limbed, good-looking noble savages. In Piercy's book, Connie Ramos' slow acceptance of the utopian society dominates. There is never any doubt that eventually she will accept it; in fact, the plot of Woman on the Edge of Time can be summarised as 'will she conform or will she conform?'. The novel lacks any real dramatic tension, and therefore fails. Le Guin's characters, on the other hand, show a more complex and realistic attitude. They find the shallow, repetitive social rituals of Yirdo "boring!...If they're trying to reproduce a facsimile of somebody's heart's desire, it isn't mine!" (p.197). Le Guin's argument is in line with arguments consistently put forward by libertarian thinkers against the concept of utopia. Qualities of happiness, freedom and dignity cannot be imposed or manufactured by a social system, no matter how utopian. Instead of a closed utopian dream, an open system of communication is required.

Dystopia shares many of the same faults as utopia. In 'The New Atlantis' Le Guin describes life under the nightmare domination of a vast welfare state. No free communication takes place between power structures and individuals. Instead the state issues a deafening monologue of political, moral and sexual norms to the subject population. As in Brave New World, polygamy has been made compulsory. Yet Le Guin is not protesting against the moral content of such edicts; instead she contests the state's right to 'speak' for its subjects.

"The state really does make things awfully hard for itself. It must have simpler to enforce the laws, back when marriage was legal and adultery was what got

you into trouble. They only had to catch you once. But I'll bet people broke the law just as often then as they do now" (p.31).

In The Compass Rose Le Guin also examines how such oppressive power structures work in daily life. A number of her stories investigate the political implications of psychiatric practice. In SQ a well-meaning scientist discovers a technique to measure sanity - a 'Sanity Quotient'. This scientist is called Dr. Speakie - one who makes others speak. At no point in the story is it suggested that Dr. Speakie's method may be inaccurate; the story's concerns lie elsewhere. Dr. Speakie's method forces others both to reveal and to 'accept' truths about themselves. His work is motivated by the questionable assumption that "it is always best to know the truth about yourself" (p.78). In place of free communication, his technique allows the authorities to create an artificial, controlled discourse of assent from the population. But his test evolves with its own logic. Soon half the world is judged to be insane, and forty per cent of those found to be sane are appointed to run the asylums. A 'psychocracy' has been created. Then, as in Frankenstein, the machine devours its maker. Dr. Speakie is found to be insane, and his secretary and office cleaner are left to run the world government. As the secretary remarks, "It really isn't as difficult as you might think" (p.88). The techniques of the sanity test have become the structures of government.

These stories have been written as science-fiction. They show worlds far away from our own both in space and time. Nonetheless, many of Le Guin's observations do apply to our society. Note that throughout her stories Le Guin is arguing that there is no simple binary division between oppressors and oppressed, or between powerful and powerless. Her stories show

people manipulated within existing power structures. These arguments are strikingly similar to the analysis of power proposed by the radical French philosopher Michel Foucault.

Power dissected

Foucault argued that the purpose of modern power structures was to preserve and manage life. He contrasted this goal with that of feudal power structures, which aimed merely to control the population. Feudal power was based upon negative injunctions - 'thou shalt not'. Modern power structures are designed to implement positive norms. They demand not only conformity but also participation from the mass of the population. According to Foucault, sexuality has been the principal medium through which this form of power has been implemented. Freud argued that the repression of sexuality formed the basis of modern culture and society. Foucault developed this argument, suggesting that 'repression' was only a minor feature of a more wide-ranging strategy. In fact, the idea of repression itself had been used to justify other more sophisticated forms of oppression. Put simply, Foucault's main thesis was that to repress is not the same as to abolish. The 'repression' of sexuality did not prevent our society from growing ever more aware of, and oriented around, sexuality. Increasingly sophisticated techniques were established to reveal the truth about this apparently secret world.

Foucault traced a straight line of development from the sixteenth century refinement of confessional techniques, through the collective enforcement of morality in Protestant congregations, the confessional autobiographies (whether explicitly pornographic or not) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the moralistic and demographic



Michel Foucault: prophet against power.

investigations by the pioneering sociologists of the nineteenth century, to the psychiatrist's couch. (Of course, this list could be extended to include present-day consciousness-raising and counselling groups). In other words, during a period of history when sexuality was supposedly being repressed, an ever-growing number of institutions were being created in which

"one had to speak of sexuality as a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing to be administered" (p.24).

Instead of 'repressing' sexuality, these new power structures utilised the existence

of supposedly secret desires as mediums through which to operate. For instance, during the eighteenth century there was almost a crusade launched with the apparent aim of stopping child masturbation. Foucault notes

"The child's 'vice' was not so much an enemy as a support; it may have been designated as an evil to be eliminated, but the extraordinary effort that went into a task that was bound to fail leads one to suspect that what was demanded of it was to persevere, to proliferate to the limits of the visible and the invisible, rather than to disappear for good." (p.42).

As in Le Guin's dystopia, the important point to be noted is not the explicit content of such edicts, but their implicit logic. Even a campaign which, on the surface, was "bound to fail" can

be extremely successful in implanting a new sense of self-identity in individuals. By constituting sex as the Great Taboo, as the secret, modern societies have therefore given increasing attention to sexuality.

"What is peculiar to modern societies...is not that they have consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they have dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret" (p.35).

Sex has become a secret, a problem, something above all to be talked about, to be confessed. This is the situation described in The Compass Rose - "the feeling of being forever watched yet never understood".

No doubt Foucault overestimated the power of these techniques. His analyses remained centred upon abstract regions of philosophy, state and law, even while he discussed something as individual and earthy as human sexuality. Perhaps this single-minded concentration on elite power led him to his dead-end, pessimistic conclusions. "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this of exteriority in relation to power." (p.95) Foucault offered a dynamic model of power relationships, but it was a closed model. His perspective was always from the social heights looking downwards. Resistance was only comprehended by Foucault as a factor within existing power relationships, never as an autonomous and spontaneous growth which could develop according to its own logic.

Foucault was undoubtedly right to argue that it is impossible to simply 'opt out' of existing power structures. All efforts to do so - from the Icarian communist colonies in the United States, through the projects of the first Zionists, to present-day

lesbian-feminist communes - eventually result in a re-formation of existing power relations. Foucault was also right to point out the profoundly conservative role played by those who call for yet another investigation to discover our 'real' sexuality, with the creation of yet another set of institutions and experts to encourage new patterns of confession and guilt. Foucault's arguments fail when he considers the patterns of resistance. His model comes too close to suggesting that modern power structures are capable of an infinite co-option of dissident thoughts and desires.

Le Guin's perspective is at once more optimistic and more realistic. In the last story of The Compass Rose she writes of a group of women who "hoped to go a little further, perhaps, and see a little more; if not, simply to go and see. A simple ambition, I think and essentially a modest one." (p.267). New social pressures and the formation of new social groups can lead to the formulation of radically new demands. In the face of such demands, the problem is neither to abolish power, nor to seize it. Instead we must turn to the creation of new power structures which serve to encourage free communication and self-direction.

JOHN COBBETT

Ursula le Guin,
The Compass Rose,
Granada, 286 pages, £1.95p.

Michel Foucault,
The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction,
translated by R. Hurley,
Penguin, 167 pages, £2.50p.

● In writing this article I have found Ken Cook's article 'Notes on History, Politics and Sexuality' in The Left and the Erotic, (London, 1983) most useful.

NICARAGUA

Why the FSLN should be demystified

Dear Solidarity,

Having read and re-read very carefully Ian Pirie's dissenting tailpiece to my article on Nicaragua (see previous issue), I feel it necessary, and hopefully useful, to reply. It was not my intention to imply that there is any simple solution to very complex problems (there isn't) but to counter the mystification of Nicaragua as a "popular democratic socialist society" currently being pushed by the trad. left. As is so often the case, the trad. left bases its argument on wishful thinking and dogmatic theory rather than on an analysis of fact. My aim was to present some of the less pleasant facts about the Sandinista regime.

Undoubtedly, Nicaragua is a shit poor country which suffered for decades under the iron rule of the Somozas, and such a situation does impose material and cultural restraints on revolutionary change. But they are not the only restraining factors - another is the marxist-leninist ideology of the FSLN. Anyone who doubts that their ideology is marxist-leninist should heed the words of Humberto Ortega: "Marxism-leninism is the scientific doctrine which guides our revolution". This ideology sees the 'vanguard' as the active subject and the 'masses' as passive objects humbly receiving the wisdom it hands down from on high. Is it any wonder, then, that

when the masses act on their own initiative by taking over factories or striking, the vanguard suppresses them? For example, when a group of women protested over the conscription of their sons in front of the official Human Rights Commission they were dispersed by the police. The FSLN commandantes no longer allow questions when they stage their 'meet the people' exercises, because people were asking what it was so hard to find cooking oil in the shops.

But the ideas of the FSLN aren't the only revolutionary ideas in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan Confederation of Workers (before its recent split 60,000-strong compared to the FSLN's estimated 7,000) aimed at building a "movement that is sincerely democratic, totally independent of the political parties, the church, the bosses, and any force apart from the working class, revolutionary in the most profound sense because aspiring to change radically the structures that condition and exploit human beings". In its 1981 May Day manifesto it called for "...a democratic and libertarian revolution, and the development of a socialist society where the workers and not the state bureaucracy would be in possession of the means of production...". Dissatisfaction with the union's national leadership led to a rank-and-file revolt, the majority forming the Nicaraguan Autonomous Confederation of Workers (CTN-A). In Managua, where it is the union of transport and food service workers, it conducts its affairs by means of mass assemblies. While the CTN-A is far from perfect (can any organisation achieve such perfection?) I would argue that it contains those who are aware of the dangers of bureaucratisation on the Soviet/Cuban model, and who

are, despite the adversity of their circumstances and the lack of a libertarian tradition in Nicaragua, trying to work out a concept of self-management. I think they deserve our support, especially when they suffer repression at the state hands.

The Nicaraguan revolution still hangs in the balance. US intervention could destroy it and turn back the clock to the days of the Somozas. It could develop into the kind of authoritarian state-managed capitalism which arose out of the Mexican revolution of 1910-1920, or it could take the Cuban path. Workers such as the 21,000 in the CTN-A could even attempt to make self-managed socialism a reality. It is this last option we should try to aid in whatever way we can. Such aid must involve demystifying the pseudo-revolutionary claims of the FSLN and those who fawn on it in Britain, which is what my article tried to do.

L. CAMPESINO

NICARAGUA

A cooler part of capitalist hell?

Dear Solidarity,

Being a Swede I have neither personal nor social historical memories of how it is to live in a country at war. And Nicaragua is a country at war! From their political point of view, the Sandinistas stress that the war is an aggression on the part of the US administration. But at the same time:

(1) they have passed a law giving total amnesty to those who give up their arms;

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(2) they are conducting peace talks with Brooklyn Rivera and MISURASATA (BR was even invited to hold talks on the Atlantic coast - he came and left- while MISURASATA are invited to lay down their arms during the discussions on autonomy and don't seem uninterested);
 (3) many of the dead contras are poor peasants.

My judgement is that without US backing the contras would have no army and no political support. They are widely disliked. On the Atlantic coast, the issue is 'more complicated'. An American working with the Research Centre on the Atlantic Coast said she thought the FSLN had understood that without some kind of agreement on autonomy the war would drag on.

It is tempting to extrapolate from the development of Russia, Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam and Cuba, and say that this is how it is in Nicaragua as well. But if we really are interested in the development of Nicaragua, we are forced to argue from the reality of that country.

On the extreme left we usually condemn all wars not fought by the working class against capitalism. There is no such war in Nicaragua to be supported on these conditions. But I would never concede that the only and correct political line is to desert 'both' armies, which in this case would equal letting Reagan dispose of the Sandinistas.

There is no political view/organisation which could be threat to the FSLN. The Front is well organised and has overwhelming support. What the Popular Sandinista Revolution was all about was schooling, health care, economic development, and the like. As long as they follow that course they can guarantee the support of 'nice people'. I consider it necessary for the council communist left to propose politics which can be a challenge

to the FSLN without indirectly helping Reagan and the contras. In short, in Nicaragua (and possibly elsewhere) there are degrees of heat in hell.

Nicaragua today is a society which is very well organised. The FSLN has a mass movement for nearly every layer of society, and if a new political problem arises, a new mass organisation is created. For example, the mothers and families of drafted youths (today every able-bodied male born between 1960 and 1965) didn't like the idea of having their sons away in the mountains fighting the guerillas, so to relieve/keep within bounds (choose according to taste) their anxiety, a brand new organisation was created.

This I see as one of the most important traits of Nicaragua today - from one point of view. The state, via the Party (FSLN) tries to organise/influence every current of social or political or economic or whatever affairs. No autonomy is possible.

GORAN LIPEN

● This is an edited version of a letter sent to us by a Swedish friend who has just returned from Nicaragua. We hope to publish a fuller account of his experiences in a future issue.

FUNDAMENTALISM

Religious error

Dear Solidarity,

There was a printing error in my article on religion in the last issue - the table on page 16 showed the percentage of actual church members rather than just church goers in the USA.

Yours, BOB POTTER