

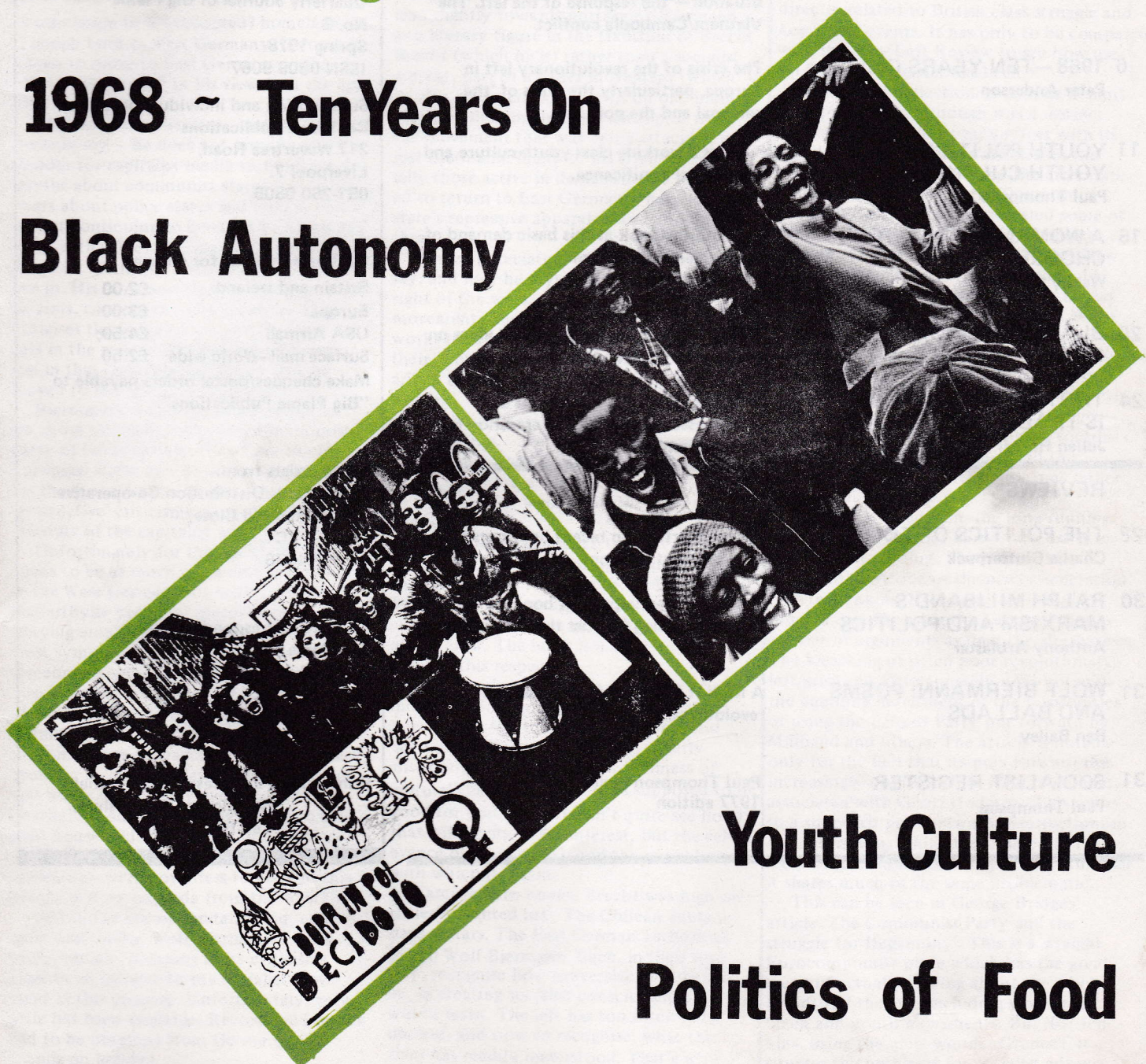
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Revolutionary Socialism 2

The Journal of Big Flame 40p

1968 ~ Ten Years On

Black Autonomy



Youth Culture

Politics of Food

A Woman's Right To Choose

Trotskyism & The I. S. Tradition

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The period since 1975 is undoubtedly proving a political watershed in the history of the class struggle in this country. Although it is clear that the key struggles of the recent period have been lost (firemen, miners, Grunwicks), it is also clear that, despite the cut in living standards and increased unemployment, the working class as a whole has not suffered a historic defeat. Nor is it true that British capitalism has managed to relaunch itself on a period of growth, solving the problems of unemployment and inflation on the way. Particular aspects of the class struggle show strongly contradictory features. On the one hand there is the 12½% cut in living standards since 1974 which marks the success of capital in this period. On the other hand there is the continuing combativity within the working class and the strengthening of the autonomous movements of women, blacks and gays.

The Economy

Internationally, the capitalists themselves see no way of resolving their crisis. Since it is impossible to regain the stability of the fifties and sixties they are somewhat desperately trying to establish an agreed basis for some sort of new 'world order'. But a whole range of economic and political factors divide them, such as the attitude to take to the entry of the Communist Parties of France and Italy into power.

On the domestic front the real economic problems have not been solved. Since 1970 industrial production in Britain has not grown — unlike even Italy. On jobs Britain, along with all other advanced capitalist countries, has no solution to permanent structural unemployment. Inflation has been reduced only because of a favourable conjuncture of various international and domestic factors and because of the cut in living standards, which has allowed companies to increase prices and improve their profit levels.

Even the improvements in the balance of payments situation and the growing and sizeable revenue from North Sea oil are in fact of only marginal value in solving the problems of British capital. Indeed, the ruling class does not know what to do with North Sea oil money since it does not want to risk a wage explosion by feeding the revenue into demand. This would only make companies raise their prices even more and start an inflationary spiral, which would provoke an explosion of combativity on the wages front. And, of course, the ruling class is aware of the classic capitalist contradiction, more marked than ever in the present period, that to compete on the international market investment needs to be made in the most advanced technologies, which only serves to reduce the number of jobs. Such a crisis calls out for socialist solutions, but, of course, that is the one option that the Labour government is not going to take.

The Industrial Situation

The response of the trade union leadership in the recent period has shaken many people by its treachery. Having clearly won a leading role in the key decisions on the economy and incomes policy in the wake of the 1974 miners' strike, the trade union leaders since 1975 have fully paid off the interest due to their capitalist masters.

Having instigated and policed the 'social contract' from 1975-1977, it had seemed likely that their ability to exert such tremendous control would not continue without substantial opposition into Stage 3. The summer 1977 union conferences of miners, transport workers and engineers bore witness to the growing disillusionment with the Labour leadership and government policies and a clear willingness to struggle amongst the rank and file. But section after section was either sabotaged or deflected from its course by the leadership. The most serious cases were Grunwicks, actively

sabotaged by the APEX and UPW leaderships; the firemen, effectively sold out by their own executive; and, probably of most significance in the long run, the miners, who were manipulated by the right wing majority on the National Executive into accepting pit-by-pit bargaining and productivity deals. Thus, although the number of strikes went up sharply in 1977 over 1975 and 1976, the key struggles were lost.

Yet even here the situation was marked by contradictions in that the 'productivity' element in wage settlements has undoubtedly been used to allow for increases over the 10% limit. The total effect has been a short-term improvement in living standards since Stage 3 started. What is clear, however, is that the 10% was an arbitrarily low figure and was deliberately set to allow firms to buy off different sets of workers (eg miners). The government has thus been able to allow various awards beyond the 10% whilst wishing to avoid at any cost a public defeat by a major section of the working class. The 10% norm must also be seen against the 12% cut in living standards since 1974. The estimated figure of a rise of 12-14% in earnings in the year to July 1978 is even lower than the 15% target which the government thought it would be lucky to get at the start of Stage 3.

Restructuring

What is of greatest significance in the long term is the thoroughgoing restructuring exercise that capital has been carrying out. Since the onset of the crisis in the mid-seventies this restructuring has taken on a greater urgency as capital tries to stem the decline in its rate of profit and establish a new basis for growth. Much of the leading edge of the working class of the fifties and sixties has been knocked back by new technology and

closures (docks, printworkers, ship-building). Almost all the other traditionally key sectors have also failed to mount a fight-back in the recent period and have often been victim of savage betrayals by the union leaders.

Often these attacks have come at the level of payment systems, methods of pay negotiation and job organisation. In the steel industry the BSC management offers a deal linking pay increases to agreement on redundancies and closures. In British Leyland a major attack to force the closure of the Speke plant takes place at the same time as in another part of the Leyland combine, Cowley, the T&G full-time officials attempt to withdraw credentials from the recently elected left wing leadership of the plant (whose election had been one for the few successes of the left in the recent period). And most serious of all, the key vanguard of the working class of the seventies; the miners, has been forced by the right wing majority in the union leadership to accept pit-by-pit productivity deals. These and other examples add up to a major reversal for the working class in its traditional industrial base. The precise significance of this has yet to be seen.

However, although in industry the wage and jobs struggle have been knocked back, this is not the only factor to be considered. One important indication of the existence of a growing, though still small, support for socialist politics was the significant vote for revolutionary candidates in the AUEW and T&GWU elections. Other important advances have been made in struggles around the cuts, particularly relating to hospitals, where genuine rank and file groupings have

sprung up and organised their own consistent actions, sometimes generalising them in the local area and to other struggles. Similar developments have taken place in the anti-fascist movement where for the first time in the recent struggles many rank and file activists in the trade unions and the Labour Party have played an important role in strengthening the opposition to the National Front.

The Political Level

Whilst some layers of the working class have moved to the left, the Labour and Tory leaderships have been moving as rapidly as possible to the right. With Labour having adopted the monetarist policies of Thatcher (cuts in public spending, increasing unemployment) the Tory Party has been left with a political vacuum. Whilst the Tories compete with the Labour Government on who is the furthest to the right on immigration policy and so on, the majority of the ruling class has undoubtedly been greatly impressed by the success of Labour in forcing wage cuts and unemployment on the working class.

With Labour doing so well in absorbing and reversing the working class struggles of the early seventies, the question of which party will suit the ruling class at the next election is open to question. Certainly, Labour can expect important ruling class support. For the left the situation also poses problems. Whichever party forms the next government the working class will be subjected to sustained attack. Whilst the Tories would doubtless be even more vicious than Labour, a victory for Labour would continue to put the

labour movement leadership on the spot. Clearly, the main thrust of Socialist Unity is correct in aiming to develop, before the election, while the political nature of the Labour Government and TUC is clearly exposed, an organised socialist current inside the working class. Such a development would prove more difficult with Labour adopting a left face against a Tory government.

The timing of the election is less of a problem. All signs point to October, which would allow for the devolution bill to be passed in the summer, thus allowing Labour to recoup ground lost to the Scottish nationalists, and before inflation begins to rise again in the autumn. With the ability to manipulate the economy in the short term through the budget, using North Sea oil money, the outlook for Labour, despite 1½ million unemployed, is not too bleak. Also an October general election would head off an autumn wave of industrial struggle. The late summer will probably see the TUC signing a Stage 4 deal which would be used to show that only a Labour government could yet again produce the goods.

The Emergence of a Socialist Current

With the Labour Party's rightward shift and the increasingly compromised position of the Communist Party in supporting its allies on the 'left' of the labour movement, the major reformist organisations of the working class are exacerbating the political crisis for their militant members. Important sections of the revolutionary left, both inside and outside organisations, have shown



encouraging signs of responding to the situation in a principled way. One such principle is to put the interests of the working class as a whole first and not reduce the interests of the class to those of one particular organisation. The Socialist Unity initiative, centred on the necessity to have a united socialist intervention in elections, has been shown to have the right response in pushing for socialist politics with an open, non-sectarian form. It has demonstrated the possibility of reaching the much wider socialist vanguard than that defined as belonging to existing socialist and reformist organisations.

Big Flame for its part stands committed to a genuinely new political organisation and thinks the possibility of building it exists. Such an organisation should be capable not only of involving the new layers of militants emerging from the class struggle but also of thoroughly re-

assessing every aspect of its politics including its forms of political activity in relation to its experience in and analysis of the class struggle. Old political models — revolutionary as well as reformist — have failed to develop many varied aspects of class struggle, at least to a significant extent, and in particular have failed for the most part to build a strong base within the working class. Such failings are not accidents of history but flow from inadequate political methods and partial analyses, as well as from the hold of reformist ideas and forms of organisation inside the working class. We need to learn the lessons of history but we must also learn to re-assess continually our present political inadequacies in order to lay the basis for the formation of a new political organisation which is capable of attracting and meeting the needs of wide sections of the working class movement.

residue of conflict, it has become clear that the Vietnamese Government is increasingly concerned at the strategies adopted by the Khmer regime. Meanwhile, the Khmers have attempted to aggressively assert their independence against what they see as Vietnam's desire to annex Kampuchea into a Vietnamese-dominated union.

Certainly the economic strategies adopted in the two countries are very different. At the risk of drawing too simple an analogy, it does seem that the Cambodian strategy resembles aspects of the Soviet Union's War Communism policies in the early twenties. The main emphasis is on productivity; nationalisations, land-reforms and co-operatives — justified very much in these terms — have been forced through in an attempt to create a 'self-reliant' economy as rapidly as possible. This has often been against the wishes of the people, who have themselves taken little part in a process which often appears to have been both authoritarian and bureaucratic. The relationship between party and masses which has been important for Vietnamese economic and political development appears to have been less evident on the Cambodian scene. Undoubtedly, in the short term, Cambodia has achieved remarkable economic successes — notably in rice production, in which it is now self-sufficient — but at what cost? Enforced collectivisation which fails to take account of the needs of the people produces results which are ultimately counter-productive; we need look no further than the 1930s collectivisation for developments in the Soviet Union.

As the Vietnamese have become increasingly critical of Cambodian policies, the Khmer government, with its emphasis on nationalism and self-reliance, has increasingly viewed Vietnamese criticisms as an interference in its internal affairs. Add to this the Khmers' experiences since the second world war, which have convinced them that the Vietnamese government ultimately wants an Indochinese federation under Vietnamese control, and all the ingredients of the conflict are there — a conflict which, for historical reasons, can conveniently take the form of a border war.

Hostilities between the two nations have undoubtedly been aggravated by the Chinese and Russian positions. Whilst China initially called for negotiations, it recently — via Chou-En-Lai's widow — condemned 'Vietnamese aggression' and has encouraged Khmer leaders to go on to the diplomatic offensive in the ASEAN countries. Furthermore, China appears to be putting pressure on the Khmer government to give Sihanouk a greater say in political affairs. If this were to happen, Cambodian dependence on Chinese support would intensify, both politically and, more importantly, economically. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union has openly supported the Vietnamese, attempting to strengthen the revisionist tendencies that already exist within many areas of Vietnamese policy.

The Kampuchea-Vietnam conflict will clearly be detrimental for socialist developments in South East Asia as a whole. Both governments are being encouraged to turn to reactionary regimes such as Thailand to obtain support for their positions, and the divisions in Indochina will undoubtedly be exploited by the ASEAN (pro-western) regimes, ably assisted by imperialism. Furthermore, the conflict will also weaken the support which the two Indochinese governments could otherwise give to the liberation movements in Malaya and Thailand.

THE CAMBODIA/VIETNAM CONFLICT

A CORRESPONDENT WRITES:

Three years ago, the liberation movements in Kampuchea (Cambodia) and Vietnam were on the verge of a united victory against the world's most powerful imperialist country. Today they are involved in an increasingly bitter dispute over border territory — a dispute whose ferocity can be judged by Cambodia's recent declaration that it would never become a 'Vietnamese satellite' of a 'Hanoi dominated federation'.

Faced with this sharp turn in events, the British left has reacted predictably. Most Trotskyist analysis has seen the conflict as an inevitable result of the 'Stalinist political regimes and ideologies' dominant in Indochina, whilst pro-China and pro-Moscow parties and ideologues have faithfully reproduced respectively the Chinese and Russian positions. Meanwhile, much of the socialist and anti-imperialist movement has remained self-consciously silent. What unites these different reactions is a lack of any serious analysis of the conflict itself.

There has, of course, been a ferocious concerted international campaign against Cambodia — centred largely on highly selective readings from Francois Ponchaud's, eye-witness accounts of the period following the fall of Phnom Penh, and on reports from selected groups of refugees crossing the Thai border. This, coupled with the Cambodian Government's refusal to tell the outside world what is happening internally, makes it extremely difficult to assess the situation. Nevertheless, we should at least try to go beyond the self-fulfilling prophecies that most left groups have put forward so far as 'analyses'.

Since French colonialism annexed parts of Cambodia to Vietnam in the early twentieth century, there has been a constant dispute over the borders. This dispute, however, has merely been the form taken by a conflict that has not always been about territory, but has concealed deeper differences between the two liberation movements.

The early perspectives of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party before the Second World War became increasingly nationalist as separate parties were formed in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to fight the Japanese. The generation of leaders in Cambodia who were eventually to dislodge Sihanouk were formed politically during this period, and their nationalism was reinforced by their treatment at the 1954 Geneva Conference when, despite their holding around 40% of the country after the war, they were largely rejected by the Vietnamese in favour of Sihanouk. These events had considerable impact on leaders such as Khieu Samphan and Pol Pott — the latter referring to it as a 'betrayal' in a recent speech.

After Geneva, the Khmer Rouge carried on their struggle without much co-ordination with the Vietnamese and Laotians until the late sixties. When greater co-ordination did eventually occur, it was often marked by conflicts, which were, however, not well known at the time — in 1972-3, for example, on the dividing up of weapons, and, more seriously, in 1973 over the Paris negotiations, with the Khmers insisting on the need to continue armed struggle without negotiating.

Since independence, to add to this

1968 ~

TEN YEARS ON

The left concentrates most of its attention on the more obvious components of the crisis: the problem of reformism; Eurocommunism; strategy in the unions, and so on. Other important areas receive little attention by comparison. One of these is the interaction between the personal and the political. This article focuses on this subject, with an introduction which explains the overall context in which the 'personal and the political' has become a burning issue in the revolutionary movement in Europe today.

INTRODUCTION

THE LEVEL OF CLASS STRUGGLE

The majority of groups that have been prominent on the revolutionary left over the last ten years had their decisive period of growth in the wave of working class struggle that began with May '68 in France, the Hot Autumn of 1969 in Italy and includes our miners' strike of 1972. For revolutionaries, the effect of this wave of struggles was to remind them of the existence of working class militancy – with great pleasure we abandoned the belief of our teachers that the working class had been bought off by an avalanche of consumer durables. [1]

But, though in this period revolutionaries were able to get out of their student ghettos and establish links with the new workers vanguards (the worker-student assemblies in Turin which led to the foundation of Lotta Continua, the links the French Maoists made with immigrant workers at Renault plants, the growth of rank and file papers in this country), we were unable to understand the nature of this new militancy. In particular, we failed to understand its relation to the economic boom (of post-war reconstruction) that was coming to a close. In the workplaces themselves, this militancy was unable to develop durable *organisational* forms and with the onset of the economic recession, worker militants turned back to more traditional 'trade unionist' forms of militancy. In Italy, for example, the factory delegates, whose emergence represented a victory of the Hot Autumn, were quickly recuperated by the unions when the recession came. The imposition of 'social contracts' in many European countries (eg Italy, France, Portugal, the UK) has in the last few years meant conditions of struggle that independent working class organisations have found very difficult to deal with.

THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The post-68 revolutionary left came into existence during a high point of anti-imperialist struggle. Things were going well for the revolutionary forces in South East Asia (ending in victories in Vietnam and Cambodia), the Cuban revolution had given important space to revolutionary movements in Latin America and in China the Cultural Revolution showed us that the Soviet process of revolutionary decay was not inevitable.

Now ten years later, we can see things are not so easy as we thought; the countries that have successfully made revolutions, like Vietnam and Angola are now faced with the task of building socialism and we are coming to realise that the structures and social forces that were so necessary for the seizure of power are not so suitable for their new task. And, in any case, revolutionary movements in the third world have not provided many answers to questions about how to make a revolution in monopoly capitalist countries like the UK.

This has come at the same time as a decline in the numerical strength of productive workers in monopoly capitalist economies – centres of working class strength (eg docks and ship-building) are being smashed by the introduction of new technology and a changing international division of labour. It is true that one result of this ongoing capital concentration and capital intensification is that the potential power of industrial disruption is being concentrated in the hands (and minds) of fewer workers, but the employers are aware of this and are developing other ways of controlling these highly skilled workers. [2]

Recent events in China have lessened the validity of that country as a 'showcase' for socialism. There is no doubt that revolutionary movements are greatly strengthened when there are countries building socialism to be held up as examples. We

were helped to get over disillusionment with the Soviet Union by the presence of China with its alternative road to socialism. Now that road is also in doubt and we (and the working class vanguards we work with) lack a reference point for our beliefs in the possibilities of building socialism.

From a revolutionary point of view, things have gone very badly in Latin America, where events over the past ten years carry the stark reminder that if the alternative is socialism or barbarism, history sometimes brings the latter.

THE STAYING POWER OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE COMMUNIST PARTIES

This problem for the revolutionary left presents itself differently in those countries where the focus for working class political support is a social democratic party (eg. the UK, West Germany) from those countries where it is a Communist Party (eg. Italy, France and Portugal). But in both these situations the revolutionary left has under-estimated the ability of these parties to retain the support of the working vanguards. In France and Italy, the expectation and hope of the revolutionary left was that, as the CPs moved to the right in the 'historic compromise' and the 'common programme', more and more class vanguards would become open to revolutionary perspectives. But this has not happened. In the main, the class vanguards have accepted the CPs' message — 'The country needs more productivity and more work discipline. Our prime target must be to beat inflation in the national interest'. Why has this been the case?

One main reason is that social democracy and the Communist Parties have been able to break many of the links that exist between the revolutionary left and the working class vanguards. If terrorism had not existed no doubt they would have invented it (and in some cases did) — but their job has been made much easier by the counter-revolutionary activity of groups like the RAF, the Red Brigades and the so-called 'Workers Autonomy', with their beliefs that the working class can be radicalised by the burning down of factories, the shooting of trade union leaders and left-wing journalists. This has come at the same time as the necessary confrontation inside the revolutionary left between male workers and feminists — a confrontation whose consequences could have been less than catastrophic only if the leaderships had been prepared to actively fight for a feminist perspective inside the organisations; something their workerism made very difficult to do. [3]

A second reason has been the failure of the revolutionary left to develop a comprehensive economic and political strategy that it could pose as an alternative to the CPs' 'gradual parliamentary road to socialism'. The strategy of the revolutionary left has remained the barren one of hoping for a left government whose weakness will give space for the 'big bang' of revolution.

The 'big bang' theory which is modelled on the Bolshevik seizure of power goes something like this; 'As the crisis gets worse, so it will be possible to win more rank and file workers over to an anti-boss and anti-trade union leader position. As this rank and file movement developed, the workers will set up organs very much along the lines of the 1917 Soviets in Russia or the 1926 Councils of Action during the 1926 General Strike. These Councils of Action will spread nationally until there is a situation of 'dual power' in which the mechanisms of control of the bourgeois state are unable to cope with working class unrest. At a certain point, the balance of forces swings into our favour and the 'winter palace' is there for the storming. It is the case, since Lenin said it, that on their own the rank and file workers can only develop trade union consciousness as a party is needed. A democratic centralist party led by full-timers who issue forth from the ranks of the intellectuals. For years the revolutionary left has remained faithful to this model and oblivious to important criticisms that have been levelled at all aspects of it. Its critics have included those (the list starts with Gramsci) who have argued that the conditions under which we will make the revolution in late capitalist countries is so different from Tsarist Russia as to make the Bolshevik model invalid. On this Lenin wrote: 'The world-wide experience of bourgeois and landowner governments has evolved *two* methods of keeping people in subjection. The first is violence with which the Tsars demonstrated to the Russian people the maximum of what can and cannot be done. But there is another method, best developed by the British and French bourgeoisie. . . the method of deception, flattery, fine phrases, promises by the million.



Fotobit

petty sops, and concessions of the unessential while retaining the essential'. [Collected Works. Vol. 24]

There are those who have pointed to the lack of democracy inside the Bolshevik Party and the lack of democracy that developed in post-revolutionary Russia. There are the critics of the Leninist theory of consciousness (the idea that revolutionary consciousness has to be brought from the outside into the struggle). These criticisms (and more) remain unanswered as the revolutionary left clings to a strategy clearly inadequate to meet present needs.

Above all else there is the problem that the 'big bang' theory only applies in a pre-revolutionary situation. What it lacks is a strategy to take us there from the situation we are in today. And, not surprisingly, that space has been filled by the numerous 'Eurocommunist' and 'third road' scenarios which are more adequate at providing a strategy for contemporary Britain *but only at the fatal expense* of dispensing with the need for a violent revolutionary break with the institutions of our society — in excessive zeal to be realistic they have forgotten that revolutionaries also have to smash the state. [4]

THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL

I said at the beginning of this article that I would concentrate on 'the personal' factors associated with the crisis of the revolutionary left. I want to do this since a balance is needed to the more traditional analysis of revolutionary success and failure that only considers 'political' factors — that is issues like inflation, the miners' strike, the TUC etc. This approach is limited because it leaves out of consideration that fact that revolutionary organisations are made out of human beings who have their own lives, their own ups and downs and their own limits of endurance. But it is unsatisfactory at another **more** fundamental level — in that it assumes a division between the 'personal' and the 'political' that is being questioned by the revolutionary left in all capitalist countries. Their questioning of this division reflects their realisation that capitalism is also a social relationship that has affected all institutions — including the relationship between individuals. [5]

'My personality and the American way of life fit into each other so easily, as if by design. To get free of America outside me I had first to get free of America inside me. How to stop performing, break the self-hatred, the guilt, the obsession with goals, the need for things, the drive to keep moving, the urge to look good. Psychotherapy, yes. Learning to feel good about myself, to accept and live my **desires** and reactions and impulses. And in the process I discovered that my hated self was not my fault but finally the society's, that this isolated unique individual was really a deeply social and historical being. And that



*"There is no liberation of women without revolution;
and there is no revolution without the liberation of women."*

breaking free to live humanely now meant attacking the America which had made me fit only to live inhumanely." [6]

This fundamental insight into the way capitalism remains in power through its ability to control 'civil society' (the phrase is Gramsci's) as well as its control of the state has led many to demand a more varied strategy from revolutionary organisations which includes a perspective for revolutionary struggle within the institutions of civil society (education, the media, the family, relationships between people). In response to this pressure the leaderships have thought it sufficient to collect a series of quotes from Marx and Lenin to show that the personal has nothing to do with the political.

A particularly wooden response to the demand that the personal be seen as a legitimate concern for revolutionary organisations is an article by John Ross in 'Socialist Woman' (Summer 1977). He writes: "All social relationships, including those of the family and the oppression of women, are defended by the capitalist state and can only be overcome following the destruction of that state. For that reason, the primacy of the political is displayed just as much in relation to the wider social struggle as in the economic. . . . A social issue can become a political question (for instance, abortion law restriction, divorce, state repression of gays, nursery cuts). But not every social issue is a political one. . . . Abortion is an excellent example of an issue which, from appearing very 'private' and 'individual' has become 'social' — a matter of concern to the community — and then political by raising demands on the state or opposing state restrictions." [7]

And the argument, by stating that an issue is only worth the attention of the revolutionary party when it becomes political has very dangerous consequences since it forgets that it is often by being taken up and fought for by revolutionary forces that an issue is imposed on the attention of the state — usually in an attempt to defuse it. It is pressure from Women's Aid groups that has forced the state to deal with the 'problem' of battered wives, which, according to Ross, was not a political issue until it comes up in Parliament or receives some other form of state recognition.

It should also be pointed out that to separate the 'personal' from the 'political' is to make a concession to the individualism that characterises bourgeois society — the division of the private from the public, the imprisonment of women inside the home, of kids in school, of the mentally ill in the asylum, the division between those who are paid to do politics and the majority whose only function is to vote for them.

Against this fragmentation of bourgeois society, revolutionaries pose a collectivist alternative the beginnings of which are to be found in tenants' groups, mental patients groups (the Socialist Patients Group in West Germany), independent youth groups and women's health groups that exist throughout Europe and the States. And the revolutionary organisation cannot see itself as exempt from this process. To meet the needs and desires of its members, it must encourage collective social relations that prefigure the communist society. Whilst it is quite true that within capitalist society there can be no islands of socialism, this does not mean that nothing can be done until 'we smash the state'. What it means is that any attempt to develop communist relations within a capitalist society will be a contradictory and uneven process — a process without which we will never develop the confidence and power to smash the state

The members of revolutionary organisations (mainly women and gays) that are putting forward these demands of the personal are questioning the tradition that says that the priority is to seize power — that this would make it possible to correct economic oppression, and then, and only then, could one begin to fight against other oppressions; oppression by age, sex, race and so on. But a refusal to accept this tradition has grown as more and militants have come to see that in those countries where there has been a seizure of power (Russia, China etc.) there has been no victory over these other oppressions. In fact, in the case of the USSR there has been a clear return to bourgeois institutions and bourgeois morality after the more liberated years that immediately followed the revolution. [8]

So a position has developed amongst revolutionaries that says: "We are going to fight for liberation from our own specific oppression, right now. We are not prepared to put it aside until after the seizure of power." As Barbara Ehrenreich puts it: "Socialist feminism rejects what I would call 'stageism' — the mechanical notion that history must occur in some predetermined sequence. For example, 'We'll talk about women's liberation after the revolution' or 'we can't change hierarchical structures in the workplace until the forces of production are developed to such and such a point' etc." [9]

Socialist feminist thinking, as far as I can see, is characterised by a much more dynamic and dialectical notion of history. We know that objective conditions in the historical 'stage' we are living in shape our lives; but we also know that we have the power to change these conditions. It is also true that this anti-stageist perspective contains a fundamental insight into the relationship between state power and the institutions of civil society — that a revolutionary movement must neutralise before a complete revolutionary transition is possible. History shows us that seizing state power is not enough — since it inevitably leads to a process of delegation that creates a new class/stratum that imposes itself on the working class.

There are good reasons why this anti-stageist perspective continues to gather strength — it corresponds to the diversity that exists within the working class and the revolutionary movement today. Together with the decreasing importance of industrial workers (numerically and politically) inside the working class and the emergence of a 'new working class' come new vanguards and new reasons for making the revolution.

PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS [10]

It is clear that revolutionary organisations do not operate in an historical void. The revolutionary left today carries the legacy of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinism. It means that even if they wanted it, revolutionary organisations will no longer get from their members the blind devotion that characterised members of the Communist Parties in the 1920 and 30s. Today's potential recruits to the revolutionary left will only join if they see evidence of the possibilities of communism in ongoing struggles. This requires from the revolutionary left a radical break from its traditional way of doing politics which is on the one hand defensive ('no cuts', 'the right to work' etc), and on the other refuses to pose a communist alternative. But Lucas Aerospace and GEC workers with their plans for socially useful products; women's health groups with their perspective of preventative rather than curative medicine; and free schools with their emphasis on non-hierarchical learning, are all examples of prefigurative politics that the left neglects at its peril. So far the debate is stuck on an absurd polarisation: either we support alternative technology or the right to work, either free schools or we fight inside the state educational system, either alternative medicine or the struggle against cuts in the NHS. What is clearly needed is a synthesis of the vital element of utopia that these 'alternative' struggles provides with the struggle to maintain the concessions [11] of bourgeois democracy which is the bread and butter of revolutionary politics.

We can no longer point to another country and say 'that is where communism is being built'. We must get the confidence that communism can be built from these alternative struggles that prefigure the communist alternative. [12]

ENDS AND MEANS

But the critique of the new left is not just about what are the priorities of the revolutionary struggle but also about the relationship between *what you are fighting for* and *how you fight for it*. What the new left is saying is that the ends do not justify the



"... it was feminists who brought to our attention..." "... political choices are involved in how we live our private lives..."

means. As Ehrenreich puts it: "... the revolution is not just something that you read about in the newspapers, it is not just something that occurs in the realm of 'political economy' The revolutionary process extends into all aspects of life — including those that have been defined as 'personal' and not 'political'. And the revolutionary transformation involves the entire fabric of social relationships, including those that have been defined as 'naturally' determined, such as those between people of different ages — or sexes. Second, socialist feminist thinking emphasises the importance of *subjective* factors in revolutionary change. That is, we don't have to wait till 'after the revolution' to transform ourselves as people — we know that transforming ourselves is a part of making the revolution. From this point of view, the task of consciousness raising — uprooting deeply entrenched bourgeois racist and sexist attitudes — is central to the political struggle."

It is important that as we redefine the relationship between the personal and the political, we come to realise that how revolutionaries relate to other people (including other revolutionaries) is a political act. [13] To fail to understand this is to neglect one of the fundamental contributions of the women's movement — that oppression 'hidden in the home' is still oppression. There is no intrinsic reason why revolutionary organisations cannot accept these criticisms and use self-criticism to develop a richer and more liberated practice. Unfortunately, what tends to happen is that the leadership (always male-dominated) experience these criticisms as a personal threat and over-react with fear and trembling. Their response is to take refuge in the comfort of past models — a process Marx described well: "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when the radicals seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis, they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language." [14]

TEN YEARS OF STRUGGLE

Many of the members of the revolutionary left in Europe were politicised by the events in and around May '68 in France. They

came into politics with the belief that revolutionary change would happen very soon. This meant that in the short-term they were psychologically prepared to sustain an incredibly high level of political activity — paper-selling outside factories every day, long marches amongst the peasantry (the French Maoists), working in factories to build up factory branches. Modelled on the Bolsheviks, the ideal was of the full-time revolutionary with no home and no ties — except to the party. In this tradition are the words of the leader of the French LCR (Revolutionary Communist League): "The militant does not settle down... He is in transit between two societies, two countries, two dwellings."

Not surprisingly, this ideal, which owes a lot to Phillip Marlowe, the private dick of Raymond Chandler's thrillers, appealed mainly to single men in their late teens and early twenties. With it went ideas of sexual liberation which reproduced in a new way the dual standard of bourgeois morality (for example men using women as emotional crutches, men unable to accept that women use any of the sexual freedom they had in theory). As it became clear that making the revolution would take a while longer, some militants came to realise that revolutionaries needed to be human and to be human they had to have time and space in their lives for things like stable relationships, kids, more money than the dole etc. But because of the moralism that exists on the revolutionary left, these first critics felt unable to make their criticisms public. They internalised what they were feeling as personal inadequacy and dropped out of organisations and sometimes out of revolutionary politics. As the failure was experienced at a personal level, the structures of the organisation were not put into question. It was feminists, with the strength of the women's movement behind them, that first brought into the open this process of militants burning 'themselves out'. They have shown us the male-oriented nature of the traditional notions of 'commitment' and have reminded us of the essential need to find ways of carrying out politics that are open (to the traditionally excluded) women with children. Women militants have quite rightly made the point that a way of organising that involves only single young men cannot bring about revolutionary change in our societies.

It was also feminists who brought to our (male-dominated) collective attention the fact that political choices are involved in how we live our personal life.

We are all agreed that it is wrong to invest in South Africa, but there are still revolutionaries who have servants [15] or are not prepared to socialise their housework or who beat the women they live with. And they see no contradiction between their personal behaviour and politically fighting for an end to exploitation, a woman's right to choose, and the setting up of women's aid centres, for example.

But there is a connection, as a short story in Spare Rib (Jan 1978) makes clear: "Love without listening is violent. The giant hand that lifts the mother of toddlers to the 19th storey of the tower block is moved by brutal tenderness. It's even possible that in the hearts of those who ravished Vietnam, trembled not only fear of reds, yellows and diminishing markets, but also ignorant love, protective, knowing-what-is-bestness. But you need not look so far. Oh brothers, sisters, how many seminal events have you misread in your own beds?" (from 'Eye to Eye' by Tina Reid)

This is not to say that revolutionary organisations should feel free to intervene in all areas of personal life. The point is more that where the boundary between the personal and the political is drawn is the result of political struggles inside and outside of organisations, for example, women fighting to get childcare recognised as important.

As their members desire to have a life of their own grew, revolutionary organisations have not found ways of operating that could give their members more space. And hopes of finding within organisations a higher (more communist) level of social relations have in most cases not been fulfilled. So we have a faster and faster turnover of members and ever-increasing personal tension until the whole thing cracks. As we did in last year's Lotta Continua conference at which feminists and workers came to blows. Or in the LCR in France, where full-timers recently went on strike for better working conditions and a shorter working week. And even if its eruption is less spectacular, the demands of the personal have been the cause of a sharp debate in many organisations, including the OCT in France, the IMG and Big Flame in this country.

CONCLUSION

Behind the writing of this article is the belief that by looking at our mistakes, those of us in the revolutionary left will be able to seize the opportunities opening up to us better. If it were not the case that increasing demands are being made on us, we would not be in crisis, we would be content to remain the totally isolated bearers of a tradition, as we were from 1930 to 1965. Our crisis comes because as we exit from the ghetto (e.g. the anti-fascist movement in this country, the anti-nuclear movement in France and Germany, the pro-abortion movement throughout Europe), we find ourselves with rigid structures and ideas that cannot cope.

At least two activities are necessary if we are to get out of this crisis.

— on the one hand, we must learn to listen and understand *collectively* what it is that the working class vanguards we work with are expressing in their everyday practice and struggle.

— secondly, we must abandon out-dated models and begin a concrete analysis of the society we want to overturn

Professional politicians — the revolutionary species is of course male, 20s, white, educated, goes to five meetings a week and drinks frequently in certain pubs. A bit unfair, of course, but I've lived the life of a professional politician and dropped out because of what it did to me. I don't mean the effect of the workload so much as the seriousness and intensity of it all, the strain it was putting on relationships with friends most of whom, while left wing, weren't politicians. One of the main reasons why I've always stayed outside revolutionary parties is because the thought of having to spend a lot of my non-working time in the company of their members just depressed me. Talking in the pub in Nottingham with a member of a left group who has been a miner since he left school — he commented on how out of place he felt because of his different cultural upbringing. For different reasons I felt the same way, so would many feminists.

What I'm getting at is not the failings of individual revolutionaries but rather the concept of the professional revolutionary. I suppose they're necessary, the pressure of

what needs to be done dictates it, but yet an organisation composed largely of 'professionals' tends to demand a certain all or nothing adherence, not just to its political line but to its very being. A mass revolutionary party will require both a widespread revolutionary consciousness and also a mass, *part-time* commitment to conscious revolutionary organisation. That's all anybody is going to get from me at this point in my life and I think it's part of why many many working class militants and feminists steer clear of revolutionary groupings. It's much easier to organise a small load of professionals, much easier to ensure the 'correctness' of their views and actions, but it's very self-limiting — co-ordinating, educating, informing a larger grouping of part-timers creates many problems I know, but I don't think in Britain there is any other way.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The high priest of this belief was Herbert Marcuse.

[2] On this point "Living with Capitalism" by Nichols and Beynon (RKP) is excellent.

[3] On this, see "Fighting For Feminism" a Big Flame pamphlet about the struggle of women comrades inside Lotta Continua

[4] The question of what kind of revolutionary strategy for monopoly capitalist countries will be taken up in future issues of "Revolutionary Socialism". Contributions are welcome.

[5] This phenomenon has been referred to in earlier Big Flame publications as "the social factory".

[6] Ronald Aronson in "Dear Herbert" (Marcuse) in "The Revival of American Socialism" ed. Fischer. OUP.

[7] "... Once people do connect deeply felt personal problems to larger political structures, they often do so to make political sense out of the whole society rather quickly. This is not merely hypothetical: many women in the last decade moved rapidly from complaints about sexual relationships to feminism to socialism. . . "

Another major contribution of feminism is the development of forms of organisation and thereby of community in which new kinds of social relations predominate. The collective investigation of personal oppressions can lead to a clearer understanding that the social distribution of power affects everyday life, and that the elimination of oppression necessitates new social relationships. . . — From "Sex, Family and the New Right" in Radical America, Winter 1977/78. In this excellent article, the authors show the comprehensive perspective the 'New Right' has on 'personal' issues like sex and the family. They forcefully make the point that the revolutionary left has been too bogged down with economism to take up these issues — issues on which it has potentially a lot to say and to offer working people.

[8] Nothing is more important for an understanding of this period than the writings of Kollantai. It is important to remember that as well as a feminist, she was a member of the Workers Opposition which put forward a coherent critique of Lenin's introduction of Taylorism and one-man management into soviet factories.

[9] From a speech given by Barbara Ehrenreich at a US Socialist Feminist conference and reprinted in "Socialist Revolution".

[10] The term is taken from an article by Carl Boggs and William Caspar "Therapy and Revolutionary change" in the Spring 1977 "Issues in Radical Therapy".

[11] I find talk of rights here misleading. There is no 'right to work' in capitalist society. Full employment is a concession of the Keynesian state to working class pressure. There is a 'right to work' in the state collectivist regimes of Eastern Europe, but that's another question.

[12] It is in this perspective that the Big Flame Teachers group is preparing socialist education packs which are alternative curricula to be used in schools.

[13] "We are interested in making a revolution, not in changing one another". This angry comment made by a questioner at a recent Big Flame meeting is typical of many revolutionaries who cannot grasp this.

[14] Marx — "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte".

[15] In France and Italy where some of the left is quite affluent, it is not uncommon to find maids and servants.

This article is the result of many conversations with comrades inside and outside Big Flame. It is only as good as it has been able to synthesise what they said.

YOUTH POLITICS & YOUTH CULTURE

The past two years have seen the development of an authentic working class culture amongst white youth — punk. This article looks at the implications of current movements and examines left attitudes on the question. It argues that prospects for a socialist youth movement are strong. The perspective offered is important if socialists are to aid this process.

One of the oddest, as well as saddest, events of last year was the Young Socialists (Junior WRP version) conference passing a motion condemning Punk Rock as a capitalist conspiracy. Like other pleasures (football, drink and the like) it was held to be diverting us from the real fight against the system. It's true that this is a relatively extreme example. But you need only scan the pages of the music and left press in the past year to see earnest debates about whether Punk Rock is socialist/ rebellious/ progressive or capitalist/ decadent/ regressive. This is a completely wrong problematic for looking at the nature of Punk or any other youth culture. Not merely because, as a recent *Leveller* [1] article noted, punk has internal divisions; but because it treats the phenomenon through ideological spectacles that do not and cannot fit. In the absence of a mass socialist movement, with its own strong cultural influence, no youth culture, Punk or otherwise, is going to be 'socialist'. No amount of deep interpretation of Punk lyrics or style can make it that. I have even seen an attempt to depict the bondage-style clothing used by some Punks as symbolic of the restrictions of capitalism.

This is not the first time the left has agonised over the nature of youth cultures and it indicates a series of political problems. There is no viable large, socialist movement in this country. No independent organisation and movement that defines socialism through its own eyes. Only movements as appendages of parties, who see the world primarily through the eyes of their 'parent' organisations. Party domination is only one aspect of the problem: what also matters is the perceptions of youth that the left tends to have, and not just those in organisations. I was sitting as a delegate in my local trades council recently, when a cheque was handed over to a young building worker as part of a campaign for Direct Workers. Clearly overawed, he mumbled his speech of thanks. He was then asked to leave the hallowed chamber. A delegate protested that he couldn't be allowed to stay and observe. The Chairman said in a very serious way that the rules didn't allow it, but he was sure that we would be seeing him back in a few years as a proper delegate. The problem with much of the left is that they see youth only as future workers, trade unionists or party members. I say "only", because, of course, they will be these things in the future and there is nothing wrong with that. But we also have to recognise the specific oppression and position of youth: materially, culturally, politically.

There is little doubt that the junior versions of left organisations are safe conveyor-belts. When I was in the Young Communist League, this was ensured by having a 30-year old President, ageing hack Monty Johnstone. Branch meetings would consist of the Chairman reading out exciting extracts from *the British Road to Socialism* (old and equally reformist version). Given the dramatic decline in membership in today's YCL, I doubt if things have radically changed. A few years later I was also active in Rebel, an International Socialist sponsored mini-movement. This was more imaginative and led some good local occupations of buildings for youth facilities, as well as having a lively and usually readable paper. Our branch in Liverpool had no IS members (IS had expelled them) and quite a lot of school students. We argued for independence from IS, a line supported by many IS youth. Unfortunately, we were too successful and IS closed it down by withdrawing financial and organisational support. We were told that "it was not providing enough recruits to IS."

Today little has changed. The two organisations that take youth seriously as a category, at least for recruitment purposes, are the Labour Party Young Socialists and the Young Socialists (WRP). They recruit a lot of dedicated young people, thirsting for action and knowledge of socialism as an alternative worldview. They also provide social activities and cultural events. On neither level are the things they do adequate. While the provision of education is good, its content and style is usually not. It too often mirrors school-type education, with parrot learning. Anyone who's argued with members of these organisations will know that it is no exaggeration to describe many of them as youthful 'hacks'. It is dispiriting to hear them argue with other youngsters in a stilted and forced way. They are moulded in the party line like many adults recruited to the left and often lose touch with their mates; Culture is often used in an underhand way: discos with a dose of Trotsky.

But more seriously, the culture is often not an alternative to capitalist forms. Young socialist events have included beauty contests and baby competitions. The general competitiveness and sex-role bias of existing culture is seldom challenged. An alternative cannot be force-fed, but has to be begun in a sensitive way. The latest SWP venture too, the Socialist Workers Youth Movement, judging by the last conference report, does not appear to have really got off the ground. These youth movements keep to safe channels by offering partial alternatives



which avoid many sensitive areas often uppermost in the minds of youth, notably sexuality and the family. These areas must be pulled into the light of day and given equal precedence with questions of unemployment, army recruitment and the like. For a fuller explanation one has only to look at the works of Wilhelm Reich in the 1920s and 30s in Germany, which have been recently, and rightfully, re-discovered by a new generation of the left.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH CULTURES

The article started by indicating that the inability of the left to come to terms with youth culture was indicative of wider political problems. More specifically, unless the left does start to understand youth culture, no viable independent socialist youth movement can be developed. It is my contention that the strength and importance of 'youth' cultures in Britain have both mediated and substituted for 'political' cultures amongst youth. Whilst youth cultures have existed in many other countries they do not appear to have played as significant a role as in Britain. [2]. Certainly in countries like Italy and France the overt political consciousness of youth is higher. Cultural and political questions have often been fused. Not just in the famous examples of France '68 and Italy '69, but, for instance, in the mass campaigns of youth in Italy for free rock concerts which involved pitched battles with the police outside the stadiums.

Today in Italy the Proletarian Youth and Metropolitan Indians are descendants, if extreme variants, of these traditions. The contradictions of class and capitalism in these countries explode *directly* in the behaviour, styles and consciousness of youth. Pupil and school movements have been extremely strong, drawing on the long traditions of political consciousness and concern for the total society that characterises working class political culture. The fact that these traditions are dominated by the Communist Parties is not the point. It is still a political culture, with which youth interacts.

BRITAIN

In Britain there is an absence of socialist and Marxist political culture. While we are a society with rigid class divisions and strong class consciousness, it is primarily corporate [3] — that is, the working class demarcates itself from other classes without posing alternatives at the society-wide level. This inevitable reacts on youth cultures, which remain sealed within that corporativeness.

Cultures can be defined as the expressive forms of style and symbolism that create and confirm a distinct pattern of life, moulded to differing social/ material circumstances, and have to be explained with reference both to the 'parental' working class culture and to the dominant society-wide culture. It is necessary to say this to dispel that potent myth of post-war societies, the 'generation gap'. The underlying function of the 'generation gap' argument was to substitute generational conflict and consciousness for class consciousness. All the serious research into youth cultures, however, reveals clear evidence that class, not age, is the primary determinant of their form and historical development. [4]

Four years ago I wrote in an article that "There may be different attitudes to things like sex, morality and music, between parents who stick to traditional ways and their children, but the very solutions that young people adopt in their different youth culture groups show their links to their parents' social positions in terms of class, occupation, region, race and sex. Far from operating in a generational void, youth cultures are trying to work out at their own age level and in their own way (clothes, dancing, fighting etc.) the problems that effect their whole class or social group." [5]

Or, as others have also put it, while they share the same basic problematic as their whole class to capitalist societies, working class youth cultures express themselves through specific sub-cultural forms. [6] To re-emphasise an earlier point: because of the general corporativeness of working class consciousness, the class contradictions that express themselves through these sub-cultural forms are only indirectly political. This helps to explain, for instance, the lack of any ongoing and widespread pupil/ schools movement. While the hostility to schooling, boiling up now and again into specific actions is undoubtedly present, there has seldom been any transference of that to an organised, generalised and conscious form. This is partly due to the relationship of the working class and its institutions to education. Unlike other countries where those movements have in the past had critical relationships to capitalist education; the British working class movement, because of its corporativeness, has seldom questioned education's nature and functioning. At least since the war, its demands have been for 'more', that is within the social-democratic and individualistic framework of 'equality of opportunity'. Within this context, indirect resistance and apathetic rejection have functioned as working class pupils' response. What went on outside school, including youth cultures was simply more important.

TEDS AND MODS

By looking briefly at some of the experience of youth cultures in Britain, we can apply the above argument more specifically. While the Teds were not necessarily the first working class youth culture, they were certainly the first obvious one. They were an overt reaction to the limits and contradictions of consumer capitalism. It was the era of "you've never had it so good", in the Tory Fifties. The Teds were an exploration of the affluent style, but the limits and suspicions were reflected in their backward projection to the style of the Edwardian era. The limits were, of course, influenced by the fact that most Teds were semi- or unskilled workers. In particular, the Teds represented a critique of the cultural limits of consumerism and the deadness of mainstream culture. What shocked many people was precisely the indirect challenge to the ideology and practice of consumerism. Carl Perkins' song sums it up:

"Well, you can burn my house, steal my car,
Drink my cider from my old fruit jar,
Do anything that you want to do,
But honey, lay off my shoes,
Don't you step on my blue suede shoes."

Teds chose to invest meaning in their own commodities, creating a distinct style, a pattern repeated right through to punk. But the most significant exploration of the limits of the affluent society was that of the Mods. This was, as the name suggests, a much more direct and living relationship with post-war capitalism. The stylish clothes and types of behaviour involved an attempt to realise the myth of social mobility, the idea that the working class was becoming middle class and could 'make it' if they worked hard enough or were 'intelligent'. The scooter was the key symbol. As someone once pointed out, the aim of the scooter was not to get from point A to point B, but to look good good on the way.

These processes were made all the more clear by the sharp contrast with the Rockers. They were a static and backward group, whose primitive rejection of consumerism reflected their social base. This was primarily among semi-rural or small-town unskilled youth, compared to the Mods semi-skilled and urban base. [7] Unmarketable in capitalist terms, and often drawn on by reactionary organisations to implement 'law and order', Rockers have remained unsurprisingly similar to the present day. The decline of the Mods reflected precisely the deterioration of the imaginary social mobility. Living in perpetual hope that next weekend would be better, their unchanging material situation eventually sunk the myths. All this was sensitively charted in the under-rated *Quadrophenia* by the WHO. The LP starts with lyrics like this:

"Every year is the same,
And I feel it again,
I'm a loser, no chance to win,
But I'm the one,
You'll all see, I'm the one.
(From "I'm the one")

"I'm getting put down,
I'm getting pushed around,
I'm getting beaten every day,
My life's fading,
But things are changing,
I'm not going to sit and weep again."
(From "The Dirty Jobs")

It ends with the realisation that:

"You were under the impression, that:
That when you were walking forwards,
You'd end up further onwards,
But things ain't that simple."
(From "I've had enough")

It was inevitable that something like Skinheads would be the reaction. From exploring social mobility images there was a return towards the safer, even caricatured stereotypes of the working class. In marked contrast to the mods they were dressed as if they had come straight from work. The music was also more uniform and regimented, from Reggae to Slade. The 'alien' elements in dress and music were gradually eliminated. 'Skins' also tried to eliminate other so-called alien presences; most notably in 'queer' and 'Paki-bashing'. Again the contrast was provided by the far more middle class Hippies. [8] They were des-

pised by the Skins because of their looseness, diversity and hedonistic pleasure-seeking. Skins were re-asserting the puritanism and chauvinism that is a feature of working class culture. This movement in youth cultures broadly parallels the decline of affluent images inside the working class as a whole. The mid-sixties saw the beginnings of the massive growth in unofficial strikes and other forms of working class resistance in industry and the community, as the economic crisis first began to bite. It is noticeable, though, that not all Mods drifted towards being 'Skins'. The older, better-off and longer-educated, often became 'Smoothies' or even working class versions of Hippies. Again showing that class is the major determinant of variations in the youth sub-cultures; the prime sociological base of the Skins being in the poorer working class. [9]

After this polarity there was a long period of diversity and fragmentation, where clearly defined mass youth culture groups declined. This fragmentation was influenced by two long-term trends in the social composition of youth. People between 15 and 24 increased by 24% between 1951-69: there are now around 8 million, with nearly a million in further and higher education. With such growth there is bound to be divergence, with more regional variations [10] and stratification by age: for instance the growth of markets for 'Teenyboppers' etc. Secondly, the increased overlap of youth cultures is partially related to the changing class structure. The less sharply defined differences in musical tastes and clothes; particularly the fact that many working class youth are now into heavier Rock and sometimes soft drugs is indicative of these changes. The most important being the growth of lower level technical and white collar labour, largely filled by working class youth. The resultant mix (also reflected in further education) with lower middle class elements has encouraged social exchanges of taste and style. Of course, the decline of mass youth cultures reflects the inevitable blockages and occasional circularity built into the process. If youth cultures exist as an expression of wider class contradictions, their very isolation guarantees that they cannot solve them. The extremes of images — affluence and ultra-proletarian — had been explored and there was bound to be an impasse. That impasse is influenced by the fact that working class youth cultures express, as Cohen indicates [11], a contradiction at an ideological level between working traditional puritanism and the new ideology of consumption.

That contradiction is also at the heart of the youth culture that has broken that impasse — Punk. We have not the space for a detailed analysis of Punk; but while it is not a mass and universal youth culture it deserves to be taken seriously. Its origins are rooted in class and culture. The material conditions of youth have deteriorated sharply in the past few years. Although this is manifested most clearly by the record levels of youth unemployment, it also interacts with the increased drabness of many jobs, living conditions and cultural options. Several observers have documented how the lyrical content of many Punk songs take up these themes of drabness and 'no future'; and how a number of the bands and Punk movements arose from working class areas like the Wythenshawe estate in Manchester (Slaughter and the Dogs etc.) This may explain the impetus behind Punk, but it does not explain the cultural form. This has to be partially related to past youth cultures. In immediate terms the past few years have been ones of relative stagnation. Dress, music and other cultural forms have become more and more blurred; music in particular has become more studio-based, emphasising technical excellence, rather than live performance and guts. This helps to explain the rawness and deliberate lack of sophistication of the music and dancing styles of Punks (pogoing etc.). The dress and other behaviour patterns push a path between the previous styles of Mods and Skinheads, but while Punk has style it is not the affluent upward-looking one of the Mods. The style appears to be an eclectic parody of consumer culture, with odd bits and pieces (safety pins, bin liners, fetishistic sexual clothing etc.) combining with the more usual narrow trousers and spiky hair styles. This is nowhere better expressed than in some of the Punk names like Poly-Styrene, who also uses a lot of brand names ironically in her songs.

The lyrics of Punk defy textual analysis. The chaotic jumble of images (particularly in Sex Pistols songs) and continual high-speed musical form upturns in existing culture in at least a temporarily subversive way. It is not a question of how progressive or socialist the lyrics are, but simply having to recognise



their subversive effect, manifested strongly in the denial of love and the usual themes of most songs. [12] Having explored the extreme images, the inverted consumerism of Punk recognises that there is no going back in youth cultures. If Punk is a sub-cultural expression of a system in crisis and decline, it is hardly surprising that socialists have tended to get excited about it. Aside from the general subversion there are enough groups with explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-fascist/ racist messages to make it the most progressive youth culture that we have experienced in Britain. [13] It is the first youth culture that has the possibility of having directly political effects. This is not to say that a socialist youth movement should base itself on Punk; that would be narrow and self-defeating. But simply that the emergence of Punk opens up real spaces for the development of that movement.

PROBLEMS OF YOUTH ORGANISING

Despite the opportune moment there are many problems and obstacles involved in taking up the urgent task of youth organising: some theoretical, some practical. On the more theoretical side there is the question of what the oppression of youth actually is, so that we can direct our organising in the most fruitful directions. One solution to this is the concept of 'ageism' put forward recently in a pamphlet *Towards a Revolutionary Youth Movement*. [14] This seeks to insert youth oppression as part of a trio alongside sexism and racism. Certainly there are some surface similarities. Stereotyped assumptions are made about people solely because of their age, at both ends of the age spectrum – "You're just a kid", "at your age you can't expect to understand" etc. And this is related to unequal power distribution. There are some structural aspects to youth oppression. These include the superexploitation of apprentices and other young workers as cheap and disposable labour. At the other end, older workers are often discarded. At the moment they are being asked to make way for younger ones through early retirement schemes designed to help bail the system out of its crisis. There is also the question of the continuing restriction of legal rights of the young. But it is easily the weakest structural basis for a specific oppression. It cannot be compared in most respects with race and sex primarily because it is only a temporary condition. Even for pensioners, those who suffer do so overwhelmingly because of their class. And if the history of youth cultures teaches us anything we see again that class is the key variable. How useful would the concept of 'ageism' have been to understanding that history?

The problem politically with the use of 'ageism' is that it

can lead to ultra-left excesses. The front of the recent paper, *School's Out*, had in bold letters on the front – "No-one is old enough to know better." This vision of adult prejudice is understandable, but in Marxist terms ridiculous. While age guarantees nothing, the Marxist concept of theory and practice is based on experience and we all have plenty to learn from older comrades. Age-based analysis also tends to pose the conflicts exclusively on authority lines. Here in an undifferentiated way the enemy becomes the teacher or the parent. While there are specific non-antagonistic contradictions [15] between these forces, the ageist strategy tends to miss the potential points of unity, for instance on cuts struggles. And while the nuclear family has oppressive features the 'ageism' argument tends to over-estimate them and under-estimate the emotional and practical uses the family has to young people, particularly working class ones. The ultimate in ultra-leftism has come in the Italian 'Metropolitan Indians' and 'Proletarian Youth'. Their manifesto includes demands such as – "The abolition of the age of majority so that all children who want to leave home are free to do so, even if they can only crawl," and 'anti-family militias, to free young people from patriarchal tyranny.' No comment.

'Ageism' not only under-estimates class, but also sexual and racial divisions. We have to be very careful with demands and organising in relation to girls and black youth. Girls have always been subordinate in youth cultures. Styles and behaviour have often been moulded in male images [16] although the impact of the women's movement is slowly changing the situation. Given these factors, a lot of the articulation of demands tend to be male-oriented. For instance, the demand for places where young people can go and make love and general demands for more sexual freedom are double edged. Girls are often sexually exploited in these situations and also want the space to define their own sexuality; which includes the right and power to say no – even to 'liberated' lads. Black youth also cannot be assumed to be included in 'normal' youth demands. The existence of fairly exclusive black youth cultures is evidence of their independent needs. And the unity between all black people (for instance in the Black Parents and Black Students movements) often appears to take precedence over age divisions. So while this article doesn't put forward any magic formulas for understanding youth oppression, we must be clear that any analysis and practice has to recognise the multi-faceted nature of that oppression. Which variable is dominant will depend on the specific context. Ageism tends to collapse these aspects into one, which is only the dominant.

one in a minority of circumstances.

There are also serious practical/ political problems. Anyone who has organised with youth knows the high level of physical oppression that often accompanies it. Activists are often beaten in their schools or expelled. Certain families will come down hard on them and the police have all manner of legal means to harass activist youth. The struggle for self-controlled youth centres is a key aspect of providing the social and political space needed. But getting them is a very hard job. Occupations are often immediately successful, but face a lot of problems of legal harassment. Also the internal divisions and lack of experience can limit the development. One example was chronicled in the August 1977 issue of *Big Flame*. A group calling themselves 'Independent Youth' took over disused premises and held a successful occupation. This was eventually called off when the council promised to provide alternative accommodation. But even before this it had started to deteriorate. The occupants were all local youth and there were big problems of internal democracy — girls doing the housework tasks, age and power divisions and so on. The lack of experience in organising skills is often crucial. But when older advisors help; even with the best intentions, a dependency situation tends to arise. This problem will always be with us but solutions could be helped by the production of an English version of an excellent and highly practical manual on 'Student and Youth Organising' (Youth Liberation — USA)

PROSPECTS FOR A SOCIALIST YOUTH MOVEMENT

Despite these problems the prospect for a socialist youth movement has never been brighter. Alongside the Punk phenomenon, the success of Rock Against Racism in providing a focus for a broad spectrum of youth has been very heartening. The participation of youth on the 'Right to Work' marches, despite the intense SWP manipulation has been a dominant factor. Anti-racist/fascist activity for and by youth is also on the increase. Although we should be ashamed that it took the NF paper Bull-dog to appear to wake up the left to the need to fight actively among youth where they are; in schools and communities. The fascists have never doubted the necessity to organise among youth. Even through the media there have been increasing reports of pupils' activity ranging from united activity against cuts to the still vital and basic demands for democratic rights; notably against corporal punishment, school uniform and the general right to organise. In this area the NUSS (National Union of School Students) has not been as successful as it hoped. It has a scattered and mainly London-based membership, not unconnected with attempting to build it in the image of the National Union of Students and the "no politics" rule imposed by its Young Communist League leadership. There have also been youth papers started in places like Aberdeen.

In the coming period the priorities for youth organising would appear to be:—

- * Anti-fascist and racist activity. Regular leafleting, music benefits etc.
- * Anti-recruitment propaganda linked to the United Troops Out Movement.
- * Information provision and organising on questions of abortion and contraception.
- * A national youth paper, plus systematic intervention in the music press.
- * The fight for youth centres.
- * Building schools organisation, if possible linked to NUSS.

These encouraging but limited activities cannot be moulded into an organisation or even a movement overnight. A lot of patient organising needs to be done which avoids abstract calls to action and unwinnable, (and therefore demoralising) demands. A meeting was called recently by people involved in the paper mentioned previously — 'School's Out' — which has a perspective of a national youth paper, acting as a growing focus for the diverse existing youth organising. They hope that by building a network of activities and organisers a basis can be laid for an independent socialist youth movement. *Big Flame* broadly supports this perspective and is prepared to put resources into it. This raises the question of independence. Any organisation of youth needs to be formally and actually independent of any one organisation. It is also clear that it cannot survive or grow without the aid of left organisations.

This tightrope has to be walked. Any youth organisation that interprets independence in an anti-organisational way or believes that it can count on uncritical support will fall off that tightrope.

FOOTNOTES

[1] In an otherwise perceptive article in *The Leveller 10* — "Who says the Kids are Alright?"

[2] America is a unique case in that a very general youth culture actually functioned as a 'counter-culture'. In a society where class divisions are already overlaid by racial ones; generational consciousness is also predictably strong.

[3] The use of 'corporate' here as sectional and sealed within itself has to be distinguished from its other use as in 'corporatism' or 'corporate state': which refers to an all-embracing and monolithic state control and domination over independent class institutions.

[4] Most of the research has been done by the Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies, who have produced a book *Resistance Through Rituals*. I agree with the basic perspectives and draw from the material in this article.

[5] "The Historical Development of British Youth Cultures" which was circulated inside *Big Flame* and *Rebel* in 1974.

[6] See essay "Subcultures, Cultures and Class" (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts) in *Resistance Through Rituals*.

[7] Figures drawn partially from data of people arrested in Mods-Rockers clashes. See *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* — Cohen (Paladin).

[8] Unfortunately we do not have space in the article to deal with what are basically middle class youth cultures. There has been a consistent thread from Beatniks, Hippies and onwards concerned with a critical relationship to bourgeois culture and ideology. Rather than explore the images of what they hadn't got, as in working class youth cultures, middle class youth reject much of the basis of a consumer society. Their youth cultures have been more passive and reflective, concerned with finding alternative inner spaces to the poverty of bourgeois life. This is one of the reasons why, with the decline of the counter-cultures, many became susceptible to the rises of the new mystical religious movements that swept the USA and to a lesser extent Britain.

[9] Smoothies are more conventional working class youth into the clubs/ women cycle of existence continuing the more affluent style. In this general point about class determinations we are not suggesting a mechanical or exclusive relationship. All youth cultures contained minorities from different social groups, reflecting the divisions and re-shaping of classes. There have always been minority components of new white collar and lower middle class youth in working class youth cultures. And when youth cultures break up, the directions of the fragments can often be related to their class components; as they were in the example of the transitions from Mods to Skinheads.

[10] There have always been regional differences in the adoption and spread of youth cultures, although this is accelerating. An example being the Northern Soul scene, which has stubbornly continued a tradition dating back almost to the Mods and centred on the unlikely place of Wigan.

[11] Phil Cohen — "Sub-cultural Conflict and Working Class Community".

[12] One of the problems of this 'subversion' is that it carries dangers of violent sexism. A number of punk songs have contained lyrics which have sadistic and anti-women overtones: most recently the appalling "Rip Her to Shreds" by Blondie.

[13] "Temporary Hoarding" the Rock Against Racism paper provides heartening evidence in its letter columns of the way many Punks are thinking about politics and music. In fact, this initiative as a whole and the development of other groupings like 'Music For Socialism' is one of the most positive things happening.

[14] This pamphlet was put together by a few people in Leeds who had previously been involved in schools leafleting, including some people who were in *Big Flame*. Although we had strong disagreements with the style and content of the schools activity, the resulting paper 'School's Out' had built on the strengths and was much better all round.

[15] A non-antagonistic contradiction is one that can be resolved (despite real and ongoing conflict) within the struggle against the main class enemy, whereas antagonistic ones cannot. The term was used by Mao.

[16] This has been particularly evident in the styles adopted, for instance, by Mod and Skinhead girls and in the imitation of other forms of gang behaviour and authority structures. But we have to be careful as most study has been done through male eyes, including this. A counterweight is provided by 'Girls and Subcultures' (Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber) and 'A Note on Marginality' (Rachel Powell and John Clarke) in 'Resistance Through Rituals'.

Wendy Clarke

A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE

The demand 'A woman's right to choose' is the most revolutionary demand to come out of the women's movement in this country. It deals not only with a woman's right to obtain an abortion as and when she wants, but also raises the critical question of the control of women's reproduction and sexuality in all its aspects. The choice for women to have access to free and safe abortion on demand questions the role of women as mothers, as reproducers of human life, and it is precisely over this aspect that politicians and moralists huddle together in fright. The spectre of women enjoying sex without the fear of unwanted pregnancy, of living a pleasurable life autonomous from men, sends shivers down their backs and froth to their lips. That women should have power to choose not to be mothers, or to be mothers in the conditions of their choice — good housing, adequate income, provision of community controlled nurseries — denies men and the capitalist order their most important stick with which to beat women into subjection and dependency. It's in this context that the question of abortion has to be seen.

In a society where the care of children is firmly allocated to women except in exceptional circumstances, *all* women are expected to conform to a particular role of a loving, nurturing, selfless object, who is also sexy, a good cook and housewife — the perfect mother of the Omo and Oxo adverts. Women are expected to bear a particular man's child. Women are not expected to have children on their own or live collectively or with a lesbian lover. The whole apparatus of the law works against women wanting to enjoy motherhood on their own terms. The stigma of illegitimacy, the difficulty of living on social security as an unmarried mother under constant harassment and supervision of her lifestyle from the state, the near impossibility of a lesbian mother retaining custody of her children after a contested divorce are aspects of the social, economic and moral control exerted over women.

Women who choose to do other things with their lives than bear and rear a child are scorned, ridiculed, sometimes pitied and usually feared. There is either something wrong with them or they have not met Mr Right. Rarely, is it assumed that perhaps they had other things to do with their lives, and could even enjoy themselves without either children to look after or men to support them. The word lesbian is hurled with venom and iciness at women who seek alternative lifestyles, often undermining or destroying them whether they are gay or not.

"To have borne and reared a child is to have done that thing which

patriarchy joins with physiology to render the definition of femaleness ... 'Childless' women have been burned as witches, persecuted as lesbians, have been refused the right to adopt children because they were unmarried. They have been seen as embodiments of the great threat to male hegemony: the woman who is not tied to the family, who is disloyal to the law of heterosexual bearing and rearing." (*Adrienne Rich. "Of Woman Born"*)

But in order to be able to make that choice *not* to become pregnant, not to become someone's wife or someone's mother, women have had to take chances with unsafe, unreliable contraceptives, dangerous abortifacients, risky backstreet abortions, or choose celibacy.

The history of forms of contraception and abortion, although usually passed on by word of mouth, is as old as the history of women. In the last century —

"Illegal abortion is notoriously difficult to quantify, for only those that fail become statistics. It is possible that abortion — sometimes euphemistically called miscarriage — was more a common feature of working class women's lives than commonly imagined. Against the stereotyped image of the sinister quack luring women to have unwanted abortions for large sums of money, the picture which emerges from the Interdepartmental Committee of 1938 is for women who aborted themselves or relied on someone known or trusted within the community.



ANGELA PHILIPS (C/L)

Drugs were obtained from herbalists, chemists or stalls in the markets. Women heard of them by word of mouth or advertisements in booklets — one of which was called 'The Shadow of the Stork'. Women passed enema syringes around in the village or round the factory." (Sheila Rowbotham. 'A New World for Women')

No doubt one of the most widely tried forms of contraception for women was abstinence, although many women, however hard they tried they could not avoid 'conjugal rights'. Abstinence is not a satisfactory form of contraception: there is always the possibility of not being able to avoid sexual relations. And if abstinence is the only known reliable form of contraception when a woman *does* want to have sex, the choice is minimal. Either nothing, or a sexual experience where it is impossible to relax for fear of unwanted pregnancy.

It is only in the last few decades that contraception has become more widely available in this country and relatively reliable. But it is still not one hundred percent safe and for many women there are side effects ranging from discomfort to death. The pill, while preventing pregnancy, also dampens many women's sex drive. It is no choice at all to be caught between not enjoying sex because of the side effects of the pill and not enjoying sex because of the fear of pregnancy. *Only the development of free, safe abortion on demand can by-pass the twin evils of fear and danger and enable women to discover and enjoy their sexuality.*

The battle to make contraception widely and freely available has been long and hard; and so far has been won only to a limited extent. Technology has changed to make contraception and abortion more widely available, but even where research, which is male-dominated, has been developed, it is not always immediately applied in a way that would allow women to control their fertility. The tradition of Christianity in particular has always condemned pleasure in sex as evil and has viewed pain in childbirth as the 'wages for sin'.

The application of medical technology to childbirth has been a limited advance for women. The medical profession as a whole has a minimal interest in *women's* experiences in childbirth and is more concerned with taking control of the process, streamlining and rationalising it. Obviously, it's true that modern medical practice is an advance on the primitive, but the crucial question is that of who controls technology. Why are more and more women forced to have children in hospital? Why is it a battle to have a child at home with a midwife in attendance? These questions can only be answered by understanding the development of midwifery and obstetrics, and the subservience of medicine to multinational drug companies and state control.

Before the development of modern medicine it was in fact women who controlled knowledge of medicine and curing. In "Witches, Midwives and Nurses", Ehrenrich and English outline how in the Middle Ages peasant women organised and passed on knowledge about abortion, contraception and midwifery and obstetrics. For many centuries these women were persecuted as witches, whilst the legal exclusion of women from the universities prevented women from entering the ranks of the emerging male medical profession.

Despite developments in medical science, women retained control of midwifery until the nineteenth century when male doctors increasingly came to intrude on what had been a female profession. The use of forceps in delivery is an example of the development of doctors' technical control over the process of childbirth. Its *routine* use by doctors subjects women to technical domination by the medical profession rather than giving confidence and support that would enable the woman herself to have greater knowledge and control over the delivery.

Dear Editor,

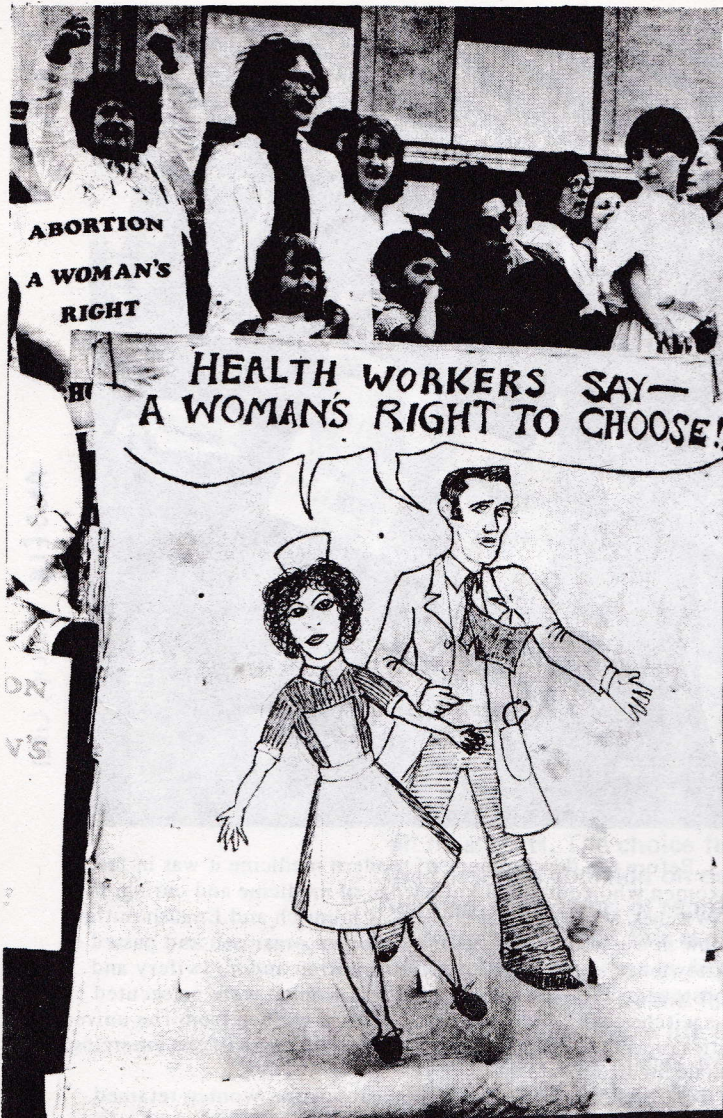
I would be interested in some comments from the collective and readers of Womens Report concerning current methods of childbirth in hospitals.

I have just completed a six week course lecturing on child development at a local college — my first session being on pre-birth growth and development, culminating in birth. I showed the Leboyer film on 'Birth Without Violence' and presented my lecture as accurately as I could regarding the present methods used in hospitals.

Amongst my audience were two male medical students, one nursing sister and one midwife. They claimed that my comments were false, that doctors were kind and only think of the mother's and child's welfare. They felt that Leboyer's film and method was purely a 'fashion' of the moment and that it was uneconomical to change to his methods. I pointed out that there were in fact some state hospitals which had already turned over one or two wards to his method — notably in London and Hertfordshire — also that there are some midwives in Kent who agree with the alternative method."

(Letter to Women's Report)

The mystique which surrounds the medical profession undermines a woman's judgement of her ability to understand her body's needs in labour. Assembly line deliveries through induction and the use of forceps tend to speed up childbirth and make it labour-saving on hospital staffing. These are



Chris Davies (Report)

probably not the conditions in which women want to give birth. Whilst there is an increasing interest in 'natural' childbirth it is often difficult to fend off a nurse waving an injection of pethidine, or to insist on sitting up rather than laying down so that it is easier to push and control the birth. Yet thousands of women want painkillers before they know they will need them, and opt for a speedy delivery in which the doctor controls the process, not themselves. *'Alienated labour' takes on added meaning when the practice of childbirth in Western capitalism is taken into consideration!*

Fear is the other face of ignorance, and in our society women are systematically denied an understanding of their bodies and their sexuality. It is this that the women's movement, and within it the women's health movement in particular, are trying to overcome.

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY... BUT WHO HAS THE CONTROL?

The battleground has shifted over the last century from one in which a few individuals tried to campaign publicly about the availability of contraception and how to use it to one in which large numbers of women demand the availability of and easy access to abortion provision as an integral aspect of contraception. This shift has happened because technology has opened up new possibilities for women to control their lives. The existence of the women's liberation movement means that women no longer have to rely on a few educated feminists to fight their battles for them when there are possibilities for mass action on the streets and involvement of working class women in local campaigns around healthcare.

In the past, it was generally upper and middle class women who had access to information about contraceptive devices and abortifacients. The issue for feminists and socialists has been to make them more widely available to women in general. Underpinning many of the struggles around abortion and contraception is the question of whether abortion and contraception are used to *control the lives of women* or whether *women should use them to control their own lives*.

Some of the early advocates of birth control took the former position as a means of assaulting the reproductive capacity of the working class. Malthus, an early 19th century economist, believed that the population of Britain was growing faster than its economic resources and feared that the working class, because it bred faster than the ruling class, was producing an 'inferior stock' of human beings. This problem was highlighted during the Boer War, when army recruits were found to be too undernourished even to serve as cannon fodder. As a result, many socialists felt that the demand for mass availability and abortion appeared to be advocating class suicide and playing into the capitalists' hands.

"I'd rather swallow the whole druggist's shop and the man in it than have another kid."

She used to boil 20 herbs together mixed with gin and salts, and take a glass every morning before breakfast.'

(Spare Rib No. 64)

A feminist analysis was the only way out of this impasse, but few women came forward with a theory that clarified the relationship between the sexual division of labour and class exploitation, and the importance of women's choice over reproduction. If contraception and abortion are seen only as a women's issue, population control can be used to suit the aims of the most reactionary governments. The fascists in the 1930s saw birth control policies as integral to the building of a master race. In the same way, today thousands of women in the third world are being sterilised (eg. India, Bolivia) or having unsafe contraceptive methods practised on them without their knowledge (eg. Puerto Rico). It is no answer for women to have compulsory contraception, abortion or sterilisation, when the criteria for the 'unfit' mother are defined by the personal morals of the doctor or the prevailing ideological standard of the ruling class.

The Malthusian arguments for birth control and population control were countered by socialist feminists of the revolutionary left and the Labour Party after the First World War. The most notable campaigner was Stella Browne. Unlike Marie Stopes who supported birth control for working class women because overcrowding in towns meant Britain was 'breeding revolutionaries', Stella Browne understood the links between feminism and socialism.

"As communism is the only explicit political and economic creed which advocates complete sex equality or sex solidarity, I trust you will allow me to point out that birth control for women is no less essential than workshop control and determination of the conditions of labour for men. . . *Birth control is women's crucial effort at self-determination and at control of her own person and her own environment.*" (From Rowbotham: "A New World for Women")

In 1924, feminists in the Labour Party formed a Workers' Birth Control Group to oppose the eugenic current in the Birth Control Movement. They wanted birth control to be provided by the state and not by private bodies. They looked particularly to revolutionary changes taking place in Russia for inspiration. They campaigned for nursery provision, a national health service, maternity provision, better housing, legal changes regarding divorce and separation, alongside abortion and contraception.

Some of these demands have been met. Contraception is available free on the NHS. There is a limited provision for abortion under the 1967 Act. Women have maternity allowances and social security benefits. There is a National Health Service. Divorce laws have changed. We have the Employment Protection Act and Sex Discrimination Act. So why has all this still not been enough?

Basically, the post-war capitalist state managed to change itself so that some women's demands could be met and incorporated within the system. The establishment of the welfare state, now under threat with successive government cutbacks, managed to integrate changes in attitudes towards women

within its social planning. Smaller, more mobile family units suited the needs of post-war economic development. Sex without procreation became accepted and a distorted form of sexuality was used by the advertising media to encourage the consumer goods boom – which was needed to stimulate home demand in the economy. All this happened in the absence of a broadly-based feminist movement.

“HEW estimates, is not ashamed to estimate, that 250-300 women will die every year as a result of the Hyde amendment and that 25,000 women will be hospitalised with serious medical complications as a result of illegal abortions. They talk about right to life. Whose life? Clearly not the rights of the poor, Third World women to life. The fetus fetishists get all teary-eyed and sentimental about the right of every embryo to live. They say that abortion is murder but they will be responsible for the murder of countless women if the Doyle-Flynn bill is passed. Babies and human life are not their concern at all but the oppression and control of women. They know that when woman is in control of her reproduction she is in a much better position to control and make decisions in other areas of her life.”

(Barbara Smith. Speech given at a demonstration in Boston USA, Aug. 1977)

THE FIGHT FOR ABORTION TODAY

Stella Browne wrote in 1935:

“Abortion must be the key to a new world for women, not a bulwark for things as they are; economically or biologically. Abortion should not be either a prerequisite of the legal wife only, or merely a last remedy against illegitimacy. It should be available for any woman, without insolent inquisitions, nor numerous financial charges, nor tangles of red tape. FOR OUR BODIES ARE OUR OWN”.

These sentiments are the starting point for the National Abortion Campaign. Though the demand for abortion *appears* to be related only to the question of women's fertility, in practice it raises the central problem of women's oppression under capitalism.

The National Abortion Campaign is an integral part of the women's liberation movement, along with the consciousness raising groups, women and health groups, anti-rape groups and the Women's Aid Movement. Out of the richness of ideas and experiences the present women's movement has developed a clearer, stronger, feminist consciousness, theory and practice which contains a recognition that the personal is political.

But whilst the struggle around abortion has been central to the development of the women's movement in France and Italy, NAC in Britain has tended to distance itself from the rest of the women's movement. This is because it has been run as a single issue campaign and has not concerned itself with the related concerns of women's health and sexuality. As such, it has been dominated by members of left groups and has attracted few feminists.

The National Abortion Campaign has also suffered a polarisation in its activities over whether to conduct a national campaign or to campaign locally for abortion provision. Concentration on abortion legislation, whether fighting anti-abortion bills or proposing positive legislation has forced the campaign into a defensive position. At the local level, however, there is more scope for an offensive and broad-based campaign. This can be achieved by raising the issue of sexuality, child- and health-care and fighting for daycare abortion clinics within the provisions of the 1967 Act.

Whilst it is now possible to give women the means with which to control their reproduction, it is clear that only limited progress can occur under capitalism. It is only through a revolutionary transformation of society that women will have the space to make and win demands for the total control of their reproductive capacity without interference from the church or the state. Moreover, the experience of revolutions in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China demonstrates that patriarchy will not be abolished unless the liberation of women is made an integral part of the revolutionary programme and not a secondary issue which will 'automatically be solved by the abolition of class exploitation'.

The demand for a woman's right to choose is a demand



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

which questions the exploitation of women under capitalism. It is not simply the choice between having or not having a child, but a question of the conditions in which children are brought up, the quality of housing and healthcare, the availability of nursery facilities, a woman's choice of work inside and outside the home, of women's enforced financial dependence on men. As such, it raises the demand for communal responsibility for childcare; that it should not be done by women alone. The only way whereby women can lead an independent life, free from the sexual division of labour is by the state itself financing the reproduction of the labour force. This, it should be stressed, does not imply the mass introduction of state-controlled nurseries, healthcare and old people's homes and the shutting off into compartments of these sections of the population as under capitalism, but community control and integration.

“Abortion on Demand” and “a Woman's Right to Choose” are revolutionary demands. They are class issues not just because because working class women are more affected by cuts in NHS abortions or because, through the abortion struggle, women can become involved in broader and more political issues. Abortion is a class issue because it cannot be separated from the fight over money, housing, health and nursery facilities – the fight for working class control over society.

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BLACK AUTONOMY in CLASS STRUGGLE

In the anti-fascist and anti-racist movement movement blacks have taken to the streets in their own self-defence. Also, since the early 1970s black workers, particularly Asians, have been in the forefront of many major industrial struggles. It is argued here that the left, predominantly white as it is, has failed to understand the specific conditions and contradictions of the black communities. It is hoped that this article, prepared by members of Big Flame's anti-racist commission, will help stimulate discussion on this question which is important for an understanding of the centrality of autonomous organisation for the building of a revolutionary movement.



Paul Trevor



WE PRESENT this article as a direct challenge to conventional thinking within the white revolutionary left in Britain about the following subjects. What is the way forward in anti-racist struggle? What is the place of anti-racist struggle in class struggle generally? What is the role of independent black political organisation, in these struggles?

It is vital to stress this is a 'basic first steps' article. Big Flame has worked with certain black political organisations, but our experience of grassroots black politics has certain important gaps. This grassroots politics is a much richer source of awareness than reading accounts of the situation by Black writers, however illuminating their analyses. This article should be seen then as a first statement, to be developed and deepened in a pamphlet to be brought out later in 1978 by members of the Anti-Racist Commission of Big Flame.

Here, we shall start with some comments on the situation of the black minorities, and the conventional response of the white Left to that situation. Big Flame's contrasted position will then be summarised. Certain key elements in black political organisation will then be reviewed. We shall conclude with the main lessons and prospects for class struggle, including anti-racist struggle, in the future.

THE MATERIAL BASE OF RACISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE REFORIST LEFT

Naturally, an analysis of specific forms of racism has to start from Britain's imperialist history, its promotion of slavery, its colonisation of much of the world, its exploitation of the peoples and wealth of the colonised countries both under colonialism and through neo-colonial Third World bourgeoisies. The wealth of Britain today was accumulated through the super-exploited masses of the Third World as well as by the native British working class.

A key aspect of this exploitation was the use of labour power from other countries on British soil — from Ireland continuously since the early 19th century, from the Jewish population of Eastern Europe at the turn of this century, and from the Third World since World War Two (mainly from South Asia and the Caribbean). Although sharing the experience of exploitation in common, the indigenous working class in Britain certainly benefited materially from the greater exploitation of labour in the Third World, whether there or here. Here, migrant workers were recruited for the worst jobs that had few local workers prepared to do them if they could avoid it. The ability of the capitalist class to pay higher wages increased in certain industrial sectors, through the general rise in accumulation.

This relative material advantage has been supplemented by many, many decades of imperialist and racist propaganda, including propaganda for the regular imperialist and inter-imperialist wars into which the ruling class here drew the working class. When the National Front issues its propaganda, it lies fall on fertile ground. White racist ideology feeds easily into the competition for housing, jobs, training on the job, for the right to an acceptable standard of living from employers or the welfare State, which is the daily experience of the working class as a whole under capitalism.

The official leadership of the labour movement in Britain has consistently refused to confront the problem of racism in British society at large, and in the labour movement itself, in particular. Lack of interest in the issue, and an attitude to immigration laws ranging from tolerance to support, has produced the same lack of interest in this form of politics from most members of the black minorities. Despite considerable membership of unions by black workers, experience of collusion between management and shop stewards against black workers has often made

black involvement in union organisation pointless in the short run.

This refusal to confront racism and imperialism has meant that at best the official leaders of the labour movement have produced a "we're all workers together" line. There has been no serious political analysis of the black working class from this quarter. Indeed the mainspring has been a combination of trying to ensure a Labour government stays in office, with determination not to expose their lack of living links with their members. A serious campaign against racism in the workplace would have hardened the alienation of trade unionists in many cases from their leaders, and would not have been supported by many regional officials.

Most recently, with the rise of the National Front, there has been more of a serious campaign than before. Even so, this campaign is axed on spreading fears among workers as to what fascism could do to them. It is not axed on the parallel attack against acceptance of racism by white workers. Once this target is left untouched, the basis for the NF is untouched. And the State can also keep up and increase its racist repression, from immigration officials through "sus" charges to destructive educational practices.

RACISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY WHITE LEFT

In recent years the major far left organisations have supported the right and necessity for black people to organise in their own self-defence against racist and fascist attacks. The Socialist Workers Party has responded to the growth in militancy among young black people in particular by setting up a black caucus around the paper *Flame*. However, there have already been two major splits from the SWP by its black members. The other main non-sectarian revolutionary organisation, the International Marxist Group, has moved closer to a position of supporting autonomous black organisation. Witness its role in the formation of an independent Asian organisation, the Asian Socialist League, after the March 1977 by-election in Stechford, Birmingham.

However, looking at the far Left's relationship to the black movement as a whole leads to two conclusions. First, the revolutionary socialist Left is overwhelmingly white, and has failed to attract to its ranks significant sections of the black working class. Second, despite the Left's frequently repeated condemnations of racism, there exists a widespread antagonism between the political vanguard of the black minorities and the left. Why should this be?

We would say that the principal failing of the Left has been, in this regard, its failure to come to terms with the need for autonomous black organisation. The other side of this coin has been the artificial basis of recruiting attempts among black people to join Left groups.

This failing has been seen most clearly in the SWP leadership's reduction of the question of black organisation to the needs of SWP 'as a whole'. Black politics and the attack on racism are collapsed by this means into a different politics, the politics of revolutionary party-building, based on the industrial worker. Sometimes, for a short time, fighting racism can be made a priority campaign. Examples are SWP activity in summer 1976 (linked closely to the Right to Work Campaign), which sprang from racist murders of Asians, and opposition to the NF in 1977. At other times, racism resumes its also-ran position on the priority list for the SWP. This lowly place flows straight from placing basic emphasis on SWP numerical growth and recruitment, *rather than giving priority to the interests of the class as a whole*.

Most recently, the use of the Anti-Nazi League as a recruiting apparatus, showing aside existing organisations against racism and fascism such as the London Women Against Racism and Fascism, Gays Against Racism, and school student groups, shows up the SWP's self-definition as the solution to all working class problems.

as well as its attempted manipulation of people's fears of heavy repression. People acutely alert to this repression, as many members of the black minorities are, do not see the merit of becoming black armies for white generals, generals who moreover are chronically short of troops, and whose strategy is only sometimes geared to the specific forms of oppression of black people.

BIG FLAME'S ANALYSIS

Big Flame opposes reducing the struggle against racism to the question of building the revolutionary party — not because we are opposed to building the party, but because in this way a valid party will never be formed. We state unequivocally that the building of an autonomous black movement, and of autonomous class organisations generally, is essential for forming a genuine revolutionary party of the working class. With equal firmness, we state that black organisations will need to continue to exist during the long transition to socialism after a successful revolution. (Our argument here stands precisely alongside our stress on the necessity for autonomous organisation of all multiply oppressed sections of the working class, such as women and gays, despite the important differences in their oppression one from another.)

The Left's understanding of black autonomous organisation has of course been affected by the cultural and political differences between the white and black sections of the working class, and the lack of involvement of blacks within the white revolutionary

specific oppression. The numerous forms of oppression experienced by black minorities over and above those currently known by white workers — labour migration from another country, heavy discrimination, police and court harassment — must make the forms of organising available to the black minorities different in qualitative terms from those relevant to the white working class. In discussing black organisations, we immediately face certain specific problems. Perhaps, apart from our degree of ignorance, the most important relates to the fact that half the black population is under 20, and was mostly born here. What exists today in the way of their parents' organisations may or may not therefore have much influence on how they organise as they move into their twenties and thirties, for the rest of the century.

Certainly the clashes between the younger generation's militancy against racist attacks, and the older generation's restraint, in Caribbean and South Asian communities, suggest change is likely. On the other hand, grassroots experience of Caribbean youth contradicts the inflated hope that there is developing a "political refusal to work" movement among young blacks. There is a refusal to take shit, either in the shape of a dead-end job or in the shape of an SB official's hostile attitude. But the destructive impact of joblessness, racist schooling and similar experiences often deadens young people's political reactions. Refusal of all work is the political attitude of very few.



Left. The result has been the Left's isolation from black struggles, and so its domination by simplified angles on those struggles drawn from "Black and White Unite and Fight (at Once)!" politics, or police brutality politics, or home country politics (Manley, Burnham, Gandhi, Bhutto). The incredibly bad situation of many black women is a theme that rarely appears; its absence is symptomatic.

Any linkage in practice between white revolutionary socialists and black struggles must take account of three fundamental issues, at least. One is the diversity of the various black minorities from each other, apart from their common experience of racism. The division between people of Caribbean and Asian origin is only the most obvious one on this level. Second, is that the starting point for the political identity of black people in Britain lies *outside* the workplace — in their own "communities"; in their family networks; in their countries of origin, especially if they are not born here; and in their experience of systematic and pervasive racism, from the immigration procedures on in. Third, these different minorities must be organised by members of their own minority — only the colonial mentality operating under the banner of marxism cannot appreciate this simple truth.

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS ON BLACK POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

A serious marxist analysis must give full weight to the ways different sections of the working class are conditioned by their

Two other issues need bearing in mind in discussing black organisations: their class orientation, and the degree of organisation in terms of national origin. In most cities there exist cultural, political and religious groups within each black community, often with overlapping membership, but frequently divided on political grounds. Here we restrict ourselves to the political groups, though one of the strengths of black minorities can often be the close relationship between what the English tend to separate from each other, as "politics" and "culture".

South Asians have their own political groups by nationality and usually by class as well. The best known is the Indian Workers' Association, split into a revolutionary section aligned with Peking, and a reformist section aligned with Moscow. Both sections are represented in most major cities. Their degree of involvement with white politics varies, though the pro-Moscow section often is involved with the local community relations apparatus. Often political activity is centred on gaining control of the local Sikh temple, a good instance of the fusion of religion, culture and politics among Punjabis of the Sikh persuasion. Tentative steps in a new direction may be represented by the militancy of the local IWA in Wolverhampton early in 1978 in anti-racist struggle, also by the formation of the Asian Socialist League by Asian IMG members during the Stechford by-election in 1977, and of the Southall Youth Organisation and the Bolton Asian Youth Movement in 1976 and 1977.

The Bangladeshi Workers Association is similarly divided between a revolutionary pro-Peking wing, and an openly reformist pro-Moscow wing. A larger proportion of Bangladeshis are from peasant backgrounds than are Sikhs, and perhaps as a result their distance is greater from the community relations apparatus. Their self-defence groups have been active, as has the Bengali Housing Action Group in Tower Hamlets, East London.

The tenacity of Asian communities in struggle has been shown repeatedly, especially in the Imperial Typewriters strike, the Mansfield Hosiery Strike and of course Grunwicks. Often too it has been women workers who have been to the fore. Their community solidarity offers material and personal support, and their lack of reliance on the official trade union apparatus means a greater intensity of struggle.

Caribbean workers of the older generation were greatly influenced by the great distances separating their islands from each other, each one having a much closer relation to the British metropolis than to the others. This reflects itself in the existence of island associations, whose main role is cultural and social, but which may take on a political colouring under some circumstances, for example speeches by Powell, or parents' discontent at racism in education. This "parochialism" is however far less in evidence than it used to be, particularly in London.

For younger West Indians, clubs based around sound systems were the nucleus of rebellion at Carnival in Notting Hill in 1976 and 1977, as well as in Chapeltown, Leeds, in November 1976. Such clubs and dances have been the focus of police attacks and of militant black resistance. Most cities also have overtly political groups, with a news sheet and/or community centre, which will try to organise campaigns on police harassment, etc.

There are also political associations based on support for one or other political party "back home" in the Caribbean; one with interesting potential is the youth wing of the Jamaican PNP, Manley's party.

The discussion, to be complete, would require analysis of Rastafarian tendencies and their political implications. Although political passivity is the message of traditional Rastafarianism, there are several signs that this could develop into a more militant and activist position under the pressure of British (and Ethiopian) political realities.

The main other tendency in West Indian politics is of course black nationalism of the separatist kind, represented by a paper like *Grassroots*. It is important to recognise that while many black people would not join such a group, its position does reflect the deep distrust of white society running through the West Indian minority, including its "respectable" elements. Sometimes such groups have an anti-capitalist position, but in practice it takes a very subordinate place. It is an ideology also offering much scope to emerging petit bourgeois black leaders in their struggle to consolidate their own position and to attack socialism as irrelevant to black needs.

Autonomous black socialist groups, like the Croydon and Brixton Collective, stand for the need for unity on their own terms with anti-racists and revolutionaries in the white working class, for the overthrow of capitalism, and the need to expose and defeat petit bourgeois leaders in their own community. For them the issues of racism and class are intertwined. Most accept the need for a revolutionary party to destroy capitalism, but have little faith in the leaderships of existing revolutionary groups either to provide a sound basis for unity, or to ensure the cultural and political identity of black people in a post-revolutionary society. We agree with this perspective, and consider that for Big Flame to grow qualitatively it must take it with the greatest seriousness.

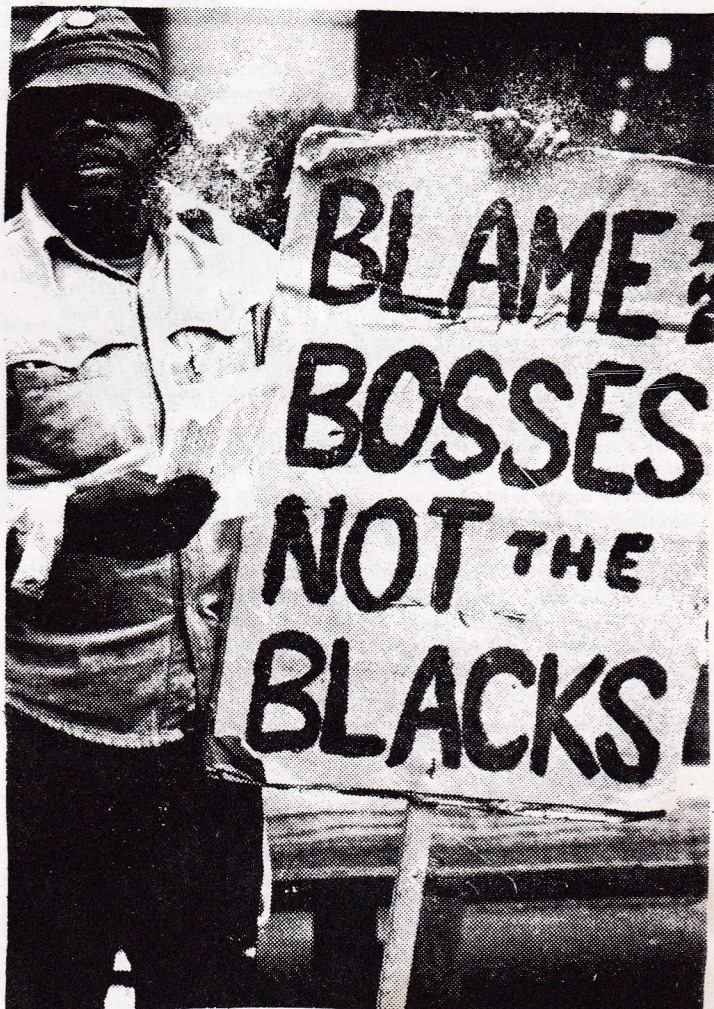
Given then the experience of multiple oppression and exploitation by black minorities in Britain; given the importance of different national cultures, from Sikhism to Rastafarianism; it is apparently obvious that black liberation must begin in black-run organisations on the revolutionary left in particular, and in autonomous black organisations in general. Only so can the black minorities build up their own strength, their own base, their own position of confidence from which to organise with white groups and to challenge white political groups' understanding of racism and the class struggle. The weak or non-existent understanding among the revolutionary left of the importance of even the bourgeois concept of 'citizenship' in the black struggle for survival against state immigration policies, is witness to how important this independent development is for the revolution. Often the specific and urgent concerns of the black minorities are written off as minor matters. Individual black recruitment to revolutionary groups, though to be welcomed as a valuable contribution to the groups' perspectives, cannot by itself transform the political consciousness of the black minorities or unify them across nationality barriers.

CONCLUSIONS

We have looked at the official Labour Left's approaches to the black working class, and the revolutionary left's. Big Flame considers that as Marxists we base our analysis on the material division within the working class, and insist we have to take these as our starting point for organisation. They are not divisions based on will-o'-the-wisp notions, but on different experiences of oppression and even of the degree of exploitation. The political strength of certain multiply oppressed sectors can only be developed autonomously; otherwise 'unity' will still be based on one sector dominating another.

Our insistence on the necessity for black autonomous organisation is not based on a romantic view of a black united vanguard to save the white working class from itself. Our preliminary comments on black political organisation must make that clear. At the same time, black political organisation, even in its separatist phase — which we reject — reflects the absence of many standard myths about imperialism, immigration laws, the police and the courts, and other issues, which circulate freely and far in the white majority. In so far as black deference still exists, it is in the older generation. The existence of this clearer angle of vision, and its political organisation and expression, must be actively amplified by the white revolutionary left. White revolutionaries must learn from black socialist analysis and from supporting black struggles.

Conversely, they must not evade the issue or make it worse, by thinking that recruiting some token black people proves their credentials, or by riding to public acclaim by sudden flooding of black defence committees, or by dictating to black groups their own group's growth as condition for support. Collaboration and co-ordination between equal partners in the revolutionary struggle is the only viable method of building the working class's political strength.



TROTSKYISM AND THE I.S. TRADITION

For ten years the International Socialism group (now the Socialist Workers Party) has dominated revolutionary politics in Britain. Since 1974 in particular, a great number of its members have left, but for the most part have not joined other organisations. The reasons for the mass of resignations have not been assessed in any political way by that organisation. This article, by a former member of IS of long standing, helps to locate politically the roots of what many see as the political degeneration of IS/SWP

We originally asked Julian Harber to do a review of the Big Flame pamphlet on Trotskyism. But as it turned out the most fruitful sections were those dealing with the relation between the 'International Socialist' tradition and orthodox Trotskyism. We decided to print it not simply because that was interesting in itself, but because a re-evaluation of the IS tradition is part of the general re-thinking going on on the left at the moment. The recent conference of ex-IS/SWP comrades was the focus for such discussions, which Big Flame attended and contributed to.

It is a remarkable thing that, despite its growth, the SWP has expelled or disillusioned so many of its important cadres, including many who were once in leadership positions and a number of important militants. These comrades, part of an 'IS tradition', have a hard task on their hands, especially when disconnected from the organisation that produced that tradition. Most were, when inside IS, understandably concerned with problems of inner-party democracy. So, outside the organisation, there is always the problem of re-evaluating the basis of the splits and the degeneration of IS/SWP. We don't say this with any 'I told you so' attitudes. One of the reasons we have followed the debate closely is because it resembles many we have had in Big Flame, trying to come to terms with the tasks of revolutionary organisation in post-war capitalism.

How do we think Harber's article measures up to these tasks of re-evaluation? It goes without saying that we have disagreements with it. This includes the analysis of Trotskyism itself. To say there are no longer any Trotskyists 'narrowly defined' by the Transitional Programme of 1938 seems to us to be mistaken. Not in that any but a few would simply reproduce the programme, but that the bulk of the Trotskyist left maintains its orthodoxy by reproducing the general political approach of Trotsky, with a generous helping of the original demands. Yet the approach was based on an inaccurate conception of modern capitalism. Those Trotskyist

organisations that are making political advances today, like the IMG, are the ones who have broken with 'narrowly defined' dogmatic Trotskyism.

We agree with Harber's general point that much of the successful growth of the IS came out of its revision of orthodox Trotskyism. We don't think that the replacement theories (permanent arms economy, state capitalism etc) were correct alternatives but they enabled IS to have the flexibility to adapt better to the realities of the post-war situation. The other noted factor was the new analysis of reformism, which shifted the stress away from the institutional links between Labour and the working class, as in orthodox Trotskyism. The alternative stress on 'home-made reformism' of much of industrial activity helped IS to be sensitive to the real situation inside the working class, despite the limitations of politics and bureaucratic domination that characterised IS rank and file organising.

Harber's analysis of the degeneration of IS recognises that it wasn't simply a matter of bad leaders taking over the organisation, or, indeed, even lack of democracy. Instead he locates it in the failure to develop the theory and political perspectives after 1970. After the leadership had decided that the theory was adequate, the task then was simply to embark on quantitative party-building. But while a process of theoretical ossification did take place, it is not really an adequate answer. Why weren't the old theories and perspectives adequate to meet the needs of the 1970s' ruling class offensive? Why had IS taken so little genuine notice of the new autonomous movements except as recruiting grounds? A fuller evaluation would have to include a more critical analysis of the contradictions and limits of the original political basis of the IS tradition. Hopefully this journal can publish such efforts. Meanwhile, Harber's article is an excellent start to a very important debate on the left.

1) Usefully, Trotskyists can be *narrowly* or *broadly* defined. *Narrowly* as those who accepted the theses adopted by the Founding Conference of the Fourth International in 1938 and the ideas of Trotsky that lay behind them. *Broadly* as those, who irrespective of these theses and ideas still call themselves Trotskyists.

2) Included among the key principles of narrowly-defined Trotskyism were:—

(a) That the final stage of capitalism had been reached in 1914, inaugurating an epoch of wars and revolution.

(b) That this epoch was in its final death throes. By 1938 the capitalist world faced imminent economic and political catastrophe. The development of productive forces had reached their ultimate limit. The *immediate* alternatives were *either* mass pauperism, fascism, war and the emergence of hitherto undreamt of barbarism or socialist revolution.

(c) That because of the nationalisation of the means of production, Russia was a workers' state. But because the working class had been deprived of all access to political power, it was degenerate. But a degenerate workers' state must be by definition highly unstable. For those deprived of power want a return to socialism. And those who hold it — the bureaucracy — desire the restoration of private property. The *immediate* alternatives in Russia were therefore *either* socialism or private capitalism.

(d) That worldwide, the working class was on the brink of revolution — and indeed had been ever since 1917. What held them back was the treacherous policies of the leaders of the traditional organisations — the trade unions and the political parties (both socialist and communist).

(e) Given that 'the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership', the only hope for the human race lay in the creation of the Fourth International, whose programme would pave the way for world socialist revolution.

(f) This programme included a set of *transitional demands* 'stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class'. Key among these transitional demands were 'a sliding scale of wages' — the demand that wages should automatically rise in relation to increases in prices and a 'sliding scale of hours' — that all work available should be divided equally among the whole workforce, both employed and unemployed.

(g) That irrespective of these transitional demands, the socialist revolution was most likely to occur in the wake of a Second World War whose outbreak was imminent. Like the First World War, this new war would be imperialist. Like the Bolsheviks in the first, the Fourth International would not take sides, but pursue a policy of revolutionary defeatism.

(h) Should Russia be attacked, however, in such a war, since it was a workers' state, however degenerate, it would be the duty of the Fourth International to defend it. But without illusions. For neither Russia, nor the Communist Parties of the Third International were capable of defeating fascism, let alone of achieving socialism.

(i) That in all countries the agency of the socialist revolution would be the working class. In colonial and semi-colonial countries, where there was a revolutionary peasantry, their activities would be subordinate to those of the working class.

(j) In colonial and semi-colonial countries, it was only this alliance of a dominant working class and subordinate peasantry that could lead to the overthrow of imperialism. In these countries, should a bourgeois revolution break out first, as in Russia in 1917, it could only be successful against imperialism if it moved swiftly to a socialist stage.

(k) That neither in the colonial and semi-colonial countries nor in the imperialist ones could socialism survive for very long in isolation. For irrespective of the personal intentions of the leaders of such societies, the pressure of the world market, the world division of labour and the hostility of the capitalist countries would eventually cause internal disintegration and the restoration of private capitalism. The less economically developed the country concerned, the quicker this was likely to happen. Socialist revolution could only be secure once it had spread to sufficient countries to be able to dominate the world market.

(l) There was no parliamentary road to socialism. In all countries the socialist revolution would take a form similar to Russia in

1917, with the creation of factory committees, soviets, workers' militias, the armed seizure of power etc.

(m) The internal organisation both of the parties of the Fourth International and of the International itself would be democratic-centralist on the Bolshevik model.

(3) By the end of the 1940s it was quite clear that history had proved this Trotskyism wrong. As anticipated a Second World War had taken place, but its consequences had been quite other than those predicted. There had been no economic catastrophe engulfing both East and West, nor had there been socialist revolution under the leadership of the Fourth International.

In the West, not only was parliamentary democracy restored in a number of countries where it had been absent in 1938, but the productive forces which were supposed to have reached their ultimate limit a decade previously were entering upon their longest period of expansion yet recorded.

In the East there was neither true soviet democracy nor the restoration of private capitalism, but a greatly strengthened Stalinist state.

Most confusing of all, in Yugoslavia, Albania and China, communist parties had seized power; and in Eastern Europe the nationalisation of the means of production had been imposed upon various countries by Russian tanks. If the nationalisation of the means of production was, as the Fourth International believed, a fundamentally socialist measure, then it was quite wrong to assert that Stalinism was incapable of leading a socialist revolution. Not only that, it was even wrong to assert that the working class was the necessary agent of socialism. It could also be foreign armies or revolutionary peasants.

Subsequent events, including the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions, the liquidation of colonial empires and the emergence of an endless variety of third world 'socialisms' have further falsified the perspectives of 1938.

(4) Since the late 1940s therefore there have been no Trotskyists narrowly-defined. Though many have tried not to, all who have called themselves Trotskyists have had to take some notice of reality and consequently to revise some of the original doctrine — though most without admitting to such revision.

(5) In Britain the only organisation of any importance that *consciously* tried to revise narrowly-defined Trotskyism was the Socialist Review/ International Socialism Group (now the Socialist Workers Party):—

(a) Tackling the contradiction noted between a theory that asserted [a] that the state ownership of the means of production was fundamentally socialist; [b] that the working class is the agency of socialism, and the post-war reality of the existence of societies where there was state-ownership, but it had come through other agencies. IS accepted [b] but rejected [a]. On this basis they rejected Bulgaria, Rumania, North Korea, China etc. as workers' states. And since Russia had a similar socio-economic structure to these societies, they rejected the idea that Russia was socialist as well. Through a consideration of the compulsion to accumulate, necessarily forced upon the leaders of such societies by the structure of the world market and the needs of national defence, all were designated state-capitalist.

(b) Seeking to explain what sort of movements the Chinese, Vietnamese Communist Parties, Castro's guerillas etc. were, if they were not socialist, IS came to the conclusion that one of the structural consequences of the domination of the third world by imperialism was the creation in these countries of a large class of property-less urban petit-bourgeoisie 'primarily engaged in large-scale bureaucratic employment, especially in agencies of the state' (N. Harris ISJ 42), but also underemployed and unemployed. This class has no interest in indigenous private capitalism, which has been largely destroyed by imperialism and is fiercely nationalistic.

The solution that sections of this class see to their own uncertainty and the domination of their countries by imperialism is the expropriation of all foreign-owned interests by a fully independent state which they will control. Under very special conditions in China, Cuba, Vietnam (and now in Portuguese Africa) members of this class were able to mobilise the rural petit-bourgeoisie — the peasantry — around this radical nationalism and defeat imperialism. As the embryonic French capitalists of the 18th Century rode to power on the backs of the artisans and peasantry, so the embryonic state-capitalists of China etc. have been able to ride to power on the backs of the twentieth century peasantry.

(c) Rejecting utterly the economic catastrophism of 1938, IS acknowledged the reality and centrality of the post-war boom. The cause of the boom it saw as an unintended and unforeseen consequence of the mammoth increase in arms spending begun by all major countries in the late 1930s and continued uninterrupted ever since.

(d) Probably most important of all IS recognised that this post-war boom had had profound effects on working class consciousness and organisation. Crucially it had led to a declining interest and involvement in the Labour and Communist parties and the official trade union machine. Power had shifted from the local ward organisation and the trade union branches to the shop stewards committees. Conflict was expressed not so much in the resolution to conference as the unofficial strike. In this situation which IS designated as 'the shift in the locus of reformism', the Transitional Programme, even if it had been correct in 1938, which IS saw as doubtful, became utterly irrelevant. Socialist ideas and socialist consciousness could only be advanced on the basis of current conditions and current consciousness.

(e) Both from a consideration of existing working class consciousness and organisation and from a theory of the structural limits of official trade unionism derived from J.T. Murphy and the early Gramsci (to be sophisticated subsequently, particularly by Richard Hyman), IS came to the conclusion that the key to drawing organised workers towards socialist politics was the creation of rank and file bodies in various unions and ultimately the creation of a national rank and file movement. As a model as to what this movement might look like they looked back to the Minority Movement of the early British Communist Party.

(f) Underpinning all these revisions was a commitment to a Marxism devoid of the mechanistic determinism of the Marxism of the Second International, of Stalinism and even much of Lenin and the early years of the Third International. As against this tradition IS proclaimed that the purpose of socialism was not the fulfilment of some objective laws of history or the advancing of the productive forces, but the achievement of collective self-emancipation and the creation of a society where all would co-operatively control their own lives.

(g) Acknowledging the profound lack of interest shown by the working class in this concept of socialism and their own isolation and numerical weakness, IS had no illusions that the creation of a new revolutionary organisation based on the working class in Britain would be a very long and difficult task. And the same was true for other countries. In this situation the creation and sustaining of any new international, Fourth, Fifth or whatever, could only lead to delusions of grandeur, if not megalomania. Better a purely national, but realistic organisation.

Taken as a whole, so far as this removed deliberately from narrowly-defined Trotskyism it is debatable whether it is very useful to call it Trotskyism at all. IS was, and the SWP still is, unclear as to whether they wish to call themselves Trotskyists or Leninists.

(6) Compared with IS, those other British organisations who had their origins in narrowly-defined Trotskyism were theoretically unimaginative and conservative. About their Trotskyism, two points only need to be made:—

(a) All abandoned to a greater or lesser extent, the belief held not just by Trotsky, but also by Lenin and Marx, that the working class is the necessary agency of socialism.

(b) The more they stuck to most of the other principles of 1938, the more sectarian they were. For the more you deny reality, the less able you are to argue your case with opponents. The classic case here was the SLL (now the WRP) who found the only way to maintain the patently false beliefs amongst their membership that world economic collapse was around the corner and that it was only the Stalinists that were keeping the working class from the barricades, was an authoritarian internal regime and isolating them from all contacts with other organisations.

(7) In defence of all these Trotskyisms though, it must be said that the conditions under which they had to try and survive were hardly conducive to self-confidence, self-criticism and experiment. It is almost impossible for us now to appreciate and understand the terrible stranglehold imposed upon Marxist activity by Stalinism, the Cold War and the irrelevance of revolutionary politics in the period of boom. In this light, the theoretical innovations of IS appear all the more remarkable.

(8) It was because of the modesty, sophistication and realism of IS against the fantasies, crudities and eccentric views of their own importance of the other Trotskyisms, that when revolutionary socialism became a credible idea again in the late 1960s, it was IS that made all the running. Starting from a tiny non-working class organisation it first made itself the largest recruiter of revolutionary students in 1968. Then through a 'turn to the class' it secured itself some industrial base — albeit a small one — in the wave of industrial militancy that rocked Britain between 1969 and 1974.

Other Trotskyist organisations certainly also grew in this period of optimism, but nowhere near to the size of IS. Nor did they manage to recruit seriously outside the student milieu. The best of them, the IMG, even recognised in practice that the world had changed since 1938, but because they were unwilling to attempt fundamentally to come to terms with their theoretical heritage, their 'openness' merely resulted in them lurching from one unpredictable position to another.

(9) Though the fact has hardly been recognised by the revolutionary left, the crunch for broadly-defined Trotskyism in Britain came in 1974. Whereas there were in 1973 nine organisations calling themselves Trotskyists. By 1977 there were at least double that number.

The fragmentation of all other organisations apart from IS was hardly surprising. They had ridden a period of upswing in the class struggle without revising their basic conceptions in any way. When face to face with the collapse of industrial militancy and the Social Contract, they had nothing to fall back on other than the irrelevant debris of the 1930s and 40s, or like the IMG to continue their erratic wanderings (and even they still persist even now with the shibboleth of 'a sliding scale of wages').

But IS too underwent internal crisis, resulting not just in the ejection of a number of small groupings, but more importantly to the departure of a large number of leading and middle-range cadres, many of whom were members of many years standing. Few of these were disillusioned with revolutionary politics. Most felt it was no longer the same organisation they had originally joined.

(10) The degeneration of IS is important and needs to be examined independently of the fate of the rest of the Trotskyist left. In large measure it can be put down to the informal decision taken by the IS leadership somewhere around 1970, that all important theoretical questions had now been decided and the task now was simply to build an organisation based upon them. This un-Marxist attitude, uncannily like the one taken towards the principles of 1938 by the rest of the Trotskyist left they had differentiated themselves from for so long, was sufficient to carry the organisation for a period. But not for long. For reality soon revealed IS theory in places to be out of date, inadequate or unconvincing. A full justification of these assertions cannot be attempted here, but briefly:—

(a) The theory of the Permanent Arms Economy, whether correct or not, was adequate to support the organisation through a period of boom. But once the boom came to an end its validity became crucial. For if it were correct it should have been able to explain why it had come to an end and what was to happen next. In fact it seemed able to say little more than the truism that there was a crisis because the PAE was becoming more unstable and that was virtually without predictive powers. (In 1977 the theory of the Permanent Arms Economy was to be completely rejected by its chief originator M. Kidron, though the SWP still clings to it. See ISJ 100)

(b) Although, of course, IS recognised the boom had come to an end, they were not prepared to try to work out the consequences of this, for their theory of the shift in the locus of reformism. In particular in 1974 on the basis of this theory they expected a short lull, then the industrial militancy that occurred under the Tories to continue under a Labour government, but in a much more political way. When this failed to materialise they failed to analyse why, but excused themselves by saying they had 'tele-scoped events'. In fact it would seem that as with any other strike waves in British history, the industrial militancy of 1969-74 and the consequent unionisation of large numbers of previously unorganised workers has compelled a fundamental re-ordering of class relationships in Britain whose birth was signalled by the return of the Labour government and its Social Contract. What the exact contours and implications of this new relationship are, have yet to be adequately described and explored. But we are a long way from 1969.

(c) Despite the apparently favourable circumstances of 1969-74, apart from in a few white collar unions and amongst hospital workers, the building of rank and file bodies proved very unsuccessful, and the creation of a genuine national rank and file movement impossible. Why this was so and what the consequences were, was never seriously discussed. Nor was the fact that, unlike the CP in the 1920s, IS was not the only revolutionary body on the left, so rank and file bodies inevitably drew in revolutionary socialists who did not necessarily agree with their strategy and tactics (and it was a real problem, in that some groupings who participated had no commitment to rank and file bodies at all, but were merely out to recruit members). Rather a (spurious) National Rank and File Movement was simply proclaimed and organised groups apart from IS frozen or driven out.

(d) Having largely disappeared from the socialist movement in Britain in the 1920s, women's liberation and sexual politics returned with passionate force in the 1970s. With their insistence on the restructuring of personal relationships and the creation of a socialist culture in the here and now, these ideas challenged, not just capitalism, but also Trotskyism, both narrowly and broadly defined and indeed Leninism as well. Despite occasional gestures IS made no real attempt at all to come to grips with these new ideas, driving many feminists and gays out of the organisation and alienating many outside who could never bring themselves to join. The hostility and indifference of IS to the women's and gay movement contrasted strikingly with their earlier welcoming of the student movement – another movement their theory had not allowed for.

(e) Had IS thought deeply about the theory of revolutionary organisation, a structure might have been created in which some of these theoretical and practical questions might have been raised and sensibly discussed. As it was, having flirted with Luxemburgism in the early 1960s, IS in 1968 became a democratic centralist organisation on the Bolshevik model.

But what is democratic centralism? According to Tony Cliff, founder and leader of IS, in his *Life of Lenin*, in Russia it meant the organisation of the Bolshevik party on different lines at different times, sometimes highly democratic, sometimes highly centralist, depending on which structure was most likely to ensure the acceptance of Lenin's particular policies of the moment. The uncritical way this is presented suggests Cliff believes this radical utilitarianism to have universal application.

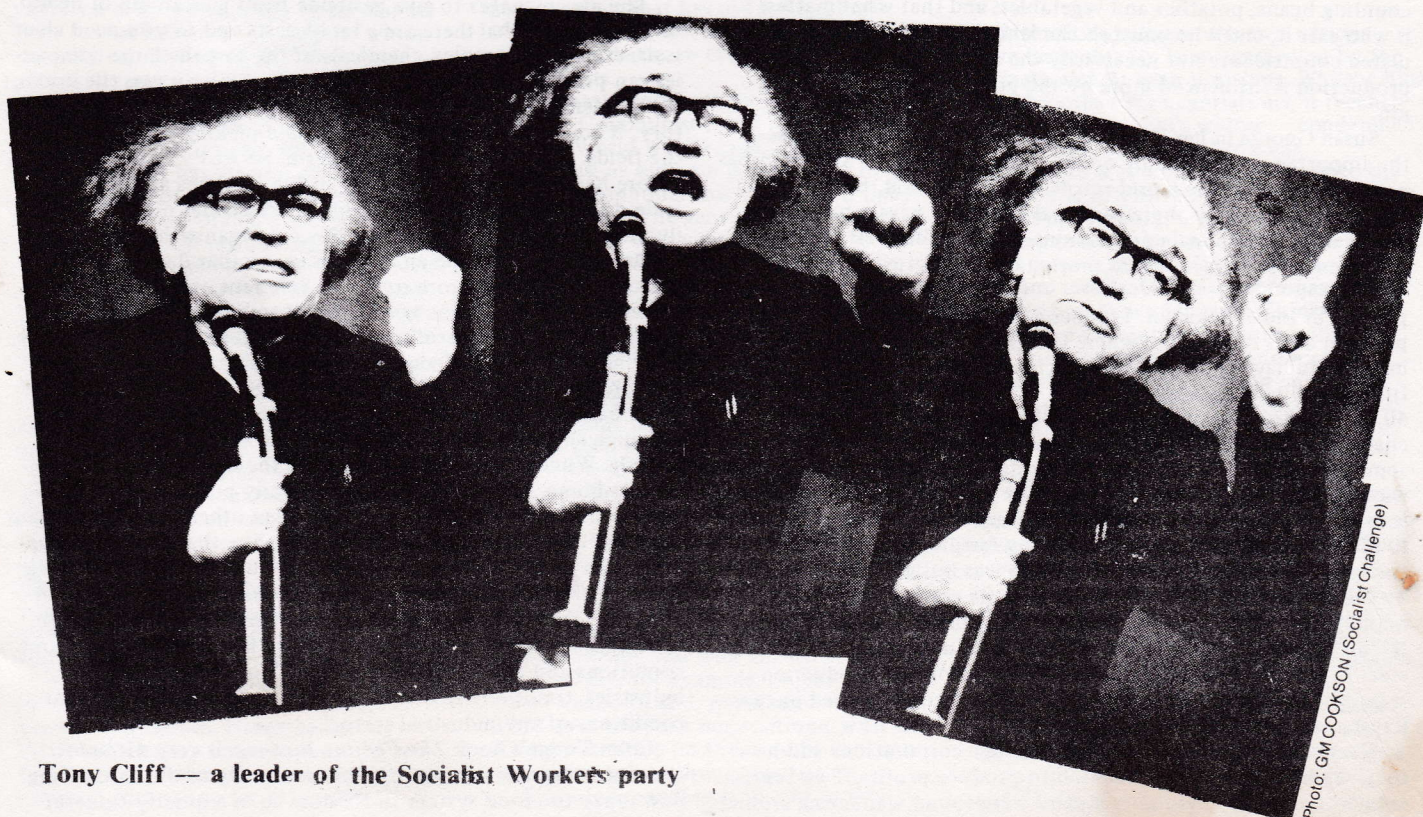
But Britain in the 1970s is not pre-First World War Russia and Cliff is not Lenin. Cliff's successful attempts to get a structure

that would build the organisation without questioning in any way its theoretical foundations – an attempt unfortunately facilitated by necessary campaigns against various groupings in the organisation who had no loyalty to IS's traditions at all and simply wanted to return to the obsolete propositions of 1938, meant that neither the problems outlined above nor the nature of revolutionary organisation itself, could hardly be raised as questions, let alone be properly thrashed out.

(11) The more urgent these questions became, the less democratic IS became in response. The culmination of the degeneracy both in theory and in practice was the proclamation of the organisation as the Socialist Workers Party at the beginning of 1977. For on the criteria of what a party was, elaborated by IS over the two previous decades, the SWP was clearly no such thing. For a party to IS had always meant an organisation that brought together the majority of revolutionary workers in industry and was capable of initiating and sustaining serious class struggle at the point of production. Moreover, 'such a party cannot be created except on a thoroughly democratic basis; unless in its internal life, vigorous controversy is the rule and various tendencies and shades of opinion are represented, a socialist party cannot rise above the level of a sect. It is fundamental to the relationship between party members and those amongst whom they work.' (D. Hallas, *Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party in Party and Class 1971*.) On this basis the SWP is not even a sectarian party, but a sectarian group.

(12) Though in style and mentality the SWP has to a large extent fallen back into the Trotskyist tradition it tried once to emancipate itself from (witness for example the recent obsession with revolutionary 'youth' – a classic symptom) and is clearly not the answer, this does not mean it will fade away or fall apart. Given the lack of alternative and the continuing economic crisis, it may even grow, recruiting mainly young people who will stay for a little while, hopefully learn something of revolutionary politics, but eventually leave as they find the policies and style of the organisation unhelpful or positively harmful to their activities at work or in their community. To a minority at least their exit will be facilitated by the negative or manipulative response of the organisation towards feminism and sexual politics.

(13) With all its deficiencies the IS tradition still, I believe, provides the best basis for the building of the new revolutionary organisation that is now so necessary in this country, though there is much in it, as I have indicated, that has to be discarded and much new to be worked out. Whether this will happen or not is quite another matter.



Tony Cliff — a leader of the Socialist Workers party

Photo: GM COOKSON (Socialist Challenge)

Charlie Clutterbuck

POLITICS OF FOOD

Review Article

- 'How The Other Half Dies'. Susan George. Penguin 1976. £1.00
'Food First'. Frances Lappe & Joe Collins. Boughton Miffin. New 'Internationalist'. (Cartoon Version) Sept. 1977.
'Famine Business'. Colin Tudge, Faber & Faber. 1977. £3.95
'The Wealth Of Some Nations'. Malcolm Caldwell. Zed. 1977. £3.00

The price of food shoots up. 500 million people go on starving. Butter mountains pile up. A grain storage unit blows up killing 35 people. What has the EEC got to do with it all? Why is food nowadays so prepacked, processed and packaged? Why is India exporting vegetable oil and potatoes? Some of these questions drift through our minds, and we try to fit them into some preconceived political analysis. But somehow they don't always fit. We all know someone is making a mint — but who? And how? There seem to be a few peculiarities about the politics of food, but what are they?

Popular mythology says that the problem is caused by 'overpopulation'. This hoary old myth, as old as Malthus, was resurrected and computerised by the Club of Rome in the *Limits to Growth*, and now serves ruling ideology by explaining everything from price rises and food shortages to riots and bad housing. Unfortunately it lingers on with the left as one of those unassailable 'natural facts'. Of the recent crop of books, probably the best at demolishing that myth is *Food First* by F. Lappe and J. Collins, published as a cartoon version in *New Internationalist* Sept. 1977. It shows clearly that there is enough food to go around without counting beans, potatoes and vegetables, and that what matters is who eats it, and who controls the land. The most densely populated countries are not necessarily the most hungry. World food production is influenced more by the price than by the population.

Susan George in her book *How the Other Half Dies* also sees the importance of stamping on the population myth. She describes power relations in the world revolving around food, between rich and poor nations, between local elites and peasants, and the power of multinational corporations. She is at her best explaining the green revolution — where short-stalked varieties of cereals which responded well to fertiliser and irrigation were planted in India, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines. "Land prices in areas of Pakistan where the green revolution has been introduced have increased 500% as landlords compete for land from which tenants have been removed. In 1969, there were 40,000 evictions against sharecroppers in Bihar state." These changed social relations of production were not the result of some 'abuse' of technology, but exactly what the green revolution was intended to do. While changing the relations into a capitalist mode of production, it also enabled multinational corporations to make a lot of money out of flogging fertilisers, pesticides, and tractors. No wonder the whole venture was initiated and pushed by the Rockefeller Institute, known for its connections with the oil industry. Production went up dramatically in the areas where the miracle seeds were introduced, but production in surrounding areas (more marginal areas) decreased. Thus overall production remained the same — except that it was now concentrated in capitalist areas.

George shows the power of agribusiness corporations and how they can home in on any situation to produce profits. Two representatives of a UK dogfood company were found wandering around

Ethiopia during the famine to see if it was a suitable place from which to export meat. Massey Fergusons, busy selling tractors to green revolution farmers didn't care what happened to the land when farmers had to sell because they couldn't pay their debts. Only 10% of what Del Monte produces in the Philippines is actually sold there — and that includes those canned goods that didn't match foreign food regulations.

Although powerfully describing the way food companies run the world, the book has some serious limitations. One is that she sees the baddies as the corporations, rather than capitalism itself. Secondly, because she doesn't put these descriptions in such an economic framework, she has nowhere to go to try and change it.

By seeing the problem solely as the big bad companies, she has some confusing perspectives. For instance, it is as if the politics of food has risen only since the emergence of the big corporations. There is very little about the history of imperialism and colonial exploitation — on which much of the UK's food supply is still dependent. She also has a vague idea that these corporations can be 'responsible'. She quotes an example of Booker McConnell setting up a sugar complex in Kenya. "Granted I have only the company's word for it, but on the face of it, it appears to be an excellent specimen of the contribution business could make to development if social goals, not merely profitability, were present." She says "neighbours have been encouraged to regroup their lands. . . and the company is doing the *hardest* operations." But cane is still cut by hand. She doesn't mention the wages, nor how much 'encouragement' was needed to get people to regroup. Why she wanted to show that companies could be responsible is beyond me. Capitalism can be 'responsible' — when it has its own long-term interests at heart.

She also manages to give pesticide firms a clean bill of health, on the grounds that there are a lot of pests and so you need chemicals, especially complex chemicals of the sort the large companies can produce. She, again, didn't see that labour was the crux of the matter, and that if it wasn't locked up in some pesticide factory, it could be ploughing, rotating and picking off pests — in the fields. According to *Food First* the US lost 7% of its crops before harvest 30 years ago. Now, using 12 times as much pesticide, the percentage loss has doubled. Pesticides don't necessarily increase yields, they concentrate and organise labour.

On the whole, Lappe and Collins use similar data to George, but come out with a more rounded, coherent analysis. And it shows in the conclusions as to 'what is to be done'. Lappe and Collins talk about controlling the land, organising co-operatively, growing for nutrition, balancing agriculture and industry, and only trading when enough food is being grown. George, on the other hand, sticks to a very individualistic middle class notion, although she does dismiss the 'eat-one-less-hamburger-a-day' brigade. While she correctly emphasises the importance of organising at home, she really can't put it in any political context. She recommends educating yourself, then others, then organising meetings and perhaps joining something like the World Development Movement. Nothing wrong in that, but her aim is to bring pressure on the multinational corporations, presumably via government lobbying. "We should try and stop the scandalous use of fertilisers on golf courses and cemetery lawns." Nothing about conditions and pay of workers in the US or European food industries, traditionally boasting some of the worst wages and conditions of any industrial sector!

Colin Tudge's book *The Famine Business* is very different, concentrating more on the UK; but is equally useful in showing how crazy the food system is. He does so in a quietly forceful

way, relying on sound arguments rather than polemic. He sets out to prove that a rational agriculture is not only viable, but essential for future existence. He does it by questioning what is nutritionally necessary, without resorting to any freaky prescriptions. He thinks "the chip butty made from good bread and eaten fresh is a sound basis for an adequate diet, and we would be better to rail against poverty than the foods that have enabled people to survive it." The products of the rational agriculture would be "potatoes and cereals, complemented by beans. Modest but significant amounts of lean meat. Plenty of fresh vegetables, and as much alcohol. . . ." This shopping list determines the shape of the agriculture. He believes in 'mixed' farms — those with a variety of crops and animals, relying on rotations. It would be organised on a 'wheels within wheels basis', where, for some commodities (pigs, poultry and vegetables), each community would be self-sufficient, while others (grain, beans, potatoes, sheep) would be produced more regionally.

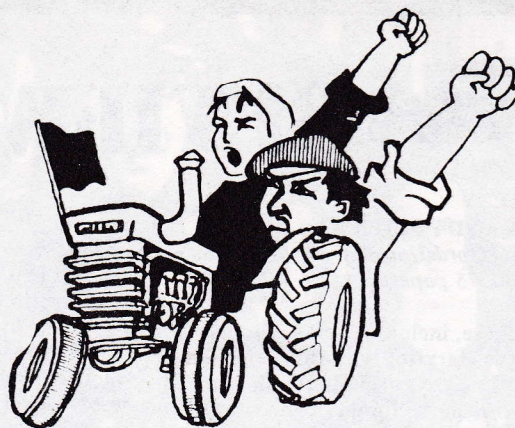
During his presentation of what a rational agriculture would consist of, he produces a lot of good arguments against the myth of overpopulation, the protein gap, and technological fixes such as textured vegetable protein and seaweed farms. He also explains about fibre diets, additives, why there is more processing, and why everything is now being frozen. Having given you a good idea of just how differently things could be arranged, he then says that with "no amount of contortion or coercion can (you) push rational agriculture into such a (capitalist) framework." All very good stuff.

But, although he says "that a Marxist economy would suit the needs of a rational agriculture", I don't feel that it is a Marxist analysis. The strength of the book may also be its weakness. It is written to convince doubting liberals, probably scientists. But in being logical, clear and convincing, it lacks 2 essential ingredients — any sense of class or of struggle. So, there is no sense of how the changes proposed will be resisted. In keeping with this, science and technology (apart from some abuses) appear to have a life force of their own, so that all that is needed is the rational version. He doesn't appear to appreciate that technology under capitalism is a manifestation of capital and thus represents the appropriation of the skills and labour of the working class, whether urban or rural.

So it was with many hopes that I turned to Malcom Caldwell — the only author who is decidedly Marxist. In *The Wealth of Some Nations* he attempts "to analyse the economic history of the last few centuries. . . by applying the tools developed by Marx. . . and to shift our focus to the physical exchanges involved."

Caldwell develops the tools of Marx well, especially in the chapter 'The Development of Underdevelopment'. "Much conventional wisdom continues to work on the assumption that the presently poor countries can belatedly traverse the path already trodden by the rich countries. But the rich countries began systematically supplementing their own resource endowments with imports drawn from real resource endowments of economically weaker and politically subordinate countries. This process continues at an ever increasing pace. So, these countries start with already depleted non-renewable real resource bases and that in a world where cheap raw materials are a thing of the past. . . Today, an international system of unequal consumption exists, a kind of protein imperialism, whereby the peoples of the rich countries in a literal sense take the food out of the very mouths and bellies of the poor and replace it with low quality foodstuffs." There is also a useful discussion on proletarian internationalism, class structures and traditions, and whether words like bourgeoisie, proletariat and peasantry are useful in understanding the situation. Here he gets away from the scenarios and theory and starts to discuss some of the problems ahead.

However, his analysis is weak when he looks at the physical interchanges — energy and food. He bases a lot on 'the law of entropy' which states "that the free energy of our system can only be run down, never increased. All our vaunted marvels of modern technology have been achieved by frantically tapping low entropy availability." While obviously true, it can be taken too far — as Caldwell does when he links it to the problems of food production. "Without an adequate continuously rising supply of fossil fuels there can be no rapidly expanding fertiliser industry and without a rapidly expanding fertiliser industry there can be no sustained rise in world food production as at present organised and without that rise world population



cannot continue to expand. It is as simple as that." Unfortunately it is not that simple. This sort of argument reflects the sort of rubbish peddled by the 'populationists' or 'environmentalists' in the late sixties.

Firstly, a capitalist agriculture doesn't develop to produce more food, but just to produce it 'efficiently'. And within that context, it can easily adapt to other power sources — gasified coal or nuclear power are obvious possibilities. He betrays a 'technologically determinist' analysis — that events are determined by technological constraints. This is the opposite of looking at the political economy, and understanding why particular developments occur at a particular time. Secondly, and more importantly, he fails to see that the main problem for capitalist agriculture has usually been one of surpluses, rather than shortages. It has never been concerned with feeding the starving millions. Its problem has always been to maintain food prices, when there is a long-term tendency to *overproduce*. Witness the butter, milk and beef mountains in the EEC, and the large area of land (larger than the UK) held out of production in the US. Because his book is predicated on the idea that there must be a collapse of capitalist agriculture, this argument weakens the conviction to want to change it.

Each of these books thus present different reasons for needing change. But one reason that is systematically missing from all of them is the condition of the working class involved in producing food. You may be forgiven for thinking that only 2% of the workforce (those on the land) is actually involved in producing food. But to those you have to add another 23% — all those making fertilisers, tractors, drains, pesticides, and all those processing and packing, making jam tarts, biscuits etc. etc. Wages of farmworkers and of the mainly immigrant workforce in the food retail industry are notoriously low. Conditions of work vary from having the worst accident rate of any industry on farms, through to the hazards of producing pesticides (eg Seveso), to the appalling long and boring hours worked by many women in the food industries, not to mention the conditions for sugar-cane workers or tea-pickers abroad.

Why is labour so exploited in the food business? Perhaps it isn't the fault of the authors of these books that they have left the central political questions unanswered. It is more the fault of the left in having ignored the politics of food and the land so comprehensively since the 1917 Russian Revolution. The question of food is somehow forgotten in our modern works. Yet, always at times of crisis it becomes a crucial issue — as Kropotkin emphasised in *The Conquest of Bread*. Witness the recent price rises and the relation with the economic crisis, and witness the importance it played during the Portuguese Revolution. Food cannot be ignored.

The question then becomes, what do you do about it. Do we demand cheap food, knowing that means committing many workers here and overseas to increased exploitation? Do we demand land nationalisation? Or self-sufficiency for the UK? How do we organise geographically isolated workers? Or immigrant workers working for 71p an hour in a bakery? Or women packing biscuits, sugar or apple tarts for similarly derisory wages? How can we help sugar-cane workers on strike in Guyana? Should we demand decent bread, and what difference does it make to those immigrant workers?

Some of these issues are common to all capitalist production, some are specific to food, some to the UK. Rather than trying to answer them now, it is hoped this will serve as a basis for future discussion and articles in this journal.

REVIEWS

MARXISM AND POLITICS by Ralph Miliband. (Oxford University Press, £3.50 hardback, £1.75 paperback)

There are those, including some who regard themselves as Marxists, who think that the Marxist all-time-greats said it all: all you need to know can be found in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin (with Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci and Mao added according to taste). Our business now is to get on and 'make the revolution'. We shall learn anything else we need to know from 'practice' — involvement in revolutionary activity.

Ralph Miliband's excellent new book, *Marxism and Politics*, will not appeal to the type of super-activist I've caricatured above. For Miliband starts from the assumption — in fact the recognition — that Marx and Co. did *not* say it all; that, odd as it may seem, none of the leading figures of the 'classical' Marxist tradition produced a systematic Marxist theory of politics, comparable to the economic and historical theory set out at such length in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. Virtually all the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky etc. which are specifically political are, in origin, occasional pamphlets written in response to particular situations and as contributions to particular controversies.

Of course, this is not to say that they do not contain much that is of value. But they do not add up to a coherent, worked-out theory of politics:

"The most careful textual scrutiny will not yield a smooth, harmonious, consistent and unproblematical Marxist political theory." (p. 5)

There is, in fact, something of a vacuum where the (or a) Marxist theory of politics ought to be. Hence no book on the subject can confine itself to an examination, however reverent or critical, of what the 'great masters' said on the subject. It has to try and add something to Marxist theory, rather than merely survey what has already been written. And this Miliband certainly tries to do.

First of all, it is worth reflecting briefly, as Miliband does, on this paradoxical situation. Marxism is a political phenomenon through and through, yet by presenting a comprehensive political interpretation of the historical evolution of human societies it tends to divert attention from the specific area of politics as that is usually defined. A broader definition of politics has some drawbacks as well as undeniable advantages. But there is also within Marxism a tendency (to put it politely) towards a kind of economic determinism in which, because political systems and institutions are seen, not as autonomous but reflecting or embodying class structure and class power, it is then assumed that if you put all the effort into class struggle the political institutions will change automatically in so far as the struggle is successful. This

cheery view is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Marx, and later Lenin, to take the most important cases, did not think it necessary to say much about the political forms appropriate to socialism. These were questions which future struggles would resolve. To speculate on them now would be merely utopian.

But the future is now with us, and has been since 1917. It is not necessary to get involved in disputes about whether today socialist states exist or truly socialist revolutions have taken place, to see that the question of what are the political forms and institutions appropriate or necessary for movement towards socialism has for long been real, urgent and agonising rather than simply theoretical. From this point of view the most original and valuable chapters in the book are the last two, which investigate the classic problems of the relation between 'class and party' and 'reform and revolution'.

In the earlier chapters Miliband explores further, and at a more general theoretical level, some of the issues he looked at in *The State and Capitalist Society*. Miliband, of course, firmly rejects the classic myth of the state in bourgeois society, which is that it is the representative or agent of 'society as a whole':

"In class societies, the concept of 'society as a whole' and of 'the national interest' is clearly a mystification." (p. 66)

It is, however, an extremely popular and successful mystification, as its victims, from the striking seamen of 1966 to the striking firemen of 1977, have good reason to know: And this is just one indication of the enormous importance of ideology as a means of control, to which Miliband rightly devotes the bulk of one chapter.

This is one issue on which Marx and Engels, writing in *The Communist Manifesto*, were clearly wrong. They believed in 1848 that exploitation and class conflict in capitalist society were more 'simplified' and 'naked', less 'veiled by religious and political illusions', than under feudalism. Perhaps it was partly this that led Lenin to lay so much stress on the role of 'force' as an instrument of state power. But whatever the reason, it is clear that ideology has played and continues to play a vast and perhaps decisive role in upholding the capitalist order, and that, at some times, this has been insufficiently recognised in the Marxist tradition. Simultaneously, it is, of course, within the Marxist tradition that the concept and theory of ideology have been most fully developed. Miliband's chapter on ideology is, unfortunately, his weakest, and would have benefited from some attention to the works of Lukacs, Adorno, Marcuse, Reich and the tradition of Frankfurt Marxism, which has been centrally pre-occupied with the various forms of ideology.

His discussion of the state and its relation to the ruling class, is, however, excellent. He rightly perceives the importance of maintaining a balance between a clear perception of the class character of the state, and not blurring the important distinctions that still exist between bourgeois democratic states and the various forms of authoritarianism, fascist and otherwise. There are also acute remarks on nationalism, and on the nature of the state in Communist countries.

Finally, Miliband turns to the issue of socialist political forms and strategies. Here he is at his freshest and most lively. The discussion, in chapter 5, of the lessons that should be learned from the Bolshevik and Russian experience, is the best short essay on this subject that I have read. This is followed by an equally penetrating assessment of the continuing relevance or otherwise of the traditional models of reformism and revolution. Miliband argues that *neither* 'model' represents realistic perspectives and projections.' (p.179) And that therefore neither the fairly orthodox Leninism of most of the left-wing groups, nor yet the 'reformism' of the Eurocommunists, is an adequate contemporary strategy for socialism. But it is clear, I think, that Miliband's own suggested scenario is closer to current Communist strategy. But he is acutely aware of the dangers of what might be called the electoral embrace, and the constraints of constitutionalism, and is not under the illusion that winning elections is the key. On the other hand, I could have wished that he had looked more closely at what he recognises as the one 'reasonably close' approximation to his strategy — the Allende regime in Chile. It would be too much to say that that one example destroyed all hopes of a 'constitutional' path to socialism. On the other hand, those who still derive some hope from that brave experiment need to say how such a regime can effectively maintain itself against the powerful, brutal forces that destroyed Allende, even as they destroyed the Popular Front government of Spain 1936.

But to say that Miliband's analysis and arguments raise more questions than they answer is not to complain. Undoubtedly, *Marxism and Politics*, read attentively, ought to bring some fresh ideas into socialist thinking, and in particular into the ongoing and unsettled debate about a fruitful strategy for socialism.

ANTHONY ARBLASTER

Wolf Biermann: Poems and Ballads (translated by Steve Gooch) *Pluto Press* 104 pp. £1.50

Wolf Biermann is a socialist dissident. His pungent critiques of the East German bureaucracy, in poems and ballads — passed from hand to hand, sung and repeated by others, when Biermann himself was restrained from public performances — were finally too much for the authorities. They seized the opportunity of a tour by Biermann in West Germany — where his material is equally popular — to refuse him re-admission to his (adopted) homeland. Though born in West Germany, Biermann chose to move to East Germany — the “better Germany” in his view — at the age of 17.

As a socialist dissident — unlike Solzhnitsyn say — he does not provide ready fodder for capitalist media to reinforce its myths about communist states (crocodile tears about police states and human rights, whilst continuing to invest in S. Africa and trade with Chile). Biermann still maintains that East Germany is the better country to live in. His criticisms stem from support for its aims, concern as to its methods. If he criticises the bureaucracy, it is because it gets in the way of the realising of communism in that country: the reason why he moved to the East.

Biermann's work presents difficulties for those elements within the Communist Party of Great Britain, for whom the East European states can do no wrong. Biermann, for them, is a rebel without a cause, whose ‘destructive’ criticisms can only serve the interests of the capitalist west.

Unfortunately for this thesis, Biermann seems to be as much of an embarrassment to the West German authorities. Their McCarthyite policy of ‘Berufsverbot’ — of denying employment to anyone with communist sympathies — hardly welcomes someone expelled from the East for being ‘too socialist’. Storms of protest followed a Biermann concert being broadcast on West German TV: that airtime was being given to ‘communist propaganda’. The broadcast could be received in East Germany: broadcast waves leap nimbly over Checkpoint Charlie! — and whilst giving a fillip to socialist households in the East, did little to endear Biermann to the East German authorities who were powerless to prevent this communist propaganda from the West!

Grit in the eye of capitalist and ‘communist’ state alike, Wolf Biermann's work, lively, caustic, damning in its criticisms, must be of interest to the socialist movement in this country. Unfortunately, very little has been available. Records and books had to be obtained from Germany, via friends on holiday.

By giving us a fairly cheap (these days . .) paperback sampler of Biermann's work, Pluto Press has whetted the appetite for more. An interview, an appreciation, 13 tunes of the songs — with guitar chords and 22 sets of lyrics — whilst generous compared to slim volumes of poetry — is only a small fraction of the man's output. Just one of his books printed in Germany has 478 pages, and includes several playlets. Pluto's selection omits this section of his work entirely.

Pluto hope to be instrumental in bringing Biermann over here for a number of concerts later this year, and people interested by the book may find fuller satisfaction there.

A welcome and much needed introduction, then. But not fully representative of his work, and thus of the range of concerns dissident writers and singers in East Germany are tackling. By omitting the fairly well-known ‘Portrait of a Monopoly Bureaucrat’ and other pieces in which Biermann characterises the East German authorities, he seems to pull his punches, and lean slightly towards portraying Biermann as a literary figure in the tradition of Brecht Brecht (which he is) rather than a socialist activist, part of a wider movement (which he also is). In cracking down on one individual, by denying him citizenship, it was the movement that was being attacked, not just Biermann. Many of his friends, especially those active in demanding he be allowed to return to East Germany, have had the state's repressive apparatus directed against them.

While appreciating what Biermann has to say, and how he says it, we should not lose sight of the work of others in the same movement. The mechanisms by which fame works tend to isolate socialist writers from their context. And that context is not primarily a literary one. In Biermann's own words:

“I hear a lot of people saying
‘Socialism — well all right
but what they're pulling on us here
it isn't worth a light’.”
(‘Don't keep waiting for the good times’)

It is to that experience that Biermann — and others — are addressing themselves in Eastern Europe. And it is the political implications of the struggle against what claims to be socialism that should capture our interest. The book is a little out of focus in this respect.

Biermann's importance is that he brings these questions to our attention. Abstract calls for the left to be less philistine, and ‘see the importance of culture’ slightly miss the point: it isn't the worthiness of ‘culture’ (like ‘education’) it's supposed to be good for you, but you can't quite see how) that will excite wider interest, but the relevance of what is said, and the immediacy with which it is said.

Fascists burn books. Brecht was high on Hitler's ‘wanted list’. The Chilean Junta bans guitars. The East German authorities expell Wolf Biermann. Each, in their own way, recognise how subversive culture can be, in creating socialist consciousness and a will to resist. The left has too often been unclear, and slow to recognise, what the right has readily understood. That's why ‘Revolutionary Socialism’ wants to encourage articles on culture, which focus on its potential dynamic and mobilising role within socialist activity.

Ben Bailey

SOCIALIST REGISTER

Socialist Register 1977, Merlin Press, £2

The yearly Socialist Register has become an institution on the British left and a not unwelcome one. Like an old friend it returns each year with a similar mixture — sections on left strategy and organisation, on the third world, on Marxist theory and so on. But it is a formula that as well as producing the occasional brilliant article, at least concentrates on real problems that are directly related to British class struggle and key world events. It has only to be compared with the New Left Review to see how useful Socialist Register has been.

This year's collection of articles is similar to past issues, although it is a distinct improvement on last year's effort with its half-dozen often tedious articles on the events of Hungary 1956 and the aftermath of disillusionment with the Communist Party. Indeed, that issue indicated some of the limitations of the Socialist Register venture. The older generation of the ‘New Left’ have particular and understandable concerns that sometimes appear as obsessions. Finding an alternative to the Labour Party option and a means to distance themselves from Communist Party methods and organisation, if not strategy, to name but two. Hungary is burned on the minds of the ‘old New Left’, as May '68 is on the late 1960s generation of revolutionary socialists. Unfortunately, these debates and the consequent debates, often appear as rather stale re-cycles of the past.

In this year's edition, the long-running debate on the Labour Party — to use it or not — is still running. The pro-use side is represented by one of the newer generation — Peter Jenkins. However, this is not so much a case for using the Labour Party as a series of arguments against the alternatives. The knocking of often poor revolutionary left positions unfortunately does not answer the damning indictment of the possibilities of using the Labour Party put forward by Miliband and others. The article is notable only for the fact that it puts forward the increasingly popular ‘third road’ argument, associated with Geoff Hodgson. This refers to a supposed path between insurrectionism and reformism. While it is situated to the left of the Communist Party's ‘peaceful road’, it shares much of the same problematic.

This can be seen in George Bridges' article ‘The Communist Party and the struggle for Hegemony’. This is a straight Eurocommunist piece which has the great merit of actually talking about the whole breadth of the left, including women's, black and youth movements. But like Jenkins, using the ‘new wonder Gramsci’ it situates the problems for socialist advance as primarily ones of ‘legitimation’. While admittedly helping to re-balance some of the economism of the left and its lack of understanding of the uses of parliament, by concentrating so much on ideological struggle, it divorces the fine words from the realities of everyday struggles. This is particularly the case with Bridges' article, which simply doesn't link the ideas to what the CP is actually doing. And certainly its activities in industry, among students and women are increasingly drifting rightwards.

The CP's 'Broad Democratic Alliance' situates all the talk of the breadth of the movement inside a reformist framework. And while both Jenkins and Bridges talk of 'popular power' they leave little doubt that autonomous working class institutions would be decisively subordinate to the parliamentary sphere. Even to the point of Jenkins echoing Coates' claim that if soviets were set up in Britain they would have to defend Parliament! Lenin would not only be turning, he'd be doing somersaults in his grave.

But the most disappointing essay is by Duncan Hallas of the Socialist Workers Party. Aside from the standard anti-entrism and anti-CP case it says nothing of any real political substance. Socialist strategy is either reduced to quantitative head-counting or ignored. Ten pages to tell us to join the SWP because it's growing. It's be quicker to read Socialist Worker. Miliband's piece is as usual perceptive and interesting. It deals with real political problems for British socialists and touches on areas often left unsaid, even 'socialist efficiency'. However, it must be said that the essay is another (anti-Labour) version of the 'third road' to socialism. Rejecting the 'Bolshevik model' because 'it ignores democratic institutions' and the methods of the revolutionary left

for 'militant adventurism', it makes the standard call for a new socialist party.

The problem for Miliband specifically is that while he has a similar strategy to other 'third roaders', he rejects their organisational means: the Labour Party and Communist parties. Regarding the revolutionary left as dominated by the insurrectionist model, he has a strategy but no army. This was shown by the failure of the May Day Manifesto group in the late 1960s and I would be surprised to see an army arise now, except for a few generals. The disjuncture between organisation and strategy is at the heart of the limitations of the 'old New Left' project. It would appear to require a leftward split in the Labour Party similar to the one that produced the PSU in France or PDUP in Italy; but this is very unlikely.

As for the rest of the Register, the pro-CP 'New Popular Front in France' by George Ross is of most value, partly because it perceptively plots the basis for the Socialist Party/ CP split, that he was unaware of at the time of writing. The others vary from interesting to uninspiring, depending upon your specialist interest. But overall still a reasonable buy.

Paul Thompson

REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

This is the second issue of Revolutionary Socialism. Although it is the journal of Big Flame, we do not regard it as our property. This means more than having non-Big Flame contributors, as there were in the last issue and there will continue to be. Many organisations and individuals are debating the possibilities of a new organisation of the revolutionary left in Britain. Big Flame is part of that process, since the decision at our last conference to investigate the formation of a new organisation. If that organisation is going to be a decisive break from the past limitations of the left then we have to debate substantive political and theoretical issues. It is not enough to distinguish the traditions of the revolutionary left from Eurocommunism or the latest brand of entrism into the Labour Party. We have to debate our own traditions, our own strategic weaknesses, particularly a re-evaluation of the relationships between party and class.

The theoretical journals of the British left do not serve us well in that respect. New Left Review has re-introduced Marxism as a serious force on the British left. But the content and style are seriously flawed. As David Widgery remarked in his recent *Socialist Register* article; the number of articles dealing with British class struggle has been a mere handful. Endless articles by often obscure continental theorists are no substitute: neither are Althusser's 'greatest hits', regurgitated once again. Nor is the content wide enough, the shadow of orthodox Trotskyism hangs over the magazine, restricting its content. Just as serious is the obscurantist academic style that the magazine has promoted.

— STATEMENT OF AIMS

This has been echoed in other journals, for instance, those of the Centre for Contemporary Studies. These comrades have done interesting work in new areas like youth culture and class consciousness, but often in so inaccessible a way to make it useless. It is not a question of writing things in a way that 'anyone' can understand them. Theory is not newspaper agitation. But playing games with words to make limited theory look complex leaves out most left-wing activists, let alone anyone else.

Then we have the various 'house journals' of the revolutionary organisations. Some are also turgid and inaccessible, merely re-producing the line of the particular organisation. International Socialism, the monthly journal of the Socialist Workers Party, has broken new ground by being regular, well produced and well written. But it suffers not only from being a 'line' journal, but from being the line journal of the SWP. Serious theoretical articles are rare. Many are dressed up justifications of current SWP policies, like the absurdly-titled recent issue, 'In Defence of Violence'.

We want Revolutionary Socialism to help break new ground in both form and content. Serious articles covering issues often under-valued or deliberately ignored issues, presented in the most popular and accessible way that Marxist theory can be.

We welcome contributions, letters and feedback generally, recognising that Big Flame alone cannot produce a theoretical journal up to the tasks that we have set ourselves. We are therefore also open to participation in editorial production.

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