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solidarity

FOR WORKERS' POWER

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 9



May Day

1971

: authority in crisis

The Politics of
Community Action

Occupied Ireland

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AUTHORITY IN CRISIS

May Day. The day revolutionaries would dedicate themselves to the cause of the oppressed, denounce the universal character of exploitation, stress the international nature of the struggle against it. The day they would proclaim anew their vision of a totally different world, where ordinary people would at last be masters of their fate and no longer be exploited, coerced, manipulated and repressed by the power of Capital. The message was simple, clear, unambiguous: 'Workers of all lands, unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to win!'.

The problem remains. The struggle continues. But the revolutionaries are everywhere in disarray, their words sour in their mouths, their hopes becoming heresies and their dreams nightmares. What has gone wrong?

Everywhere - and as never before - people are striving to re-appropriate what capitalism is still ruthlessly extracting from them: sweat, blood, labour power, the meaning, substance and control of their own lives. At Dagenham, Halewood, Turin. In the docks of Rotterdam and the mines of Kiruna. In the paddy fields of Bangla Desh and in the tea plantations of Ceylon. On campuses: from Berkeley to Nanterre, from LSE to Kent State. In Italian gaols and in the psychiatric 'hospitals' of the USSR. And wherever young people feel their life is their own, to be lived to the full, and not to be traded piecemeal for a handful of coins.

The crisis of 'authority' is deep-going, increasing, irreversible. The old society is slowly disintegrating under our eyes. Those who can read the writing on the wall, those who are not blinded by a 'revolutionary' orthodoxy that is increasingly an obstacle to vision, will see we are already ankle-deep in Revolution.

Comrade, just look around. All that held the old world together is questioned, found wanting, challenged, contested - or just neglected and by-passed. Every challenge engenders a repressive or bureaucratic response which triggers further challenge. What price today their religion, their patriotism, their patriarchal family, their traditional morality, their work ethic? On May Day let us renew our dedication to dig the grave of the old society and to be midwives of what is painfully struggling to be born. But let us run, if only to keep pace.

Comrade, just look around. Veterans from the Vietnam war assemble in Washington. They 'form a long line and one by one throw their decorations and citations on the steps of the Capitol. They call their medals

"garbage" and "symbols of dishonour and shame" "Look beyond them" one says, "and you see blood, dead babies, dead human beings". (1)

Those in physical or moral authority all feel the coming storm. In his pascal pontifications Pope Paul VI describes the world around him as 'an agitated sea threatened with terrible tempests.' Stability is menaced 'by institutionalised social struggle, endemic contestation, progressive moral decadence'. The whole value system is crumbling. The Church itself is shaken by 'perturbing currents challenging doctrine and discipline'. Catholics want birth control. Priests want sex. Papal pronouncements or no papal pronouncements.

In Britain last year, one William Palfrey, Chief Constable of Lancashire, leads a massive police march through the city of Blackburn. Hundred of fuzz, given special leave for the occasion, sing 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' as they parade through the streets. Thousands of those being by-passed by the surge of events rally to the Chief Constable's call 'to protest at the deterioration of morals and standards, typical of our day and age'. 'Each massive procession has its own band with mounted police at its head'. Inescapable symbolism: uniformed police as the custodians and last repository of Victorian morality.

At work, much the same. Just look around, Comrade. 'Last October James Johnson, a production worker fired from a Chrysler factory in Detroit, went home, got his gun, came back to the workshop and killed two foremen and one trade union official who tried to cool him down ... But the storm didn't end there. The day after, all the workers on assembly lines in Detroit stuck press cuttings of the event onto their foremen's desks. It was the third recent case of a foreman murdered'. Establishment sociologists are talking about a 'crisis of authority within the factory'. (2)

On New Year's Day, 1971 - without so much as a squeak of consent from their employers or trade union officials - hundreds of thousands of workers decide to have a day off. They don't ask, they take. This spontaneous movement was so widespread, so successful, that the Confederation of British Industries is now seriously discussing whether to make January 1, 1972 an 'official' holiday.

Education is in ferment. Comrade, do you even understand what it means? No, we don't mean teachers agitating for higher wages, although good luck to them. Members of the Children's Committee of the National Council for Civil Liberties who, in a document entitled 'Children Have Rights', say: 'The right of young people to have sexual relations as soon

(1) The Observer, April 25, 1971.

(2) 'Class Struggle and the GM Strike' - see review p.15 of this issue.

as they wish to have them is a most important one and, of course, carries with it the right to contraceptive information, advice and equipment ... it is unfortunate for children to live in conditions which do not allow privacy for such activity.' When the young apeak like this, authoritarian conditioning is being subverted at the roots.

A girl of 16 receives contraceptive advice from a Brook Advisory Centre. Her general practitioner divulges the information to her parents. The medical profession is shaken by one of the most heated controversies in the last 20 years. Everyone joins in. The G.M.C. vindicates the doctor ...only itself to stand condemned in the eyes of thousands of young doctors.

Or a Birmingham schoolteacher takes part in a sex education film in which masturbation and intercourse are honestly depicted. She is suspended by the local Education Authority. Scores of other authorities immediately ask for copies of the film. Every one of their acts rebounds against them.

Threats of student protest against American involvement in the Vietnam war forced Mr Walter Annenberg, United States Ambassador to Britain, to decline an honorary degree of Doctor of Law from the University of St. Andrews. Mr Annenberg said he 'was unwilling to do anything which might result in a demonstration of feeling which could be interpreted as directed against his country'. (1)



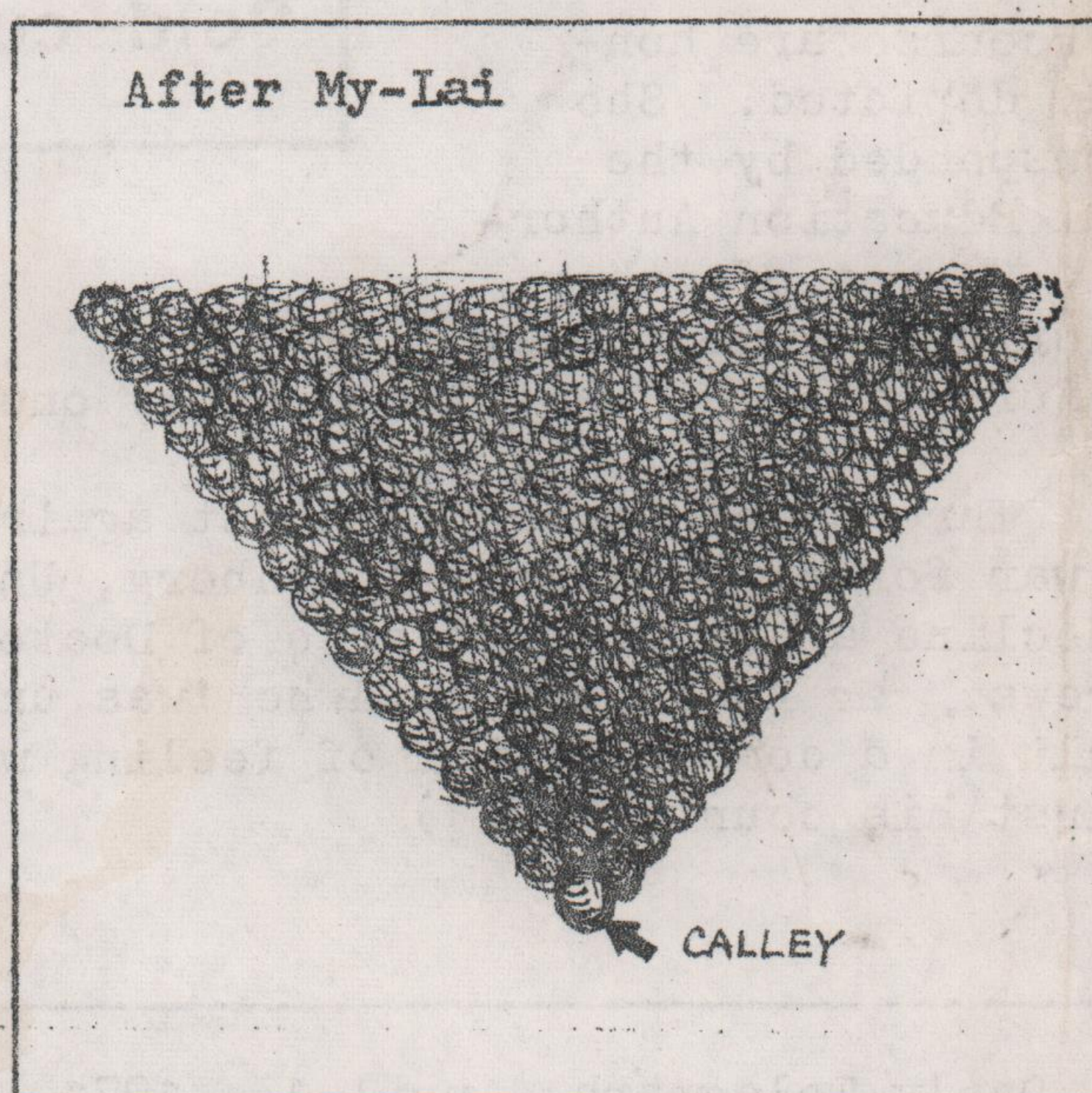
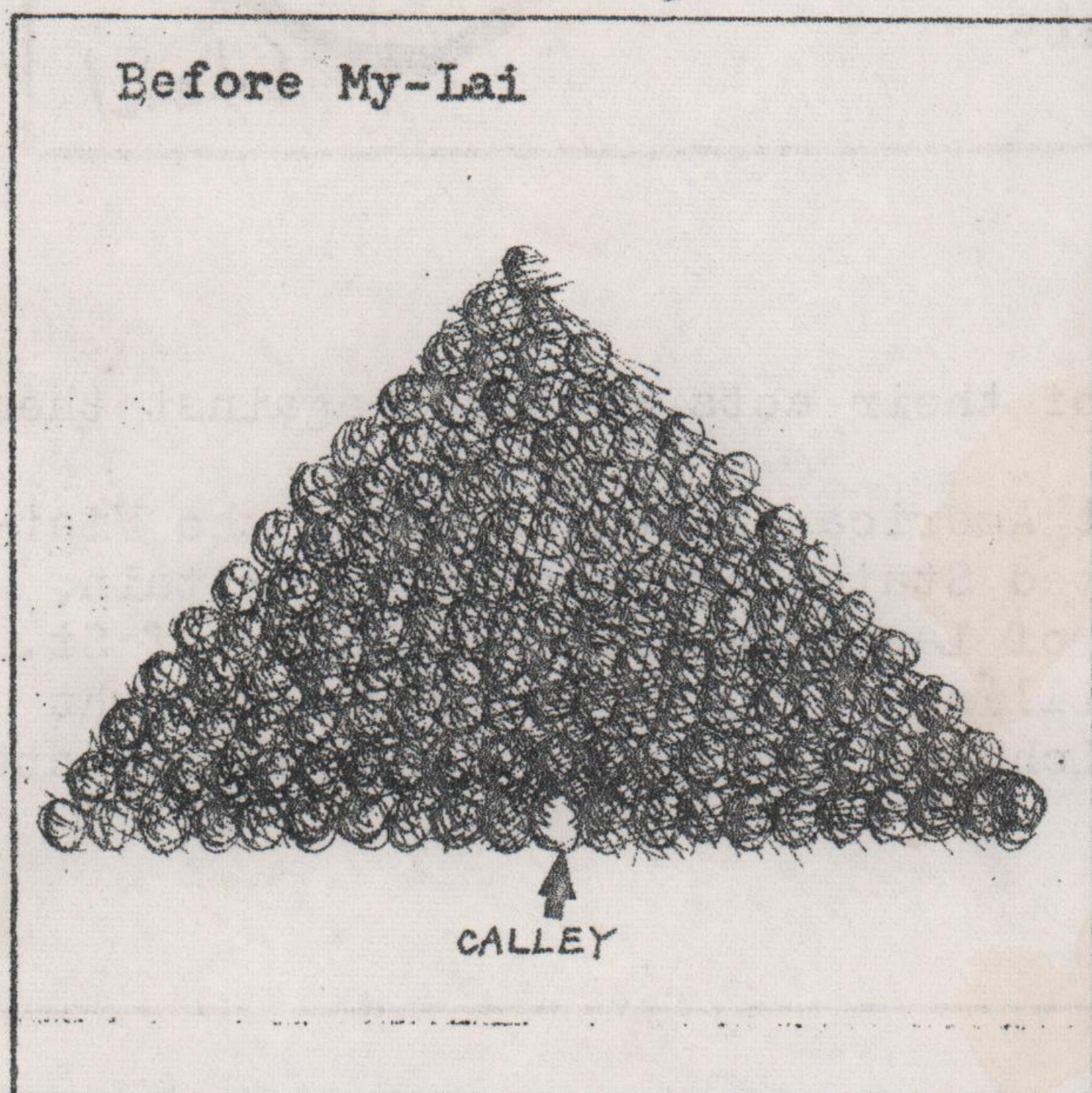
(1) Daily Telegraph, April 13, 1971.

Meanwhile, such is the lack of confidence felt by the Establishment that Peregrine Worsthorne, Assistant Editor of the arch-reactionary Sunday Telegraph, can write that 'the American Army in South Vietnam is a demoralised fighting force, backed by a civilian population at home that has entirely lost faith in the war. Once upon a time American soldiers were necessary to put backbone into the South Vietnamese Army. Today the American forces have no backbone even for themselves. Drug-saturated, mutinous, defeatist, incompetent, they constitute more a threat to the security of South Vietnam than do the Vietcong. In very truth, they are the enemy within. If President Thieu has any sense he will have reacted to President Nixon's speech by saying "good riddance to bad rubbish".' (1) Amen.

In France, the crisis of authority now permeates all strata of society. The lycées are becoming unmanageable. The Ecole Normale Supérieure prestigious factory for top academics has to be closed down. Firemen stage sit-down demonstrations in the street. Magistrates stage demonstrations against the utterances of Gaullist ministers. (Here too, the rulers are losing their self-confidence.) The silent majority continues to vote for the same old gang, as if relishing the sight of them sinking ever deeper in their own shit. An official opinion poll asks whether the State is there to protect the rich or the poor. 62% of those questioned answer 'the rich' - 9% 'the poor'. One day, thoughts will become action. One day, the grouse will shoot back. Run, comrade, run - if you want to keep pace.

(continued p. 28)

(1) Sunday Telegraph, April 11, 1971.



THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITY ACTION

The following article seeks to demystify people concerning the activities of well-meaning but misguided radicals, busying themselves in the 'community action' field. It is based on a paper presented to a conference on Community Action organised by 'Press-Ups' (12 Castle St., Edinburgh) a Left information service, and held in Edinburgh on December 5, 1970. Copies of the article are available, for the cost of postage, from the author (8 Almond Place, Holytown by Motherwell, Lanarkshire).

The increased interest in recent years in what has been loosely called 'community action' must be seen more in terms of attempts to contain or direct working class discontent than as part of a movement to improve working class lives and conditions. Wherever one may find an area where people are trying to get something done (such as getting authorities to provide more amenities or demolish slums) one will also find out-of-work social workers, drop-out students and graduates, political activists of all types, etc, etc. My thesis is that where community militancy does appear it is in great danger of being smothered by well-intentioned outsiders who, for one reason or another, see community action as the salvation of their ideology or political ambitions or even personal hang-ups.

Community action must also be seen in the context of the British reformist tradition, or rather in the tradition of the perpetual defeat of the working class by middle class 'solutions' to their problems. 'Community action' is in great danger of being the latest in this line.

Britain has, in effect, avoided revolution over two centuries by having a programme of reforms just adequate to dispel protest without fundamentally altering those relationships in society which cause the discontent, without altering, in fact, the relationship between rulers and ruled. The

'It was the glory of the first Reform Bill that it not only avoided a revolutionary triumph of discontent but, by giving its due influence to property, steadied the whole political system.'

Lord Cockburn, Whig
Leader 'Journal 1831-1854'

'Don't be deceived by the middle classes again! You helped them to get the Reform Bill, and where are the fine promises they made you?'

Chartist orator in 1841.

working class has always been led into fighting individual issues, not seeing the inter-relationship of these issues, and accepting concessions such as the vote, various aspects of the 'welfare state', council housing, trade unions, etc. As society is prosperous these 'rights' can be afforded, but when things get difficult these rights soon come under attack as is happening today: welfare and housing cuts and an attack on trade unions.

This sort of thing has to be spelt out because there are so many young middle class people who see concessions won for the working classes and not by them as being real (even revolutionary) change. In the past working class leaders have always ended up going through laborious 'legitimate' channels accepting concessions rather than fighting to alter the total conditions of working class existence. One of the main reasons for this has been the way in which the system absorbs radicals by making them lose touch with their mass support or by incorporating their 'progressive' ideas into the machinery for state control.

In the architectural world, for instance, we saw the 'radical' communist group of architects, who played such an important part in promoting the 'socialist' architecture of mass housing and cheap schools after the second World War. Their enthusiasm for putting their ideas into practice was greater than their understanding of the class struggle. The system was keen for their ideas, more relevant to the modern industrial age than the more traditional approach. They are now the Establishment of the profession, just as some of the community action ideologists will become. One can identify them by their anxiety for the authorities to accept their ideas rather than appealing to mass support.

Because the ideologies of this country are so overwhelmingly bourgeois, even when they are 'revolutionary' - just look at the composition of any 'revolutionary group' - there is a tendency to identify much more closely with the authorities than with ordinary people. But there is also a simplistic view of politics. Politics is seen as a battle between the goodies and the baddies, between the anti-capitalists and the capitalists. Many even seem to accept that it is better for the anti-capitalists to carry out capitalist policies than for it to be done by the capitalists. Hence the continued support for the Labour Party, simply because of its superficial claims to represent the working class.

It is time that people saw that politics is much more complex. Overlaying the traditional economic contradictions is a system of mystification, deception and confusion which makes it so much harder for those demanding change to present an issue in a simple way. The battle is not one of goodies against baddies, but of ordinary folk against those who control capital and those who control people. The amalgamation of the latter two groups is the basis of politics, both East and West. Through it real issues are obscured by a sham competition for 'power' through elections (this power being simply a control mechanism to support an unjust system).

Campaigning on individual issues simply draws the attention of this adjusting mechanism to areas of possible trouble which, because of its own incompetence, it has failed to deal with. If on examination the problem isn't going to cause too much trouble, then the authorities won't bother about it. Hence isolated pockets of slums, poverty, bad working conditions, etc, can be neglected, providing the problems are kept isolated and divided.

To isolate problems (divide and rule) is a natural strategy of the ruling powers. The whole mechanism of the welfare state isolates people into cases, categories of problems, etc. Problem families, problem areas: all are contained by a sophisticated operation of social workers who stop any rot spreading to the 'normal', 'adjusted' people. Most promising of the actions opposing this are the Claimants Unions, who endeavour primarily to overcome the isolation of people with what are nominally individual problems.

What all community activists must understand is that this is a society where wealth and power are still concentrated in a few hands and where the policies of the country or communities are not accountable to the majority of people. This is obscured by massive propaganda and ignorance and can only be resisted by a total resistance, i.e. by a total understanding of how the system works.

Clearly, no spontaneous community protest will achieve this. Nor will a community activist be successful if he tries to present a total revolutionary perspective to a community. But what is dangerous is where community activists have a partial view of society (often centred around themselves) and where their influence on a community tends to build up the importance of their own role rather than the importance of a wider movement for social change.

Community activists (or self-appointed community organisers, which they often are) are on the whole professional or middle class people who have become discontented with one or more aspects of the system. They are disillusioned with the Labour Party, perhaps students, academics, all sorts. They usually have a more radical distrust of authority than officially appointed people dealing with community problems. Thus they are often more acceptable to working class communities who have no love for City Hall. But what is happening is that these 'experts' who move into an area are reinforcing a system where society relies on experts to run its affairs, and where ordinary people are not supposed to know enough about the working of society to have any say in its running. In so many places I have seen self-appointed community workers acting as go-betweens for the community. The community learns nothing about how to solve its own problems, nor does it come into conflict with the power structure. It is isolated from these problems by these magical people who come into the area 'wanting to do something to help'. This just reinforces an apathy which community action ideology often says it is there to dispel.

Community action, as far as I am concerned, should be the community doing things itself, i.e. taking action, learning that the 'need' for the rule of the experts is merely a mystification. Community action should be the negation of the expert. If people were, in a collective way, to tackle the problems that face them, it would soon dispel apathy. And it would soon be condemned as 'anarchy' and revolution.

The new sympathetic activist who moves into a deprived or problem area is a new breed of expert. Well intentioned, radical, less hamstrung by authoritarian procedures or bureaucracy, he is much more effective at organising people. But he is still the expert, still making people feel that they need others to tell them what to do.

Indeed the community activist is so successful that it hasn't taken the government and academic institutions long to realise his importance. Already 'community workers' are being churned out. Action research has become the latest jargon for sociologists to 'work at the grass roots' (sounding like the coal face). Groups like the Organisation for Student Community Action have started to give students (in a very hygienic way) a chance to get their hands dirty ... so that they can be more effective in their roles as 'leaders of the community'.

Many radicals have got onto the community action bandwagon: out of work CND activists, discontented social workers, Labour 'leftists', student maoists, etc. They are popping up all over the place, starting community newspapers, getting themselves onto the committees of tenants and community associations. Some are making a useful contribution but in the majority of cases I think more harm than good is being done. Often community action is artificially manufactured to suit the ideological requirements or the impatience of the outside activist. Often where community action is imported people don't show any interest. Working class people are manipulated enough as it is. Their alienation from some freaky community project is understandable as they haven't created it. Where they do

London news

Squatters group may have to evict families in arrears

By Pat Healy

Social Services Correspondent

The Lewisham Family Squatting Association may be forced to evict squatting families next week to avoid a total collapse of the organization.

The association, which has won wide support for its work in pioneering legal squatting, is facing a crisis caused by the refusal of a small number of families to pay rent.

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+ The Times +
+ March 9, 1971. +
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accept it, it is often just to use it or tolerate it. But the community activists carry on undaunted. They may win concessions for people, but rarely involve people in the hassles involved. They do not educate because they don't realise that the best form of education is doing something for oneself.

Where the community fails to respond a whole mythology of activities and achievements are created. Take the Leith Tenants Association which I had a hand in generating but had little contact with after the initial meeting. This initial meeting was described in Press-Ups (Scotland's new trendy with-it alternative media thing).

'We had been tipped off that there would be an attempt to evict several families that day. So we planned to stop this. The day before an eviction had been stopped by pointing out that there was a technical error in the warrant, and we hoped that this could be repeated publicly in the street so that the tenants could see that not everything was against them. But it was the police, not the Sheriff's officers, who turned up. They arrested everyone in sight for holding a riotous unauthorised meeting in the street. This unified everybody in a previously split community.'

This complete fabrication was probably thought justified to stress the need for unity. In fact no arrests were made and the police only took one name and address. The failure to achieve unity is probably one of the reasons why the Leith Tenants Association, despite tremendous potential, has not really got off the ground.

This kind of mythology appears all over. This example has been given as I can substantiate it. Things only occur like this where the community action is not in the control of the local people, who would never allow such distortion. The outside activists tend to see politics in terms of organising, manipulating and deceiving people: people have to do what the politicians and experts think is best for them. Leaders in the bourgeois sense are always self-appointed ... especially in the field of pseudo-community action. Leaders of this kind soon forget the people they are supposedly leading. They can so easily go over to the other side, no matter how radical they appear to be just now.

'Under the process of decompression, antagonists who seemed irreconcilable at first sight grow old together, become frozen in purely formal opposition, lose their substance and neutralise and moulder into each other.'

Raoul Vaneigem

These radicals of today can so easily become the Government operators of tomorrow because in their eyes only they have the understanding to lubricate the system where it is beginning to grate unpleasantly. Too many community activists will be pleased when the government comes along to support their work. They will see this as some sort of victory. They will fail to see that this is the way the system absorbs 'progressive developments'.

'Lord Justice Davies said that nobody could have heard the evidence without feelings of depression and oppression. He said that in the neighbouring borough of Lewisham the squatters association had come to an arrangement with the local authority.

He added: "I go outside my judicial functions but I do express the hope that the door is not closed finally and some consideration might be given to see whether something resembling the Lewisham amicable arrangement cannot be found".'

Evening Standard, December 16, 1970.

Where Government is trying to absorb community protest there is usually a lack of success. I have visited a 'neighbourhood council' in London where a whole pack of community bureaucrats and organisers had been sitting in an office for 2 years with no apparent effect on the community. 'Unofficial' organisations have been set up like the Association for Neighbourhood Councils. These 'liberal' organisations are primarily concerned with 'making democracy work'. They are disturbed at the way democracy is beginning to break down. People don't vote in elections, they resort to nasty strikes and demonstrations. It is important to iron out these unfortunate areas of trouble so that the politicians and bosses can get on with destroying the world without trouble from the working class. This means setting up new organisations to increase the deception and mystification, and introducing 'reforms'.

Read, for instance, the Labour Government's White Paper on the Reform of Local Government:

'It is common experience that local groups are increasingly springing up to protect or advance the interests of their communities. Neighbourhood Councils would reflect and articulate this growing strength of grass roots opinion. They could keep the main authorities more closely in touch with local feeling, attract a new and different type of elected representative into local government and strengthen its democratic base.'

It is important that we do not allow 'community action' to be a means of recuperation for this absurd and unjust society.

This paper is not rejecting community action out of hand. Nor is it saying that community groups shouldn't fight for concessions and minor reforms. No one gets anywhere by adopting a 'pure' analysis and doing nothing about it. The point I am making is that community action should be an expression of working class feeling and militant action. It should be a way for people to see how society works by tackling things themselves. It should NOT be a new role for middle class experts or working class leaders who are not concerned with changing the total condition of the working class. People should not be allowed to lead community groups up the blind alley of meaningless reformism.

Community activists should therefore try to play a catalyst role without making themselves indispensable. They should be able to pull out as soon as a group is going and leave it to the local people to run themselves. If the activist is local he shouldn't allow his greater experience and commitment to be daunting to others. People with professional expertise should always play an advisory role. It is useless and futile to try to manufacture community action.

If people create their own organisations, if they decide how these should fight, if they avoid delegating responsibility to others, if they participate in the struggles for change, then real changes will come about. Where the working class puts its trust in self-appointed 'revolutionary' parties, reformers and 'experts', then it will never overthrow bourgeois domination for an egalitarian system.

Ultimately working class people need to confront society as a whole through their own self-generated organisations. If community action continues to make people rely on others to bring about social change for them, then it is a valueless activity. Where community action helps people to see the need for solidarity, to achieve better relations with their neighbours, to oppose the division and fragmentation which society imposes on us, then it is of great value. The use of this yardstick can help one to evaluate community action. It should show that where a tenants' association concentrates purely on a rents issue and its leaders are away battling test cases in the courts, the campaign will soon founder. This sort of action doesn't bring people together or build up a community strength. Similarly where outsiders go into an area, start up a 'community paper' but retain control of the means of production of that paper, or where they must set themselves up as Chairman of the local organisation to stop it collapsing, then one will discover alienation and apathy towards the community project.

Community action is the salvation of those with outworn ideologies. Look at the sad decline of the East London squatters movement from the great promises of an anarchist mass movement to the respectability of Shelter's support. The Liberal Party and the Young Liberals are endlessly passing resolutions about community 'participation' and community action.

I had a letter from the Vice-Chairman of the Young Liberals who told me he approaches the field 'from the point of view of a specialist in the techniques of political organisation'. He described himself as a 'professional politician' and said he was writing a computer programme for 'political strategy planning'. I haven't got round to writing to tell him that one of the main aims of community action should be to fight the 'professional politician'.

Of course those masters of reformism, the Fabians, soon latched onto community action. Their pamphlet, edited by Anne Lapping, includes an article by John Banks called 'The Role of Central Government'(!). This sums up 'four main kinds of community action':

1. Minority pressure groups pursuing redress or reform ON BEHALF OF OTHERS (my emphasis), e.g. Poverty Action, Release, Shelter, etc. (his examples).
2. Minority pressure groups primarily pursuing reforms in the Health and Welfare Services.
3. Minority groups concerned with reform or change on behalf of themselves (this sounds more like it...but wait for his examples) such as middle class civic and amenity societies (in Hampstead, no doubt).
4. Minority groups providing a service not otherwise provided, or trying to persuade the Government to provide these ...essentially 'voluntary' action groups, etc.

By my definition Mr Banks is talking not about community action, but about pressure and charity groups.

It is clear that to Fabians the idea of working class people doing things for themselves is as foreign as the idea that socialists should present a challenge to the private ownership of capital. The Fabian pamphlet doesn't refer, for instance, to militant tenants' struggles.

Social workers have a professional interest in containing community action. Effective community action would do them out of a job. Rather than opposing community action they are attempting to control it. Take the Seeborn Report, as quoted in 'Case-Con' 2.* Social workers have 'the extremely difficult and complex task of encouraging and assisting the development of community identity'. 'Case-Con' goes on to point out that they are expected to enlist the aid of a variety of voluntary organisations and 'concerned' citizens. This implicitly excludes, of course, such bodies as Claimants Unions and militant tenants organisations (and I would add

* 'Case-Con' (a paper for revolutionary social workers) can be obtained from 19, Lidfield Road, London N.16.

militant Black groups in England), or anyone else who challenges the Seebohm Committee's assumption of 'common values, attitudes and ways of behaving'. 'It is at this point that socialists must part company with many of the new ideologists of community action' Case-Con adds.

'Case-Con' goes on to quote another Fabian paper 'The Fifth Social Service' in which Tony Lynes (of Child Poverty Action) describes his new pressure group strategy: 'The new Fabianism seems to offer a means of achieving gradual progress without upsetting the basic value assumptions of our society ... It becomes increasingly clear that considerable change in the right direction is possible within the existing scale of values and priorities'.

That people can deceive themselves in this way is pitiful. They lose sight of the realities of the modern world or of the conditions of life of ordinary working people. Without challenging the basic value assumptions of society, without altering its priorities, we cannot hope to see change. Those who tell us that if we are polite and well-behaved we will alleviate suffering without actually changing anything must be exposed for the false prophets that they are.

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It was interesting to note how predictable were most of the contributions in the discussion that followed the presentation of this paper. There were those who were so mixed up about the use of 'class' terminology that they saw it in terms of personalities and family background. They thought I was exhibiting a guilty conscience about my middle class background and was thus advocating keeping out of working class struggles. But my use of class in this case is in terms of the manipulated and the manipulators. The manipulators are those, particularly those who go to University, who are being groomed to organise the society of the future. The manipulated are the great mass of people who are being increasingly forced into boring, meaningless jobs - whether white or blue collar - and who have little opportunity to decide where or how they are going to live.

My paper doesn't really propose anything specific or constructive. It is essentially an attack on reformism, a plea for people to have a realistic political perspective.

It must be made clear, however, that I am not advocating we all join some particular political organisation. I do not hold the views of a self-confessed 'Leninist' who was working with the Balsall Heath Tenants Association in Birmingham, whose view was that the Tenants Association

would experience nothing but defeat. This would allow him to recruit the 'more advanced' tenants into his Revolutionary Party (in this case the I.M.G.). This is not what I am advocating. Indeed most of the political groups hawking the Bolshevik heritage have an essentially elitist view of a changed society. Community control would be too much of a threat to a system of 'democratic centralism' for them to support community action.

Manipulation of people and distortion of history go hand in hand. Both the Left and the bourgeoisie conspire to present the idea that the working classes could never organise anything themselves.

'Bourgeois and radical alike distort the history of the working class and attempt to draw a discrete veil over the immense creative initiative of the masses in struggle. For the bourgeoisie the Russian Revolution was the conspiracy of organised fanaticism. To Stalinists and Trots, it is the justification for their right to lead. For the bourgeois the Hungarian revolution of 1956 showed how capitalist rulers were better than Stalinist ones. For the Stalinists it was a fascist conspiracy. The Trots wrote pamphlets showing how badly the Hungarians needed their services. Over every revolution and struggle, the parties compete in their squalid business of seeking to justify both themselves and their dogmas. They all ignore the efforts, the struggles, the sacrifices and the positive achievements of the participants themselves. Every attempt by people to take control of their own destiny by their own rule has been buried beneath a million tracts and a welter of 'expert' interpretations.'*

Let's make sure that community action is the community taking action, and not a meaningless label for someone else's ideology.

Tom Woolley

* From 'Revolutionary Organisation', Clydeside Solidarity pamphlet

REVIEWS

CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE G.M. STRIKE, published by Philadelphia Solidarity, Available from A. Reay, 4 Lloyd Street South, Manchester 14. 12½ Pence, post free.

This meaty and profusely illustrated pamphlet is an account and analysis of last autumn's 58-day long strike at General Motors' 155 factories in the USA and Canada. This struggle started with a spontaneous walk-out by 6,000 workers in Canada, followed next day by thousands more in Detroit. The movement was then taken over by the leadership of the U.A.W. who drastically reduced the men's demands in the process.

This struggle, although on a much larger scale, has many lessons for Ford workers in Britain. The G.M. strike started at a time most convenient to the employers, when the Company was in possession of large stockpiles. Because of this it took a long time for the stoppage to really bite. The parallel with the recent situation at Ford is close.

The settlement, like that which will be signed at Ford, ignored the men's demands about conditions within the plants. The basic G.M. rate was raised from \$4.03 to \$ 4.51 (£1.88) per hour. Retirement age was reduced to 58 in 1971 and 56 in 1972.

The workers' reaction to the new contract and to the local settlement which followed it was so severe that a leader of the U.A.W. was quoted in the 'Wall Street Journal' (November 2, 1970) as saying: 'If the local contracts are not signed by mid-November, we risk losing control of the whole thing'. An illuminating insight into the labour bureaucracy's conception of its own role.

The pamphlet has been produced with praiseworthy speed. Although I disagree with its rather traditional marxist approach, it should be read by all militants, particularly those in the motor industry who want to see the way the wind is blowing.

M. F.

THE MILLION POUND STRIKE by Jim Arnison, with an introduction by Hugh Scanlon. Lawrence and Wishart, 1971. 40 pence

This short (85 pp) paperback by the Lancashire correspondent of the 'Morning Star' is an account of the bitter official strike at Roberts-Arundel in Stockport in 1967-68. (For a contemporary account, see 'Solidarity' vol. 4, no.6 and 7.)

The struggle started because of an attempt to smash job organisation. Only 145 workers were involved, but the dispute was notable because of the massive solidarity which these men received. There was widespread 'black-ing' of the Company's goods and services, large-scale financial help, sympathy strikes by thousands of workers and some pretty robust physical aid on the picket line. (Unfortunately during one 'incident' the Deputy Chief Constable only had his arm broken.)

Roberts-Arundel had recently been taken over by a bitterly anti-union company, based on the Deep South of the USA. It is not surprising that firms from such backward areas should see the interests of workers and the interests of trade union officials as being identical, and act accordingly. In many ways the dispute was atypical. The issues involved were of a kind that the trade union movement was fighting for in the early part of the century rather than those of today, when trade unions and management usually collaborate in trying to smash shop floor resistance.

The book is a useful account of this particular struggle. The author is well informed about what went on, but as one would expect from its origin, the work has serious defects. It boosts the role of the local officials, particularly if they happen to be members of the Communist Party, while totally ignoring the considerable support given to the strike by revolutionaries. It injects a typically stalinist and irrelevant anti-American bias into the conflict - as if there were not plenty of true blue British firms every bit as bad as Roberts-Arundel (the long strike at B.S.R. more than proved this point).

An example of the serious distortions which the book contains is Arnison's account of the clashes between demonstrators and police and blacklegs on February 22, 1967, when there was a half-day sympathy stoppage by many factories and sites in the Stockport area. There were hundreds of pickets at Roberts-Arundel and these were joined by a large contingent of hundreds of construction workers from the big Shell site at Carrington. Fighting broke out, the police were on the defensive, and the demonstrators were within an ace of occupying the factory.

At this stage, following urgent appeals from the Chief Constable, AEF District Secretary John Tocher (now Assistant Divisional Organiser for No.11 Division of the AEF and since 1969 Chairman of the Communist Party) drove to the factory.

'When he arrived the police asked him to appeal immediately for the demonstrators to disperse. John Tocher is not the type to panic. Surveying the scene, he knew at once that such an appeal would be worse than useless. He carefully set up his equipment and began to hold a meeting. That was all there was to it. Slowly but surely the fighting began to evaporate. The workers stopped to listen as Tocher thanked them for their magnificent display of solidarity. This enabled Bernard Panter (AEF Convenor of the Carrington site and now a member of the National Executive of the Communist Party) to get his Shell lads together, and when Tocher

asked for an orderly withdrawal, the Shell workers formed up and marched away in a disciplined manner'.

Thus the C.P. defused a situation which would probably have led to the occupation of the factory and to a drastic shortening of the strike. An occupation would have provided a magnificent and badly needed example for other workers to follow. One year later in France, in May 1968, the French Communist Party was able to carry out the same role on a gigantically larger scale.

I do not make these criticisms for reasons of political sectarianism, however enjoyable this might be. I do so because the distortions contained in this book about a strike involving a few workers are an example - albeit a minor one - of a process of falsification, both conscious and unconscious, of the history and experience of the working class which has gone on for decades, and has had a distinct effect on its present consciousness. The writing of the history of the class itself is of fundamental importance if an autonomous revolutionary working class movement is to emerge. Although it contains useful information, particularly on how to organise the effective 'blacking' of a company, this book should be read critically.

M. F.

THE POSTAL WORKERS AND THE TORY OFFENSIVE by Paul Foot. A Socialist Worker pamphlet. 5 pence. Obtainable from I.S., 6 Cotton Gardens, London E2.

This is a very mixed pamphlet. Paul Foot's homework is well done when he is dealing with the history of the Post Office, but there are some typical I.S. judgments when he is talking about the UPW. Foot claims for instance that 'the Union of Post Office Workers' leadership took a turn to the left with the election of Tom Jackson to the General Secretaryship in place of Ron Smith...' (p.9) I joined the Post Office soon after Jackson became General Secretary but saw little evidence of his radicalism.

The nature of Jackson's 'left leadership' is well shown in the following episode, which Foot himself describes. Dealing with the wage settlement of February 1970 (when we got a 12% average increase) Jackson had triumphantly proclaimed 'We got all we asked for'. He was to be in for a shock. 'On the ballot vote of the union's branches, acceptance of the offer was approved by the slenderest of majorities. Among postmen, there was probably a majority for rejection. If there had been any doubt in the minds of the union leadership about the militancy of their members, it was now laid to rest. The postmen, after nearly 50 years of apathy, were spoiling for a fight to improve their wages and conditions'. (p.11)

In his account of the recent strike Foot does not seem to be aware that the workers were not consulted and that many militants were critical of this particular method of struggle. They nevertheless responded to the call despite the 'no strike pay' announcement at the outset. The fact that the rank and file were not consulted is very important, not only because they are entitled to be consulted, but because there are reasons for leaders not wanting to involve the rank and file in making decisions. Their opinions may not be what the leaders want. The rank and file may know better what will be effective. The leaders moreover have other interests. None of this is mentioned.

Nor is it emphasised that the UPW did not ask for solidarity action from other unions or other workers who were handling postal goods and servicing telephone exchanges where scabs were at work. The Post Office Engineers Union for instance did much to help defeat the strike by keeping the telephones going. Does Foot know that at least two of his fellow I.S. members are well known in the POEU? Many militants and even people who call themselves revolutionaries hold positions in unions. Are they obliged to cling to these positions rather than help the workers' struggle forward, even if it means losing these positions? Why for instance did Jim Higgins (I.S. and E.C. of the POEU) not appeal publicly to his own rank and file over the heads of his fellow E.C. members? Why did he not do what an ordinary lorry driver did who, Foot tells us, lost his job for refusing to carry a couple of letters for his employer? Had sundry 'lefts' acted in this way it could have set an example which many would have been glad to follow, and which could have led to a victory for the postal workers.

According to Foot 'the real blame for the collapse of the strike must be placed on the General Council of the T.U.C., first for not providing the funds when they were needed, and secondly for not organising the other unions in dispute with the Government to coordinate their efforts with the postmen'. (p.19)

Does I.S. really believe the T.U.C. could act in this way? If not, why do they go on talking about making the T.U. leaders follow militant policies? This sort of nonsense just isn't good enough. Isn't it time revolutionaries said clearly that such things are no more possible than making the Labour Party follow socialist policies? The alternative for revolutionaries is to see that their own members take action at shop floor level and where they have any influence in the working class movement.

Foot has no serious criticism either of the C.P. or of Jackson, who is at most blamed for not criticising the T.U.C. He says: 'By Tuesday, Jackson was outlining his line of retreat to the Executive. On Wednesday (March 3) the entire Executive, having agreed to surrender by 27 votes to 4 (with the Communists on the Executive supporting Jackson), travelled to the Department of Employment and concocted a formula for calling off the strike'. (p.18) That's all - no comment!

It is not common knowledge that Maurice Styles, UPW Chairman, is also a Communist Party member. He showed no initiative but identified completely with Jackson and the E.C. throughout the strike. Is there no connection between this and the role of leading I.S. members in the POEU? Foot seems to have had some difficulty in criticising the C.P. in view of the vulnerable position of some of his own leading members.

Foot has nothing to say about the decision of the UPW leaders to recommend a ballot by branches for calling off the strike. Is it not revealing how the so-called leaders of Trade Unions and Parties know when to allow the exercise of 'democratic rights' and when to withhold them? No consultation at the beginning. But the workers allowed to vote for accepting defeat when they had been given no real help or real effective conduct of the dispute.

All Foot can offer in his conclusions is an explanation that the workers must become aware of the political nature of the industrial struggle and form a Party which will lead them to victory over capitalism. 'The fight against the operations (of the Tories) cannot be won by isolated acts of militancy, however prolonged and however heroic'. (p.23)

There you have it. The workers must follow some 'alternative leadership'. But why should 'acts of militancy' have to remain isolated? In the course of strikes and disputes, could they not be the starting point for more acts of militancy, which would make them less and less isolated?

The Parties of the 'left' (C.P., I.S., S.L.L., etc.) avoid encouraging real rank-and-file action while mouthing left phrases about forming Councils of Action, Liaison Committees or Shop Stewards Committees (which of course the Parties will control). They all stifle initiative and the development of self-confidence and political maturity. These only come from actions which the rank and file manage themselves.

The postal strike has opened a big discussion on very important questions concerning tactics in disputes with employers. It has again posed questions about trade union organisation, with particular reference to the role of so-called leaders. In addition it will force the people who regard themselves as revolutionaries to look again at their basic political conceptions and ideas, with a view to changing them to conform with today's reality.

Joe Jacobs.

THESES ON THE CHINESE REVOLUTION by Cajo Brendel. 10NP plus postage from 'Solidarity' (Aberdeen), 3 Sinclair Rd., Torry, Aberdeen.

The social implications of Mao's revolution have yet to be fully documented and analysed from the libertarian viewpoint. That there has been conflict, at times widespread, between the workers and peasants in China and the architects of 'their' revolution seems little in doubt. It seems equally certain that, as in Russia, libertarian opposition to the Party - both in the recent past and at its inception - has been ruthlessly crushed. China, like the N.W. passage, has been subject to myth-building on a grand scale, and in this important pamphlet Cajo Brendel has begun what we sincerely hope to be a continuous process of demystification. The point must be made that, whatever the Chinese revolution may have achieved, it has not achieved any fundamental change in social relationships. The day-to-day reality of order-giving and order-taking has certainly taken on a new form and a new terminology, but in essence the enormous changes in contemporary China have not been about man's domination over the content of his work or the totality of his life. These decisions are still taken externally, and he is still reduced to the role of acting out his life as if it were planned by others.

Cajo Brendel has attempted a new interpretation of the Chinese reality, comparing its upheaval with the Russian model and coming to some very revealing conclusions. He quite rightly asserts that a change in the relations of production has taken place, but describes this as being little more than the demise of Feudalism. During the period of the cultural revolution the struggle that tore the country had nothing to do with Socialism. Nor was it, in any real sense, a total revolution. Its significance lay in its legitimisation of the new economic relations engendered under state capitalism.

In his summing up Brendel anticipates the victory of the 'new class' in China, though the pamphlet was written well before the inauguration of ping-pong diplomacy with the West. The pamphlet (originally published in Holland) is a very useful addition to the still rather meagre body of information on the 'real' China, and is well worth reading.

Del. Foley.

SOLIDARITY AUTONOMOUS GROUPS

<u>ABERDEEN</u>	:	c/o Ian Mitchell, 3 Sinclair Rd., Aberdeen.
<u>CLYDESIDE</u>	:	c/o Dan Kane, 43 Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton.
<u>DUNDEE</u>	:	c/o R. Downing, 17 Blackness Avenue, Dundee.
<u>NORTH WEST</u>	:	c/o R. Sumner, 23 Sewerby St., Manchester 16.

OCCUPIED IRELAND

An army of occupation, even when called a peace-keeping force, tends to behave in an authoritarian, arrogant and arbitrary way. It is not surprising that it should soon become thoroughly hated by the civilians it deals with. For a long time Irish Republicans have referred to the six northern counties as 'occupied Ireland'. The term now has a deep and bitter significance for thousands of Catholic workers and their families.

And yet, in August 1969, British troops were welcomed into those areas of Belfast and Derry where the people are now most often up in arms against them. Their presence was demanded by revolutionary groups. This was not due to any liking for militarists or any illusions about the benevolence of the British armed forces. It was a measure of desperation. Compared with the batons of the R.U.C., the guns of the 'B' Specials, or the missiles and fire-bombs of Protestant bigots, the soldiers seemed a necessary evil.

Since then, the conviction has grown that they are more evil than necessary. During 1970 their presence was felt constantly: armoured vehicles patrolling the streets, rifles levelled at everyone on the pavements; arms searches in people's homes; C.S. gas pumped into areas whenever a small group of youths made some trouble. Then there were more dramatic shows of military strength, such as the notorious curfew on the Falls area, repression of the Shankill Road, and periodic shooting of men alleged to be sniping or throwing petrol bombs.

Of course, the soldiers were often attacked first. But always, after the fashion of soldiers, they used their more lethal equipment to retaliate - and not only against their attackers. And anyone with experience of arrests on demonstrations can guess that they probably got the wrong people.

The troops are not good-hearted victims of murderous ingratitude. They were sent to Northern Ireland not to defend the Catholic community but to 'stop trouble' on behalf of the governments at Westminster and Stormont. In this respect, military action alone can only succeed temporarily, by force of arms, at the cost of increasing long-term resentment.

The most recent outbreak of violence (February 1971) shows some trends developing within the occupied sector. First, the unity of resistance to the military. A woman interviewed by the B.B.C. expressed it in

these terms: 'A while ago, some of us here thought there had been enough trouble, but now we're right behind the men.' This is why children have been so prominent in disturbances - it's the sort of situation where kids would obviously be eager to mix in, unless prevented by their parents.

We don't have to look for the mythical 'anarchist agitators' conjured up by Unionist politicians. At the same time, there are definite political groupings at work, in the form of the two rival factions of the I.R.A. These are the gunmen and other activists who either instigate or take over riot situations.

The 'official' I.R.A. was infiltrated by communists and fellow-travellers in the early 60's, and adopted a 'socialist' programme. After the August riots in 1969 it was blamed for leaving Catholic areas unprotected. The organisation split. The 'Provisionals' returned to the policy of armed militancy, attacking British Imperialism and fighting for a united Ireland first and foremost.

To maintain some of their influence, the 'Officials' were forced to take the same sort of line, and there is now little to choose between them. Both are limited in their theory, ruthless in action, authoritarian in practice. They think in terms of 'controlling' areas, and shoot each other as well as British soldiers.

The struggle of people against the military cannot be disentangled from I.R.A. politics. In embattled streets, the toughest set of gunmen may seem to offer the best hope. The realities of the Northern Ireland crisis, in wider social and economic terms, are obscured; the experience of fighting together against 'law and order' does not lead beyond traditional anti-British slogans.

For reasons like these, the demand for withdrawal of British troops is a valid one for socialists to make, as the best chance of dispelling false consciousness. It is also humanitarian, in that it would stop the present bloodshed. The risk is that it might lead to worse bloodshed, the kind that brought the troops in.

Chichester-Clark, Maudling and Co. are taking a hard line: beating the gunmen, forcible repression, threats of tougher political measures, including internment. If the witch-hunt against the 'Provisionals' and their 'anarchist friends' gets under way, there could be hard times ahead for socialists in the province.

SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVES

The general outlook for socialism over there is, on the face of it, pretty grim anyway. The division in the working class goes very deep. 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' are not really descriptive of religion; in fact, they tend to be understood in an over-simplified and misleading way

by people outside N. Ireland. The terms place everyone there in the context of an entire background: social life, political views, cultural interests as well as the religion, which may be only nominal. This is why non-religious and even revolutionary elements still tend to identify themselves as being one or the other, instead of getting away from both those categories. You have to be a 'Protestant' atheist or a 'Catholic' atheist.

The conflict is expressed in religious terms, but it is not a question of long memories, ancient hatreds and so on. It is a reflection of the actual near-apartheid situation in which people live their lives. (1) But there has to be a degree of fraternisation, where life-styles merge and the division disappears: mixed and neutral areas, entertainment, city centre shops, public transport, university, welfare services - and Europe's largest Labour Exchange, to name a few.

In society at large, away from the fighting, we can see symptoms of crisis in Northern Ireland as elsewhere. (2) The relations of capitalist production have inevitable effects: alienation and resistance. There is quite a good record of shop-floor militancy and solidarity.

In private life, traditional values and relationships are confronted with new radical elements. Youth culture is not just an alien import, and the underground scene is not confined to students. Convictions on drugs charges often involve young workers, apprentices and unemployed. Authoritarian family structures are, however, still strong. Too many docile daughters and dutiful sons are far from discarding their parents' prejudices. A liking for pop music can go along with enthusiasm for Orange or Irish-Rebel folklore. The change is gradual (even more so in Eire, where censorship and clericalism reinforce conservative trends).

Only the working out of the social crisis in its most total sense can lead to socialism. But just because the civil rights struggle was always a limited one, doesn't mean revolutionaries should have kept out of it. That would have been to ignore the most obvious crisis of the society they were living in.

(1) For an in-depth study of the roots of conflict, see Owen D. Edwards The Sins of Our Fathers (Gill and Macmillan, 1970).

(2) See The Crisis of Modern Society, by P. Cardan, Solidarity Pamphlet 23.

SOCIALIST VOICES

In the event, most conscious revolutionaries in N. Ireland did the opposite. They dived without hesitation into the rising tide of agitation. They helped to develop the movement and developed themselves within it, emerging as the present 'People's Democracy' group. (3)

At first, as a mass meeting of students shocked at police brutality, the P.D. was hampered by large numbers of mindless moderates and careerist student politicians. All the same, it became at once the radical wing of Civil Rights, acting as a catalyst and a corrective to the movement. It instigated action - student demonstrations confronting police, the Belfast-Derry and Belfast - Dublin marches - and maintained criticism of Green Tories and of the regime in the south.

After the academic year 1968-69 (still looked back on nostalgically as the 'P.D. Year' at Queen's University, Belfast) the P.D. moved out of the student environment. Branches were set up in Belfast and some of the larger towns. The organisation united Young Socialists, anarchist, liberal and republican elements, and described its theory as 'Connolly socialism'. Fortunately, its socialism does not begin and end with Connolly. P.D. theorists are primarily concerned with N. Ireland in the present; they also take account of 20th century history, and extend their range of comment to the international scene.

The Political Programme published in the 'Free Citizen' (4) of December 4, 1970 is not explicitly libertarian, but includes the attempt to avoid an authoritarian power structure. The long-term aim is the establishment of a socialist system of society in Ireland and throughout the world. In the Workers' Republic, governmental functions will be shared by territorially elected representatives and delegates from Councils, all subject to recall, and as much decision-making as possible will be devolved from the centre.

Proposed methods of achievement over-emphasize the role of the mass political organisation instead of autonomous action by the people. Only the consent of the majority is required, and parliamentary means are not excluded. But the political movement is to be the weapon of the working

(3) O.D. Edwards gives an over-enchanted account of the P.D. and New Left which may be contrasted with the hyper-critical pamphlet 'The People's Democracy from a Working Class Point of View' (title not to be taken literally, but containing some valid points) published by the Irish Communist Organisation.

(4) 'Free Citizen' is the weekly newspaper of the P.D. (subs. £2.50 from 88 Ladybrook Park, Belfast). P.D. has also produced 2 issues of a theoretical magazine, the 'Northern Star', and 2 pamphlets, 'Struggle in the North' and 'The Great Eel Robbery', both by M. Farrell.

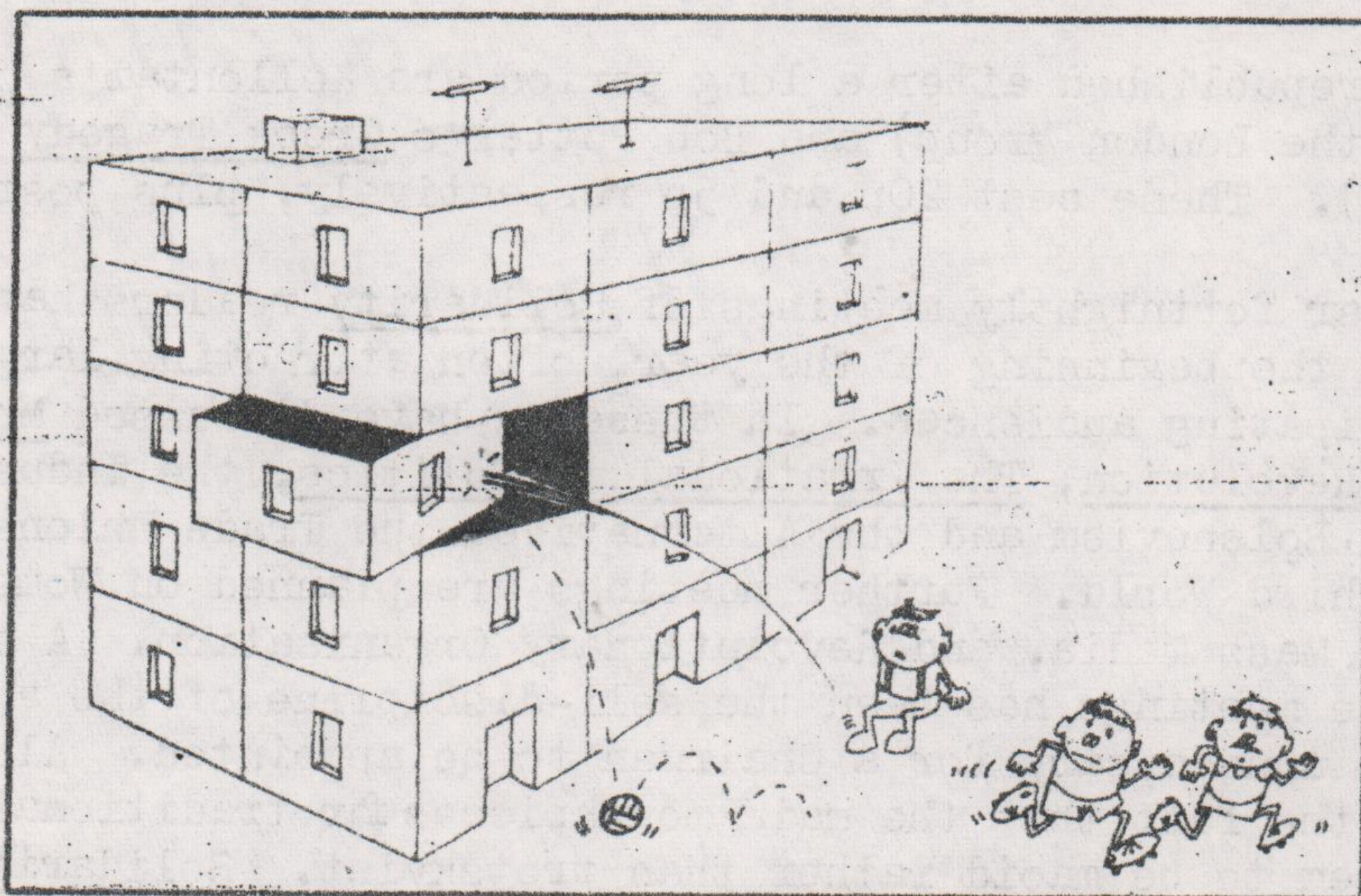
class, and agitation to improve conditions is to be combined with constant propaganda for socialism. There is a long list of 'immediate demands', a transitional programme including nationalisation, social reforms, liberalisation, and an all-Ireland Assembly to coordinate the work of democratic Workers Councils.

There are many grounds for criticising the P.D. - confusion, Leninist illusions, Irish romanticism - but the fact remains that it is the only group in N. Ireland where libertarian socialists can operate. Among its activities have been housing, protest against repressive laws, support for strikers against blacklegs, agitation on bus fares and eel fisheries. It has not made much progress with industrial action, or with the task of getting through to the Protestant workers. On the other hand, it must have made an impression on many of the Catholic community at one time or another, especially through its weekly newspaper.

Things are difficult for the P.D. just now. Excluded from premises in Belfast, it reverted to meeting at Queen's. Membership shrank, and it retreated to a room in someone's house. Even in the last month or two, the situation has tightened up, and attitudes have hardened still further. It is now advisable to collect a fairly substantial group before trying to sell the paper.

Let us hope the P.D. will survive, and continue to add its voice on the side of radical dissent and of libertarian socialism.

L. W.



ABOUT OURSELVES

Our last issue sold out (1,300 copies) thanks to a number of new subscribers and bulk order takers. 1,400 copies of the present issue are being produced. If our circulation could be stabilised at - or made to exceed - 1,500 copies considerable technical improvements would be possible.

Three new pamphlets have been produced: Pamphlet No. 34 (Socially Responsible Scientists or Soldier-Technicians?) draws together the articles on this theme published in Vol. VI, Nos. 6, 7, and 8. The text is getting around in BSSRS circles and among science students and graduates at a number of universities. More should be heard about this campaign in the months to come.

Pamphlet No. 35 (The Paris Commune of 1871) is a reprint of a piece first published in Solidarity, Vol. I, No. 6, about 9 years ago. Republished for the Commune Centenary, the article aims at counterposing the positive aspects of this great popular uprising to the current flood of Trotskyist propaganda, according to which 'the only lesson of the Commune is the need for a firm Party leadership'.

Pamphlet No. 36 (Sorting Out the Postal Strike) by J. Jacobs, was produced within a week of the end of the recent postal dispute. It analyses the main weaknesses of the strike: the lack of rank and file consultation or control on the objectives of the struggle or about the best methods to be used, the lack of serious preparation, the lack of solidarity action among Post Office Engineers and others, and the continued confidence of the men in 'leaders' who would solve their problems for them. The pamphlet includes the texts of two Solidarity leaflets, several thousand copies of which were produced and distributed during the strike itself and which were well received. Over 1,000 copies of the new pamphlet have already been sold, more than half of them to postal workers in the London area. Subscribers will all be receiving a copy of this pamphlet.

Also republished after a long period are Kollontai's Workers Opposition (by the London group) and Bob Potter's Greek Tragedy (by the Clydeside group). These cost 20p and 5p respectively, plus postage.

Regular fortnightly meetings of Solidarity readers have been held in London since the beginning of the year, often attracting large and actively participating audiences. In these we have discussed Modern Capitalism and Revolution, The Irrational in Politics, the Industrial Struggle Today, Bolshevism and the Alternative, the Trade Unions and the Bill, and the Third World. Further meetings are planned on Women's Liberation, The Mass Media, and Revolutionary Organisation. A striking feature of these meetings has been the self-discipline of the audience, often making it unnecessary for a Chairman to be appointed. Also interesting is the fact that the main mouthpieces for traditional 'left' politics now seem to be maoist rather than trotskyist. Solidarity speakers have also held meetings in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and Canterbury.

On Monday, March 22, a successful joint meeting was held with the London Division of the ILP, the New Socialists and a number of anarchist comrades. Together we commemorated both the Centenary of the Paris Commune and the 50th anniversary of the Kronstadt uprising. To our knowledge this is the first time the anniversary of the Kronstadt Commune has ever been celebrated at a public meeting in London and probably the first time that these two important historical events have been linked together and jointly commemorated by libertarian revolutionaries. We hope the dialogue will continue.

As interest in our ideas and publications spreads in the USA, the task of despatching, invoicing and nagging for the settlement of many individual small orders from this part of the world is now becoming more than we can cope with, without seriously compromising more creative activity. Although we remain keenly interested in comment, news, direct communication, criticism, argument and the exchange of invective with comrades, supporters and dissenters in the USA, we would ask them henceforth to place their orders directly with SOLIDARITY, G.P.O. Box 13011, Philadelphia, PA 19101, USA, who will be receiving our material in bulk. We hope shortly to offload similar orders from Australia onto the shoulders of a comrade in Brisbane. Watch this column for further details.

We finally repeat our call to readers to write for us and send us material for publication. Too many of our supporters are just passive consumers of Solidarity ideas and not actively engaged in developing them. We will consider anything that is lively, accurate and relevant, particularly if it breaks with traditional 'left' thinking, raises new issues or throws new light on subjects not yet discussed in our paper.

APPEAL TO READERS

We have now decided to buy plate-making equipment, which will enable us to produce many of our forthcoming pamphlets in offset litho. (This will release some of us from much of the slave labour of duplicating.)

The paper itself (at least for the time being) will continue to appear in duplicated form. We would also like to purchase an electronic stencil maker. This will enable us to improve (with pictures, etc.) the duplicated paper. The total cost of these two items amounts to several hundred pounds. We need donations urgently.

HOUSING, RENTS AND THE TENANTS' STRUGGLE IN SCOTLAND

A new 'Solidarity'
(Clydeside) pamphlet

Housing and class.
How to wage (and how
not to wage) the
tenants' struggle.

5P (+ postage) from
43 Valeview Terrace,
Dumbarton, Scotland.

In Britain the contempt for the 'traditional left' grows apace. Traditional politics continues slowly to disintegrate. On April 4, the Sunday Times published the result of the Opinion Research Center's latest survey. The theme was 'Who are your masters now?'. 'No single minister could be remembered by even half of the people questioned'. '26% of those questioned thought Callaghan was in the government', '30% thought that Jenkins was a minister'. In Golborne Ward, North Kensington, an election organised by the democratically elected Neighbourhood Council results in a higher turn-out than in the official Municipal Elections.

At the last General Election the total vote cast in classical working class areas slumps magnificently: Vauxhall (54.5%), Bermondsey (53%), Brixton (52.6%), Hackney Central (50.8%), Bethnal Green (50.4%), Islington North (49%), Islington South West (48.9%), Poplar (48.8%), Southwark (48.2%), Stepney (45.6%). Meanwhile the traditional revolutionaries, as usual behind the workers (a long way behind) still exhort people to 'vote Labour, without illusions' (I.S.), or to return yet another Labour Government 'in order to hasten the final recognition by the working class of Labour's rotten reformist leadership' (S.L.L.).

The eyes of millions are gradually being opened by important international events. Not only are the institutions of established society being seen for what they are but false solutions are being discarded. Demystification is gaining momentum. A self-managed society is being increasingly discussed as a meaningful alternative to the monstrous societies of East and West. Everywhere the authority of self-professed 'leaderships' is crumbling. People in their thousands are coming to realise that 'no Saviour from on high' will free them, that they must take the control of their struggles into their own hands, and that their salvation lies in their own strength, cohesion, solidarity, willingness to fight and sense of purpose. They refuse to exchange one prison for another.

The decks are being cleared as erstwhile revolutionary groups, one after another, openly line up on the side of reaction. The 'vanguard' parties become vanguards ...of counter-revolution. In Ceylon a Left bourgeois government in which Stalino-Trotskyists participate is returned to power in March 1970. Tricontinental, the 'guevarist' journal published in Havana, welcomes this tremendous victory. In its issue of December 1970, between hosannahs to the new regime and full-page pictures of a beaming Madame Bandaranaike, Tricontinental describes the return of the United Front Coalition as a 'serious blow against imperialism, especially U.S. imperialism'.

A widely supported popular uprising breaks out a few months later. The United Front government unanimously votes Emergency Regulations, slanders the revolutionaries as 'fascists' in the best Stalinist style and engages in vicious repression, shooting political prisoners without trial. Arms to suppress the workers, peasants and youth of Ceylon are sent to Mrs Bandaranaike by a friendly U.S. government (its convalescence from the

recent 'serious blow' now fully completed), by Mr Heath's Tories ('nothing like a few Trots to defend "our" tea plantations, what?'), and by Mr. Brezhnev's very degenerated Workers State. Indian and Pakistani officers, previously not on speaking terms, are now fraternising in the bars of Colombo hotels ...in the defence of the rulers of Ceylon. One might be dreaming. Not to be left out of the act, the side-line strategists of the S.L.L. denounce the Janatha Vimuthi Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Movement) as having 'helped the Ceylon Government to strengthen its reactionary grip over the workers and peasants' (Workers Press, April 22, 1971). Fidel who - let it be remembered - supported the Russian intervention in Czechoslovakia (the sugar of principles and the principles of sugar) remains mum. China, too, maintains a deafening silence. (The only sound coming from that quarter is the noise of ping-pong balls.) The 'marxist-leninist' vanguards have all been found wanting. In Ceylon, the masses and those helping to coordinate their struggle are on their own. The truth alone is revolutionary.

In East Bengal, a similar shambles. The ruthlessly reactionary regime of Yahya Khan is bloodily putting down the local population who had had the impudence to prove itself a majority on its own home ground. Indiscriminately, with weapons bought from China ('power flows from the barrel of a gun') the West Pakistan Army is slaughtering the inhabitants of Bengali villages and towns, shelling student hostels, seeking to decapitate a whole generation.

Mao has strange friends. First Nkrumah. Then Colonel Boumédiène (in Algeria). Then the King of Nepal. And of course the butcher Yahya. So the author of the Little Red Book allows Pakistani planes to overfly Chinese territory, and promises troops in the eventuality of the Bengalis driving West Pakistan out of Bangla Desh. The Peking paper Jen Min Jih Pao (April 10, 1971) proclaims that the 'relevant measures taken by President Yahya in connection with the present situation in Pakistan are the internal affair of Pakistan'. Long gone are the days when the Peking Stalinists were urging that 'those countries in which socialism (their term, not ours!) has been victorious must make it their sacred internationalist duty to support ... the people's revolutionary struggles in other countries'. (1)

(1) From 'More on the Differences between Comrade Togliatti and U.S.', March 1963. Those interested in the early manifestations of the bureaucratic conservatism of China's rulers should consult an article published in Solidarity vol. III, no. 12. The article describes the actions of the Maoist Communist Party of Japan with regard to an industrial dispute in that country that threatened Tokyo's relations with Peking.

All this should compel revolutionaries to re-evaluate their estimates and reconsider their allegiances. Is their loyalty to ossified organisations, to dead dogma, to established power, or to the living revolution developing under their eyes? How much longer will they remain trapped in 'lesser evil' politics? How much longer will they remain the last pillar of support of established society? When will they realise that, with their present policies, they are not part of the treatment, but part of the disease?

We call on all who read us to reassert their belief in the brotherhood of man, in power from below, in international solidarity. What has passed for 'internationalism' these last few decades has not been a commitment to the autonomous struggles of working people or peasants or of youth. It has been a more or less uncritical identification with the various bureaucracies (Nkrumah, Nasser, Kenyatta) struggling for state-capitalist power in the ex-colonial countries. It is time revolutionaries started supporting what they want (even if they don't get it immediately) rather than supporting what they don't want (and constantly getting it). It is also time they abandoned the futile and sterile response of 'let's build a new leadership' every time some old 'leadership' collapses or reveals its true colours. Instead let us encourage the growth of mass consciousness, mass confidence, mass initiative and of self-activity. Let the people themselves sweep away this rotten society. They won't replace it with another bureaucratic monstrosity, but with a society where we will all, at last, understand and control our destiny.

"UNCONDITIONAL
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Nigel Harris,
I.S. no. 41

