

SOLIDARITY

for social revolution

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NORTHERN IRELAND:

A Cheap Holiday In Other People's Misery

Looking back in old copies of *Solidarity*, mostly from the 1960's, I was struck by the variety of articles with first-hand experience of many struggles. One of the subjects treated with imagination was Ireland. Contributions ranged from strong Republican positions to the stranger Loyalist positions of the Communist Organisation of Britain and Ireland. Discussion was incisive and there was little of the 'received wisdom' which now invades all revolutionary thought and propaganda.

The Belfast Anarchist Collective noted that there had been no attempt by the *Solidarity* magazine to confront the British/Irish question for years. Apart from resulting from the general decline in *Solidarity* throughout the 1970's, I think it was because of the ossification in *Solidarity's* theory which meant the organisation could not move on from or even develop its notion of the 'tribal conflict' in Northern Ireland.

In July, I had the chance to go to Belfast and I did, spending time with Belfast Anarchist Collective (BAC) and some Republican friends. At this stage I should say that one of my oldest friends is a die-hard Republican and that plus the fact that I didn't meet any loyalist obviously colours my perspective. Mind you, the last thing I'd read on the question was 'The Counter-Revolution in Ireland' published by Black and Red and is a rigid, worthy tome on how the Irish people are going to have to wait for world proletarian revolution because the Irish proletariat isn't sufficiently developed. Some of the explanation on the origins of Sinn Fein is well worth reading, however.

Although I could say a lot about my superficial experience over there, I hope to concentrate on two things. The role of the Republican movement in the struggle, and the nature of rioting, which I think is specially interesting for us in Britain at the moment. As far as the hunger strikers were concerned I think it is clear that the strikers were in fact acting independently of the Republican leadership in the sense that it was they who were

making the decision to continue this form of struggle. As libertarian revolutionaries we would support critically prisoners fighting for reforms within the prison system which appeared to be the direction of the strikers demands. I don't think they are political prisoners in the Amnesty International sense of the word, but undoubtedly, in the sense that there are two armies slogging it out, any prisoners taken by opposing sides should be regarded as prisoners of war.

As far as I can remember *Solidarity's* position on Republicanism is that it is as reactionary as Loyalism, with state capitalist aims attached to a nationalist outlook that denies the existence of the fundamental class divisions in society. Republican aims are for a federated socialist state of Ireland. Their hope that socialism will be able to survive is based on the unproven notion that somehow Ireland can be self-sufficient. No attempt is made to confront the fact that instead of English capitalists and landlords running the country, EEC bureaucrats and American multinationals will.

This ideology leads to the practice of reliance on armed struggle and community action which is quite admirable in its hope that the Brits will be removed and Irish socialism established by force of will only. This practice has more in common with anarchism than Marxism and is exactly why we are not anarchists because of the failure of that ideology to try to come to terms with the complexion of modern capitalism. In practice it also means that working class power is rarely used to support Republican aims. Although this may not be possible in logistic terms in the North, it certainly could have a shattering effect if the Southern working class were encouraged to take action. The end result of this practice will, if events don't take over, lead to exactly the state capitalist nightmare *Solidarity* fears. An exchange of masters, whether 'progressive' or 'nationalist' will be no solution for the Irish people. A re-arrangement of individual powerlessness is no revolution.

Do not turn people against us, IRA warns Bogside youths

As a result of Republicanism's faith in the Irish Catholic people, there is little evidence of this movement attempting to contact the Loyalist working class for a unified action against the class system that exploits them, and the British statelet that oppresses them. The reasons for this are obvious and are as a result of the classic divide and rule strategy of the British ruling classes. When I was taken round some of the 'new' estates of Belfast set up specifically for Catholics, my friend explained why the roads in these estates had a width of only one car across:

'They (the Northern Ireland Government) never thought the Taims would be well off enough to afford cars.'

Now some of them are, but have difficulty driving to their homes. Apparently the Protestant estates are built with wider roads.

The sops that have been thrown to the Loyalists amount to securer jobs, better housing and less harassment. Ordinary conditions of capitalism exist for them as anyone else but years of justified fear of a united Ireland and Roman Catholic rule have turned them off from the political aims of the Republicans (although Paisley is as anti-abortion, anti-sex and moral as any priest). Whether Protestant fear of Republicanism came before Republican hatred of Loyalism is difficult to see, but there have been cases when the Northern Irish working class has united (1932 Shankill Road unemployed demonstrated solidarity with Falls Road unemployed who had been shot by security forces) and some reckon there was a chance in 1968 before Catholic civil rights became synonymous with the aim for a united Ireland. However, by the time the Loyalists launched their attacks on Catholic streets (you can still see the burnt out 'peace lines') the only force prepared to take up the challenge of armed self-defence was the Provos. The alternative of community self-defence a la Free Derry stood no chance against organised violence (Brit or Loyalist) without access to arms and the only known access to arms was the I.R.A. So there will be no stretching out of the hand of friendship to the Loyalists as long as Republicans remains the only force to defend the Catholics.

Republicans know that the main reason they exist and have support is based on this faith the Catholics have in their ability to defend them. This explains the ambivalent position the Republican leadership has when the youth of a Catholic community takes matters into its own hands. When I was over there, a demonstration in support of the hunger strikers outside the City Hall was smashed up by the R.U.C. (to much cheering by the Loyalist people who were watching). What was a totally peaceful demonstration was suddenly surrounded by gun-toting Brits and those not arrested were 'escorted' by the R.U.C. back to the Falls Road and pushed up there. Waiting at the bottom of Falls Road was an assembly of armoured cars, reinforced R.U.C. jeeps and and lots of security force personnel. A skinhead lobbed one stone at them which bounced harmlessly at their feet. Immediately the organisers of the demonstration (People's Democracy, Irish section of the 4th International) went over to the skinhead and told him to cool down as this was a peaceful demonstration and they didn't want to 'alienate people' (in a situation where more and more you are either Catholic or Loyalist, such a sentiment seems remarkably pointless). Next minute the jeeps charged us and opened up with plastic bullets. The leadership of the demonstration rapidly disappeared and I don't blame them if it was for the sensible reason of not getting hurt (the plastic bullet has killed 9 people since it was introduced in 1975) but I think there was more to it than that. The demonstration then turned into a minor



skirmish between some young people around Divis Road Flats and the RUC in their jeeps.

The Republicans do not, and never really have, seen themselves as a political movement to destroy wage labour, and authoritarian relationships as the basis for the establishment of a society of individuals controlling their own lives and organising production and distribution for everyone's individual desire. The fostering and strengthening of the Catholic community for the ultimate task of kicking the Brits out has always been priority No 1, and the fostering and strengthening of the Catholic community means supporting the Catholics uncritically at their current rate of exploitation and their present state of organisation. When the youth riot, they don't just riot against the Brits; minor Catholic capitalist businesses go up in flames as well. As a result the Republican leadership often finds itself attacking these autonomous actions, issuing directives and threats whose basic message is that the armed struggle against the Brits should be left to the Provisional IRA. Because the Republican movement is little more than an armed group for social democracy, it finds itself in all kinds of contradictory situations:

'When you're tearing down the social fabric, you don't have anything for the kids to aspire to, so they turn to petty and not so petty crime, like burglary, then muggings sometimes rape. Knee-capping is no good. The hoods know that a knee-capping lands them in hospital for a couple of months and it's a better place to be than in the ghettos. And when they get out, they go back to the old ways. The only way to stop the hoods is a bullet in the head. That's why I think the Republican movement should try to establish youth centres and other facilities to give the youth a place to go'.

That, roughly, is what a Republican said to me and exposes the desperation of the place. A movement that claims to defend the community, has to defend it against itself, as a result any notion of workers' self-management go out the window, in fact could only really operate in spite of the Republican movement. If it weren't for the armed Brit presence the Provisional Republican movement would probably be indistinguishable from the left of the Labour Party and perform exactly the same function; make capitalism a little bit more bearable for more people. Autonomous action is elsewhere.

Where autonomous action actually is, is in a rapidly diminishing space being strangled by the joint nooses of nationalist ideology and the British tactics of repression. The rioting by the youth of N.Ireland often by its very nature breaks out of various ideological justifications for it. So you have 'Loyalist' youth petrol-bombing the troops they're supposed to be loyal to, albeit to protest some paper concession to the 'Fenians', and Catholic youth burning Catholic premises in the name of the Catholic community. Quite possibly all this could just be on the basis of causing enough aggro to attract the attention of the bosses in Westminster but it does often raise the question of who controls the streets and who owns the property these youth are supposed to identify with.

But the riots in N.Ireland don't have the refreshing recklessness, and

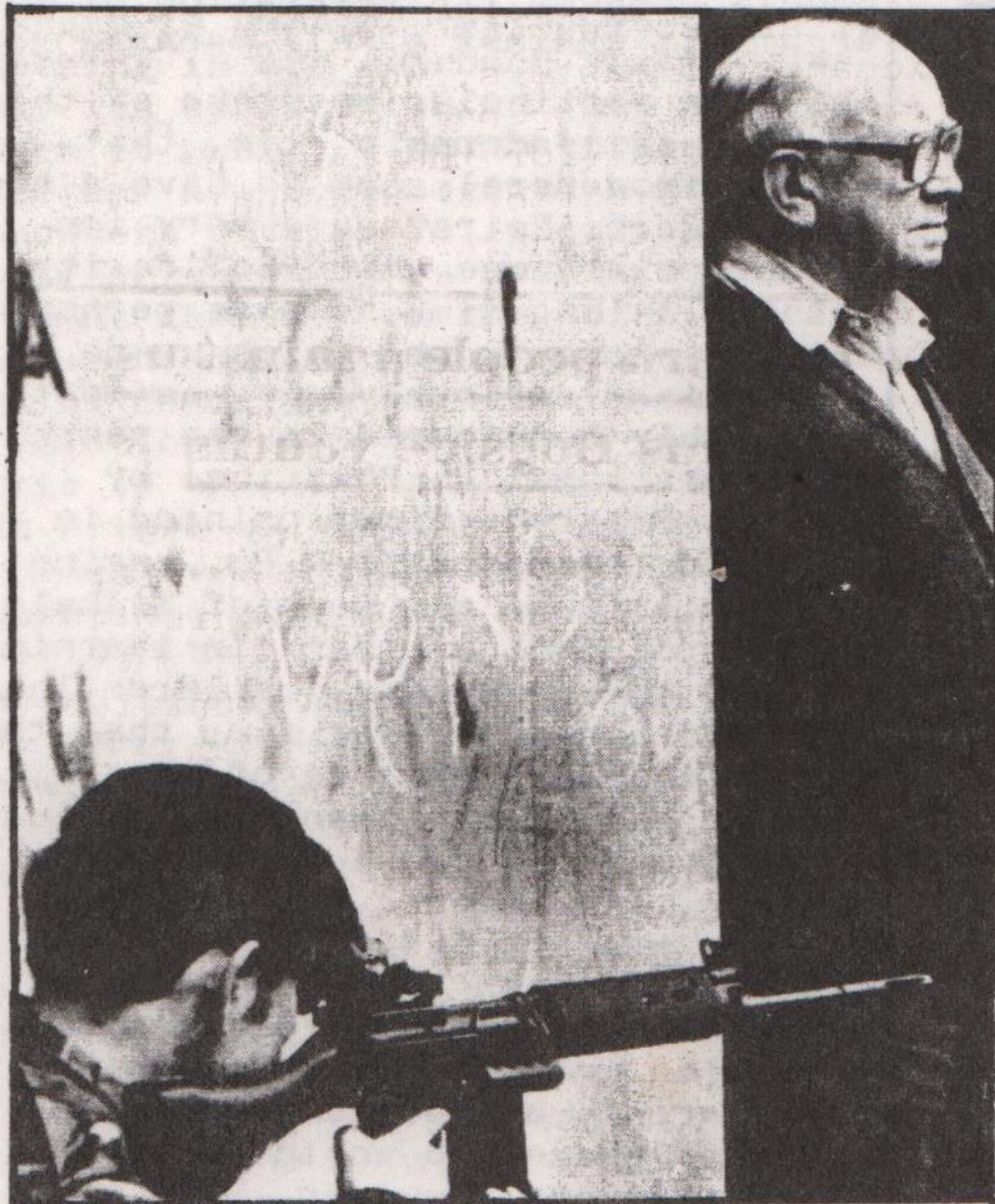
excitement which characterised many of the disturbances in Britain (although a much fuller and less positive analysis of these riots is crying out to be produced). They are a down-to-earth no-nonsense, sometimes angry, but very institutionalised ritual. The one I saw certainly was and some members of B.A.C. confirmed this. About 50 young people gathered around the Divis Road Flats tossing bottles to each other, smirking and taunting the RUC jeeps further down the road. A few bottles were lobbed in their direction and when the jeeps charged the boys scattered into the flats knowing the RUC rarely follow them in there without British Army support. Then they would come out again and the whole game started again. Meanwhile Belfast City Centre and other points of social and economic excellence carry on business as usual. The forces of repression have contained these disturbances; the destruction is limited to the already devastated streets: only the leaders and businessmen of the Catholic community feel threatened. Young people in Britain do a bit of football hooliganism, in N.Ireland they have a riot, both have about as much effect on changing things as going to a disco. The containment of British riots to the streets of the ghetto and the ideology of deprivation leads to the same uselessness.

I imagine that the British/Irish problem will be 'solved' either by the UN (Tony Benn's idea) or by some Eire/EEC consortium. However such chaos and repression that does exist in the North has given rise to a mass of discontented people prepared to fight and used to taking to the streets. Whether the monoliths of socialist ideology and bureaucratic integration will be able to contain these people remains to be seen.

S.A.B. (Leeds)

Postscript: The logic of this article for libertarian revolutionaries is clear. To break the stranglehold of nationalism, the naked repression of imperialism will have to be broken. A systematic campaign to demoralise the British armed forces could begin this process...

If imperialism resolves the problem through bureaucratisation then a whole new analysis and activity will have to begin.



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ABOUT OURSELVES

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21, Treliske Lane, Highertown, Truro,
Cornwall.
4, The Grove, Lancaster.

The National Secretary can be contacted via London group.

The International Secretary can be contacted via the Oxford Group.

Habitual readers of "Solidarity" will have noticed the considerable diversity of views expressed in our recent issues.

The disagreements which are aired in these pages reflect the debates and the divergent tendencies within Solidarity. It would be foolish to pretend that this lack of uniformity has not created problems for us (or that the silence of other groups on such matters means they have no internal dissensions.) But there are many problems which will still have to be solved, not least because many of these solutions can only be practical ones, and to abandon our commitment to critical, and self-critical, thinking would mean the stagnation of our politics.

From the letters and comments we receive it is apparent that some articles have given rise to misunderstandings, while others would like to make all of us responsible for the opinions of each. We have no need of the kind of acceptability to be gained by attaching labels to ourselves, or by tailoring our ideas to conform to the prejudices of others.

If we aren't to recount the whole of our political experience in every issue, it is inescapable that this journal will be largely made up of fragments, the public formulation of a dialogue through which we give shape and substance to our lives. The least of our expectations is that a few of these articles, creatively applied, may be of use as we try to make sense of a bewildered world. While the contents of this journal generally reflect the group's politics, articles signed by individuals don't necessarily reflect the views of all our members.

The editorial production of this journal is rotated around various Solidarity groups nationwide. This issue was the work of Oxford group(ing?)

OBITUARY

At the most recent 'National Solidarity' conference it was decided to suspend the publication of this magazine after this issue. Most members present agreed (though maybe for different reasons) that the quality of the magazine has been declining lately; and since there is a possibility that the 'National Solidarity' organisation may be disbanding or regrouping soon, some people felt it was best to suspend publication. However, this does not mean that all members of 'National Solidarity' have abandoned the idea of publishing a magazine, and other series may start in the near future.

LETTERS

I'm no guru!

Dear comrades,

I completely agree with P.A. (SfSR 16) that in understanding the women's movement and indeed all popular movements it is no good just studying the ideas of people whose names become widely known because they happen to write or do things which hit the headlines.

I was a bit hurt though to be called a 'guru'. Is this the penalty for writing? I have always seen what I write as a contribution towards a 'continuous debate'. One of the nasty aspects of capitalism is that skills and activity and creativity are not freely exchanged. I was able to start writing because in making the women's movement we began to develop an alternative. What we wrote was part of a political communication --- it was needed by all of us. This is still important to me as a feminist and socialist.

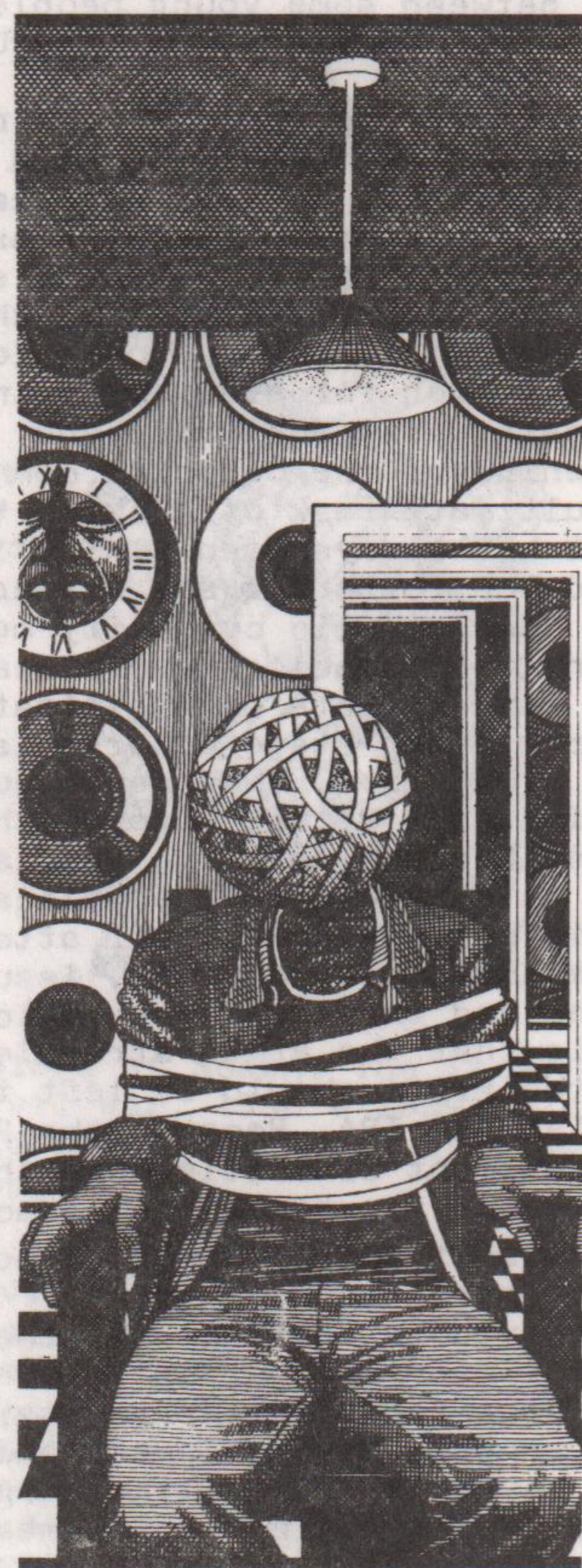
So it's ironic to be dismissed as a guru. Writers are people after all!

Yours in comradeship,
Sheila Rowbotham.



Recommended reading

In the last issue of SfSR Nick Keene wrote suggesting that Solidarity should present its refutation of the arguments against a self-managed society. In particular he spoke of the problem of leadership i.e. that people in general seem to have a need for leaders. He raised a very important point, one which Solidarity has for a long time seen as perhaps the key problem, and which we do indeed take seriously. It was most thoroughly considered in the pamphlet 'The Irrational in Politics' by Maurice Brinton, first printed in 1970. In the pamphlet M.B., basing his analysis on the work of Wilhelm Reich, pointed out that 'In learning to obey their parents, children learn obedience in general', i.e. that the authoritarian structure of the family is a fundamental mechanism in accustoming people to the authoritarian society, and creates the necessary psychic structure within which exploitation can be accepted - that is, a need to repress feelings of rebellion in order to survive the daily grind, and so to reject the ideas of those who would encourage those feelings. However, M.B. also points out that the implied pessimism



of this analysis was not justified, because it ignored the possibility of change in attitudes - the struggle for sexual freedom modifies the arena in which the next phase of the struggle will have to be fought as the struggle in production does in the area of economics.

Obviously this is a very brief sketch of the problem, and the analysis in the pamphlet, as its author has recognised, was insufficiently critical of "the concept of the centrality of sexual repression in the origin of authoritarian conditioning". However, it is a good starting point in considering the question, on which I hope to write more in future issues, and I would refer Nick and other readers to it while I'm having a think.

Sid French.

"Authoritarian Conditioning, Sexual Repression and the Irrational in Politics" is available from London Solidarity, price 40p.

SEX APPEAL

SOLIDARITY FOR SEXUAL POLITICS.

We hope to produce a compilation pamphlet on the 'Great Sexual Politics Debate' as seen through the pages of Solidarity publications from 1975 to 1981....But we need approximately £400 to produce it. Anything you can spare for this deserving cause will be gratefully appreciated. Please send donations to Manchester Solidarity.

EDITORIAL DISCUSSION

The editorial group (Oxford) apologises for the delay in bringing this issue out (due to events beyond our control) and particularly to any contributors who would have liked their articles to be more up to date.

From this issue we left out 3 articles: 2 on Poland, which we felt had been somewhat overtaken by

events, and one on Northern Ireland, which we felt came outside the orbit of our politics, as it was a passionate plea to support the IRA, albeit a brilliant piece of writing.

Instead of a group editorial, we decided, after a political discussion by the editorial group, to print two different points of view on the current political scene by individual members of the editorial group

Breaking the mould?

1981 has witnessed some quite dramatic changes in the British party political scene. On one hand, the Conservative party has shown itself more openly divided than at any time since the war, while on the other, the long-running feud between right and left of the Labour party has finally resulted in a significant right-wing faction abandoning Labour to form a new party which, in alliance with the Liberals, has been making spectacular advances in the opinion polls. It is, of course, doubtful that all this will have any major effects on the type of governmental economic policies we can expect to suffer for the next decade. The Labour party, the SDP-Liberal alliance and the Tory 'wets' are all committed to some form of Keynesian fiscal expansion backed up by wage controls, and although there exist a number of disagreements on the precise form such a policy should take (such as the differences over the EEC, statutory incomes control, nationalisation and protectionism), we can almost certainly look forward to the prospect of a turn to revitalised versions of the sorts of programmes unsuccessfully pursued by governments in the mid-70s, whoever takes power after the next general election. In an important sense, therefore, the realignment of British party politics is little more than cosmetic: on the assumption that the present Conservative government either performs a U-turn or loses office, (through an electoral defeat or, improbably, as a result of parliamentary defections), the economic policy die seems well and truly cast. How successful this 'new Keynesianism' is likely to be is, of course, another question. There are good reasons to doubt that one of its variants will 'solve the problems of capitalism' - in particular, much depends on the response of the working-class to new conditions. What is important here, however, is the similarity of the so-called 'alternatives' put forward by the various parties which stand a

chance of succeeding the present Tory government.

Nevertheless, to dismiss the changes on the party political front simply as a superficial gloss on what is fundamentally a growing consensus among the potential managers of capitalism would be mistaken. The realignment of British politics might not reflect any significant 'breaking of the mould' in policy terms, but it most certainly does stem from deeply important changes in the relationship between the ways people perceive their positions in the class structure and the party political preferences they express in elections. Since the war, people who consider themselves as working-class have identified less and less with 'their' Labour party at election time. At the same time those who see themselves as middle-class have weakened in their allegiance to the Conservatives. These tendencies have resulted in the steady decline of electoral support for the Conservative and Labour parties: the percentage of the electorate who voted Labour or Conservative fell from 80% in 1951 to only 60% in 1979, partly because of a long-term growth of abstention (which in fact had reached its zenith in October 1974) and partly because of an increase in the percentage of voters backing minor parties. Simultaneously, there has been a change in the social composition of party membership, particularly that of the Labour party at constituency level. The picture of a Labour party composed of Polytechnic lecturers so often put before us by the media is undoubtedly a caricature, but the trend towards an activist grass roots increasingly dominated by those popular usage would define as 'middle class' is undeniable. This trend is at once both instrumental in perpetuating the decline of identification with Labour on the part of those who consider themselves working class, and the result of such a decline. What is important here, however, is not the minute workings of the 'embourgeoisement' process going on inside the constituency Labour parties, but the very fact that it is happening: Labour, long since having ceased being for the workers, is now less and less of the workers.

Some people have yet to realise this: one thinks at once of those sincere souls who, while critical of Labour's structure and programme,

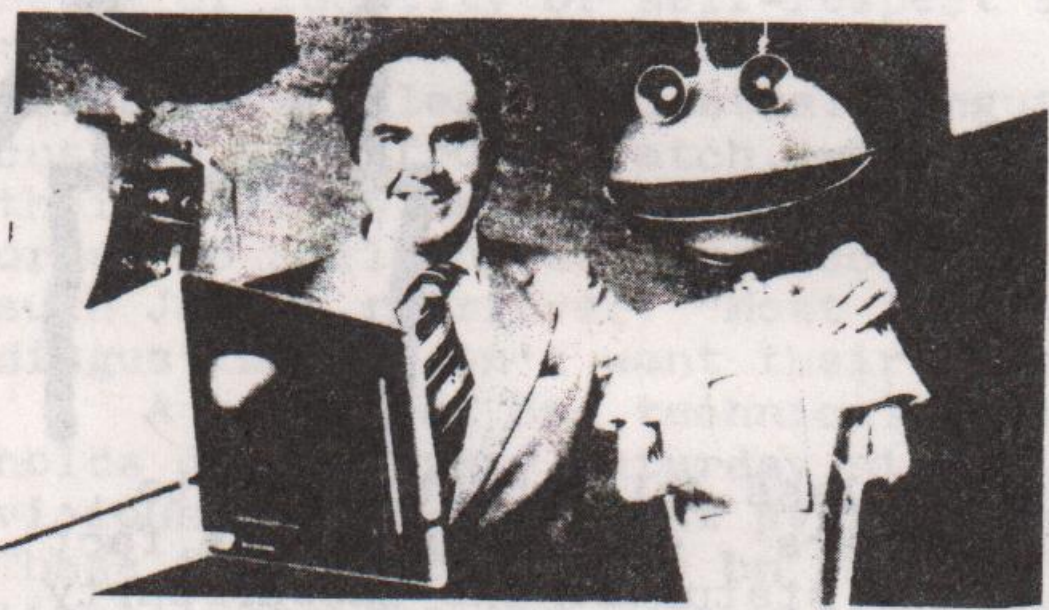
je participe
tu participes
il participe
nous participons
vous participez
ils profitent



nevertheless join up 'to talk to the workers', oblivious to the fact that the status of the Labour party as a 'mass party' has for a long time been extremely questionable. Others are, however, much shrewder. It is no coincidence that the academics who first charted the development of a disjunction between the ways people saw themselves in class terms, and the ways they participated in party politics as voters or activists, are now advising the embryo Social Democratic party. For the SDP is essentially the attempt of a temporarily defeated political elite to exploit the weakening identification of class and party in the collective political consciousness for the sake of gaining power. What is more, the 'Gang of Four' played their hand at a singularly opportune moment. By splitting from the Labour party when it was in opposition to possibly the most unpopular Conservative government of modern times, the Social Democrats can now count not only upon their apparent novelty, their 'democratic' rhetoric, and the disaffection of many Labour voters, but also on a cadre of ex-Conservative voting 'political virgins'. In alliance with the Liberals, the SDP stand a fair chance of at least holding the balance of power in parliament by 1984.



Of course, in reality the 'alternative' offered by the SDP is no alternative at all: the problems posed by the emergence of the SDP are no different to those posed by any statist response to popular alienation from party politics, at least for the most part. There is, however, a particular danger inherent in the development of the SDP which is even now upon us. The existence of a 'left of centre' alternative to Labour makes it far easier for the Labour party to assume the mantle of 'socialism', regardless of its state capitalist programme and its bureaucratic organisation, and this is one label it should not be allowed to appropriate. Socialism is not a matter of nationalisation, 'workers on the board' or political parties but a question of each and every one of us seizing control of the decisions which fundamentally affect our everyday lives. We won't 'break the mould' of British politics



with any number of Limehouse declarations or, for that matter, with any number of Tony Benns or Arthur Scargills. In the current political climate, it is imperative that we continue to attempt to make this clear.

Stefan Igel (Oxford).

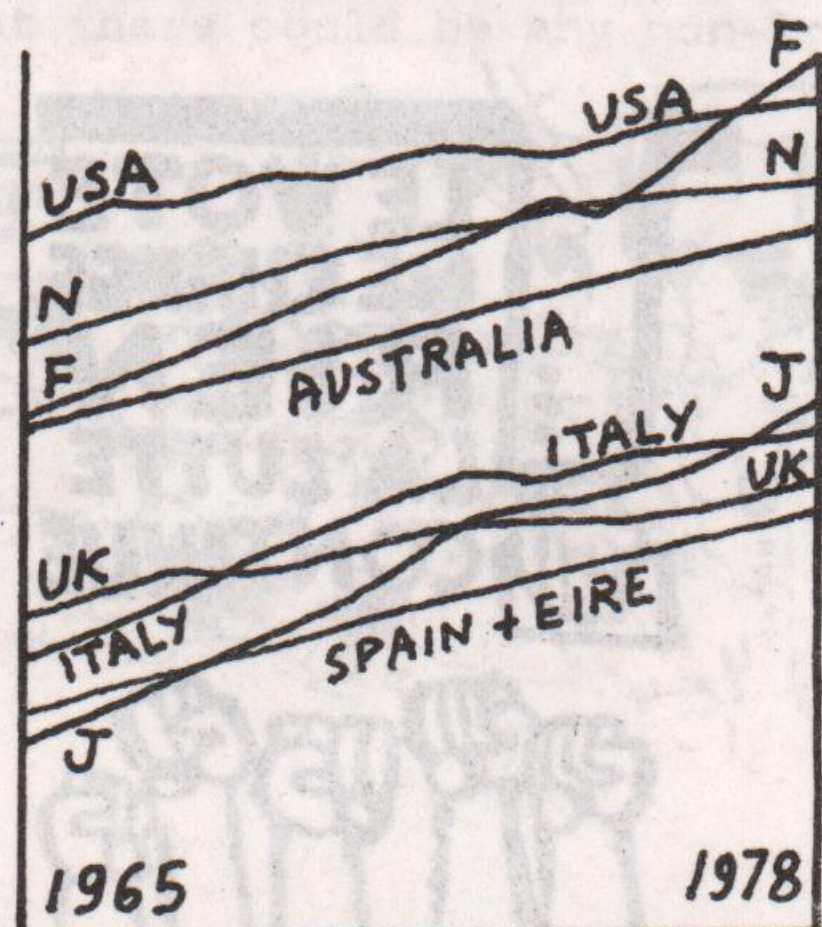
GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT PER HEAD 1965-78

F = FRANCE, BENELUX & WEST GERMANY

N = NORWAY, SWEDEN & DENMARK

J = JAPAN

SOURCE: OECD.



Consumer society and the Welfare State (along with international factors like the Nuclear Stalemate) have moderated both the class struggle and the booms and slumps of capitalism, and made the post-war period a fairly stable one. But the UK economy has grown much more slowly than those of comparable industrial nations (see graph), where the unions are more productivity minded and participate with Government and industry in substantial investment planning. It's also noteworthy that those countries have more democratic parliamentary systems than ours, with two elected houses and proportional representation.

It didn't matter much to the British worker if other countries were getting richer quicker than us; UK living standards managed to double between 1950 and 1980, and tea breaks are part of our standard of living too. But our economy is highly dependent on trade, and the increasing international economic competition of the '70s made us particularly vulnerable to inflation. Industry embarked on a crash programme to reduce manning levels, and workers were faced with speed-up as well as a frustrating wage-price spiral. Strikes, both official and unofficial, reached unprecedented levels; and since sales often lagged behind production, it was then in management's interest to provoke industrial action.

So many strikes ended in disunity and disillusionment, and so many successful wage demands vanished in rising prices, that workers began to favour productivity agreements, and unions became very unpopular with many of their own members. In this atmosphere, Thatcher was elected, and industry seized the excuse to shake out a couple of million workers. The Leninists despaired of the workers and left the industrial arena to join the Labour Party in droves, thus provoking the Social Democratic split.

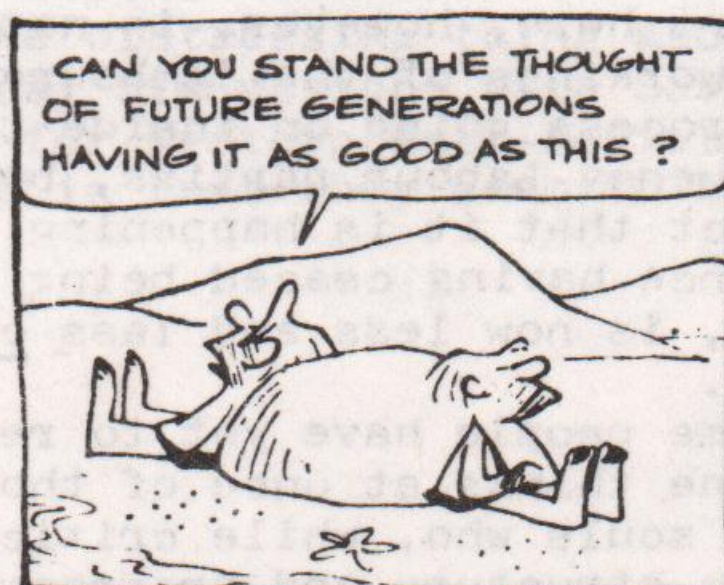
The respective lurches to left and right of the Labour and Tory parties, and the new 'moderate' option of the centre alliance, are

all attempts to revive the interest of the electorate in the political process. The two-party system has encouraged a widespread cynicism towards all politics. But the disillusionment goes deeper than that; consumer goods and welfare services no longer have any novelty - they are widely regarded as shabby. Naturally the Liberal /SDP alliance looks to the fast-growing economies of Europe and Japan for a cure. But their 'corporate' structures were forged in the upheaval of liberation from fascist regimes. It is doubtful whether our present troubles are enough to shake our national inertia. (One interesting side-effect of the now almost inevitable electoral reform, will be the likelihood of several fascist members in Parliament).

Libertarians who have always tried to tail-end the Leninists will now be forced to tail-end the Labour Party, or else fell lost in the 'sectarian wilderness'. Others will seize on everything that can be called a 'self-managed' struggle, and support it, however out of tune with popular feeling it may be. Many feel the scarcity of industrial action proves the demoralisation of the workers, but the recent BL strike was a clear example of their willingness to fight; it's just that people want to have a decent chance of winning. The Polish events have illustrated the effectiveness of moving cautiously.

Perhaps the most important 'struggles' that are going on at present are the invisible ones. The armchair revolutionary can only see strikes, riots and revolutions; but resistance to authority goes on regardless in our everyday lives. The Leninists, who seek political power, and control over information, have no use for such things; they foolishly believe their own unpopularity has been created by the media. Our best tactic in these uncertain times is to stick to libertarian principles without domatically supporting any programme.

E.P. (Oxford).



U.K. ECONOMY: Blues for Tina

'There is no alternative' (M. Thatcher, ad nauseam).

'The government is notorious for reiterating that "there is no alternative". The destruction already caused is so great that this proposition is becoming true, not in the intended sense that present policies alone will restore prosperity, but in the sense that neither these nor others can succeed in doing so' (Cambridge Economic Policy Review, April 1981, p.5).

Now that monetarism has been discredited in practice as well as in theory, the hunt is on for an alternative. The economic strategy proposed by the Cambridge Economic Policy Group (CEPG) deserves some attention, as it may well be the cornerstone of a Bennified Labour government in 1984.

The CEPG calls for 'a period of sustained expansion of demand' through tax cuts and increases in state expenditure. As it sees price rises as the result of cost pressures (especially on wages and import prices), it is not unduly concerned about the inflationary implications of monetary expansion at a time of very high unemployment.

This is a rather orthodox Keynesian reflationary package, with added stress on import controls. It has worked in the past. Wynne Godley, guru of the CEPG, has often pointed to the lessons of the 1950's, when inflation fell from double figures to exactly zero, and unemployment declined to a little over 1%. Not for nothing is Godley sometimes described as the 'new Keynes'.



ECONOMIC SNAGS.

There are three main problems with such an alternative economic strategy: the effect on wages, the effect on the balance of payments, and the effect on capitalist confidence.

If unemployment fell rapidly, wages would probably accelerate. This would be inflationary, which is generally reckoned to be a Bad Thing. It would also contribute to balance of payments difficulties, and might eat into the real level of profits. Precisely how serious this would be depends on the degree of permanent damage inflicted on shop-floor organisation since 1979. Wage controls (alias 'incomes policy') would almost certainly be a necessary part of any alternative strategy, though the CEPG is rather reticent on this question.

British manufacturing industry is now in such a state that any substantial increase in demand would lead to a massive rise in imports, and produce an enormous balance of payments deficit (the CEPG estimates this at £10 billion within a year). This could be corrected by a drop in the exchange rate, but any devaluation would have to be very large indeed (40%, according to the CEPG). Import prices would then go through the roof, real wages would fall sharply, wage inflation would accelerate further, and the end result would be a downward spiral of even greater intensity than that which led to the IMF intervention in 1976. This is why the CEPG favours import and foreign exchange controls instead.



Keynesian policies will work only if capitalists believe that they will work. If they don't, then the monetarists' notorious "crowding-out" theory becomes self-justifying, and private investment - the key to the recovery of British capitalism - will fall as government expenditure increases. (This interaction between theory, beliefs and theory is one of the reasons why the study of the economy is such a messy business). A collapse in capitalist confidence might be a sensible response to a revival in working class militancy, or to a severe balance of payments crisis. It might equally be a blindly irrational reaction to continuous newspaper headlines of the 'Benn Barbecues Babies' type. The CEPG is silent on this point, which Keynes must have had in mind when he made his famous call for 'a somewhat comprehensive socialisation of investment.'

SIEGE ECONOMY, SIEGE POLITICS?

The most important problems facing an alternative economic strategy are not economic (in the narrow sense), but political. Can the workers be kept quiet while the recovery takes place? Will foreign capitalists retaliate against import controls? Can British capitalists be stopped from panicking, or from going on an investment strike? And what sort of society, with what sort of politics, would correspond to a siege economy?

I rather suspect that the next Labour government will be able to sell a revamped (and remanded!) 'Social Contract' to a working class which has experienced the full horrors of monetarism. It is not difficult to concoct a package which offers more jobs and lower taxes in return for smaller wage demands. The original Social Contract was very popular at the start, and it was only when Healey welshed on it after the IMF intervention that opposition really grew.

Much depends on what happens to real (as opposed to money) wages as the recovery proceeds. This is

where import controls begin to look so attractive, as the other option (huge devaluation) would worsen the terms of trade and make a cut in living standards inevitable. Much better to finance renewed economic growth at the expense of foreigners! The CEPG claims that retaliation by foreign capitalists is unlikely, since there is no intention to reduce imports, only to stabilise the level of imports despite growth in output and incomes. Whether Uncle Sam and the man from Mitsubishi will see things in this light is hard to say. If the alternative is the final disappearance of British capitalism down the plughole, they just might.

The recent behaviour of the French bourgeoisie suggests that British capitalists, too, may keep their heads. After all, the CEPG's medicine isn't much nastier than Dr. Mitterand's, making allowance for the more serious condition of the patient. The more footloose multi-nationals may dream of investment opportunities in Singapore or Brazil, but there will be good profits to be made from dealing in import licences and evading exchange controls, and a substantial cut in unemployment will expand the home market. In the end, money often does overcome ideological prejudice.

DEATH AGONY OR NEW LEASE OF LIFE?

It should not be necessary to point out that there is nothing remotely socialist about the CEPG's proposals, which represent a blueprint for a new and healthier state capitalism on (say) the Japanese model. That wouldn't be an especially pleasant society to live in, but there doesn't seem to be any strong reason why it should be much more oppressive than the present 'shitty mess'. Certainly there is no evidence that the economic recovery of British capitalism requires something approaching Fascism before it can take place.

On balance I think that the alternative economic strategy has a rather good chance of success. It also has a good chance of being implemented, whether the next government be Bennite, Healeyite, Social Democrat, or even wet Tory. There is, after all, no (capitalist) alternative.

John King,
15th, July 1981.

IT'S AN
INTERNATIONAL
MONETARIST
CONSPIRACY.



SOVIET UNION:

Resistance and everyday life



The rise of Solidarnosc in Poland has raised the question of the possibility of similar developments in the rest of the Eastern bloc, particularly the Soviet Union. Here we print three articles of relevance to this question. The first is a chronology of post-war landmarks of class struggle in the USSR, made available to us by comrades from Echanges. The second is an interview with an ex-member of the Leningrad 'Commune' which existed in the mid-1970's, originally published in the Austrian review 'Gegenstimmen'. Finally, we print extracts from some notes made by a comrade who has recently returned from Leningrad: these are personal impressions which shed light on a wide variety of areas of everyday life in the USSR.

CHRONOLOGY OF CLASS STRUGGLES IN THE USSR

In a country where the production is based on wage labour, workers' resistance is an ordinary phenomenon. In Russia this wasn't a secret in the twenties. But since the beginning of the thirties, silence reigned on this subject. Does this mean that the resistance disappeared? On the contrary. But information about this is rare. The following chronology is a list of events, put together by German comrades. Their address is: SURREALITER, c/o Edition Nautilus, Hassestrasse 22, 2050 Hamburg, FRG. Everybody is invited to write what can be known about these events with a view to a more detailed study of this subject.

1948: mutinies of imprisoned soldiers in the camp of Vorkouta. They seize the arms and take over the power in the camp. In other camps similar attempts take place.

1951: Strike of forced labour workers in Ekibastus near Kazakhstan.

1952: Uprising of prisoners in the camps of Noul'sk (North Siberia), Pestschanij, Wotchrusewo, Oterlag and Gorlag in South Siberia and in Kazakhstan in the North Ural.

1st August, 1953: Revolt of coal miners in the camp of Vorkouta, 64 killed.

16th May, 1954: Camp guards of the camp Kingir near Doscheskasgan in the province of Kazakstan kill 31 prisoners who try to escape. After that 11,000 prisoners go on strike. They defend themselves with knives and axes. The revolt is suppressed with tanks. There are 700 dead of whom about 500 are women.

Beginning of 1959: strike at the factories Thalmann in Voronej.

1960: young workers, members of the Komsomol, who work in a leather foundry in Temistan near Karaganda in the province of Kazakhstan protest against their bad working conditions and the bad supply of goods. They also protest against the fact that Bulgarian auxiliaries enjoy privileges. They destroy the installations and occupy the city. They attack the barracks but encounter no resistance at all from the soldiers who hand over their weapons. The uprising is suppressed by special troops of the KGB.

April 1961: the dockers of Odessa refuse to load butter on ships with their destination Cuba, because there is no butter for sale in their own town.

Summer 1961: the inhabitants of Kemerowo in South Siberia demonstrate against the high price for food products.

June 1962: general strike at Krasnodar (oil industry) in the North Caucasus. A youngster is killed by the militia.

1st June 1962: the government raises the price of meat and dairy products. At the same time a revision of tariffs is carried through that leads to salary cuts. In the factory Boudienny in Novotcherkask near Rostov, there is a general strike. The workers force a train to stop and they discuss their case with the passengers. The militia intervenes but is put to rout. People write graffiti on the trains, saying "Death to Krutchev". Troops with tanks occupy parts of the factory grounds while 5,00 continue their occupation of the factory during the night. On June 2nd, the workers demonstrate in the city, completely covered with light metal plates. The office of

the local Soviet is protected by non-Russian troops of the KGB. They begin to shoot into the crowd without any warning. The local soldiers refuse to shoot and will be shot or sent to the camps. Members of their families are exiled. In the city, the people try to liberate those who have been jailed: they launch an attack against the barracks of the militia to get arms. The city is occupied by tanks. On June 3rd, the administration makes known, that the whole population of the city will be deported if people don't start to work again. The town is under martial law for two weeks. During fights two people are killed.

1963: strikes in Riazan, Omsk in the Urals and in Leningrad.

October 1965: strike in a chemical complex in Leningrad and in a factory for ball bearings, named GPS 1 in Moscow, against the reduction of productivity bonuses. The new tariffs are cancelled.

May 1964: strike of 300 taxi drivers in Leningrad against working conditions that become worse and worse. They block an important crossroads in the city.

Mid-1967: strike in the factory for ball bearings GPS 2 in Moscow against a reduction of salary, which will also be cancelled.

1967: strike in the Donetsk basin. In November a strike in tractor factory in Karkov.

1968: strike in many factories in Sverdlosk against reductions of salary which attain 40% after the introduction of a five day working week. The salaries are raised to their old level.

winter 1969: two bus stations in Kichinev (Moldavia) strike for two days. The snow prevents the drivers from driving and they have to pay for the extra petrol used. Half of the drivers do not receive a salary, the other half are short of money. The drivers win, but after one year everybody is fired.

May 1969: demonstration of workers at hydro-electric plant in Kiev. Demonstrations at Tashkent where street battles occur.

October 1971: strike of miners in Donetsk basin against the shortage of meat and for better working conditions.

18-19 May 1972: uprising in Kaunas





(Lithuania) after the funeral of a worker who sacrificed himself by burning himself to death, crying "Long live a free Lithuania". Street battles go on for 48 hours, barricades are erected and one policeman gets killed. The town is occupied by paratroopers.

June 1972: demonstrations in Dniepropetrovsk; shops are looted and destroyed. There are ten dead of whom two are police.

February 1973: Uprising in Tiflis (Georgia).

March 1974: conflict in Tallinn (Estonia).

12th May-16th June 1974: hunger strike in the labour camp in Perm.

1974-1976: the underground movement for the liberation of Georgia organises bomb attacks against government buildings, party headquarters, arms factories, industrial installations, army and airforce depots.

8th November 1975: mutiny on board the destroyer Storcevoi in the Baltic Sea. The marines try to get to Sweden, but the boat sinks after an attack by helicopters and submarines.

24th February 1976: at the dawn of the 25th Congress of the Party, pupils of a Leningrad school distribute handwritten pamphlets in which they called for revolution.

January 1977: a wave of strikes in numerous Latvian towns and also in factories in Kaunas against the low salaries, the food rationing and rationalisation measures.

1976-1977: boycott by dockers in Leningrad, Riga, Tallinn, Klaipeda (Memel), Vyborg against the imports of luxurious articles from western countries that are meant for expensive hotels and the officials of the Party and government.

1977: in two big factories in Toula, people refuse for some weeks to receive their salary: why should they get money if they cannot buy anything with it?

10th October 1977: mass demonstration in Vilna after a football match between Russians and Lithuanians. The stadium is set on fire, police are attacked, arrested demonstrators liberated. The authorities use martial law.

15th December 1977: strike in a rubber company, Inkaras in Kaunas. The workers succeed in cancelling wage reductions.

September 1978: uprising in Douchanbe, (Tadjikistan). 13,000 demonstrators. Tanks smash the revolt.

Beginning of October 1978: strike in Abkhazia, a republic in Georgia, in the capital Souchoumi and also in many mines in the region.

6th May 1980: strike of the bus drivers of Togliattigrad, so complete that the 170,000 workers of the Lada factory cannot go to work. 8-9th May 1980: the 200,000 workers of the Gorki factories strike against the meat and milk shortage. 2,00 hand-written pamphlets are distributed.

1st October 1980: 1,000 workers of the factory for the production and repair of agricultural machines in Tartu (Estonia) strike for two days to obtain their productivity bonuses. They also protest against the fixation of production quotas by the plan. The management gives in.



THE LENINGRAD COMMUNE

Interview with an activist of the Leningrad 'Commune' (see Solidarity for Social Revolution No.10, 1979, and Freedom 6.6.81) who had to leave the USSR in November 1978 at the age of 16. Edited and translated into French by 'Iztok' (published by Bulgarian libertarians in Paris) from original in the Austrian review 'Gegenstimmen'. Translated from Iztok by L.W.

Question: Some of the main representatives of the Left Opposition group had been active since February 1976. What was happening then?

Answer: Young people, school kids and students, produced leaflets for the 25th Congress of the Communist Party. Those leaflets were pro-communist and came out in favour of communism with a human face. The KGB arrested Andrei Reznikov and Alexander Skobov among others. Reznikov was a student at the Institute of Information. Since he was only 17, he could not, by law, be sent to a labour camp; after 2 months in a KGB prison he was referred to a committee for young delinquents, sent down from University and sent into the army for two years. Skobov was then a student in the History faculty; others were in their last year at school, or

first-year students. Their leaflet ended with the slogan: 'Long life to communism! Long live the New Revolution!' The group was pro-communist and pro-marxist, but there were also socialists and anarchists in it. Question: How did the group develop subsequently?

Answer; ...After the 1976 action, Skobov organised a commune in Leningrad. Hitch-hiking is very popular with young people, and we have a certain system for doing it. For example, if you want to go from Leningrad to Odessa or Novorossisk, you can be supplied with addresses of people who'll give you food and lodging. In this way you discover that there are communes here and there, and so a network was built up of young people who kept in touch.

In Skobov's commune there were not only people from Leningrad, but also from Moscow, the Baltic republics and Siberia. When they came to Leningrad they would stay in the commune. Arkady Tsourkov, then a student at Tartu University, and Resnikov lived there from time to time. With Skobov, they formed the



nucleus of the Leningrad group.

Q: How did you join the commune?

A: I had a lot of friends in the Academy of Arts; they were in the habit of meeting in cafés like the Sphinx or the Red Cat in Leningrad; some would even come from Moscow. And since they needed a place to stay for the night we would help them. So I got to know people around Skobov who introduced him to me; we became friends.

Q: Can you describe the commune?

A: Our commune was on the edge of town, on Primorsky Prospect, about half an hour by train from the centre. It occupied the first floor of a two-storey wooden house. It was Skobov who had drawn up the commune's statutes. He defined the commune as a small-scale communist society; everything in it belonged to everyone. He did not recognise private property; he rejected violence. There was a cash-box for the things we needed. It was always open. Each of us knew where the keys were. Five, sometimes ten, people were living there, and many came from other towns.

Q: How did the commune become the centre of a political movement?

A: There was a lot of discussion in the commune. We talked about the situation in the country, about foreign policy, the latest cultural news, philosophy, etc. We felt how hypocritical the system was. There are so many lies. We hated the system of passports and the economic system with its planning, all decisions coming from above. The education system was rotten. All we studied was the official version of Marxism, the official CP documents, Brezhnev's book, etc. We could only analyse history or literature according to the authorised version.

There was a typewriter in the commune. We issued statements on Party policy and the state as well as on how we should combat it. We called for demonstrations and public debate. We were in the habit of presenting the USSR as non-communist and non-marxist, the CP not being marxist since in the Soviet Union all power is in the hands of the state. Communism ought to be a free society. We were able to conceive of the state as being necessary in the construction of communism, but in the USSR the state only serves the interests of the upper classes.



Q: What were the main political tendencies in the group?
A: I'll list three main ones; marxists like Tsourkov, Resnikov and Federova; anarchists like Khavine and me. Skobov was half-anarchist, half-marxist; plus three more left democrats like Victor Pavlenkov who came from Gorki. The left democrats were neither anarchists nor marxists, they only took part in the democratic movement for human rights from a left viewpoint. We differed on strategy and tactics; there was not just one opinion.

Q: The 'Left Opposition' group was planning a 'General Conference of the Left Opposition'. How did this project originate?
A: Skobov, Tsourkov, Federova, Resnikov and others went to Moscow for a meeting. At the meeting, the people from Moscow as well as Leningrad planned a major conference in Leningrad. We began to bring out 'Perspectives' on the commune type-writer. We produced 10 to 15 copies per issue but lots of people read it; someone reads a copy and gives it to a friend, and so on. We wanted to distribute it in the universities and schools especially, to present our ideas and find support.

Q: What were the contents of 'perspectives'?
A: Very varied articles, extracts from books, poems. No.2 contained analyses of the present situation in the USSR and drew some conclusions, for example that what was most necessary was to make a revolution.

Q: Did the conference take place?
A: No. On August 12, the militia came and took the apartment to pieces. The commune then ceased to exist, although a few still came, pursued by the militia as well.

Q: What happened to the leaders?
A: On 14 October 1978 Skobov was arrested. On April 16 1979 he was sentenced to psychiatric treatment for an indefinite term. Arkady Tsourkov was arrested on October 31 and sentenced in April 1979 to 5 years in a concentration camp, plus 3 years' internal exile. On April 16 Khavine was arrested and sentenced to 6 years. Resnikov and Federova were sent to the Altai (?), Victor Pavlenkov and I had to emigrate.

A friend in Leningrad told me the school I was at has changed completely. My school was one of the best, a school for the privileged, children of well known actors, important party members, etc. It was a 10-year school, and a special French school*. There were only 6 schools of the kind in Leningrad. After the December demo., attended by pupils from the 9th and 10th class, the KGB quite simply closed down the 9th and 10th classes. Many of the teachers were sacked. Today it's a poor quality school like the ones you have here in the USA for Puerto-Ricans and blacks. The KGB wanted to root out the bad influences in the school like this.

Q: What can we do to help the movement of young people in the Soviet Union?
A: I think the movement is continuing in the USSR. What would be required would be to launch a campaign here for the liberation of Skobov, Tsourkov and Khavine. Discuss it, form committees, organise demonstrations and other actions.

*Note: In the USSR the education system is 'simplified': the child goes to school at age 7 for 10 years, 8 compulsory; after 10 years s/he can sit for university entrance. Each 10-year school has a special subject, e.g. a foreign language.

LENINGRAD NOTES



April 1981: Just some fragmentary observations on various topics. Material in quotes from Soviet informants.

FORMALISM

1. Meeting with head, some teachers and prominent pupils of an English-language middle school. Head keeps interrupting to 'correct' pupils' correct English with his own incorrect English. Questions about curriculum, discipline, homework (3 hours a day in top forms, or up to 5 hours for weak pupils) etc. But head wants questions on another topic: "Aren't you going to ask about our self-government system? Zhenya, tell them about our self-government system." Zhenya launches into an account of the monthly rubbish-clearance exercises. The head interrupts impatiently: "I'm sure rubbish isn't the only question you deal with." Another boy starts rambling vaguely and is in turn interrupted before he manages to say anything. One of the visitors gives examples of problems dealt with by English school councils - uniform, dinner arrangements. "Our trouble", replies the head, "is that we don't have any problems. We can't think of anything for our council to do."

3. "All for the Leninist subbotnik!" Under the loudspeakers blaring martial music, some people sweep the dust along Nevsky prospect in one direction, while others sweep it back again in the other direction.

CORRUPTION, CLASS

"My father offered to go and talk to the necessary people to help me get into the institute, but I said I didn't want him to. That year I didn't get in, though others who I'm sure did worse than me in the exam did get in. The next year I accepted my father's help."

(In response to my comment on the stress placed on intellectual achievement in the USSR). "Not a bit of it, that doesn't count at all. What matters is your family background and who you know. I found myself in an institute where the children of the elite are concentrated. If you don't come from a prominent family, they look at you as if to say: 'Where has this thing blown in from?' God, how I hate the clothes they wear as signs of status, those leather jackets!" (I describe corresponding phenomena in England: general problems of living in a class society, etc.) "But here they are constantly talking about equality: that's what makes it worse."



RACISM

Substantial differences - minority languages, clothes, art forms, customs - decline and disappear without this seeming to undermine national stereotypes. Russians resent Caucasians (regarded as "blacks" or "Georgians"; most Russians do not make distinctions among Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, etc.) as well of course of Jews, for doing too well for themselves. Minority people despise Russians as lazy inborn drunkards. In policy discussions fears are expressed of the "yellowing" of the country, though the word does not appear in print. Among Jews pride in intellectual and cultural superiority



CUBA: Fidel introduces "socialist incentives"

Twenty years of Castroite socialism do not seem to have totally convinced the Cuban masses that this is what they want. When the sugar cane harvest was reaching its zenith in March, the leadership found that abstract appeals in the name of patriotism, socialism, etc., proved insufficiently inspiring - instead they had to resort to material incentives to try and encourage the cane cutters and mill workers to finish the harvest on time.

In addition to production bonuses available to all workers, special prizes were offered to the most productive. Top of the list came visits to the workers' earthly paradise, the USSR, followed by cars, air conditioners, refrigerators and holidays in Cuban resorts.

As it happened the scheme was not entirely successful - the harvest overran by about three weeks. But bureaucrats monitoring the results were no doubt encouraged by the fact that this was the soonest the harvest was finished since the revolution.

The other recent event which raises questions about the degree of popular support enjoyed by the Castro regime was the Mariel exodus last year, when hundreds of small boats from the US ferried an estimated 60,000 Cubans 90 miles across the Caribbean to the heartland of imperialism. Although it was reported that the Cuban authorities took the opportunity to rid themselves of inmates of both the prisons and the asylums, the majority of those who left apparently did so of their own accord, voting with their feet, as it were.

As far as the Cuban bureaucrats are concerned, anyone who wants out must have a problem; in the words of Fidel Castro, the refugees were "scum...declassified, anti-social and

lumpen elements receptive to imperialist sentiments and ideas". No doubt many of the refugees are sympathetic to the Miami-based emigré groups. But even this explanation is not sufficient to explain away what is evidently a considerable groundswell of feeling against the regime.

In fact the Cuban authorities themselves have acknowledged the problem, in private if not in public. One of the major themes of the Cuban Communist Party's 2nd (! - in 20 years) congress last December was the need to strengthen the party's 'indestructible' links with the masses. They are likely to find it a tough job, however, given their reactionary attitude towards people's spontaneous activity, as evidenced by their appraisal of events in Poland: the official report to the congress warned that "especially in Poland, imperialism is orchestrating a sinister act of provocation against the Soviet camp".

The fact that bureaucrats dismiss the refugees as capitalist-minded is ironic in view of the fact that they themselves are resorting more and more to capitalistic methods in order to boost economic performance. According to Edward Gonzalez, an adviser to the US Rand Corporation on Latin American affairs (and therefore probably a fairly objective if not impartial observer), the Cuban economy has been in serious trouble since the mid-1960s and has been kept afloat by extensive Soviet aid, including grants worth \$6 billion since 1975.

Obviously such problems cannot all be laid at the door of the prevailing economic model - bad weather, for example, often destroys Caribbean crops whatever the nature of the regime. But it has apparently been accepted by the leadership that one

of the major problems, inefficiency, is the fault of the system itself. Over the last two years, changes have been made in an attempt to tackle this problem. These include allowing the development of a small private sector, particularly in marketing agricultural produce and selling services such as repair work and language tuition.

More importantly, the labour code has been changed to allow managers of state enterprises to shake out surplus workers. Those who will suffer most are women, whose numbers in the work-force have risen by a third to 800,000 over the last 5 years and who now make up about 30% of the work-force. Castro himself has warned the Cuban Women's Federation that their rate of incorporation into the work-force would have to slow. Women expressed fears that when faced with a choice, (male) plant managers would prove to be biased in favour of men "because they claim that women create problems".

One of these problems is absenteeism - although the family code stipulates that couples should share housework and child-care, and allows divorce when this principle is violated, the reality appears to be structured along more conventional lines, with women shouldering the bulk of the work at home. So much for Che Guevara's ideal of 'socialist man' - remember that one?

Anyway, the trend towards capitalist techniques of raising efficiency seems established now; interestingly enough, it has been accompanied by a less-than-euphoric appraisal of monolithic state management of the economy. According to the Washington Post, the Cubans have advised their budding counterparts in Nicaragua to reactivate and stimulate the private sector and keep the state sector small; they also pointed out that a distribution system run by the state was more costly and less efficient than a market system. Which is a strange conclusion to come to after 20 years of socialism!

N.T.



Stop Press: Latest reports indicate that the 'realistic' economic measures implemented in recent times are having the effects desired by the authorities. The performance of the economy in the first half of the year was better than at any time since the Revolution, according to the President of the National Planning Commission. Productivity presumably also reached record levels, as these results were achieved despite the shaking-out of 215,000 workers from industry. The other side of the coin is that, for the first time since 1960, unemployment is beginning to become a problem.

The new system, in which bonuses and other incentives form on average 15-25% of take-home pay, is said by Communist Party officials to follow the guiding principle of socialist distribution; from each according to his ability, to each according to his work. Full the other one, Fidel!

LENINGRAD NOTES continued

is widespread.

Belief in such stereotypes is not merely chauvinist but actually racist - i.e. character traits (Russian drunkenness, say) are thought to be transmitted hereditarily. The prevalence of hereditary belief can be illustrated by a topic that came up in our language-course group: adoption. Although there are many people who want children but are infertile in the USSR, adoption is extremely rare. This is not only due to administrative complications but also because people distrust the hereditary quality of children they don't produce themselves.

People who have lost substantial ethnic background often lose any sense of identity or self-respect in this atmosphere. So some people deliberately learn ancestral languages, customs etc. from scratch, which even their parents had completely lost, in order to build up self-respect. One such Jewish retriever: "Most Jews are disgusting, I don't want their company."

A hostel of one technical college holds discos every Saturday night, and vicious fights break out every time. These fights are always on racial lines: Russians and Ukrainians versus Caucasians, Central Asians etc. They often start when a Caucasian student takes offence at the casual use of mother-fucking insults by Russians.

My impression is that being Jewish in the USSR feels something like being Indian, Pakistani, African etc in the UK. The process whereby most racist feeling has been diverted onto more highly visible out-groups here has not occurred in the USSR.

POLITICAL ARGUMENT ON FACTORY VISIT

A group was taken to a factory for the repair of railway wagons. The Chief Engineer, flanked by two trade union officials, gave a long account of the history of the factory while we were served Pepsi-cola. I could not resist asking questions which led to a long argument about the role of the trade unions: the others on the visit were annoyed with me for being so "aggressive" and because "that was very boring for us".

As the first task of the trade unions was the protection of legality I asked for examples of violations of legality at the factory and of how the trade union handled such cases. No specific reply was forthcoming: the trade union officials repeatedly denied that there could be any non-trivial



conflicts in a socialist society which had abolished exploitation. "We are all workers. Against who could we struggle? Only against ourselves. If observing safety requirements, say, endangers plan fulfilment, then the plan always goes by the board. No accident ever happens twice for the same reason... I know you're thinking of Poland. Conditions are very different there: the workers lack the consciousness of our workers, they are exposed to a great deal of bourgeois propaganda, private property still exists there. I've been there - I've seen what chaos they're causing there. They are harming no-one but themselves. What you call 'freedom' or 'democracy' we call 'demagoguery'. We also used to waste time with all these meetings, now we get down to work."



I tried to take a moderate position, and argue that even in a society without exploitation there are multiple goals which must come into conflict - e.g. productive versus environmental goals, light versus heavy industry. There can be different views on priorities, and thus competition among different programmes. The response was that reasonable discussion led to the formulation of the most rational programme; what need was there for any other programme? "Of course some people love arguing, and will never be satisfied."

It was interesting that the trade union officials took a harder line than the engineer, representing the management, who was prepared to admit problems and difficulties, but was prevented from developing his more complex view by the volubility of his colleagues.

This seems surprising if we are influenced by the role of trade unions here, but in the USSR they are just personnel departments concerned with distributing welfare benefits. A couple of people explained that people who are not just concerned with material benefits but want to achieve something avoid trade union work, as they avoid Party work, as empty and hypocritical routine. Technology allows some room for initiative and involves facing up to real problems, so that engineers are the most progressive people - not only technically but in social matters.

The distressing thing about political discussions with Soviet people for Western anti-Soviet socialists is that they seem to have a

single concept of socialism, i.e. what they've got. They may be more or less pro or anti Soviet, detest or admire Thatcher and Reagan, but they are aware of only two alternatives - the "Soviet" system and private capitalism. Soviet propaganda fails in preventing people from knowing about, idealising and envying the West, but it succeeds in keeping out awareness of other models of "socialism", and this is the only success that it really needs, since there is no return to private capitalism and everyone knows it. So the best thing is to plug on about Hungary, Yugoslavia etc., the Czech action programme, etc.

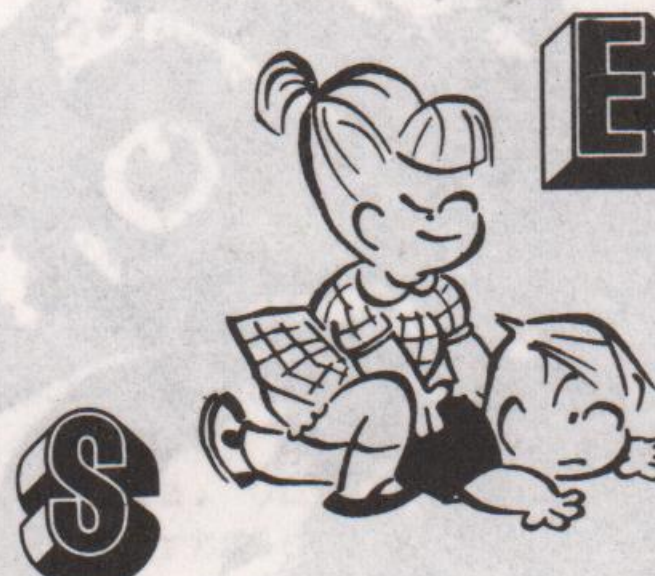
POVERTY

Everyone says that, if you only see Leningrad, you get a misleading impression about the standard of life. But people who jumped on a train to see a smaller town got interrogated for several hours by the KGB, so I gave up the idea of doing this. They say that in many places the shops stock only bread, potatoes, vodka, and that living in the countryside is a primitive animal existence.

On our excursion to Novgorod we saw full-scale models of peasant huts as they were in the old days: implements and stocks downstairs, the whole family living in one room upstairs, sleeping on benches round the walls, except an old or sick person - the stove, and children on shelves under the roof. But I heard there are still plenty of people living in huts of this type. Similarly, in a museum there are pictures showing how terrible the slums of Baku were before the revolution; but such slums still exist in Baku - one water tap for a whole street, etc.



X



SEX

Lynn, Jo and I went along to a public lecture on "the etiquette of relations between men and women." As the speaker plunged straight away into erogenous zones to a responsive audience packing the hall, this was obviously a generally understood euphemism for something more specific. The lecturer, a doctor named Sergei Sergeyevich Libikh, emphasised sexual technique, but in its psychological context, taking a humane and humorous approach. There was frequent embarrassed laugh-



BOOK REVIEWS



Class and ideology

FRANK PARKIN: MARXISM AND CLASS THEORY: A BOURGEOIS CRITIQUE. (Tavistock £7.95 and £4.95).

PETER SAUNDERS: URBAN POLITICS (Pelican £2.95).

NICHOLAS ABERCROMBIE, BRYAN TURNER AND STEPHEN HILL: THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY THESIS. (Allen and Unwin £12.50).

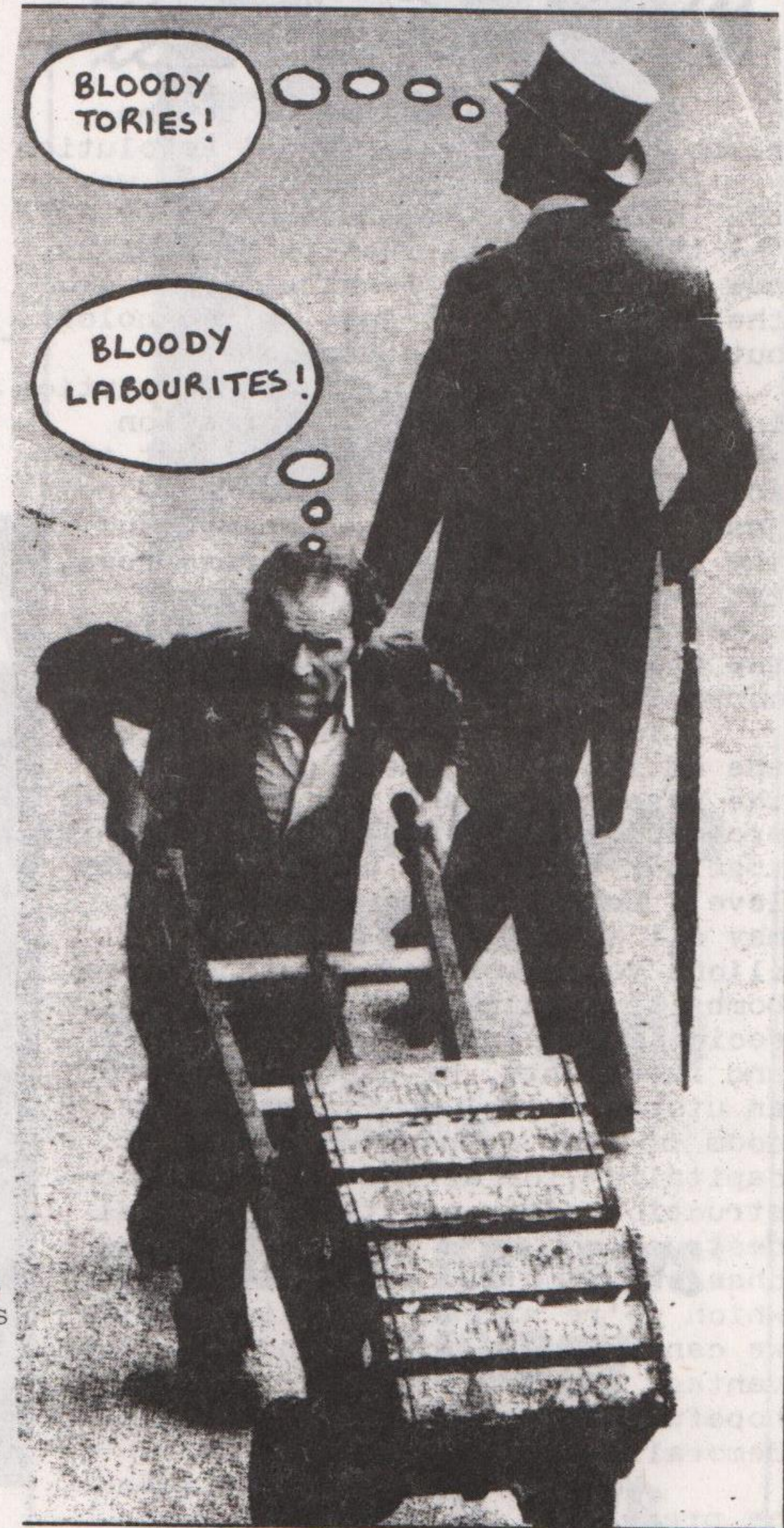
In an article in 'Solidarity for Social Revolution' number nine, John Quail wrote of Solidarity that we 'have not developed the detailed concrete understanding of our society to the point where we can make realistic suggestions suitable for making a self-managed society. We can criticise but we can't counterpose.' Even though two years have passed since this was written, it seems to me that nothing whatsoever has been done about the paucity of Solidarity's sociological understanding to which John refers: indeed, recent experience suggests that the problem is not simply on the 'detailed concrete' level of understanding but also extends to the theoretical realm. In a sense, of course, this is unsurprising, since it is obviously difficult to come up with a coherent and comprehensive world view immediately after deciding there is something wrong with the Marxist perspective most radicals use as an intellectual crutch. At the same time, however, the unwillingness of Solidarity to take up the challenge in anything approaching a serious manner is nothing short of pitiful, and I feel that something really ought to be done. As a start, we could do worse than to acquaint ourselves with what some sociologists are thinking today, and what follows is a brief review of three recent publications I have found stimulating and which I believe could contribute substantially to the development of our theoretical positions.

The first of these is Frank Parkin's latest book, 'Marxism and Class Theory: a bourgeois critique'. Parkin is one of Britain's foremost stratification theorists, and readers might be familiar with his earlier 'Class Inequality and Political Order' which is available as a Paladin paperback. 'Marxism and Class Theory' is a more theoretical work, but it is just as readable and far more provocative. "Given what now passes for Marxist theory", he says in his introduction, "almost any imaginable bourgeois alternative seems preferable", and this remark sets the tone for what follows: Parkin takes

an almost sadistic delight in demolishing the attempts of even 'sophisticated' Marxists such as Poulanzas, Barran and Wright to deal with the realities of the class structure of modern capitalism. Marxist class theory, for all the changes it has undergone in the hands of the academic Marxists who sprang to prominence in the sixties higher education boom, has proved itself unable to cope with phenomena such as the growth of white-collar employment, the shift to managerial control of enterprises, the expansion of the state sector or the continued importance of ethnic changes in society; as a result, Parkin believes it should be abandoned. He puts forward an alternative which draws heavily on the sociology of Max Weber. Class, for Parkin, is a matter of 'social closure' or 'the monopolisation of specific, usually economic opportunities' so as to exclude outsiders: it is based on power rather than 'relationship to the means of production' as Marxists would have it. There is not the space here to go into details, but it seems to me that Parkin's schema, although flowing from a social democratic perspective which claims trades unions and political parties to be agents pure and simple of the working class in the class struggle, could form the nucleus of a radical alternative to the Marxist orthodoxy the left has been flogging for so many years.

One aspect of stratification which Parkin does not discuss at length is housing (although there is nothing in his approach which rules out its application in this area). Here it would be worth turning to another new sociological work, Peter Saunders' 'Urban Politics', the first half of which is a useful summary of recent thinking on the relationship between housing and class, the latter being conceived of here in Marxist 'relations of production' terms. This is an important topic, because it brings up the thorny problem of how community struggles stand next to workplace struggles, a problem which Solidarity has had little to say about lately in spite of the riots. Saunders himself appears to see workplace struggles as primary, and I tend to agree with him: what is relevant, however, is not my opinion on the issue but the fact that it exists as an issue which is worthy of discussion. I'm fairly sure that Saunders' politics are too concerned with the need for leadership to inspire many readers of 'Solidarity', but his book is quite a good starting point in spite of this and the rather long empirical study which occupies its second half.

On a rather different subject, but again one which has received scant attention, there is 'The Dominant Ideology Thesis' by Abercrombie, Turner and Hill, unfortunately ridiculously overpriced at £12.50 in hardback. After noting the similarity of the cases put forward for the existence of a dominant ideology by certain Marxists (Gramsci, Althusser and Habermas) and various bourgeois sociologists, the authors argue that 'ideology' is hardly the major tool of social control it has been claimed to be. What social theorists have identified as the dominant ideology of modern capitalism is in fact incoherent and contradictory, and (most importantly) remains largely uninternalised by subordinate groups in society, even though the methods of ideological transmission developed under modern capitalism are potentially far more efficient than ever before. It is not ideology but the 'dull compulsion of economic relations', backed up by the threat of state violence, which keeps society in check, according to Abercrombie et al, and to claim otherwise is to drift dangerously close towards disregarding the degree to which conflict does exist in our society. I am personally unsure about their analysis on certain points - nationalism, for example, would seem to be quite important as a 'dominant ideology' as would certain ideas regarding sexual roles - though 'The Dominant Ideology Thesis' does a good demolition job on what is now orthodoxy. The issue is, moreover, of the greatest importance to libertarians: the all pervading influence of the dominant ideology has been dredged up time and time again, from Kautsky to the Situationists, as a justification for the direction of political action by elites with 'correct consciousness', and any intellectual ammunition for use against this tendency is more than welcome.



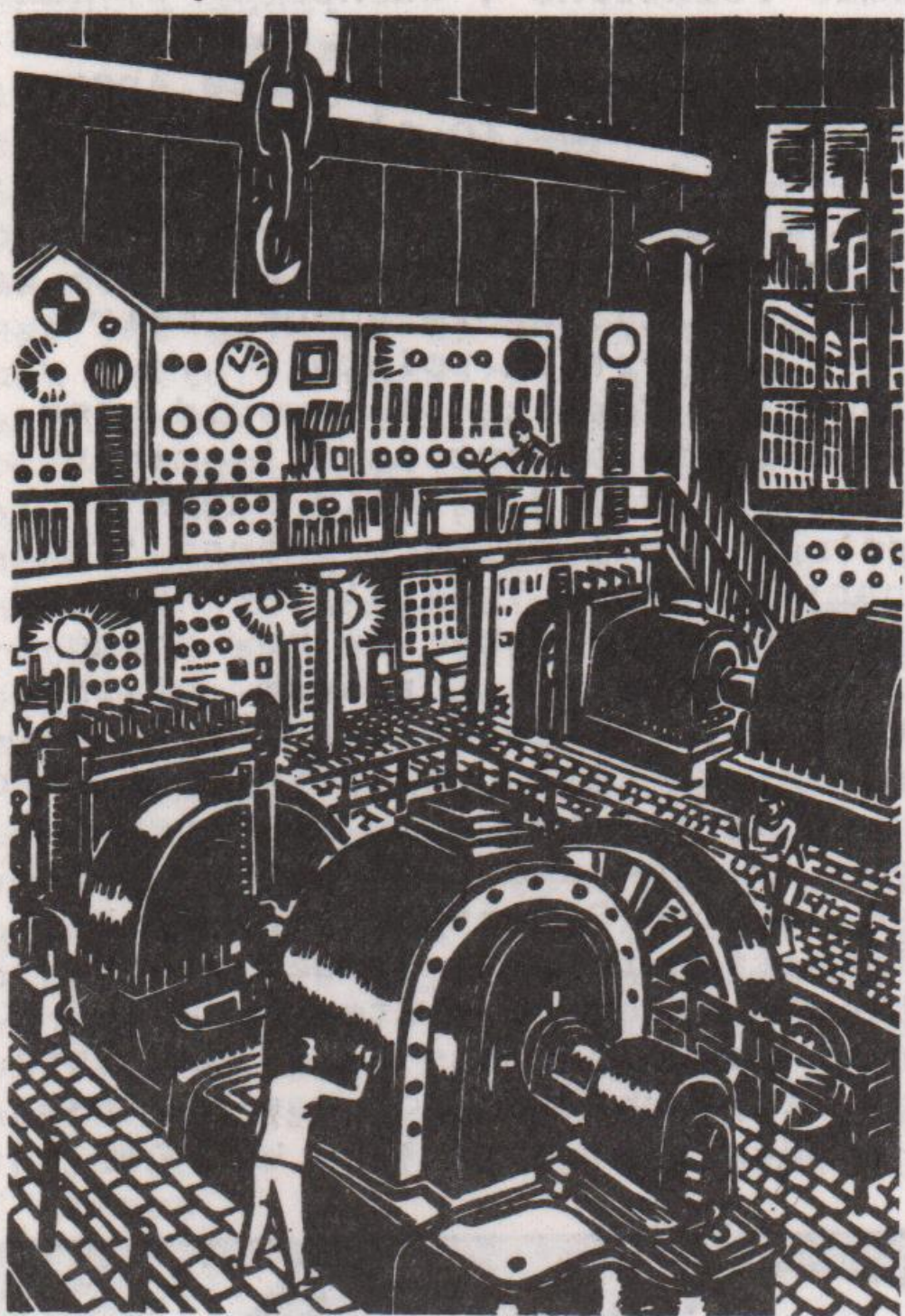
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I suppose that the point of all this is to emphasise that, despite the economic crisis, despite the authoritarian wave sweeping the left and the anti-intellectualist actionism of the anarchist movement, there still exist the tools to help us construct an analysis of society which is coherent, accurate and compatible with libertarian ends. Of course, none of the books mentioned here automatically yield 'the truth', they pose questions as well as giving answers. Nevertheless, I do think that an excursion into sociology is just as fruitful as one into radical psychoanalysis, ecology or Marxian economics: the best of it is even fun to read.

P.A.(Oxford)

Third wave

The Third Wave. Alvin Toffler. Pan £1.95.



The first wave, to quote the blurb, was the Agricultural Revolution (? 10,000 BC); the second wave was the Industrial Revolution (?1700 AD); the third wave is what is hitting us now - a change as least as great as the first two, not just in technology, but in the nature of society.

The microchip with its revolution in communications and information seems to be leading the way; but the third wave is being precipitated not just by advances in technology and the exhaustion of certain resources, but by increases in the size and speed of the world economy and in the prosperity and sophistication of consumers.

Toffler announces the end of the nation-state, mass production, the mass media, and the 9 to 5 job; production and consumption will merge together again on a high technology level. He doesn't say when; so it may all sound unreal to today's cliché youth worried about jobs and bombs; but unlike the moralising socialists, ecologists, pacifists and feminists, he doesn't present an utopia as the only alternative to doom or the eternal damnation of capitalism, or as the work of reconstruction after capitalism's final destruction; he's talking about changes which are already underway, which we're already creating, which we can become aware of and take advantage of; he's pointing out a hopeful direction in an apparently demoralising situation.

None of the facts and ideas he presents is startlingly new;

what's important is the connection he makes between them. This mayn't be original either, I can't say as I've read nothing else in this genre, but compared to what has been said in Solidarity about either the current economic crisis or the effects of the microelectronic revolution, 'The Third Wave' is a much more interesting starting point for discussing where the world is going.

There's plenty to criticise about the book; it gets fairly repetitive around the middle; he doesn't speculate enough about the possible new miseries of his new civilisation, though he admits loneliness will be one of the big problems of the transition to it. A more cynical view might hold that many of us are still trying to adjust to the first wave.

Others will condemn the book as an apology for progressive capitalism, a temptation to the heresy of reformism. It certainly avoids the question of the distribution of personal wealth, and it doesn't predict the end of all government. Instead it talks about decentralisation of decision-making, the replacement of hierarchies by networks of interlocking committees, and electronic voting on issues by the whole population or by randomly picked representatives. The present trend of our rulers to revert to one-man-management is seen as a last-ditch attempt by second wave forces to make sense of something they can't understand.

Toffler apologises if 'third wave people' look like a new middle-class of computer programmers, and he throws in feminists and ethnic minorities to make them look more radical-respectable. Here he does the third wave a great disservice as its appeal is far broader than that. But his apology reflects the ghettoisation of society which is one of the negative ways the second wave is adapting itself to the third wave impact.

In short, the book opens more questions than it answers. But the kind of overview it provides of the present in the light of the future is one well worth debating as a counterweight to dwelling on 'current' topics like Poland, the riots, CND or unemployment.

PS: I am now reading an excellent antidote to Third Wave optimism, James Bellini's Rule Britannia, not yet out in paperback. It's much better than the vapid TV series, but it still suffers from the use of doubtful argument and superficial statistics. However, his thesis is a fascinating one: put in Toffler's terms, for Britain at any rate the second wave was only a flash in the pan, and we are reverting to the feudal system. These pop future-predictors like Toffler and Bellini may be dismissed as commercial trivia by 'serious academics'; but they will only be exposing further how moribund their own 'sciences' are.

E.P.(Oxford)



Spain



The Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War, 1936 - 1939. by Ronald Fraser. (Penguin 1981 pp.628 £4.95p)

This book is based on over 300 interviews made by the author with participants in the Spanish Civil War. From these he draws a detailed mosaic of human experience. His work has only a few weaknesses: firstly, it only covers the disputed areas of the front and their respective civilian support - thereby ignoring the undisputed West and South-East of Spain. The author also fails to tell the story of the "ordinary people" (his term) in the war. Nearly all his interviews seem to come from middle-level militants of the various political organisations. His approach largely bypasses the need to provide analysis: instead we are confronted with a complex web of conflicting ideologies. One last complaint: despite two short review sections on "Women and the Revolution" (with credited footnotes to Liz Willis' Solidarity pamphlet) and "Women and the Counter-Revolution", nearly all the material in this book relates to the male experience. Yet women's rejection or acceptance of the traditional Catholic stranglehold over their lives was a vital factor in determining the political attitude of a village or an urban quarter.

However, the strengths of this book far outweigh the weaknesses. It's written simply and clearly - you don't need a degree in Spanish History to understand it. An intensely vivid picture of a society in turmoil emerges; no doubt it is only one picture from the many that could be drawn. To expect "objectivity" from a history of the Spanish Civil War would be absurd. To his credit, the author avoids the trap of liberal "objectivity" and the snare of attachment (however 'critical') to a single party programme. For these reasons, his book compares favourably with many anarchist works on the Spanish Revolution.

Direct commentary on the anarchist movement takes up perhaps a sixth of the book; the shock waves from this vast working class movement for self-management are felt throughout the book. Many lessons can be drawn from the evidence presented. There is nothing glorious about the street violence which some Autonomists see as revolution. The horror, the petty viciousness and the ineffective-

ness of such acts to further the cause of the revolution is a constant theme of the book. Similarly the "polarisation" of society - again sometimes invoked by revolutionaries - only embittered and perverted both sides out of fear and panic; emotions which nearly killed the "new world" it held in its heart. The "Blood of Spain" is not a melodramatic title - both the war and the revolution were tragedies.

Yet within this tragedy creativity did burst forth. The surrealistic summer of 1936 in Barcelona is one of the most exciting episodes recounted. A hallucinatory exhilaration created hundreds of initial-bearing committees, which existed only by good faith and the power of the imagination. The CNT debates on socialization (trade union corporate control of entire industries from the raw materials to the finished product), co-operatives (independent enterprises working within a market system) and collectivisation (co-operatives linked through a federation) remain relevant to discussions of self-management of the economy.

What went wrong? Did the CNT make a mistake? This book provides no answers, but does give some evidence. As I read it, the CNT was caught

between two unattractive alternatives. One was to collaborate totally with the Republic. Due to its monopoly of Soviet arms, the Communist Party soon dominated the other Republican forces. Only the opposition of the rank and file CNT prevented complete Stalinization of the Republic. In turn, Stalinization would have broken the forces of the Republic. The second choice - total revolution - would have depended on the ability of the CNT to

generalise the movement for self-management from its strongholds in Catalonia and Andalusia. Failure to do this would have resulted in a bitter internecine battle, which would have only aided Franco's forces. The CNT tried to muddle through in between these two distinct alternatives, failed to produce a clear perspective, and was outwitted by the communists and outgunned by the fascists.

This text also revealed another factor that was new to me. The idea that capitalism should be replaced by some sort of collective economy was also very strongly felt by Falangist and monarchist militants; ironically they even shared some of the same ideas as the revolutionary left. Franco meant the end of idealism on both sides.

The author of this book is no libertarian revolutionary, but he is a painstaking historian who gathers material with care and presents it with clarity and a real literary skill. Maybe this book is not the "fair" treatment of Spanish anarchism that some are seeking; it is an extremely vivid evocation of the revolution and the society within which it briefly flowered.

John Cobbett.

LENINGRAD NOTES continued

ter in the audience, who sent to the front masses of questions on slips of paper. It reminded me of accounts of the sex-education lectures of Wilhelm Reich in interwar Germany. Some of the questions were for answering after the lecture.

Libikh claimed that 40% of Soviet women do not reach orgasm; some similarly high percentage (60%)? of Soviet husbands do not caress their wives. He talked about pre-coital stimulating and post-coital tranquillising caresses, knowing the partner's erogenous zones, the need for reassuring communication, how the woman should not lie "like a block of wood".

Dialectics were duly applied. Apart from a crude attitude to women, men can also have an over-idealised attitude. "Love is not an insult". Men who fear otherwise should also bear in mind that under defined conditions - when by going to the cinema, walking along the Neva, etc. the woman has come to expect "that sexual intimacy will occur" - the absence of sexual approach is in fact offensive. Sexually inexperienced men should be open about the fact and not pretend to be Don Juans, and seek the help of their partners. Women also should not easily interpret male shyness as rejection.

However, an informant says that Soviet women are irritated at having to educate their partners, and seek older men in the hope that they will be more experienced. She pities her colleagues who at middle age "know only how to flirt" and little more, being disgusted at mention of oral sex etc. Soviet women may seem more confident in personality than British women, say in relation to their occupational roles, but this is only superficial. When I reported that I had heard the generalisation that Soviet men had weak characters, she agreed with this but could not account for it. In general there is a lot of insecurity and ignorance among both sexes - which



after all is true also in the West. If some problems - e.g. propaganda of ideal sexual images by advertising etc. are more severe in the West, others are more severe in the USSR - e.g. the fears arising from abortion being the main means of contraception.

Libikh dealt with questions mainly by reassuring the questioners that things were quite normal - e.g. the woman wanting to fuck again straight after doing it once, or the woman being older than the man. On pre-marital sex, he knew there were many different situations, and that it is usual in Sweden, but "this isn't Sweden". His main argument against was the need for relaxation in private, and as unmarried people can't get their own flats, privacy is a deficit good for them. Extra-marital sex prevented genuine family life. He abstained from natalist propaganda, simply stating that having children was the private decision of every comrade.

NUCLEAR WAR

I looked through a civil defence handbook. It dealt in detail with the effects of nuclear, bacteriological and chemical warfare, with emphasis on protecting industry. It is interesting that the sort of information which is restricted to quite small numbers of people in this country appears in a text for wide use. "But it's all rubbish; nuclear war will be the end, because of damage to the ozone layer". A clear idea of what nuclear war would mean may therefore be at least as common in the USSR as here. One guide gave a brief account of the communist future, but then added: "That at least is the official position. But personally I think there will be a nuclear war".

Stephen Shenfield



BREACH OF THE PEACE...



Bring
Back the
Cat!

A friend of ours has been arrested on a charge of breach of the peace (causing fear and alarm to the lieges) for handing out a leaflet headed "Riots in Britain" in an area of Aberdeen where youths and police had clashed the week before. 10 days later (August 8th) 6 people distributed the same leaflets in the same place but police who were nearby took no action. On August 15th, the "People's Journal" condemned the leaflet in the article we reproduce below.

Put this leaflet in the bucket!

A DISTURBING leaflet is being circulated in the Aberdeen area.

Headed "Riots in Britain . . ." it is printed and published by a group calling themselves Solidarity (Aberdeen).

The leaflet follows the recent riots in English cities and contains some statements which many people will find outrageous.

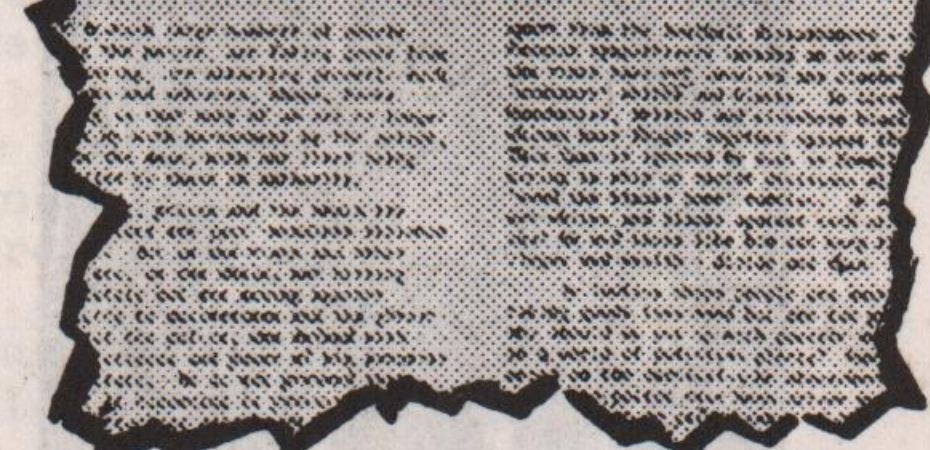
It attacks the police, both locally and nationally, while defending the rioters.

Right-thinking folk will dismiss the leaflet, which is finding its way into many city homes, without a second thought.

The danger is that some people, the young especially, may be influenced.

Part of it reads—"By looting shops people are quite rightly taking goods they need but are too poor to buy. Why should we put up with poverty and inequality in a world of potential plenty?

Riots in Britain...



The leaflet—it contains outrageous statements.

"Many have commented on the carnival-like atmosphere in areas where the police have been driven out. In taking such actions we gain a sense of our own power and a glimpse of how the world could be if all of us ran things, without any bosses, state, or police."

The leaflet criticises both the Conservative and Labour Parties for their response to the rioting.

It alleges that police in Aberdeen frequently harass young people in parts of the city. It also claims that a major motivation in the riots has

been people hitting back against police oppression.

At the end comes a call—

"If the struggles on the streets and the struggles in the workplaces can join together, if we can see the need not only to destroy this society but create a new one based on all having an equal say and producing for human need . . . then we can make the whole world a no-go area for all police, governments, bosses, authorities and leaders."

Solidarity give their address as c/o 163 King Street, Aberdeen.

The leaflet does not appear to be giving Grampian Police much cause for concern.

Chief Constable Alexander Morrison believes that 99% of people into whose hands the leaflet falls will not pay much attention to it and that it will end up in the waste basket.

"I don't think any credibility can be attached to it, but let the people be the judges of it," he said.