

housing, economic dependency and lack of childcare help or facilities. This 'choice' precipitates the most terrible guilt. This can be borne and assuaged if women know of others who share their dilemmas and who understand the agony of the choice. It is crippling if suffered alone — and in silence.

WOMEN SINKING INTO POVERTY

The Right know this — and exploit it to the hilt. The Right's politics on abortion are the politics of guilt, they feed off the worsening economic situation. Women have fewer and fewer real choices that they can make about their lives, as they are forced to choose between either deepening poverty or economic dependency on a man. The recession bites deep. The inequalities between male and female earnings is widening (certainly in this county the Equal Pay Act and the Sexual Discrimination Act have meant an increasing ghettoisation of women's work — and lack of childcare facilities and women's continuing primacy in childrearing means women continue to have to work part-time. All of which means women are poorer than men).

THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Let's look at a couple of the points which US socialist feminists make as reasons for women's involvement in anti-feminist anti-abortion politics.

The ideology which goes with a recession is to be more inward looking, xenophobic and patriotic. The perspective reads something like this — *"It's all the foreigner's fault our economy is faltering. It's the Arabs putting up the price of oil, the Third World or Soviet bloc or Japanese undercutting our prices. We were better off in the glorious good old days of the 50s and 60s. God was on our side."* God is still knocking around of course — especially in the States. Barbara Ehrenreich commented that, "God may turn out to be one of the most important public figures of the 80s!" Religion is a pessimist's panacea — we don't have to be responsible to ourselves or other people because God will take care of us, kill our enemies, punish the wicked. In the States the Moral Majority are not afraid of nuclear war because Americans are the chosen people who will win — and it's all there in the Apocalypse.

The revival of pessimistic backward looking ideology means a revival of the family. For a woman with little to cling to in a gloomy world, the family is often all she has. It's respectable. It's traditional and it ought to work out and make her happy with a bit more effort. After all everyone says it's her fault if it doesn't work out. Clinging onto your man is like clinging onto a plank in a stormy sea. It gives the illusion of a greater safety than it actually provides — and it is quite true that many women are only one man away from welfare.

FEAR OF FREEDOM

With the recession, and the media distortion of the WLM (more in the US than here) women arguing for freedom and equality are seen to disrupt the status quo and threaten other women. Sexual liberation is particularly threatening when, as I have mentioned, it often means greater freedom for men and more sexual irresponsibility. Inevitably, it is women who are blamed for sexual promiscuity or moral laxity, and while we're directed into blaming the victim, men are busy screwing us all. Both literally and metaphorically.

"In short, the anti-feminist woman is, like all other women, grappling with the weight of her oppression. She is responding to social circumstances — a worsening economy, a lack of aid and commitment from men — which feminists did not create and from which feminists all feel the consequences. The issues that she faces are the issues that face us too: her fears are nothing less than our fears. . . . The differences lie in our strategies for dealing with all this. Her strategy is defensive: reactionary in the sense of reacting to change with the desire to return to the supposedly simple solutions of the past . . . Like going to war or being born again it signifies an end to complexity, compromise and ambivalence . . . It is a strange kind of idealism — nostalgic idealism the glorification of a lost past rather than the striving for an undiscovered future." — Deirdre English.

Part of the glorification of this lost past is trying to reinstate the old rules of the marriage game. Men didn't have sex with women (unless they were 'loose' or prostitutes) without marrying them. Men were meant to provide for the kids, and take sex responsibly. Men got sex, and women's submission, women got stability and security — or so it supposedly went. Then along came the Pill and legalised abortion — sex and procreation were separated, and with it, women appeared to be able to compete equally with men, no longer tied to preg-

nancy and children. Women were now valued if they were independent, could pay their own way — and be a good fuck. Independence is fine so long as men reap the benefits in bed. After all, a woman who has orgasms is so much more fun to be with, as long as she's not too assertive.

NO RETREAT

For those of us who want to continue with the struggle for women's autonomy the strengthening of the Right is ideologically even more threatening than for men. We have more to lose — economically, politically and morally — as the recession threatens to wash us away. The answer is not to beat a hasty retreat to the sanctity of the family, monogamy or heterosexuality. If we try to conform or keep our heads down now we have no hope of offering an alternative world view and moral vision to people just as frightened, confused and oppressed as ourselves. Pro-family propaganda is powerful because it is part of all our pasts, part of our psycho-sexual construction. And the Right can — and does — play on our guilt and fears, and that is why it can intimidate its followers. It's like a psychological protection racket. Submit, be normal, play the rules, and Big Daddy, or Reagan, or Thatcher, will look after you in the long term. Marriage is safer than trying to make it on your own. Being a mother and housewife is really what you want.

RESPONSES IN BRITAIN

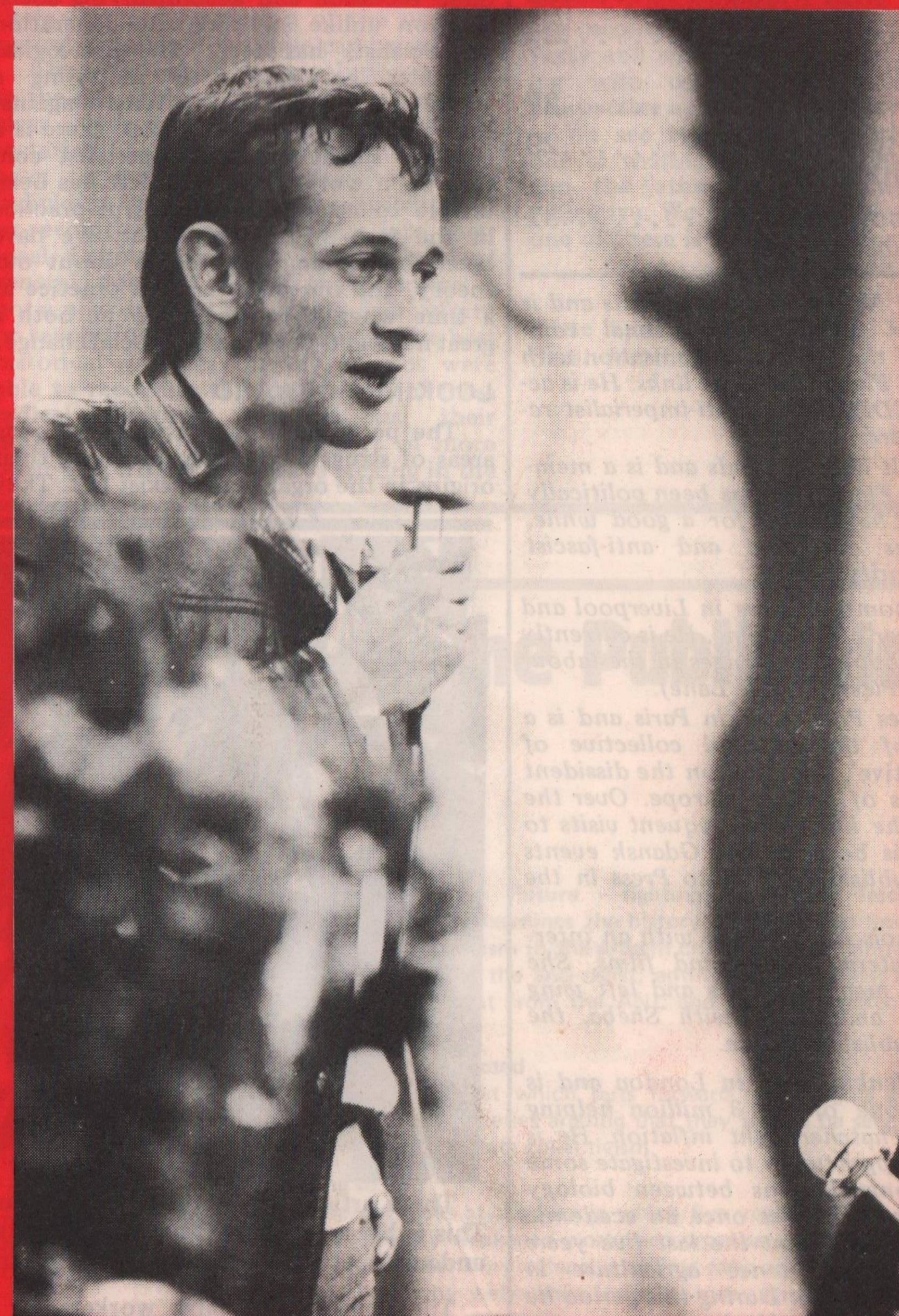
There are however, at least two possible responses to the conservative, anti-feminist ideology that we in Britain can have. Firstly, feminists can involve themselves in NAC to make its new slogan a reality. We need to actively campaign around reproductive rights, not just abortion, to give life to the words 'Our bodies, our lives — our right to decide.' If we don't know for ourselves how important the struggle is, then the American example should jerk us awake. Also, in Britain, I think NAC has the potential to be active in support of non-white women's experiences of racism in healthcare; and certainly local groups should be aware of the Nationality Bill's implications for women's relationships to their children

On a different tack, I think there must be a concerted effort to develop a pro-lesbian heterosexual politics. I mean a variety of things by this, and I'll set them down rather randomly. There is beginning to be a much more open discussion about the *reality* of sexuality with all its contradictions rather than a rather woolly, romantic, ill-defined right-on feminist sexuality, which is implied but often not defined. The sex issue of HERESIES is an example. When sexuality is discussed the central issue of why the majority of women are heterosexual (and often enjoy it) is largely ignored. Heterosexual women who are against lesbianism need to be argued against, but an unofficial censorship has operated against heterosexual women who support lesbians. These women often feel they ought not to be 'consorting with the enemy' and feel awkward about exploring within the WLM the contradictory nature of heterosexual desire. Some of the writings and activities of the feminist anti-pornography movement, I find expend much energy against male sexuality without a similar positive look at female sexuality. Female sexual desire is *not* always bland, unaggressive, devoid of fantasy or immune to being stimulated by voyeurism, photography or writing. Why should it be? And why don't we organise as vociferously against true romance, Barbara Cartland, and other romantic smut that has just as powerful an effect on creating our sexual identity and desires as pornography probably does for men? Romances are sexually implicit with women swooning (or having an orgasm?) when the hero kisses her hand — and that kind of sexual passivity is no more my sexual turn on than the sadistic pictures in *Hustler*. One of the dangers of focussing feminist energy to organising around pornography without addressing some of these questions is we can become largely indistinguishable from the Right — and it is part of a process of evading the issues on sexuality. Talking openly about sexuality often isn't easy, but as Amber Hollibaugh said in Issue 7 of the journal "Our responsibility as leftists is to begin to arm people with the concepts and information they need to take control of their own lives . . . Whenever we demanded of ourselves and our audience a confrontation around sexual and economic issues, ultimately we won." We need to find a feminist solidarity over sexuality to help free us from guilt, passivity and confusion — but that does not substitute its own repressive normative values in its place. Sexual repression is at the core of women's oppression — and sexual liberation must truly mean what it says.

Wendy Clarke

Revolutionary Socialism

Big Flame Magazine No. 8 Winter 81/82 70p



POLAND IN FOCUS

Solidarność conference report
+ interview with Andrej Wajda

Contributors: Jean-Yves Potel, Paul Thompson, Paul Holt, Jill Nicholls, Robin Jenkins, Bernard Navacelles

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Bernard Navacelles lives in Paris and is a member of the international commission of the OCT, an organisation with which Big Flame has close links. He is active in CEDETIM, an anti-imperialist research centre.

Paul Holt lives in Leeds and is a member of Big Flame. He has been politically active in Chapeltown for a good while, and makes anti-racist and anti-fascist work a priority.

Paul Thompson lives in Liverpool and is a member of Big Flame. He is currently writing a book on changes in the labour process at Plessey (Edge Lane).

Jean-Yves Potel lives in Paris and is a member of the editorial collective of 'L'Alternative', a journal on the dissident movements of Eastern Europe. Over the last year, he has made frequent visits to Poland. His book on the Gdansk events will be published by Pluto Press in the spring.

Jill Nichols is a feminist with an interest in Eastern Europe and films. She writes for many women's and left wing magazines, and works with Sheba, the feminist publishing house.

Robin Jenkins lives in London and is currently one of the 3 million helping Margaret Thatcher fight inflation. He is using the opportunity to investigate some of the contradictions between biology and Marxism. He was once an academic sociologist, and spent the last five years engaged in subsistence agriculture in Spain and Portugal. During this period he wrote 'The Road to Alto'.

Wendy Clarke is active in the women's movement in Liverpool, and writes long letters when on holiday.

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Revolutionary Socialism undergoes perpetual discussion of its role and character. It doesn't appear out of a vacuum and therefore has to respond to as well as describe political events and changes. At the present moment the revolutionary left is in a deep crisis, but with areas of positive change indicated which are of fundamental importance to socialist politics. The crisis has an objective basis — we are living through a period of economic recession and accompanying social reaction unlike anything our generation of socialists has seen. The ideological Thatcher government is mounting a severe and well-organised offensive against the working class. In addition, there is a growing threat of inter-imperialist conflict on a world scale. The left has been unable to establish a successful practice in the face of this onslaught. We have been left feeling pessimistic about our theory, and our impoverished practice at a time when there seems to be both a great need and potential for social change.

LOOKING FORWARD

The potential comes from developing areas of struggle which do not have their origins in the organised Marxist left. They

Revolutionary

have their beginnings either in the autonomy of the women's movement and the black movement, or in the radical protest movements that have grown up around issues such as ecology and the nuclear question. There is also in Britain the rise of the Labour left and the enormous impact that has had in the last few years on the whole of the left.

These are exciting and forward-looking areas of struggle which pose a challenge to the revolutionary left. A challenge that has been responded to rapidly, if superficially, by the reformist Marxist currents ranging from the Labour left to the Eurocommunist tendency within the Communist Party. In practice, the Eurocommunists talk about alliances but because of the unequal weight of the partners in the alliance, this boils down to old-fashioned labour movement hegemony. The feminists' and black militants' participation in the alliance is token and marginal.



Three articles in this issue of Revolutionary Socialism cover the events in Poland. This is because we feel that the importance of what is happening in Poland has been underestimated by the left in this country.

The demand of Polish workers for a free trade union has dramatic implications for other East European countries. And already at the recent Solidarity conference, messages from dissident Czech and Rumanian workers were read out to great acclaim. But there are also implications for us in the West — for the demands of Solidarity go very far on the way to workers demanding a decisive say in the management of the economy and the right to intervene in civil society.

It suits the media here to portray Solidarity as wanting to reproduce in Poland the divide between unions and political

things sweet in bourgeois democracies. But as the article on the conference makes clear, militants of Solidarity see themselves as intervening in all affairs of state except international relations. The confrontation that now looms in Poland is the direct result of this political forward march of Solidarity.

We would like to thank Eva Kaluzynska who supplied the photos, taken by Polish photographers, of events in Poland. Eva is raising money for photographic equipment for Polish militants. All donations should be sent to Eva Kaluzynska at 5 Tabley Road, London N7.

Socialism

We need to separate out the different levels and forms of challenge. The debate around the relation between feminist theory and Marxism bites into some of the key elements of Marxist thinking. The ideas raised by feminism confront economistic and deterministic interpretations of Marxism. Furthermore, feminism also questions the relationship between class consciousness and personal consciousness, such that it demands a change in the practice of the revolutionary left to incorporate feminist ways of working now as part of the struggle for change of all social relations. Many feminists have felt unable to continue working in organisations which incorporate a list of feminist demands in their programme but will not alter their daily practice. What is needed is an area of debate for the two theoretical perspectives to transform each other.

The black movement, like the women's movement, is a movement that organises around an objective difference with the aim of transcending the usage that capitalism has made of that difference. It is important because it challenges the Eurocentrism of Marxist movements, and because it emphasises a realignment of

forces against capitalism on the lines of racial oppression. Although the new wave of feminist theory began by drawing parallels between the oppression of women and blacks, it is clear that the debates now cover very different territory. There is a marked absence of dialogue between the black and white revolutionary left, and it is urgent that this does not continue.

The radical protest movements around ecology and the nuclear question have waxed and waned. At the present time they are in a period of growth, where the politics are confused but people respond at a gut level to the bleak vision of unlimited power in the wrong hands. While not belittling the emotional response that gets people involved, it is important that there is more discussion of the political potential released by these campaigns.

The relation of the revolutionary left to the rise of the Labour left has not been clear. One response has been that of sectarian hostility. The other reaction has been to surrender the initiative; at the individual level, with the massive entry of ex-revolutionary left members into their local Labour party, or at the level of general politics. Clearly the dilemma is not a new one and the debate over reform or revolution has a long history. The best historical writings on the subject were able to recognise the importance of mass radical reformist organisations, their potential and limits. That sort of more open but critical analysis is lacking in the

revolutionary left today.

TOWARDS CHANGE

As a result of these observations, we are proposing certain changes in the way in which *Revolutionary Socialism* is produced. We see the need for a magazine which presents a revolutionary politics but which is open to a genuine dialogue between the main historical currents of theory and practice and the new developing areas of struggle. The present editorial collective believes that a positive step in this direction is to ensure that the dialogue exists within the practice of producing the magazine itself. The editorial committee is open to people whose main political contribution is within the women's movement, the black movement, the ecology movement or the Labour Party and who are committed to developing with us a revolutionary socialist perspective and practice.

We see two levels of participation — one in writing articles for the magazine, and the other in joining the editorial collective. We hope many people will feel one of these is a possibility for them.

The Editorial Collective

(Pete Ayrton, Dave Harding, John Hillier, Sarah Martin).

Revolutionary Socialism Back Issues

No. 2. Articles on 1968 - Ten Years On, Youth Culture, Abortion, Black Autonomy, The IS Tradition, by Peter Anderson, Paul Thompson, Wendy Clarke, Julian Harber.

No. 3.

No. 3. Articles on the Labour Party, the Shop Steward Movement, Women and Waged Work, Barcelona, Italy, by Leo Panitch, Richard Hyman, Colleen Chesterman and Jill Hardman, Peter Anderson.

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No. 4. Articles on Local Organising, Health, Daily Life, by Hilary Wainwright, Chris Whitbread, Sheila Hillier, Paul Holt.

No. 5. Interviews on the Labour Party (with Raymond Williams) and Alternative Plans (Mike Cooley), articles on Socialist Feminism and the Crisis of the Revolutionary Left in Europe by Wendy Clarke and Peter Anderson.

No. 6. Articles on Women and the Russian Revolution, Sex and Class, the Labour Party, by Alix Holt, Anne Philips, Paul Holt.

No. 7. Articles on Anti-imperialism and Feminism, the New Right in the States and Spain, by Rayah Feldman, Pep Subiros, Allen Hunter, Amber Hollibaugh.

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An important pamphlet which puts forward new insights about the nature of 'socialist' societies arguing that they should be seen as a new mode of production - state collectivism. 1979

Organising to Win 60p

This pamphlet looks at the way in which five years of Labour government had seriously weakened workplace organisation in many sectors. It looks at the new Tory offensive against rank and file workers. The aim is to show why we've been losing so many struggles at work and how we can start winning again. 1979

Walking a Tightrope - Big Flame Women's Pamphlet. 60p

An excellent pamphlet which covers - women and violence, women in the community, women and work, women and imperialism, sexuality, women on the left. General framework is the tightrope between an autonomous movement and mixed left organisation. 1980

Brother Goose Comic Book. 50p

A selection of the incisive political cartoons that have been delighting Big Flame readers for years, plus some new ones. Available from - Brother Goose, c/o Big Flame, 43a Hardman Street, Liverpool 1. 1980

GRASS ROOTS IN FRANCE

The Left in this country has uncritically welcomed the recent socialist electoral victory in France. Coming after a period of working class *retreat*, the socialist victory will not, for the present, have grass root pressures to contend with.

This article, written from the perspective of the revolutionary left, analyses the political context in which the socialists came to power, the policies of the new government and its continuity with Gaullism.

Immediately after the victory of Francois Mitterrand, its candidate in the May presidential elections, the French Socialist party (PS) obtained in the June parliamentary elections its highest ever vote (38%) and because of the electoral system ended up with a parliamentary majority. Even with a sharp decline in the Communist vote (down from 21% to 16%) and that of the revolutionary left (down from 3.3% to 1.6%), the left in France received 55% of the votes cast — a record.

So, the PS controls the situation; a reversal of 23 years of right-wing rule. An event of worldwide importance since it goes against the trend of monetarist and New Right electoral victories (e.g. Thatcher in the U.K., Reagan in the States) which have led certain rash political commentators to announce the death of Keynesianism and social-democracy. The influential newspaper *Le Monde* described Mitterrand's victory as the coming to power of a 'socialism of the third type' as opposed to both the 'actually existing socialism' of the Soviet bloc and the social democracy of Northern European countries like Germany. Other more euphoric commentators see the Mitterrand government as the political realisation of May 1968 — pointing to the presence in the government of Regis Debray, who fought alongside Che and of four Communist ministers (the first for 34 years). It is a government whose first acts were to suspend construction of the nuclear power plant at Plogoff and withdraw plans to enlarge the military camp at Larzac — both focal points of the struggle of the last few years. And on the economic front, the Mitterrand government is committed to nationalise 11 giant industrial groupings and that part of the French banking sector that remains in private hands.

LEFT GAULLISM

It would however seem that this 'new left' government is homing in on some fairly traditional policies. Its foreign policy is very revealing. Mitterrand and Cheysson, the foreign minister, have made quite clear the pro-European and pro-North Atlantic nature of their foreign policy. At the Madrid meeting of the heads of state, Cheysson announced French government support for the entry of Spain into NATO on the grounds it 'was a focus for the defense of christian and occidental values': even though France itself is, since De Gaulle, no longer a member of NATO. And Mitterrand has also been very supportive of Schmidt's fight for the deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles in West Germany — a fight which is being waged with great bitterness inside the ruling Social Democratic party. Mitterrand's coming to power has led to no weakening of the Franco-German alliance and his Atlantic allies have been reassured by the hard-line against the Soviet Union. Still, the relationship to the United States is not clear cut. The PS and sometimes the government insists on the importance of the 'North-South dialogue', the struggle against apartheid (though the government has made clear it will honour all civil and military contracts with South Africa and Argentina). Mitterrand's government has expressed solidarity with Nicaragua and, much to the annoyance of the Reagan government, has co-signed with Mexico a declaration stating that the FDR must be part of any political solution in El Salvador. Even if this support is only at the level of words, it can be of use to anti-imperialist governments (Mozambique, Nicaragua etc) and liberation movements.

This 'third-worldism' of the French government excludes the taking up of neutralist or non-aligned positions; on the contrary, it is the affirmation of French independence and the shoring up of French imperialism in those areas where it is still hegemonic (e.g. parts of Africa). This policy re-affirms the orientations of De Gaulle. This *Gaullism* is apparent even in the Middle East where the Mitterrand government is re-affirming the traditional equilibrium of French diplomacy

which means links with Saudi Arabia as well as Iraq and Libya — as well as leaving space for the pro-Zionism traditional to social-democracy! This Gaullism is also apparent in the government's military policy. Another nuclear sub has been ordered and the minister of the armed forces has announced his intention to beef up the army and make it more 'republican'.

ECONOMIC REALISM

What is clear is that the large swing to the PS at the elections reflected a belief of many voters that it had the best policies to deal with the economic crisis and the fast rising rate of unemployment. The *Socialist Project*, the name given to the 1980 PS programme, put forward a Keynesian reflation of the economy through an increase of working class consumption. The function of this 'left' programme was to help the leadership of the party block the rise of the modernist right-wing of the party (led by Rocard) whose outlook was much less statist and more for a decentralised mixed economy. However, now that he is in power, Mitterrand's economic policies have become much more 'realist'. Delors, his finance minister, was a member of the Gaullist government of Chaban-Delmas (1969-72) and his role is to build a bridge with the financial establishments who are fearful of the possibilities of extreme measures. So far, a moderate increase in the minimum wage has been enacted, one hour taken off the working week (35 hours a week in 5 years time), and jobs have been created in the public sector in an attempt to reduce unemployment. So far, the government is able to argue that the mess the economy is in is inherited from the last government. The Mitterrand government still maintains its support from the working class who expect a lot from the promised structural reforms of the economy (nationalisations etc).

POLITICAL CALM, SOCIAL TRUCE

The Mitterrand government is in a 'political state of grace'. The right wing political parties have not yet recovered from the shock of their electoral defeat — brought about by their own divisions. The owners of capital are far from happy with Mitterrand's election but so far their attitude has been one of surly negotiation — at the same time refusing to make available for investment the funds the government needs to reflate the economy. The Communist Party is in a state of crisis. It fought the election with a hard-line programme that was sectarian towards the Socialists, racist towards immigrants (many of whom can't vote) and chauvinist in its appeal to the French workers — and they got a smack in the face: losing 25% of their electoral support. In comparison with this 'neo-Stalinism' of the PC, the socialists were able to appear as a unifying force.

At the trade union level, things are just as quiet. The CGT, the union controlled by the Communist Party, would like to put a 'left' face but its freedom of action is limited by the need not to put the Communist ministers on the spot — of course, the Communists have been brought into the government to make sure the CGT behaves. The CFDT, a union close to the Socialists, sees itself as putting into practice the policies of the new government. Some of its full-timers have become advisors to the government. There is a left wing opposition in the CFDT but it has been disorientated by the new situation and is uncertain how to go forward. (1)

STATE OF GRACE

This political state of grace that the Mitterrand government is enjoying is the effect of the social peace. In the 1970's, there was a convergence in the development of workers' struggles and the struggles of the other social movements. It is the period of the struggle at Lip (1973-78), of many factory occupations where workers occupied and carried on

production, of the struggle against the extension of the army camp at Larzac (1970-81), of ecological and anti-nuclear struggles (e.g. the Malville demonstration was in 1977) and the rise of the women's movement. Over the last few years these movements underwent many defeats (e.g. workers in the steel and textile industries, immigrant workers) and where resistance remained, it was isolated — everyone was struggling on their own. This isolation took place within a worsening political situation. The Giscard government moved to the right politically — no dialogue with the unions, more racist laws and the expulsion of immigrants, a frontal confrontation with the independence movements in Corsica, Brittany and the Basque country: and a campaign for 'law and order', for national security and the 'defense of the western way of life'. Confronted with this right-wing offensive, what remained of the radical social movements had no alternative but to remain within the confines of a defensive strategy of resistance.

So, the Mitterrand government has two aces up its sleeve. Firstly, it has the passive support of the masses. And secondly, it has the sympathy of many activists of the social movements since on coming to power it has removed the most blatant aspects of the policy of repression of the Giscard government — gone are many of the racist laws, the emergency tribunal, the arbitrary expulsion of immigrants, the death penalty etc. Even so, the Mitterrand government has not removed itself from the logic of capitalist politics; for example, the nuclear power station at Plogoff is suspended but, as a whole, the nuclear power programme remains unchanged, or again, racist laws are repealed to be replaced by more 'cool' ways of dealing with immigrants.

THE ECHO OF MAY 68

A strength of the Mitterrand government has been its ability to recuperate for its own ends former members of the extra-parliamentary left. This could lead one to assume that France is moving towards a period of social consensus which would make possible a 'left austerity' policy far removed from working class interests. A leading industrialist recently said



During the election campaign, Socialist Party posters advised voters 'to turn over a new leaf' and they did. (Sue Greenberg - photo)

that the election of Mitterrand was 'a distant echo of May 68'; this is correct. The PS articulates the needs of the new, middle strata, students ten/fifteen years ago, who now have expectations of more power but also of qualitatively different social relations. The PS type of 'self-management' goes some way to answer these aspirations as do the government's plans for administrative decentralisation (very important in a country as centralised as France). The economic crisis will no doubt greatly reduce the government's scope for reforms. This could well lead to disillusion amongst these middle strata — they could then become favourable to a right wing solution. Whether or not this happens depends on how the working class reacts. If it allows itself to be integrated into the process of government, Mitterrand's France will come to look more and more like Schmidt's Germany. On the other hand, if the working class refuses to be integrated, it could lead to the rebirth of the social movements and even to contestation within the socialist party, which is not a homogeneous political force.

The occurrence of the (from our point of view) more optimistic scenario depends, to a certain extent, on what happens to the political forces to the left of the PS. The Communist Party (PCF) is greatly weakened by its division into a euro-communist and neo-stalinist wing — the latter being dominant in the PCF. However, a positive factor is the

appearance of dissident oppositions within the PCF (e.g. the Forum of Critical Communists, the Communist Manifesto Movement etc) who are asking themselves the same questions as are members of revolutionary left groups, with whom they are in discussion. The revolutionary left was greatly weakened during its crisis in the 1976-78 period. Some groups (e.g. the PSU) are proposing a 'division of labour' with the Mitterrand government whereby the PSU would organise at the grass-roots and leave the 'summit' (the political) to the PS (and the government). Others like the LCR (the 4th International in France) see the victory of Mitterrand as the 'harbinger of revolutionary developments' and are making a priority in this period of maintaining their own organisation — which has weathered the last few years better than most. The OCI, a sectarian Trotskyist group, has sunk so low as to support the right wing of the PS — covering up this support with militant slogans in its press.

A EUROPEAN DIMENSION

We are faced with the growth of a modernist reformism on a European scale. A growth that the revolutionary left has so far failed to come to terms with. In many European countries, social democracy has given itself a new lease of life — in power in France and Greece, with the Bennite opposition in Britain, as a bastion of anti-fascism in Spain (PSOE), and even now in Germany (the left of the SPD). In some cases, this new lease is facilitated by a division of labour with political forces produced by the new social movements of the 1960's (the alliance between the Socialists and the Radicals in Italy, PSU support for the Mitterrand government in France, the entry in the Labour party in Britain of many libertarians and non-aligned socialists etc).

We urgently need to understand this new social-democracy which cannot just be dismissed as a 'betrayal' of the masses whose immediate interests it benefits. Its growth coincides with the failure of the revolutionary left to give a *political expression* to the struggles of the new working class and the new social movements whose bloom in the 1970's we were an organic part of. One thing is certain — if we are unable to elaborate such a political expression, the new social democracy will hurt as much as the old one.

Bernard Navacelles

Footnote

1. French trade unions are divided into confederations along political lines. The main ones are the CGT (dominated by the PCF), the CFDT (modernist socialist) and FO (right-wing social democracy). Recent elections showed as respective strengths CGT — 42%, FO — 17%.

Appendix: A short history of post-war social democracy

From the beginning of the post war period, the old social democratic party (the SFIO) went into decline. Its internal policies were reactionary, its international ones were colonial and it supported the arrival of De Gaulle. In the 1969 presidential elections, Deferre, the SFIO candidate, got 5% of the vote.

In 1971, a new party was formed (the PS) with Mitterrand as its leader: it included the SFIO (as its right wing) and a left wing centered around the think-tank CERES. In 1972, the PS together with the PCF and the Left Radicals drew up a 'common programme for government' which was the political basis on which Mitterrand fought the 1974 election as candidate of left unity. In these elections, Mitterrand got 49.2% of the vote (in fact only 3% less than in 1981).

In 1974, the leadership of the PSU (including Rocard) an influential left wing group, joined the PS — this greatly adds to its credibility as a force for progress and change. The PS begins to grow rapidly and threaten the PCF's position as the largest party on the left.

In 1977, the PCF, faced with the threat from the PS, leaves the common programme of the Left and returns to sectarian isolation. As a result of this dissolution of the common programme, the PS and the PCF do badly in the 1978 elections.

In 1979 (and 1980) Rocard, on a platform of 'self-management' mixed with 'decentralised capitalism', challenges Mitterrand for the leadership of the PS; his challenge fails but gets the support of 40% of the delegates at the party conference. In order to defeat the Rocard challenge, Mitterrand is forced to ally himself with CERES — his platform is a traditional left one of statism + nationalisations.

It is clear that after his presidential victory, the Mitterrand current is in control of the party. Though his alliance with the CERES may come unstuck if Mitterrand fails to carry through the economic transformations he is committed to in his programme.

RIOT AND REVOLUTION

The politics of an inner city



The wave of "disturbances" which swept Brixton, Southall, the inner cities of most major towns, and parts of several smaller towns during the first two weeks of July have been either dismissed as "riots" or hailed as "insurrections". This article argues that the events in one inner city area of Leeds were an uprising by a small section of the black and white working class. This view is based on an account of the development of political action in this area over the past ten years, and on a critique of the narrow categories used by most sections of the far left when they come to decide what is "political".

The uprising in Chapeltown, Leeds, took place on the nights of 11th/12th and 13th/14th July. Unlike the events in Brixton (9th-13th April), Southall (3rd July) and Toxteth, Liverpool (3rd to 8th July), there was no particular incident which sparked off the action. The mass media were alive with the reports of battles with the police, "looting" and petrol bombs as young people took to the streets throughout the previous week in Liverpool, Manchester and all parts of London. It was obvious to everyone, not least to the police who told business owners to take precautions, that something would happen in Chapeltown. Table 1 provides a not very reliable indicator (police arrests) of the degree of activity in the preceeding few days. Table 2 shows that, on the first night of the action in Leeds, youth throughout the country were just as busy.

CONFRONTATION

On Friday 10th July, at about midnight, a small group of white youth smashed the window of the Jewish bakers and an Asian owned Post Office on Chapeltown Road. There is no evidence that these youths were either fascists, insurrectionists or casual vandals. No-one seemed to take much notice of the incident, despite the rumours that had been circulating over the previous few days. In the early hours of Sunday morning (12th July) a mainly black crowd of youth smashed many shop windows on Roundhay Road (the eastern boundary of Chapeltown) and helped themselves to some electrical equipment. Some say they were provoked by a raid on a blues (a West Indian party). Others say they were on the streets already. In the early hours of Monday morning (13th) a far more intensive confrontation took place. A larger crowd, including many white youth, attacked the police in the

residential heart of Chapeltown. They fought pitched battles, using petrol bombs, and they smashed and burned down a number of shops and businesses. The police say they deployed 300 police with riot shields, and 43 of them were injured. They say £2 million worth of damage was caused.

This bare description can be paralleled in most other inner cities, and in the black areas of many other towns. The fabric of Chapeltown is very like that of other black areas: large terraced houses, long ago deserted by the bourgeoisie, now damp and decaying and being replaced by neat brick boxes. A working class population which is a mirror of colonialism and war; an international working class of West Indians, Asians, Irish, Scots, English, Poles, Ukrainians, Italians, Yugoslavs. In 1975, 39% of Chapeltown's population was born in Britain, 31% in the West Indies and 11% in Asia.¹

THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Why should Chapeltown have exploded on 12th and 13th July? When you notice that there were disturbances in virtually all-white towns like Gloucester and Cirencester, you have to be careful not to try and generate a global theory out of your own town's activity, and it must be stressed that this account is specific to one inner city area in Leeds. Extensive research would be needed to derive a more general explanation than that offered here. At best this article might suggest a method of analysis of the politics of the inner city.

A full explanation would have to include an account of the specifics of migration from the Caribbean and Asia to Chapeltown, and an account of the transfer of material resources out of Chapeltown, over the past thirty years. The former is important because it has a bearing on the type of West Indian and Asian organisation which has developed

here, and the latter is important because it helps explain why the plight of the white people in the area has much in common with that of the black people. But here I am concentrating on one other aspect of the explanation of why Chapeltown exploded. I am attempting to make sense of the events in terms of the political processes of the area over the past ten or so years.²

When the Leeds Labour Party agreed to changes in the council ward boundaries in 1973, prior to the re-organisation of the council into a Metropolitan District, it knew it was handing over the whole of Chapeltown to the Conservatives. It probably did not foresee that one consequence of that agreement was to sever the connection between politicians (e.g. councillors and council officers) and the people of Chapeltown. The Chapeltown area was already blessed with a Conservative MP (Sir Keith Joseph), but among the rabbit warren of council wards covering the area there was one safe Labour ward which returned three Labour councillors. The councillors were not noticeably left-wing, but they did uphold the view that they were there to help people with their problems. After re-organisation, the merged wards resulted in the election of Conservative councillors, who were quite unabashed in their refusal to hold surgeries or attend local meetings.

END OF POLITICS

The severing of the connection between conventional politics and Chapeltown can be quite precisely dated. The very last time that significant numbers of people attempted the "normal" method of influencing council policy was on 30th September 1973. Two hundred people packed into Cowper Street School to fire questions and criticisms at the council. Of the fourteen local councillors who, in one way or another represented the area, only the three Labour councillors turned up.

This meeting had been organised by the Chapeltown Community Association. Formed on 31st March 1971, the Community Association represented the efforts of the first wave of white gentrification to establish a conventional

TABLE 1 — THE BUILD UP

Place	Date	Arrests
St Paul's (Bristol)	2 April	100
Brixton (London)	9-13 April	244
Finsbury Park (London)	20 April	91
Southall (London)	3 July	23
Toxteth (Liverpool)	3-8 July	200
Moss Side (Manchester)	10 July	53
London	10 July	385
Birmingham	10 July	42
Wolverhampton	10 July	22
Liverpool	10 July	65
Preston	10 July	24
Hull	10 July	27
Luton	10 July	1

TABLE 2 — THE WEEK-END: mid-day Saturday 10 July to mid-day Sunday 11 July

Place	Arrests	Place	Arrests
Stoke	50	Fleetwood	25
Blackburn	43	Preston	25
Wirral	40	Derby	24
Blackpool	40	Birkenhead	31
Manchester	38	Kettering	21
Leicester	32	Portsmouth	21
Nottingham	29	Huddersfield	20
Sheffield	20	Wallasey	17
Maidstone	13	Leeds	11
Tunbridge Wells	11	Halifax	11
Corby	8	Gloucester	7
Cirencester	4	Birmingham/	
		Wolverhampton	329
Hackney	103	Bradford	68
Walthamstow	13	Luton	25

political/community organisation. It gathered under its flag a few middle-of-the-road West Indians and Asians, some of the long-established "respectable" white residents, and had a considerable following among ordinary Chapeltown people over the first two or three years of its life. Democratically run by a skillful and energetic town planner, it had considerable success in improving local conditions.

It was made redundant by the emergence of a new form of West Indian organisation. In the early 1970's, West Indian activists began more general organising that took up the issues affecting all West Indians in the area. The two major events were the summary dismissal of the white middle class ladies doing good for the 'disadvantaged' by running the Studley Grange Playgroup (the Chapeltown Parents and Friends Association took control in November 1972); and the strike organised by parents of children at Cowper Street School in protest against the lack of facilities and the racism at that school (Chapeltown Parents Action Group, June 1973).

MILITANT POLITICS

Both these actions were a testing ground for a confrontational style of politics, and both succeeded. The strike at Cowper Street School was sprung on the council and was completely effective. The Director of Education was summoned to mass meetings of angry and articulate black parents, the Headmaster was "moved on", and resources put into the school.

This activity in Chapeltown was linked to the upsurge of black militancy throughout the country at that time. A black militant organisation — the Afro-West Indian Brotherhood (it did contain women as well) was centrally involved in the school strike. It did not take a vanguard position, however, and worked with the parents, and with members of the island groupings, in order to form a united and combative Parents Action Group.

The Chapeltown Community Association was marginal to all this, but it too went through a process of development. For not only black people were taking militant direct action. In May 1973 a large group of white parents on the Scott Hall estate, often regarded as part of Chapeltown, staged twice weekly demonstrations blocking the rush-hour traffic in support of their demand for a Pelican crossing. They too refused all mediation, and only called off their action after six weeks of protest, when the council made a cast-iron guarantee that the crossing would be provided.

This wave of direct action influenced the more progressive members of the Community Association, but the other factor which transformed the situation was the growing realisation that talks were not going to bring results in a situation of economic down-turn. In March 1974 the council launched its own effort to dampen the militancy in Chapeltown — a "participation planning exercise" which proposed all kinds of new housing, community facilities and environmental improvements. However, it was already too late for the council to try and restore faith in "participation". It leafleted every house in the area to try and draw people into the eight local meetings it organised between March and April. According to its own figures, only 7% of the local adults turned up.

PLANNING TO DECEIVE

A pamphlet produced in July 1975 by the community newspaper *Chapeltown News*³ to coincide with the publication of the council's final ideas about the future of the area, attempting to put the exercise in a materialistic context.⁴ It highlighted the growing economic crisis. It pointed out that two months after the council had suggested an improvement programme for Chapeltown it had announced that it could not afford to employ any new staff. It showed that the crisis in building was acute (1970-74: price of land up by 195%, cost of building a house up by 50%). It correctly predicted that there would not be enough money to meet the promises.

ROTTING FISH

It is unlikely that many people in Chapeltown saw the situation in the precise terms described in this pamphlet. But there is no doubt that there was no faith in conventional political activity. Even the Community Association had organised direct action in piling rubbish in Chapeltown Road to stop the traffic, and tipping rotten fish on the Cleansing Dept. office floor to protest against the lack of proper street cleaning (July 1974). In the autumn of 1974 there was unprecedented activity among the Sikh community, including demonstrations, in opposition to the local busworkers' and

management's refusal to allow Sikhs to wear turbans on the buses. Again, militant activity was successful.

It is now clear that the culmination of this departure from the time-honoured methods of negotiation and compromise was the Chapeltown Bonfire Night incident, on November 5th 1975. About a hundred youth, almost all of them black, had gathered at a traditional bonfire night spot on Spencer Place. They stoned an unmarked CID car which drove slowly through the crowd, and this was the signal for a two or three hour battle in which five policemen were injured, two very seriously, and several police cars were smashed up. The Bonfire Night action marked a turning point for local politics.

Frequently, mass struggle takes place before the appropriate political formations have been created, and this was one such instance. The various Parents Groups over the previous few years had been militant in ways not favoured by labour politicians, but they had always set their demands and made a very pointed intervention against specific targets. While their activities had been on behalf of the youth, and had included some far-sighted young people among their leaders, there was no specific organising with the mass of youth. In fact, by this time the most militant of the black leaders had left Chapeltown, and influence had transferred back to ethnic organisations based on particular islands.

RASTA INFLUENCE

The aftermath of Bonfire Night highlighted the political vacuum. Almost all the black adults were shocked and dismayed by the severity of the assault launched by the youth. The leading figures among the youth themselves were turning towards Rastafarianism and were thus unwilling to mount an overtly political campaign. The few remaining people in the community who had experience of the earlier militant organising were unable to set up a defence campaign. *Chapeltown News*, the community paper started in October 1972 and by now a local paper with a political and international analysis carried reports and comment which was uncompromisingly in support of the youth. It was avidly read, but was incapable of organising in Chapeltown because most of the collective were white.

By the time the youth came to trial in June 1976, however, one major step had been taken by the black community leaders. They had organised a legal defence composed of black

barristers for almost all the defendants. A massive victory was obtained in the courts, due to the aggressive tactics against the police adopted by the barristers (led by Rudy Narayan) and to the fact that the jury was almost entirely working class.

But it was a court-room victory. There was no effective grass-roots organising. In the absence of political leadership, the youth were beginning to see Rasta as the only viable option — a process which is even truer today. While it is wrong to see Rasta as apolitical — its affirmation of blackness, its emphasis on black self-organisation and its insurrectionary music are clearly political in one sense — the fact is that almost all Rastas see the methods of politicians, revolutionary or reformist, as part of the Babylon system to which they are fundamentally opposed.

POLITICAL VACUUM

Nor was the political vacuum in Chapeltown filled over the next five years. The political down-turn during that period — the failure of the Labour government, the rise of racism and Thatcherism — contributed to a drawing up of the horns among blacks and whites in Chapeltown. The white *Chapeltown News* collective handed over the paper to the few black militants who had tried to campaign over the Bonfire Night Trial, but the paper folded in 1977. No political ideology that went beyond the black militancy of the early 70's took root in the area.

Instead, a political method which made a fundamental break with the earlier militancy was adopted by several community leaders. Their efforts were focussed on developing certain community projects. These projects — the Law Centre, the Harambee hostel for homeless youth, the "Boys" Club, the (forthcoming) West Indian Centre — all provide an extremely valuable service, and they have insisted on local community management. But none of them are, or can be, a focus for political organising in the community. The educational functions they perform are carefully contained within the parameters set down by their funding agencies (the local and national state), and they live in fear of the accusation that they are "political". Now that several local activists are actually paid by the local state, the potential for militant activity is reduced even further.

EXPLAINING THE UPRISING

This brief analysis of the recent political history of Chapeltown is designed to highlight the absence of a local organisation which could express the grievances of the people through the methods of militant politics. It suggests that the youth had no other avenue than the street violence of early July through which they could make their feelings heard. It shows that Chapeltown has a long experience of direct action as a substitute for the conventional political methods — methods which have been scorned for many years. But it does not prove that the action by the youth should be regarded as political action, to be dignified with the expression "uprising".

In an attempt to prove this point, I first want to look briefly at the analyses put forward by some other tendencies on the left. In one sense, everyone on the left admits that there was a political dimension to what are frequently described as "riots". It is commonly argued that the "riots" are a result of the political and economic crisis, and that they express the alienation of youth, in particular black youth. Most leftists would agree with Tony Benn:

*"These policies (or successive British Governments) — now described as monetarism — have already destroyed much of our industry, undermined our Public Services, laid waste whole areas of our country, widened the gap between rich and poor, and virtually blanked out hope for whole sections of our population who are now condemned to long term deprivation. These are the real causes of the recent disturbances."*⁵

The International Marxist Group attempted to sum this up in a memorable variation of their CND slogan: "We want jobs, not riot police".⁶

But several tendencies on the left explicitly deny that the youth themselves are taking politically valid action. Tony Benn, for instance, says that "The Labour Party does not believe in rioting as a route to social progress nor are we prepared to see the Police injured in the course of their duties".⁷ Chris Harman, of the Socialist Workers Party, also maintains that the "rioters" are not employing the correct methods for changing society:

"The power of the rioters lies in their ability to drive the police off the streets... but the streets they control are the streets of poverty. They burn down parts of the old society but they do not have the means to build a new one. For those

*means lie elsewhere, in the productive core of society, the factories and mines and docks."*⁸

Even Stuart Hall seems anxious to assure his readers that the riots are "not the beginning of Armageddon... not even the birth pangs of St Petersburg 1917", although he later discards this facetious approach and talks of "civil disorder" and a "culture of resistance".⁹

On the other hand, those who do regard these events as politically valid — for example the Brixton and other Defence Committees — provide no justification for their assertion that they were "uprisings" rather than riots. It is necessary therefore to try and spell out the conditions under which events gain the status of being "political" and against the status quo. We have to look at the terrain on which the action takes place, the type of people taking part, their ideology and political consciousness, their method of organising and the actual effects of their actions.

Chris Harman, in the quote above, maintains that the area for struggle which is defined as political is the "productive core of society". Harman fails to recognise that the rule of capital extends beyond the walls of the factory. The modern ruling class, in particular since the advent of the welfare state, has long recognised that the discipline of work is insufficient to control the working class. It uses its control of social life, via education, housing, leisure and welfare benefits policies, as one means of containing and directing the grievances of the working class. The areas where people live — affectionately, if sometimes inappropriately known as "the community" — thus become terrains of struggle against the state.¹⁰ As the number of people drawing benefit or working "on the side" grows, the city streets will become a even more frequent site of struggle.

So far, this article has suggested that the people taking part in the uprising in Chapeltown were young, and mainly black. One reason for arguing that the action was not an important political rebellion is that such a small section of the population took part. There are various points to be made here. One is that there were a large number of white youth taking part. Many of them live in the area. Many others came from nearby white working class estates. It has been said that some of those white youth came into Chapeltown because they saw an opportunity to fight against the blacks, while others came to grab their chance to deal some blows against the police.

Whatever their motives, it is an important fact that so many white youth took part. Nor is it surprising. In Chapeltown, the housing conditions, the schools, the social facilities are common to all, white and black. The police vendetta against local youth is almost as ferocious for whites as it is for blacks. On the outlying estates, social conditions are, in some areas, as bad as if not worse than, those in Chapeltown. While autonomous political organising in Chapeltown has been uneven, it has brought some gains, in the form of new housing and projects; but in the white estates it has been almost entirely absent; the only political activity is to deliver the vote to absentee Labour councillors.

The second point is to remember that, while only the most militant or the most foolhardy actually took part in the violence, hardly anyone in Chapeltown condemned them. On the Sunday morning after the first night of window breaking, many of the older people seemed worried and upset. On the Monday morning, there was an atmosphere of jubilation among many of the youth, surveying the smouldering ruins of Chapeltown Road. Crowds of older people expressed their concern, and many, young and old, criticised the destruction of the local shops. But this criticism did not turn on the question of destruction per se: several older West Indian men wanted to know why they burned down "our" shops instead of burning down the "Town Hall". Even the right wing Community Relations Council (CRC) felt it unwise to condemn local people. Rev. Glendenning, the white Senior CRO said "Last night I witnessed a disturbance largely managed by whites" (meaning outsiders).¹¹ It goes far beyond what Stuart Hall describes as a "loss of consent" or a sense of social injustice.¹² It amounts to popular support for the most direct methods of political expression seen on mainland Britain.

The third point concerns the role of women. If it were the case that only males were involved with the uprising, then the argument that it represented only a small portion of the working class would hold considerable force. But the reverse is true. In Chapeltown, over the years, the backbone of community organising has been female, among blacks and whites. There were plenty of women on the streets during

the uprising, and it is women who are central to the events after the violence:

"Women, mainly black, [are] left to do the cleaning up afterwards; the women are the ones who face police harassment when the homes are searched; it's the women, the mums, who bear the brunt of the worry finding the money to foot the bill for the kids fined by the court."

*"Women are an integral part of the struggle — some of us are daughters, mothers, wives of those convicted, injured, imprisoned, and some have taken to the streets too."*¹³

And in Chapeltown, the prime movers of the Defence Committee were women.

POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION

It is on the question of the ideology and political consciousness of the participants that most will rest their case that this was not an uprising. There may have been one or two militants from left wing groups involved in the street fighting, but few involved would define themselves as political in the conventional sense. But, it depends on what you mean by "political". In its detailed surveys conducted after the wave of black urban disturbances in America in 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders found that participants were better informed politically than non-participants, were more concerned about "Negro rights", had less trust in local government, were more angry about politicians and were less willing to fight for their country.¹⁴ All these are indications of some political sophistication, which, I believe, would be paralleled here if similar surveys were conducted in this country.

There is some evidence available from journalism published in the wake of the uprisings. Very few interviews have been published, no doubt partly due to the hostility people feel towards the media, and those that have are not entirely conclusive. The dominant picture that emerges is one of hatred of the police. The most extreme published statement came from a black youth in Liverpool: "My aim was to kill a policeman. We wanted to leave a few of them in the middle of the road with their arms broken".¹⁵ Some would say this is not a political attitude. But it is arguable that, in a society in which the law is designed to protect the property of the ruling class, and in which the police is armed body charged with the task of enforcing that law, then to take on that force is a political act.

HERE AND NOW

A final point about political consciousness springs from George Rude's discussion of the riots which preceded the French Revolution:

*"Revolutions — as opposed to peasant rebellions or food riots seldom if ever take the form of mere spontaneous outbursts against tyranny, oppression or utter destitution: both the experience and hope of something better are important factors in the story."*¹⁶

In the sense of "experience and hope of something better", the participants and their supporters are clearly politically motivated. Some of the Rasta youth hope for a better future in Africa, but most of them are very clear about what they want *here and now*, and they see other people in this society obtaining it: enough money and freedom to lead a dignified life. The white youth feel the same. All would identify with the slogan "Looting takes the waiting out of wanting". And they all know that, with society organised as it is now, they will be waiting for ever unless drastic measures are taken. This is not to imply that their political consciousness is necessarily revolutionary. Their sense of the measures required to fulfil their needs may not go beyond local street violence against the police. But their disaffection from the conventional methods of politics, their willingness to take matters into their own hands, even as far as fighting the most oppressive arm of the state, all these are a necessary, if not sufficient, part of revolutionary consciousness.

The next issue is that of organisation. Almost without exception, socialists and communists regard the paraphernalia of their kind of organisation as a prerequisite of truly political activity. If there are no obvious elected or appointed leaders, no hierarchical discipline, no leaflets and newspapers with which to spread the directives of the leadership, and above all no programme of demands and methods of negotiation, then the action is not political.

The point about the disturbances, however, is that most of the relevant factors were present, but not in the conventional forms. There are a number of leading figures among the youth, who are generally organised around particular streets, youth

clubs, football teams or sound systems. For the black youth, the 12 inch import record, or toasting over a backing track, communicates the political views of the time (they have superseded the nineteenth century newsprint). As for discipline, every "riot" has its story of premises and people known to be valuable to the community being protected. In Chapeltown, Mr Steffensen described how his shop was guarded by the youth he had watched grow up.¹⁸ And the police give ample testimony to the speed with which forces were deployed against them, disappearing and regrouping at will.* A programme of demands does exist, but again it does not conform to the pattern jealously nurtured by the revolutionary leadership: "This economic thing is crap. It isn't just unemployment. If you are black and come from Liverpool 8 you can't get anywhere."²⁰ They want the police off their backs and they want to "get somewhere". These are non-negotiable demands, and they will struggle in the way they think best until they get them.

Finally, we have to look at the actual effects of the disturbances. If they were not political events, they certainly had the most dramatic political consequences. Mrs Thatcher described early July as her ten most worrying days.²¹ Lord Scarman has been conducting a judicial version of Custer's Last Stand in almost continuous session since 15th June, in an enquiry set up to look into the causes of Brixton's first upsurge on 10th to 12th April, but which has been extended to cover the further events in July. Environment Minister Michael Heseltine, in an unprecedented move, was sent to Liverpool for a full two weeks to investigate the Toxteth uprising. It would appear that the revolt of the Tory wets has gained much of its force from an understanding that the "riots" show that all is not well with Thatcher's Britain.

In Chapeltown, the effects have been equally significant. George Mudie, the Labour council leader, took an astute initiative in calling all the ethnic community leaders together for a series of meetings designed to get their views on what needed to be done to solve Chapeltown's problems. Certain momentous changes were immediately forthcoming. The unemployed got concessionary prices at the local Sports Centre. The Boys Club was given a stereo. The leaders heard in advance what projects were receiving money under the inner city programme (drawn up before July). There might well be some genuine gains from these "Liaison Committee" meetings, but the council appears to have succeeded in its major aim of enmeshing the leaders in talks and diverting attention from the youth.

These political effects do not lead to any conclusions about the politics or "programme" of those who took part in the uprising. They merely prove that they youth shook the shit out of the establishment. The real question for revolutionaries is "what happens now?" and it is to this that we now turn.

WHAT NEXT?

It might seem strange to have devoted so much space to trying to demonstrate that these events were deeply political. But there is almost no evidence that the white left press has been able to comprehend these events. That is not altogether surprising, given the white/male/factory blinkers worn by the left parties and groups. My argument here is that, in order to begin to think about what needs to be done after the uprising, an analysis which includes the dimensions of race and sex, as well as class, has to be developed. Such an analysis must entail an understanding of the political dynamic outside the waged workplace, in the working class "community". This article is an attempt at such an analysis, and it is obviously inadequate, but, hopefully, it is a start at making political sense of what has happened over the past ten years in Chapeltown.

The other point that this analysis should have made clear is that there is a certain rhythm to political development to which revolutionaries must attune themselves. Each struggle in Chapeltown has had its gains and losses. The gains have usually been tangible: one kind of material resource or another. The losses have been key people getting tired or impatient and moving on to pastures new. There has, however, been one ever-present problem. No grouping has been able to provide a forum for an open-minded evaluation of the politics of each of the struggles over the whole of the period in question. So it has been almost impossible for collective political development to take place. The rhythm of struggle has been dictated, in the early period, by the aspirations of the militants, but in the later period the key factor has been the street activity of the youth — and in the past few years there has never been a political force which can itself begin to

dictate events.

This political force cannot be conjured up. It can be parachuted in — several white left groups have tried it, and are resuming their efforts now — but failure is inevitable. To some extent, it can be built by the few black and white militants with revolutionary politics who are rooted in the area, so long as they realise that the organisation has to grow organically with needs and the human resources of the area.

It is in this respect that the youth are central. Black or white, their style of life is not conducive to the revolutionary routine of meetings, leaflets and demos. Nor are they easily impressed with the rhetoric, reformist or revolutionary, of the self-styled leaderships. So the tactic of using a Defence Committee as a vehicle for recruiting youth to an existing political grouping is a non-starter. The "practical" tactic of setting up youth oriented projects, which actually begin to cater for their immediate needs, could be helpful in providing a base from which the youth can be encouraged to organise themselves, but this is likely to fall foul of the funding agencies should it become at all subversive.

In this, as in every other area of political work, there is no escaping the conclusion that there has to be a long, hard struggle to develop a political analysis relevant to the particular situation of the multi-racial inner city, and an organisation which embodies that analysis. In Chapeltown, this would mean a new organisation. For it to relate to the youth in the post-uprising period it would have to recognise the fact of their autonomy: the fact that they expressed needs, for money, freedom and dignity, which are quite separate from the needs which capital is able to fulfill; and the fact that they use methods which are quite separate from those employed by the conventional forces of protest. And it would have to understand that they want *power*. In the first instance, power to control their streets, to walk without harassment.

To build such an organisation, the militants would have to be able to demonstrate their understanding of these facts by their words, writing and actions. They would have to draw the youth into activities which improve their immediate situation — by organising against police harassment, by schemes which provide money, by making cheap ways of enjoying themselves. These cannot be provided for the youth; the youth have to make them themselves. An essential component of this would be self-education — in particular, the youth talking and writing about their own situation, its causes and the way out. In the process, some will get jobs, or move away, or "settle down" — and some will become revolutionary militants. Then a new cycle will begin. The twelve Bradford Asians, presently facing trial on conspiracy and explosives charges, formed a revolutionary organisation — the United Black Youth League — precisely because they wanted to move beyond the conventional political forms. They are now facing the consequences. But there is no alternative.

Paul Holt

NOTES

1. "Chapeltown Residents Opinion Survey" conducted by Leeds City Council (1975).
2. Much of what follows is based on the writer's own research.
3. *Chapeltown News* is available for reference in Leeds City Library. It documents almost all of the events described in this article.
4. *Planning to Deceive* is in the Library of the Leeds Trade Union and Community Resource and Information Centre, 6 Blenheim Terrace, Leeds 2.
5. Tony Benn press release 18th July 1981 from Labour Party Publicity Department, 144-52 Walworth Road, London SE17.
6. *Socialist Challenge*, front page, 9th July 1981.
7. Tony Benn op cit.
8. Chris Harman, *Socialist Review* 16 May-14 June 1981.
9. Stuart Hall, "Summer in the City", *New Socialist* No.1, Sept/Oct 1981.
10. Marion Tronti derives this argument from the Grundrisse in his article "Social Capital" (*Telos* No.17, 1973). Some of the stimulus for my views on the uprising come from another Italian theorist, Sergio Bologna, in his "Tribe of Moles", in "Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis" (Red Notes/CSE 1979 from BP 15, 2a St Paul's Road, London N1).
11. *Yorkshire Evening Post* 13.7.81.
12. Stuart Hall op cit.
13. *Spure Rib* September 1981.
14. Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Bantam Books 1968) pp.134-5.
15. John Shirley's article in the Sunday Times, 12.7.81.
16. George Rude, *Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815* (Fontana 1964) p70.
17. Conversation with the writer.
18. *Guardian* 14.7.81.
19. Sunday Times op cit.
20. Various newspapers 14.7.81. Unfortunately Mrs Thatcher does not appear to have explained *why* she was having such a bad time.

SDP

Some Damn Party!

Recent electoral successes of the SDP-Liberal Alliance highlight the need for an urgent appraisal of the SDP's political project. This article (written before the Croydon NW by-election) charts the early dismissive reactions to the Social Democrats from the Labour and revolutionary left and provides an analysis of the different groupings which make up the SDP. The prospect of the SDP-Liberal Alliance carving out some sizeable vote at the next election and thereby possibly preventing the return of a Labour government presents profound problems for that part of the Labour left which is electoralist in approach. This may in the long run be no bad thing given the Bennite left's unwillingness and inability to translate into practice their rhetorical commitment to self-activity and mass involvement.

Pinned to cupboard in work, I have a postcard with the slogan — 'Keep Politics out of Politics — Vote SDP'. Nor is it entirely unjustified. The founding 'Limehouse Declaration' outlined 'Twelve Points to End Conflict', but 'society for all', 'a decent environment', 'a consistent economic strategy', and other well meaning slogans of intent are hardly likely to set the world alight. Little policy has been added since, the joint statement with the Liberals was equally vacuous, and the most meaningless banalities at the recent 'rolling conference' continue to gain standing ovations.

But the vagueness of politics and the contradictory views of leading members, should not make us underestimate the importance of the SDP. Their purpose is to build a modernist party, which can act as the focal point in *re-constructing the centre-ground of British politics*. If this is successful it will shift the centre of gravity of that politics decisively to the right, thus reducing the space for socialist politics of any kind. In this sense, the lack of hard policy is part of the baggage of that re-construction. As one of their leading mentors, Peter Jenkins of the Guardian argued, the public are not very interested in policies and programmes. What counts is an image within which a loose policy formulation can operate. In a situation in which the Tories are discredited, but Labour has not established a clear alternative on a mass scale, it is possible that the SDP (with the Liberals) will claim for themselves an important section of the electorate.

This is a possibility no-one on the Left can afford to ignore. Yet until Warrington, reaction to the SDP had been far too dismissive. Labour left-wingers invoked the already crumbling power of the 'two-party system' and solid voting loyalties. But, like it or not, firm identification on the lines of class, party and voting are declining. This is not to say that that identification cannot be re-built with radical socialist policies, but it is not to be taken for granted. The Far Left has also been dismissive. Echoing left MP Dennis Canavan's description of the SDP as "chancers, opportunists and careerists", Duncan Hallas in *Socialist Worker* predicted:

"Conceived in intrigue and frustrated ambition, born in a blaze of media support, it will die — after the general election — unmourned, unhonoured and unsung."¹

This wily send-off has been softened since Warrington and the string of SDP successes at local level. But, the message has not really sunk home, particularly on the Left of the Labour Party, whose spokespeople still come up with ridiculously dismissive comments.

The SDP is given at best a spoiling role in the next general election. As usual, the right-wing is more on the ball as this quote from the Economist shows:

"With modern Toryism entering what seems like a doomed phase, a smashing of the undemocratic alliance between Labour and official trade unionism has become Britain's biggest political need . . . It is Labour which the Social Democrats must push into third place and ultimately render impotent, not the Tories."

Traditionally, it has been the alliance between the bulk of trade union leaderships and the centre-right of the Parliamentary Party which has provided the gravy train of rewards and power for Labour politicians. This is why it is quite wrong to label the SDP leaders 'careerists'. In fact, by making the break they were taking a leap into the dark, unlike the large number of right-wingers — the Heales and Hattersleys of the world — who've stayed the latter are unwilling to risk the uncertainties of a political party with whom they have a great deal in common.

WHY THE CENTRE NEEDS TO RE-CONSTRUCT

What actually led the Social Democrats to make the break? The first element is the *collapse of the political consensus*. On the face of it this is strange, because in the past they have been at the heart of such consensus. As R.W. Johnson comments:

"Until Thatcher, the centre was always in power . . . The new centrists talk bitterly as if they have somehow been prevented from having their way. But the truth is that nobody but them has had their way."²

The SDP continue to emphasise many aspects of consensus politics — the mixed economy, the EEC, incomes policies — but we should not underestimate the extent to which key figures in the SDP have learnt from the collapse of the *existing*

centre. The lessons to be learnt is certainly there, with the opposing radicalisms of Thatcherism and of the re-vitalised 'alternative strategy' of the Labour Left. To re-establish the centre-ground these 'extremes' need to be confronted with an equal 'radicalism'.

As we shall see later, one strand of this reconstruction embodies an attempt to break with what is presented as the statist and collectivist past of Labour politics; stressing instead the theme of de-centralisation. But in strict policy terms, there is as yet little that the Social Democrats can do to distinguish new from old centrism. The break is more to do with *organised political forces*. They are now prepared to jettison the traditional social democratic contribution to the political consensus — the attempt to incorporate the working class movement into the workings of a reformed capitalism. Referring to the continuation of Keynesian liberal policies by the SDP, Peter Jenkins writes:

"To say that this was the formula that was tried and failed is to forget the extent to which Labour Governments have been institutional prisoners of the Labour Movement, as well as encumbered by old fashioned ideological baggage."³

It is therefore regarded as necessary to jettison both the institutional force of Labourism and the class-based ideology of socialism, which however imperfectly expressed was the cement of traditional social democracy, even of the kind espoused by Crosland and the like. Stuart Hall is therefore correct to refer to the emergence of the SDP as "part of a deeper process of re-alignment" linked to a general crisis of ruling class hegemony.

WHO ARE THE SDP?

The Labour Party has been going for most of this century and is now described as a very 'broad church'. The Social Democrats are less than a year old and have already achieved such diversity. We are not concerned here to point to the cranks and neo-fascists who've attached themselves to the new formation; but wish to indicate the major groupings so as to help understand its prospects and limits.

(i) Radical Centre

Recent books by Williams and Owen make a case for the SDP to be regarded as an authentic successor to a radical tradition of humane social policy, de-centralised initiatives and internationalist commitment. They, along with other

solutions can espouse a safe radicalism which appeals to the liberal middle class. From reports of membership and meetings, both personally and in the media, it appears that this constituency is the main social base for the SDP, as well as attracting the considerable number of academics who signed the original 'Limehouse Declaration'. However, it would be unwise to draw from this the conclusion that the SDP is or will be a radical formation. Its organising base includes two other prominent groupings partly hostile or indifferent to the above themes.

(ii) Orthodox Right

In terms of prominent figures who have joined the SDP it is hard to think of people like Jenkins, Rodgers, Dell (the former Trade Minister and now merchant banker) and Lord Diamond as in any sense radical. In fact they represent orthodox right-wing social democracy, whose preference is to manage capitalism with some humane intervention, rather than through the market and class confrontation alone. Now that they have junked their link with the class-based appeal of Labour, they can even more heartily embrace the consensus middle ground which includes ex-Tories like Brocklebank-Fowler.

At the level of national appeal the prominence of this group is likely to block all but the most watered-down radicalism. But it has equal significance at the grass roots. You cannot create a national party with a combination of a few leaders and many credit card holders. The orthodox right therefore will often provide the nucleus of organisation. This is the case where departing MP's take with them a layer of party workers, CLP secretaries or groups of Councillors. When the Secretary of the right-wing Campaign for Labour Victory, Alex McGivan, became the first SDP paid official, he also took with him the means of relating to hundreds of local activists in the 'moderate' camp. When my MP (for Liverpool Toxteth), Richard Crawshaw, walked out of the Toxteth Constituency meeting he had made his resignation speech to; he was heard in total silence and carried with him two other people — his wife and his agent! The few more that have joined him are insufficient to make him anything more than a prisoner of Liberal backing.

We should also not forget that the Labour Right is far from homogenous and at a local level is a disparate collection of groupings that have little in common other than being



SDP's Gang of Four (Socialist Standard)

seeking to retain a populist appeal that can reach into working class support. Professionally anti-communist and viciously anti-union, they have described their basic stance as 'to the right of the Tories on issues like trade unions, to the left of the Labour Party on some social policy issues'. The leadership of the SDP have kept their distance, but prominent SDA supporters signed the Limehouse Declaration and Lord George Brown campaigned in Warrington. It was this faction that jumped the gun and stood candidates against prominent left-wingers in the GLC elections.

Again the significance is not so much in numerical terms but as a component of the organising base and political articulation of the SDP.

STRATEGIES AND CONTRADICTIONS OF RE-CONSTRUCTION

While the general aim of the SDP members is to do what they failed to do inside Labour — to create a party modelled on the lines of some of the European social democratic parties like the German SPD — this requires tactics to re-construct a centre formation in the new circumstances. Support for the mixed economy, the Common Market and NATO alone will not do it. That new ingredients are necessary is made clear in Peter Jenkin's comments before the SDP came on the scene: "The right-wing of the Labour Party has passed into the hands of the ideological receiver, intellectually it is bankrupt." It is in this context that the previously mentioned strand of radicalism becomes important. The attacks of Owen and Williams on bureaucratic statism, is, as Stuart Hall points out, 'working on a real contradiction', embedded in the particular nature of the growth of economic and social intervention by the state. But how radical is this strand of SDP thinking and will it be successful?

For the tactic to succeed, the radicalism must be *sustained*, both to demarcate a political perspective and to maintain that important section of support. The ability of the SDP to do this is doubtful, not just because of the opposition within the party, but because of the limits of the radicalism itself. The undoubted freshness of their appeal cannot last for ever and in its absence the concrete policy initiatives that flow from the de-centralisation perspective are pitifully few. Reducing the size of companies, hospitals and schools is easier said than done. To create co-operatives on any systematic scale would require an intervention against existing forms of ownership and market distribution that clearly goes against the SDP's love affair with the marketplace.

The SDP sees 'bad attitudes' as the main obstacle to industrial peace and progress. My SDP MP, Crawshaw, is instructive on this point. He refers to the necessity of "shaking off many of the ideas we have had in the past which have been responsible not only for bad Management/Worker relationships, but an output which does not match up to our main competitors". In the same long resignation state-

ment to electors of Toxteth, he later makes clear precisely *who* has these wrong ways of thinking:

"I have not, however, been prepared to advocate a course of action which I knew would in the end bring about the closure of a particular factory. People have left meetings when I had to spell out the harsh facts of life. It is little comfort to me to be told perhaps two years after the factory closes that I had at least told them what the true position was".

Radicalism and the acceptance of the 'harsh reality' of the market do not make easy bedfellows. As with Owen and others the power of capital is either ignored or taken for granted.

STATUS QUO

Outside of a coherent alternative and anti-capitalist economic strategy, de-centralising initiatives must operate within the constraints of the existing economic power structure. In fact, the perspective functions to re-inforce those constraints, as John Horam, SDP MP for Gateshead West admits:

"There is nothing like the market — properly used — for forcing the pace of change. And when we cannot use the market we will often have to use proxies for the market, such as increased de-centralisation".⁵

Other economic perspectives offer little more. William's small is beautiful philosophy leads to considerable emphasis on small businesses as the road to economic progress. Yet, despite the American examples she uses, there is no evidence that small business create better working environments and rewards. In fact the opposite is frequently the case.

Even if we accept at face value that there is some radicalism in the perspectives — some potentially useful policies to humanise the environment, increase the accountability of local government, to create better schools — the utter lack of any strategy for achieving them in the context of multi-national companies and the priorities they impose on governments — make it unlikely any of them will see the light of day. As Paul Foot comments on Shirley Williams' 'Politics is for People':

"We will not get her house improvements or her small power stations. But we *will* get her bombs, her incomes policy, her stronger common market, her increasingly hysterical calls for sacrifice."⁶

The attraction of the SDP to a layer of previously radicalised people may therefore lessen. The most noted contradiction is their unequivocal support for the Cruise Missile and opposition to unilateralism, when thousands of young people of a radical-liberal persuasion are being drawn into CND. People like Sue Slipman who seem convinced about the radicalism and feminism of the SDP will either have to change their politics or become disillusioned. While they are right that patriarchal attitudes still permeate the Left, there is not the slightest evidence from any SDP source that it has learnt from feminism and the women's movement.



prominent social democrats like Evan Luard, have for some time been absorbing many of the radical themes that have emerged in the last decade, for instance the ecology movement and to a lesser extent feminism. More importantly, they realise that around such themes a social constituency of support can be built. Julian Atkinson in *Socialist Challenge*, described SDP politics as:

"A raid into Slipman/Polly Toynbee country. There are a layer of people vaguely radicalised in the late sixties and early 1970's while students. They got good jobs and then young Emma and Mark came along. A growing dogmatism on the value of wholemeal bread was mirrored by an increasingly adult and mature agnosticism on politics."

While 'socialist' is still a key word, the link is really with a radical liberal tradition, which by embracing the call for 'new'

fanatically opposed to the Left. The more the Left gains at local level, the more the SDP will inherit that diversity. What it gains in increased numbers and organisers may be lost in political incompatibility. A case in point is the grouping of Labour Councillors in North Islington who have left to become a Social Democrat group⁴. They were right wingers, typical of a process whereby inner-city Labour Parties become home to any social or political group who wishes to grab a piece of the local action.

(iii) SDA

Even more to the right are SDP recruits from the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA). They have been working for a break with Labour and socialism for a long time, whilst

The widespread antipathy at the rolling conference to positive discrimination for women was one indication of this.

FALSE RADICALISM

In this context, SDP radicalism will not be manifested at any serious policy level. Instead it will provide a framework for the two most important components of their strategy. The first is the construction of a reformism, which will be different from existing variants. Central to this will be an acceleration of the managerial style of politics that was always part of right-wing Labour Governments. In the absence of a need to make concessions to organised workers — the essential ingredient of Labourism — something must be found to re-style the orthodoxies of support for NATO, limited state intervention, incomes policy and the EEC.

This is where a watered down version of 'radicalism' can become important. For if the traditional humane statism of social democracy is no longer seen as adequate, then participatory democracy must be added to the mixture. Emphasis can therefore be given to measures like local income taxes, neighbourhood councils, industrial democracy (worker-shareholder/directors) etc, within the ideological framework of de-centralisation, but leaving the real structures of power and wealth untouched.

In contrast to their commitment to democracy in society, the SDP seem in no hurry to build democracy in the party — even the commitment to 'one person, one vote' election of the leaders is now in doubt. Influenced by the extremely favourable launch and treatment in the media and scarred by their experience at constituency level in the Labour Party, the SDP leadership has given the impression that its wishes to by-pass by conventional *activists* structures. Perhaps they are following the advice of Peter Jenkins:

"... party organisation itself is becoming obsolete. The romantic myth of the party worker lives on, but the original purpose of the extra-parliamentary party, the mobilisation of the electorate, is of less and less importance. Television enables leaders to make a direct appeal to the masses and the purpose of most electioneering these days is merely to create media events. In this Britain is not alone; nearly everywhere party organisation is in decline."¹²

While this may be true of the USA, events in France, where Mitterrand and the Socialists won *despite* media hostility and non-attention throws doubt on the hypothesis. But Owen seems enthusiastic, commenting:

"We have to work out new techniques for sounding people. One reason why both major parties have been taken for a ride by their activists is that most people don't obtain their politics at local ward meetings or annual conferences... They use television and newspapers. Yet with modern techniques we should still be able to tap these people. I want to see us develop postal questionnaires and computerised central files on which we will include peoples' special interests".⁷

There are undoubted advantages for a media-conscious party, but in eschewing any organic relationship with activist structures in favour of a mythical consultation with the 'detached voter', the SDP are taking considerable risks. It is one thing to fight and do well in a bye-election like Warrington where all the leadership heavies can be brought down in the full glare of media attention. It is another to build an organisation capable of making an electoral impact nationally and sustaining the interests of the members who feel committed enough to put their time into it. Negative reactions by some SDP recruits to the top-down way the SDP is being constructed and run and the plans by-pass activists give an indication of the possibility that the SDP could alienate important sections of their active support. It is remarkable that in a number of organisational aspects, particularly finance, the SDP is the most centralist of all the major parties. I was also impressed by the wonderful, invention of a rolling conference with no votes (damned clever that, that'll teach the activists), while a succession of unelected leaders introduced the future SDP policy that members had never seen before.

CONCLUSION

The last point emphasises the SDP's need for a comprehensive alliance with the Liberals, not merely to maximise electoral possibilities, but to combine organisational and political strengths. The chances of this are not necessarily good. There is evidence that the respective activists on the ground are considerably more sceptical of each other than

the leadership. My own view, is that for the SDP to ever play more than a spoiling role it will need to fully merge with the Liberals over a longer period. There is not the space, particularly under existing electoral arrangements, for two centre parties.

Even with an alliance, a number of pundits argue that the SDP will do more damage to the Tories than Labour.⁸ Labour's post-war electoral successes have been greatly helped by Liberals stealing the Tory vote. In addition, because of the social and geographical concentration of its votes, Labour can lose a certain degree of support and retain the bulk of its seats. In contrast the Liberals and SDP have their actual and potential support much more evenly spread and would need at least 32% of the vote to be certain of winning a credible number of seats. The seats they have the best chances of winning are likely to be Tory ones where the Liberals came a respectable second previously and where middle class Tory voters will desert to more moderate waters.

This situation highlights why it is vital not to conceive of the problem of the SDP solely in electoral terms. A minority Labour Government that sneaked in on residual class loyalty and distaste for the Tories would not have the legitimacy to carry through any sort of radical programme. The consequences of pretending that Labour automatically speaks for all working people — as some on the Left often give the impression — would have potentially catastrophic effects for the already battered image of socialism. To gain that legitimacy, the Left must vigorously campaign against the politics of the SDP. What is at stake is whether the emergence of the SDP as a centre party can shift politics to the right filling the gap left by the demise of Thatcherism. Hence the Left cannot rely solely on the internal weaknesses and contradictions of the SDP project.

OUR PROBLEM

It is a problem for the *whole* Left, for we are talking about re-establishing the credibility and popular support for socialist ideas and practices. This means, among other things, taking up and answering the most prominent themes the SDP have raised. It will be a temptation, particularly for the Labour left, to attack them on areas like the Common Market, where for good and bad reasons, the SDP's stand has little mass support. But in the long run, issues of de-centralisation and democracy are more important. Parts of the Labour left have already shown a remarkable capacity to duck these issues; leading Militant supporter, Pat Wall referred to "the so-called democratic idea of one man, one vote" at the Labour Party Special Conference, while Heffer and Moss Evans argued that one man, one vote was "expensive and impractical".

The Left needs to develop its critique of the bureaucratic character of the state services, arguing for de-centralising initiatives that are rooted in popular self-organisation. The Alternative Economic Strategy needs to be broken from its narrowness and statism. The issue of democracy needs to be expanded to include a critique of the limitations of all forms of representative democracy, and not just confined to debates about the workings of the Labour Party. The radical pretensions of the SDP can be shown to be hollow. But it will require an imaginative combination of grass roots struggles, independent self-organisation and new socialist policies that can be implemented by or forced on Labour Councils and Governments. Both ideological struggle and practical alternatives are therefore necessary to turn the anti-socialist tide, of which the SDP are one important manifestation.

Paul Thompson

NOTES

1. Socialist Worker, 4th August 1981. One of the few exceptions to the lack of serious treatment is Stuart Hall, 'The Little Caesars of Social Democracy', Marxism Today, April 1981.
2. RW Johnson, 'How Soft at the Centre?' New Society, 18/25th December 1980.
3. Peter Jenkins, Guardian, March 4th, 1981.
4. See report in New Statesman, 'Britain Out of Europe: Vote SDP', Bruce Page, 27th March 1981. Since then many more councillors have left to join the SDP and followed by their reactionary vote-fixing MP, Michael Halloran.
5. John Horam, Guardian Agenda, January 19th, 1981.
6. Socialist Review, 16th May-14th June 1981.
7. Quoted in Guardian, February 11th, 1981.
8. See Kellner and Reece, 'How the Social Democrats may help the Labour Left', New Statesman, 10 April 1981.

SOLIDARITY SETS PAGE



The delegates in their groupings at the 1981 Solidarity conference, held in a sports stadium. The notice-board above the rostrum, usually for scores, gave continuous information about the speakers and flashed messages about meetings of sub-groups around the conference.

BIPS

After the first national congress of Solidarity there can no longer be any doubt. What we have been seeing since August 1980 has been a deep-seated revolution in Polish society. The independent, self-managed union born out of the strikes on the Baltic coast has developed its power, its range of experience, and an unprecedented organisational capacity. In 18 days of work (from 5-10th September and from 26th September to 7th October 1981) it has given itself a programme, a democratic constitution, and an elected national leadership. The delegates to the union had been chosen after a long process of elections, first in the various enterprises, and then at regional level. They were mandated on precise demands, and remained answerable to their electors. Each delegate represented something like 10,000 workers, with 95% of industrial workers being represented. All these delegates took part in the thematic study groups which met in a dozen major towns between the two week-long sessions (almost 400 delegates also worked on drawing up the Union's national programme). There was a high level of communication and information: the Congress had a daily newspaper, *Głos Wolny*, which summed up the previous day's proceedings, commented freely on the work in hand and published various items of national news.

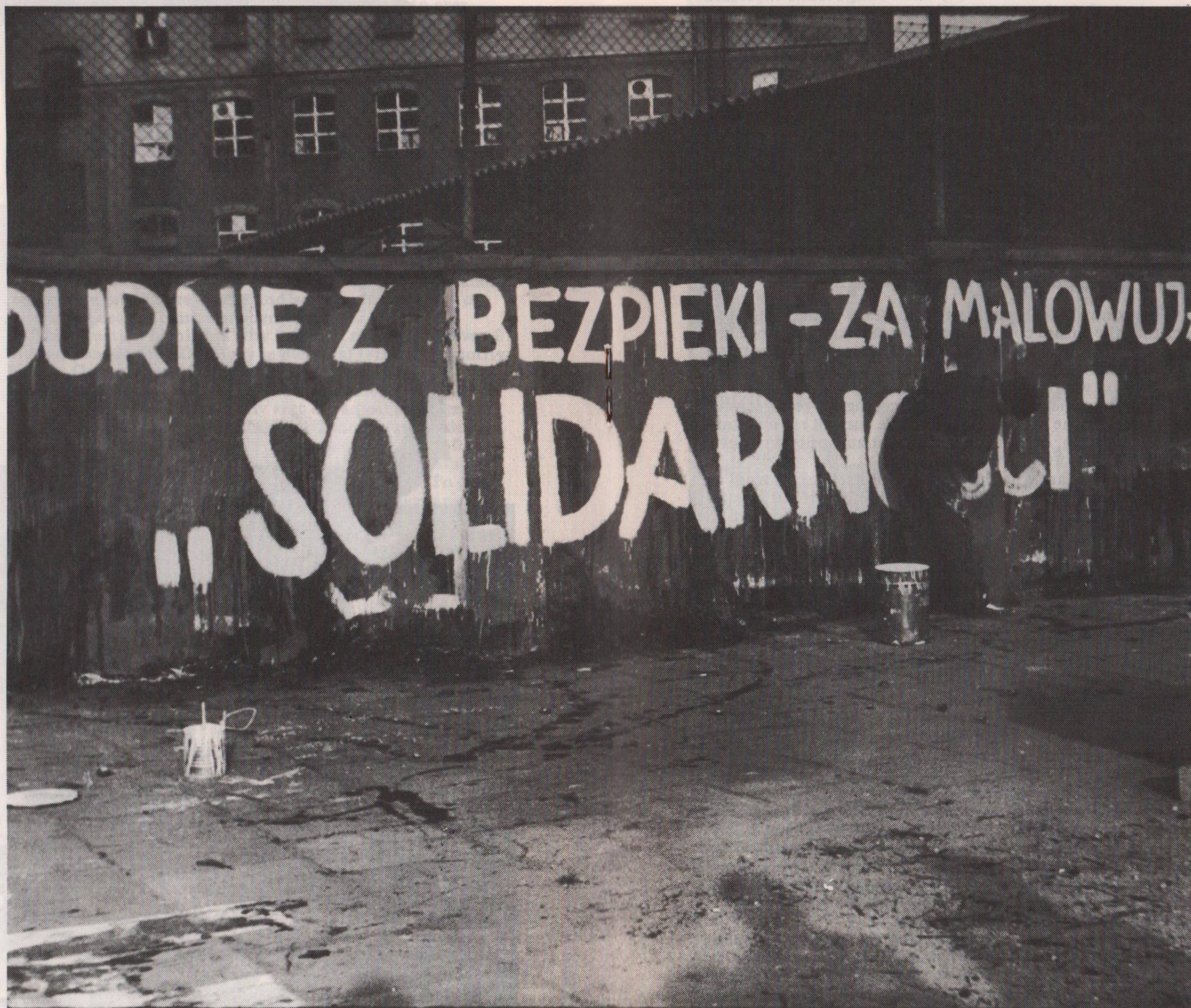
THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY REPRESENTED

You could see at first glance that there was a fundamental difference between this Congress and the kind of Congress that is usual in Eastern bloc countries. We all know those ceremonies where a mass of delegates sit in passive serried ranks around their Central Committee and their Secretary General on the platform. Contact between delegations is not encouraged, is considered pointless, and is anyway impossible. You listen to droning speeches from the platform, and you applaud whenever the Politburo puts in an appearance. Gdansk was nothing like this. Seating for the delegates was divided into 20 sections on the ground-plan of an enormous skating rink. Each section had a microphone, and this enabled people to contribute from their seats as the need arose. Procedural motions were all submitted to the Congress by the organising committee. Delegations were able to consult with each other, communicating and exchanging experiences and points of view. In order to make a speech all you had to do was put your name on a list.

As well as the delegates there were around 2,000 invited delegates and observers following the debate. Outside the hall several thousand people came at the weekends and after working hours, to listen to the speeches as they were relayed through loudspeakers. And while the majority of Eastern bloc trade unions had refused their invitations, trade union confederations in the West had sent delegations, who delivered fraternal greetings.

UPSIDE DOWN WORLD

This Congress represented a majority of Polish society that was taking matters into its own hands, and which knew the trials that lay ahead. In the corridors the talk was not so much of a trade union congress, but of a "constituent" or "workers' parliament". This reality was tacitly admitted by the Government, which sent one of its ministers hurrying to attempt to justify the recent price increases. This was also how the Congress was seen by the crowds that gathered around the Gdansk Sports Centre. They listened attentively to debates that often seemed never-ending, and they discussed among themselves. There was a sort of good humour which, although it was worried for the future, was fully aware of the importance of what was being decided. The Congress also presented a changing balance of power in society. Near the Congress hall you could read huge slogans: "We Want Access to the Mass Media"; "Who's Afraid of a Free Trade Unionist?", etc. Each night the militia came along to erase these slogans. Then, every morning, a team of shipyard workers would arrive, brushes in hand, and would repaint the slogans. A world turned upside down! A world in which the militia creep along under cover of dark, while workers act in broad daylight. This guerrilla warfare — which in other parts of Poland took on a more dramatic character — continued throughout these days in which working-class Poland was planning its future. It was certainly present in the announcements that were made regularly from the platform. For example, the news about the strike at the Szczeglowice mine. On 26 September a delegate from Upper Silesia explained what had happened: after a television programme had given a distorted view of the situation in their mine, the miners held a mass meeting to find out who had set up a stooge to speak in their name. The president of the Works Committee admitted responsibility. The workers were furious: "At that point somebody turned up with a wheelbarrow. The president didn't say a word. He was sat in it, and was wheeled out the door!" Later the miners went on strike for the reinstatement of the trade union official who had been sacked after this incident. This militant sense of humour was not only to be found in the Congress itself (a Private Eye type of bulletin called *I Manipulate* was published every week), but also in the number of badges which were being sold like hot cakes around the conference hall. The "hit" of the summer in Gdansk was a song that had been produced for the Sopot Alternative Festival organised by Solidarity at the end of August. This tells the story of a pair of young lovers, lying in the grass. An army of red ants arrives on the scene, and the chorus is something like: "Will they invade? Will they not?" This sense of humour was also shown in the case of the young Cracow militant delegate whom I met on the train. He was dressed in an American Army combat jacket covered with Solidarnosc badges, interspersed with other badges which said: "AE" (Antisocial Element), "Counter-revolutionary", "I Love Soviet Union", "Siwak Superstar", etc. He was supposed to have gone to Gdansk by



"Fools from the security police paint out Solidarity graffiti... In a role reversal, the secret police creep out at night to rub out slogans that are replaced in broad daylight by militants from Solidarity. BIPS

plane, but the militia had turned him back at the airport because of his jacket, his badges and his long hair. So he had parked himself in the crowded corridor of the express train, holding a kind of open meeting, showing everyone his airline ticket and explaining his adventures to his fellow travellers.

POLITICS ADVANCE

This mix of cool and heated discussion, these days of hard work (each delegation had its own meeting in the evening, often late into the night) were the signs of the total upheaval that had taken place in Poland. In the space of one year everything had changed. It is true that some sectors of the urban population were tired and afraid (for example, pensioners, single people etc), but this did nothing to dull the basic solidarity which united this struggle. The Government manoeuvres and attempts by the Party to re-establish itself fooled nobody. On the contrary. It was striking that after 13 months of mobilisation, questions of politics had come to take pride of place. It was not that people were seeking power, but henceforth they were to be reckoned with as a political force. And since the Party was forever sticking up posters in the factories proclaiming "Proletarians of all countries, Unite!", the Congress approved by acclamation an appeal to the workers of other Eastern bloc countries. This was one of the finer moments of the Congress, when the delegates laughed

whole-heartedly as the last sentence was read out: "We very much hope that soon your representatives and ours will be able to meet and exchange trade union experiences." Outside in the corridors, a number of observers thought that this had been a mistaken tactic, but for the Congress as a whole, a question of moral duty was at stake. All the factory meetings that I attended, and those I've heard about, were unanimous: this statement had to be passed by Congress. And not a single trade union militant seemed hostile to the idea that it should be printed in the languages of the people concerned.

A DEMOCRATIC AND REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAMME

However, the atmosphere was more realistic than it had been at the Lenin shipyard last year. In August 1980 the history of a country run for years under planned 'socialism' was turned on its head. People made speeches, commemorated their dead and spelled out their hopes. The birth of a revolutionary process was accompanied with hopes of a radiant future. With their new Union, everything seemed possible. One year later they had already seen setbacks. They knew that they had to refine their tactics, study their demands and arrange effective forms of struggle. The economic crisis was still there, and getting worse. The Party and the Government still showed no signs of an ability to cope. Changing people's lives was to prove an enormously broad-based undertaking, requiring

colossal resources and a lot of patience.

It was this realisation that set the tone for the political discussions at the national Congress. Many differing points of view were presented from the platform, reflecting deep-rooted movements in society, and these enabled an overall programme to be drawn up.

This unique document was made up of 35 theses. It benefited from the experiences of the preceding year, but also from the experiences of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak workers in 1956 and 1968. (1)

It described Solidarity as an "organisation combining the characteristics of a trade union and those of a broad-based social movement", and called for the construction of a "self-managed Poland". (2) "A socialist state must serve people, and not just itself. The state serves society as a whole, and cannot be identified with one single party".

*A whole range of aims and demands were spelled out, around three basic questions: self management, the restoration of the economy, and the preparation of a "new social contract". "Our programme is a programme of struggle for objectives that we have defined ourselves; a programme which reflects the desires and aspirations of our society, a programme born from those aspirations".

The document took into account Poland's geopolitical situation. Without naming their big neighbour, the document explained: "Our sense of responsibility forces us to take into consideration the balance of power created in Europe in the period following the Second World War". But it added: "Poland can only be a worthwhile partner once it has chosen and decided, by itself, and with a fulness of understanding, its obligations." The document also warned against domestic reaction: "The nation will not pardon anyone who betrays the ideals of Solidarity — ideals that have been born to be fulfilled. The nation will not forgive anyone who, by their actions, however well-meaning, brings about a bloodbath or the annihilation of our spiritual and material inheritance."

The 35 theses spell out a project for a "new social and economic order, combining planning, self-management and the market." The planned reforms are wide-ranging: working conditions, health, family rights, the environment etc. The educational system must be reviewed. The document opposes unemployment, and calls for a level of social control over economic life as a whole. It declares war on privilege. The political system (in particular electoral law), the law-courts and the administration must be democratised. "Pluralism must be reflected within political life", and the union announced that it "will support and defend civil initiatives aimed at drawing up for society varying political, economic and social programmes, as well as supporting the self-organisations which will enable these programmes to be brought about."

A long chapter entitled "The Self-Managed Republic" calls for authentic, representative workers' bodies to be made "social owners" of the means of production. Thesis 21 suggests that Parliament should be given a second chamber. This would represent the self-managed organisations existing in the country, and would have a decisive voice on matters of social and economic priorities.

This project, in the opinion of the document, requires the establishment of a "new social contract" comprising three inseparable elements: "an anti-crisis agreement", in order to prepare for what was likely to prove a tragic winter, which would be "the first proof of co-operation between the authorities and society"; "an agreement on economic reform", which would require a "co-operation towards radical change"; and an agreement for the establishment of a self-managed republic which would prepare "perspectives and methods for the democratisation of institutions in the public domain."

This document, together with the statutes that were adopted during the first session, represents the basic agreed platform of the 896 delegates present. The preparatory discussions, and the 18 days of full session allowed differences and divergences to appear around various basic points. These positions provided the broad contours of the major political currents which would be elaborated in the months to come.

TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY

Since people were rejecting the totalitarian anti-democratic political system which had dominated Poland for 36 years, it

* Since its foundation, Solidarity has had expert advisers. The majority of these advisors are either Catholic intellectuals or left-wing intellectuals (members of the now dissolved KOR). Their role is to advise Solidarity in its negotiations with the government and to draw up alternatives for the economy.

would be surprising if they did not examine equally closely the question of democracy within the union. At times their carefulness on this bordered on excess. Foreign observers were frequently irritated by the long procedural discussions which took up so much of the full session, but, in the words of Karol Modzelewski, this was only one of the "small prices of democracy". As if to excuse themselves, Congress delegates would say: "We are learning democracy", and in fact they were creating a democratic system from which many a Western "democrat" would have something to learn. Various proposals were outlined, on the question of reforming the statutes and in assessing the activities of Solidarity's National Commission (KKP).

On two occasions (after the events of Bydgoszcz in March and in the negotiations over the self-management law that was passed by Parliament in September) the executive of the KKP overstepped itself. It took major decisions on behalf of the union (agreements with the government), decisions which were contrary to what they had been mandated by the KKP or by Congress. The delegates' discontent focussed on the record of the outgoing KKP.

In some people's opinion one had to begin from the objective existing conditions, in order to understand how difficult it would have been to do any better. For others, such as Z. Zaworski, a delegate from a small region of Poland, these conditions had in part been created by the union: "In criticising the KKP you are criticising yourselves. Who elected the KKP if not you yourselves? I have been a worker-member of the KKP since September 1980. At that time, and up until December, I was able to stand up and speak as a worker. But then there was this influx of "new philosophers", these intellectuals who don't give anyone else a chance to speak. Where are the workers of our early days? They are not even delegates at this Congress!

This contradiction between workers and intellectuals emerged from a number of interventions. It expressed some of the union's weaknesses. Many people thought that life in the workplace, social questions, job security and health had been overlooked by the KKP. In their opinion the "experts" played a negative role. And it is undeniable that the ongoing tensions in Poland and their organisational weaknesses contributed to rancour of this sort. They gave rise to an anti-intellectual climate which would prove favourable to political manoeuvring.

CONTROLLING EXPERTS

Some delegates were aware of this danger, and stressed both the weakness in the trade union's work and also the necessity of a unity between manual workers and intellectuals. Andrzej Gwiazda in particular went back over the history of the KKP. Despite his reputation for having a very critical view, he put forward a very qualified argument. He demonstrated the non-democratic evolution of the KKP's mode of work, while at the same time defending the necessity of having experts. "We resent them giving their opinions, but it was precisely for that purpose that we chose them. We cannot accuse them of manipulating the union. What we must do is simply listen to their point of view, and select them on the basis of the diversity of their opinions." Another Warsaw Solidarity leader, Andrzej Malachowski, took up the theme, and highlighted the poor functioning of the trade union apparatus: "At this moment we are in a state of chaos, which prevents us going forward." He shifted the discussion towards the organisation's overall preoccupations: "Everybody wants to change the world, but nobody knows how to help the worker in his everyday struggles. How to get better job security. How to alter the quality of our everyday life. These are the worries which should be uppermost in the minds of every militant. We have spoken too little about all this." His contribution was warmly applauded, because instead of picking on scapegoats (the intellectuals) he had avoided demagoguery and had presented a clear case.

Similar criticisms were directed at the president in the course of the electoral campaign for the presidency. His three challengers, Marian Jurcik, Andrzej Gwiazda and Jan Rulewski (3), each in their own manner expressed a measure of bad feeling that was common to many delegates: "Every trade union militant, whatever their level, and particularly if they are at the highest level of our organisation, should maintain their links with the workers", said Marian Jurcik. Counterposing one of Lech Walesa's utterances, he added: "I am no supporter of dictatorship, but of the conscious

discipline of our militants" (4) The voting results expressed this mood of challenge. Lech Walesa was elected in the first round with 55% of the votes cast, but this still meant 45% of the votes against him. This discontent was also to be seen in the elections for the KKP. Two experts, R. Bugaj and B. Geremek (the latter being Lech Walesa's principle advisor) were not elected. Finally, while the Congress gave a proper send-off to the outgoing KKP, at the same time it strongly criticised their initiative at the time of the compromise vote over self-management. In general this process of criticism revealed a strong measure of anti-bureaucratic feeling within a movement which did not want to lose its self-control.

ECONOMIC REFORM

This control was particularly important in the light of the fact that the future course of events was likely to prove very tricky. Economic catastrophe was becoming everyday more deeply entrenched in Poland — a product of the lack of organisation within the management of the economy, and of the bad economic choices of the preceding 15 years. It was aggravated by the incompetence of the current ruling group, who, in addition, do not have sufficient authority to right the situation.

At first Solidarity had not permitted itself to draw up an overall counter plan of reforms, but little by little it began to elaborate a series of concrete proposals. These concerned the two aspects of the crisis. The study groups working on the new union's programme revealed a number of differing conceptions of economic choices, and produced an overall conception of workers' self-management.

On the first point, the platform was opposed by two tendencies. First that of Professor Stefan Kurowski, one of the union's experts, who was enthusiastically welcomed by the delegates. Basically he was proposing an "alternative programme in order to get out of the crisis": his formula was attractive enough. His proposed reform was global and based on a massive reduction of investment, a restructuring of the existing infrastructure, a development of the private sector, and an extension of the free market. He proposed a rapid restoration of the economy which would be stimulated by a fresh orientation of the State's agricultural policies. He stressed self-management within enterprises, but this was in order to highlight their financial and commercial autonomy. He emphasised market relations. These radical changes were also supported by a delegate from Radom, Jacek Jerz, who outlined the economic and social programme of the KPN. (5) He made the additional proposal for the abolition of the State's monopoly on external trade.

These proposals were strongly resisted by the economists grouped around one of the Warsaw delegates, Ryszard Bugaj. (6) He described them as "demagogic": "The calculations in these proposals are illusory. We should start from the real existing situation and not try to make people believe in miracles." In effect, Bugaj explained, if one were to follow the proposals of S. Kurowski and the KPN it would just be a question of having to wait for things to happen, whereas what was needed was a mobilisation of the whole country. What was worse, he explained how one of the first costs of these measures would be an average price rise of the order of 200%. Bugaj's group, with the support of a majority of the union's experts, proposed another method: "Our starting point should be the answer to the following question: who should pay for the crisis?" For him there was no doubt: it should be the privileged strata of the population. He proposed a number of temporary measures to control prices and distribution, with a view, in the short term, to re-establishing a normal functioning of the economy. It would only be later, by encouraging the development of self-management and by negotiating with the public authorities, that one would be able to undertake an overall reform. This reform was only sketched in its broadest principles.

However, this debate, which resulted in a series of contradictory amendments in the programme's preparatory texts, remained a controversy between experts. The delegates themselves made a few partial comments, stressing above all the workers' concrete demands. The document as it was finally voted (still very general in its terms) tended towards the positions of the Bugaj group. It developed in a rather more concrete sense when the Congress delegates learned, on Sunday 4 October, that the price of cigarettes was to be increased dramatically. One after another the delegates came



"Hungry of the world, unite!" Women's demonstration in Lodz.

to protest from the platform, threatening strikes, refusing to work for one hour in order to buy a packet of cigarettes, and bringing onto the platform the Finance Minister, M. Krzak, who had rushed post-haste from Warsaw to explain his economic policy. After two days of motions and counter-motions the Congress adopted by an enormous majority a document presented by Karol Modzelewski. This demanded a "freeze of prices at their present level", the immediate opening of negotiations on economic reform and on the price rises which would have to accompany it — but certainly not precede it. In the event of a breakdown, the union threatened to launch a brief but symbolic national general warning strike.

Leaving aside the frequently academic debates, this reaction revealed the kinds of motivations that governed the responses of Polish workers to the crisis. Such as reaction was all the more important in the light of the Government's plan for spectacular price rises on 1 January 1982.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

The same general behaviour could be seen within the debate on self-management. The final proposals of the new union were the outcome of numbers of different positions. They were clearly different from the positions adopted by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) during its third plenary meeting at the start of September. The disagreement was basically on the powers to be accorded to the self-management council. For the Party, it was to be simply a consultative body, whose director would, in the last instance, be controlled by the administration. Furthermore, only a limited number of enterprises would be entitled to self-management. One union expert estimated that the total production of the enterprises excluded by the government exceeded 50% of national product. The delegates' opposition to the party position was total.

The Sejm was to vote on the government bill drawn up on the basis of the PUWP's plenary session. The debate opened on the eve of the second session of Solidarity's two-part Congress. A number of deputies proposed a compromise with the Solidarity leadership. The spectacle was incredible to behold: the majority of MPs were trying to amend the Government bill to make it more favourable to the union. The directors of

self-managed enterprises were to be elected and recallable by the self-management council and/or the founding committee (where, however, the Party and the administration would retain a majority say). In the event of disagreement, each party would have the right to appeal. On the other hand, the list of enterprises entitled to self-management would be negotiated with the union. On 22 September the KKP executive noted this bill, and on 23 September adopted a compromise text supporting the Sejm on these two points. The referendum demanded by the Congress's first session, and rejected by the Sejm, was forgotten.

When the second session opened, the KKP executive put their point of view to the delegates. Andrzej Celinski, on behalf of the executive, described the laws voted in Parliament as 'a great victory for the union'. They created a new situation which would be very favourable to the development of self-management. Of course, they were not sufficient, but they could provide a legal point of reference around which to build the council movement. "If the government attempts in an arbitrary manner to limit the number of self-managed enterprises, it will be acting against the law. This is of prime importance." The exaggerated optimism of this assessment was not accepted by the delegates, and furthermore the way in which the executive had arrived at their decision was judged to be anti-democratic. In effect, only four people, of whom two were non-elected experts, had decided on behalf of the union as a whole.

HISTORIC ERROR

The majority of delegates thought that too many compromises had been made, even though the law, on balance, was positive. Andrzej Gwiazda described the compromises as a "historic error". A statement drawn up by 56 delegates, founding members of the self-management movement, was read from the platform: "The laws that have been passed in Parliament do not fulfil our aspirations. We are appealing to Congress to adopt a resolution in line with our demand, and forcing the union authorities to undertake a real defence of self-management." Three delegates who were engaged directly on the construction of self-management councils sounded the alarm: "In increasing

numbers enterprises are coming to us with alarming news, describing how the State is attempting to stifle the development of a properly autonomous movement for self-management. Directors of enterprises are sending out memoranda setting up committees to organise elections for the workers' councils, under the chairmanship of the First Secretary of the local committee of the PUWP. The existence of constituent committees for self-management, formed on the initiative of workers themselves, is systematically ignored. This situation has come about with the connivance of the Government." And this was the spirit of a motion voted for by a large majority of the delegates. The motion more or less disowned the compromise that had been accepted by the KKP



Women and children demonstrating in Lodz.

executive in the period between the two parts of the Congress. Above all, it highlighted the delegates' attachment to the conquests of the preceding year. It underlined the absence of any confidence in the Government and highlighted people's desire to play an active and conscious part in the restoration of the economy. It was becoming clear that if there was to be conflict with the Government, it would be on fundamental questions. They would have to avoid diversionary questions, and concentrate on themes that concerned the population as a whole. Thus the motion on self-management was complementary to that on the price rises. In both cases, the rank and file of the union, by virtue of expressing the discontent and the radicalisation that was to be found within enterprises, was able, thanks to the level of internal democracy, to have the main say.

"PRAGMATIC" AND "FUNDAMENTALIST"

However, this intransigence was framed within a strategy that was relatively moderate. This, at least, was what emerged from the debates on the union's strategic orientation in relation to the authorities and the Party.

During the workshop sessions, two conceptions were outlined. For the majority of the outgoing leadership (Walesa, Modzelewski, Gwiazda...) who described themselves as

"pragmatists", the union should remain within the framework of the agreements signed the previous Summer. Any advance would have to be made step by step. The system would have to be reformed, and would be improved by asserting a control over the authorities. "Our union should be fighting for bread, and not for power. For this we should use and support all the new forms of organisation and self-management which will enable the workers to take into their own hands the production and distribution of commodities." Poland's geopolitical situation could not be changed in the short term. Thus, the Government would have to be forced into acceptance of the new social contract. On the other hand, though, a minority of delegates and experts, who defined themselves as "fundamen-

talists", proposed that the union should launch a frontal attack on the system. "It is impossible," they claimed, "to have any thrust in this State apparatus. Our union's duty is to point out and to eliminate the causes of the present crisis. We cannot afford to limit ourselves to the symptoms." This proposition went beyond the framework of the Gdansk agreements and focussed on a political objective - the rapid organisation of free parliamentary elections.

This split was not, however, yet structured into organised currents. It mustered delegates and experts from very different political origins, and ranged them into different camps. The majority ended by supporting the orientation which has been dominant in the union since the strikes of August 1980, and appeals to the humanist, socialist and national traditions of the Polish workers' movement. Expressing their concern for trade union democracy, its spokesmen stressed the need for self-management, and considered that the organisation of free elections would be premature. The radicalism of the "fundamentalists", on the other hand, attempted to profit by the growing discontent within society. But the majority of them were acting on formulas which mixed a basic hostility to the PUWP with nationalism and traditional catholicism. And while the delegates applauded a number of speakers from this tendency, when it came to the voting they preferred

to opt for the first position. This was shown in the final programme that was adopted.

POLITICAL CURRENTS

At the end of this Congress it would therefore be premature to try to fix a political geography of Solidarity as an organisation. We can only indicate the directions in which the directions in which the various currents are developing, and guess at where they will arrive. In part they correspond to the political traditions of the pre-August democratic movement, and in part they are rooted within the varying reactions of the Polish people to the crisis.

The first division is between what one would call a "nationalist right wing" and a "secular and progressive left wing". The former identify with the programme of the KPN and with the "Club for the Preservation of Independence" (KSM), founded in the course of the Congress. This featured a number of intellectuals with varying political pasts, including A. Macierewicz (ex of KOR, one of the *Glos* people), S. Kurowski (an economist attracted by the theories of Milton Friedman), and A. Hall (a leader of the nationalist group Young Poland). The majority of the lay left-wing grouping consisted of ex-KOR militants, Catholics who were hostile to the religious influences on the union, friends of Lech Walesa, and the self-management tendency.

The nationalists who had plumped for free elections and a radical economic reform in the direction of a liberalisation of the economy were probably the main losers in this Congress. There was a grouping arising out of a particular conjuncture, and will have difficulty surviving. What is more, they tend to be based more on debate than on practical trade union experience.

The political tendencies which will decide the future of the Union will probably emerge from the "pragmatic" majority, which, in itself, is fairly heterogeneous. If one takes as one's fundamental criterion the question of the union's tactics in the face of the authorities, one can distinguish three different positions, linked by a number of intermediary positions.

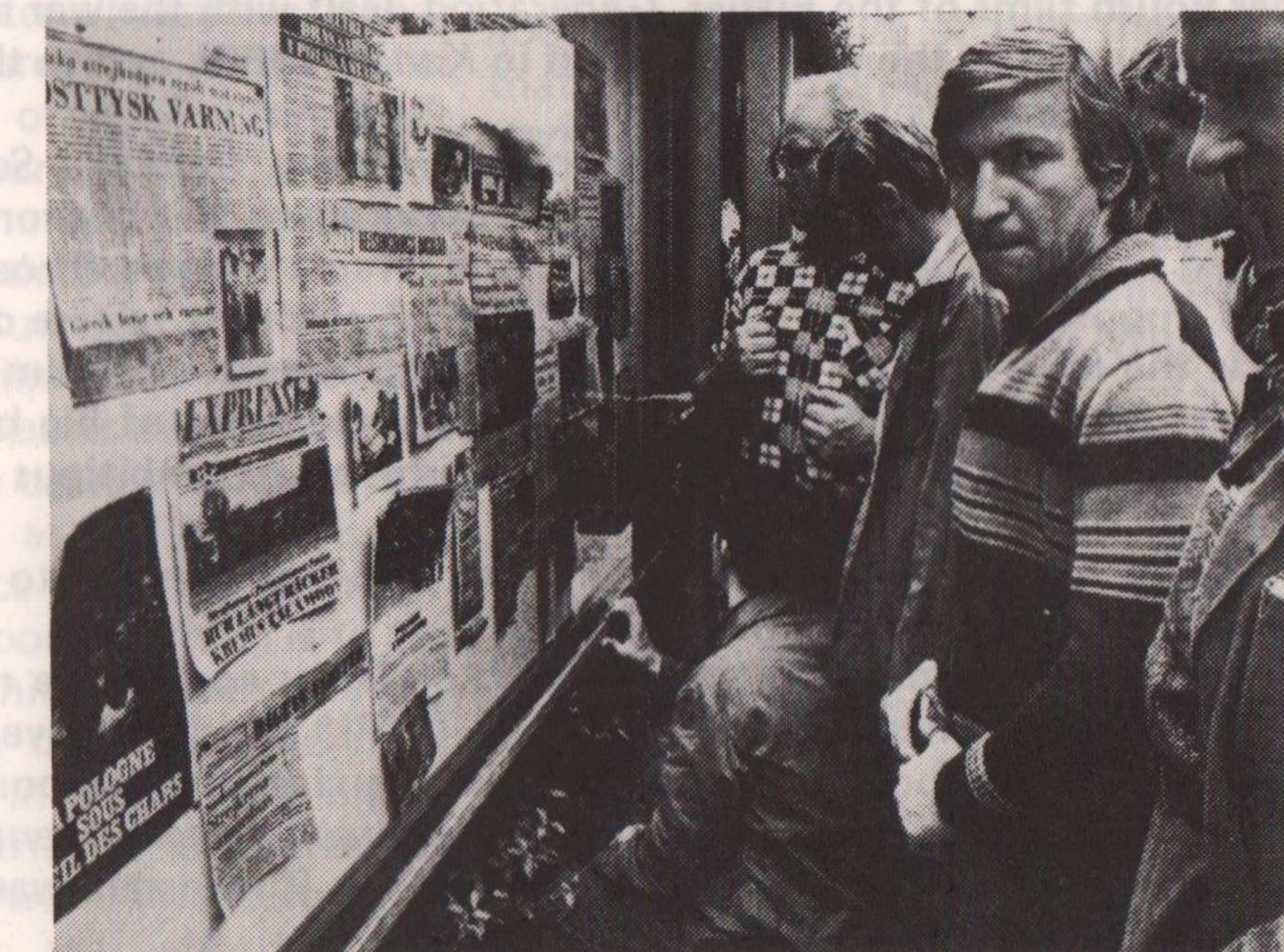
THREE POSITIONS

First, Jacek Juron, who envisages, under certain conditions, the formation of a "government of national unity". "The problem is as follows," he explained during a discussion in Warsaw in mid-September. "Are we in a position to put forward a programme of gradual reforms on the supposition that during that period power is going to remain in the same hands? Is it likely that this reform will prove impossible? One as he feeling that life has answered this question in the negative. (...) Even if the realisation of the reform programme by the base were to prove impossible, it would be necessary to group the whole of society around this programme, for it is only in such an event that everyone would see the authorities as responsible for the confrontation. And if this confrontation happens, the Government will lose very fast, as it did at the time of the Bydgoszcz confrontation. At that point, one could set up a government of national unity, which would set elections in motion and would introduce reforms. (...) The USSR would be forced to accept such an agreement." This formula was received sceptically by many of the trade union leaders, but might correspond to a number of overtures made by the Party leadership in the course of the Congress, along the lines of the formation of a tripartite (PUWP, Church and Solidarity) government, based on negotiations. In the Congress corridors a petition was circulating, drawn up by a number of intellectuals (including three noted union experts), which basically put forward this position.

The second point of view, equally clear-cut, but perhaps less precise in its institutional proposals, can be sifted from the statements of Andrzej Gwiazda and his friends. In addition to their insistence on trade union democracy and the necessity of a firm line in negotiations, they saw the development of the preceding months in a bad light. "Our union is undeniably in a difficult position, and we must be aware of this," said Gwiazda, in his speech during the election for the presidency of Solidarity. "...Leaving aside economic questions, the queues, the lack of basic commodities and industrial products, our union also has to face up to increasingly serious attacks by the authorities. (...) It is clear that the authorities intend to increase these attacks. They are attempting to engage us in a large number of local conflicts. I think that we have made a big mistake in not replying very firmly to the first attack." Here he was alluding to the March compromise reached after the Bydgoszcz incidents, and he con-

cluded: "We are hiding our heads in the sand when we try to placate the authorities. By taking steps backwards, we get closer and closer to a generalised conflict, and we will not be in good condition to fight." He did not commit himself on the question of power, but he described workers' control as the union's principal task in the face of the economic crisis: "We must take over control. This can be considered as a task of the people, a popular task, because it requires a kind of laborious, non-spectacular work on the part of all members of the Union. It is difficult, but we must undertake it. And we will see who will retreat first, the government or us."

Finally, one can identify a third position in the statements by the militants from Lodz and Lublin, who supported the motion adopted by Congress, concerning self-management. They combine the development of workers' control over production and the construction of the self-management movement, with a conception of the active strike. This tactic was included in the electoral platform of the leadership elected during the Lodz regional Congress. In the event of a confrontation with the authorities (which they consider inevitable), Z. Kowalewski, a spokesperson for this tendency, wrote: "We must be ready to make the transition from the passive occupation type of strike to an active occupation strike." He outlined the methods that would be necessary and concluded: "So let us begin by entrusting the principal means of production to society and be setting up social enterprises. (...) If Solidarity is forced into taking up the ultimate weapon of the mass strike, it should launch a strike



Reading the foreigner's view of Solidarity. Puls Publications which will accelerate the process of self-organisation within society as the owner of the means of production, and which will prepare the way for the country to pull out of the crisis." However, this perspective has no answer to objections based on the nature of the international context.

These three positions are far from summing up the rich strategic debate which Solidarity has undertaken, and at the same time they are not fixed positions. There are as yet no tendencies with precise political platforms. Rather, there is this spectacle, a sight rare enough in Western Europe, of a permanent forum where trade union leaders reflect out loud, trying to find an effective solution to the apparently inextricable situation in which they find themselves. And we should add that these controversies are all founded on one sacred hypothesis, on a factor whose absence would compromise the hopes born in August 1980: the unity of the union.

Jean-Yves Potel

1. Many articles and documents were published in Solidarity's newspapers to celebrate the anniversaries of the Prague spring and the commune of Budapest.
2. These quotes are from the version given to delegates and include amendments.
3. Marian Jurcik is president of the union in Szczecin, Jan Rulewski is president in Bydgoszcz. Andrzej Gwiazda is a member of the Gdansk leadership.
4. During a debate on the constitution, Lech Walesa had demanded dictatorial powers.
5. The Federation of an Independent Poland (KPN) is a nationalist group that came out of ROPCIO. It is led by Molszowski, currently in prison for 'anti-socialist activities'.
6. R. Bugaj's project brings together self-management, planning and the market, it gives pride of place to 'social ownership of the means of production.'

INTERVIEW WITH WAJDA



The name of Andrzej Wajda is virtually synonymous with Poland's modern cinema. Born in 1926, Wajda initially studied painting at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, but later transferred to the Lodz Film School. There he made several shorts and worked as an art director, scriptwriter, and assistant director before his debut as a feature director in 1954, with *Generation*. Like many other Polish films of the Fifties, *Generation* dealt with the war and the devastating effects of nearly six years of Nazi occupation. Wajda returned to the war years again in *Kanal* (1966), and to the murderous political turmoil of the immediate postwar years in *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958).

Wajda's first film with a contemporary setting, *Innocent Sorcerers*, was made in 1960 but was not released until 1961. Its vision of alienated youth was hardly appealing to the authorities. Increasing government restrictions throughout the Sixties resulted in the decline of the Polish School. Wajda worked abroad on co-productions during much of the decade.

An important breakthrough came in 1977, with the release of *Man of Marble*, a scathing indictment of postwar Polish history that is the most socially critical — and, most important — film ever made in Eastern Europe. *Rough Treatment* (1978) is one of the best films ever made about the shadowy workings of big bureaucracies. *The Conductor* (1980) returns to the harshness of the present day and contrasts the careerism of an ambitious provincial orchestra conductor with the dedication of an aged expatriate of world renown.

Wajda's latest film *Man of Iron* (see review) is a sequel to *Man of Marble* and covers the events of 1980 which led to the creation of the free trade union Solidarity.

The ovation Wajda got at this year's Solidarity conference reflects his standing in Poland as an organic intellectual. A member of the Experience and Future Group (DiP)*, Wajda has over the years used his position as untouchable by the state to speak out against the despotism of the Polish ruling class. His support for the liberation of Polish workers is not an optional extra of his film-making: it is an intrinsic part of his *personal engagement* in revolution.

The interview by Daniel Buckley and Lenny Rubenstein was completed in September 1980 and first appeared in the US film magazine *Cineaste*.

* see DiP's *Poland — The State of the Republic* (Pluto Press 1981)

Q: You are both a director and a producer of films. How does that work?

A: First, you must understand how film production in a socialist country is organized. The general policy of the national cinema — programming, distribution, exhibition, and production itself — is in the hands of the state. More practically, it is in the hands of one man, the Minister of Culture. At its worst, this results in all films produced being of the type *he* likes. Imagine Sam Spiegel having a monopoly on film production in the United States, and you have an idea of our situation. Because of this, we have searched for a system that would guarantee diversity and a measure of freedom in film production. From that search grew the concept of film units. Each unit consists of a director, a literary manager, and an executive producer. Around this trio are clustered other, usually younger, directors. The people in each film unit work together from a shared artistic viewpoint. They develop themes, write screenplays, discuss one another's work. With several such units, we can propose various film ideas to the Minister, who now controls all financing. The older, established

director who has proven himself can vouch for the talent of a younger colleague, who normally would be unable to discuss new films with the Minister. That is my duty as a producer, to act as a go-between with the Ministry.

Q: So all feature film production originates in the units?

A: Yes, We have eight units working in Poland now; each produces about five features a year. I head one unit, Krzysztof Zanussi another, Jerzy Kawalerowicz a third; the other names probably wouldn't be familiar to your readers. The units exist for three-year periods, after which they may change. Each is formed around the distinct personality and interests of its head, who is the decisive influence on the themes and style of the films made in that unit. This idea of working units developed here in Poland. We consider it one of our greatest successes, and it has been adopted in several other socialist countries, including the Soviet Union.

Q: When did the units develop? Was there a struggle over them?

A: The postwar Polish cinema was created by a number of filmmakers and critics who, as early as 1929, had formed

an organization called "START" to further the interests of noncommercial cinema. They put forward the slogan, "Film must be socially useful." After the war, this group came to Poland with the Soviet army. The majority were members of the Communist Party, and their influence on the formation of the Polish cinema was decisive. After the war they contended that the Polish cinema must become a directors' cinema, even in the management of practical details, and not dominated by producers, and especially not by political advisors or bureaucrats. At that time the idea of film units was already being discussed by this group. Unfortunately, their ideas were not compatible with the bureaucratic structure of the new socialist government. This was a conflict from the very beginning. So the units were not actually created until after the revolution that brought Gomulka to power in 1956. Five units were started then. Among them was one called 'Kadr', headed by the young Kawalerowicz. I belonged to it, and so did Andrzej Munk. The real beginning of what came to be known as the Polish School began in this unit. Still, the units never achieved the

amount of independence we envisioned for them, and in the late Sixties they suffered greatly from attacks by the government.

Q: Are you trying to increase the units' independence now?

A: Yes, exactly. On the wave of the recent political events, with all the changes now taking place in Poland, we are demanding complete independence in script selection and in financing films.

Q: You want the Ministry to give the units a certain amount of money, and for the units to decide independently what they wish to do with it?

A: It's a little more complex than that. You see, all the heads of the units are selected for three-year periods. By coincidence, this period is just now ending, and all the units must elect new heads, or managers, as we call them. What we want right now is for the managers to be selected from a list that will be chosen by the filmmakers' union. We'll allow the Ministry to choose the managers, but only from that list.

Q: But what about financing?

A: We want each unit to receive a certain amount of money at the beginning of each three-year period. At the end of this period each should pay this money back, recouping it from box office receipts, TV sales, overseas sales, and so on. In this way, each unit will be ultimately responsible for its own financing.

Q: And you're not afraid of commercial pressures replacing political ones?

A: No. The weakest aspect of Polish cinema is that it produces a lot of films that are completely unnecessary, that are not addressed to any audience at all. Of course, one might ask why we are fighting for added responsibilities, since these might make our lives even more difficult than before. But we are looking for a clear criterion of our activity, and we feel that the financial one is honest. At least it's much more honest than the political one. Commercialization, in the Western sense of the word, does not pose a danger to us. In Poland, every truthful political film is also commercially successful. So, too, are films based on classic Polish literature. We are not worried about an over-production of stupid comedies or anything like that.

Q: You're putting a lot of trust in your audience.

A: Yes, because the Polish cinema during its best years was supported by the audience, not by the Ministry. Audiences were much more intelligent and just in their judgments than the Ministry was. You should also know that the authorities are always juggling attendance figures. This happens two ways. First, theaters sell tickets costing either two or twelve zloties. For some films, two twelve-zloty tickets are counted as twelve two-zloty ones, to increase the attendance statistics. The reverse happens to certain other films. The second way is through a different distribution system. A 16mm copy is made and distributed to schools, military units, and so on. So to the

attendance figures reported by the theaters the authorities can simply add in the entire Polish army or all the school children. Of course, only certain films are distributed in 16mm. And this is a purely political decision, made by the Ministry. The only audience we want counted consists of people actually coming to the box office and buying tickets, not these millions of 'abstract' spectators.

Q: Do you think this will eliminate many of the politically opportunist films?

A: Yes, precisely. When the Minister wants a supposedly political film, and is paying for it, he then has a vested interest in its success. If it is, in fact, unsuccessful, he merely manipulates the statistics to prove otherwise. That would not be possible in the system we propose.

Q: Which films now are the least successful with Polish audiences?

A: Those we call, ironically, 'artistic'. By this we mean those films trying to copy or follow western European trends — obscure avant-garde or existentialist films, expressions of the filmmaker's 'soul' and nothing more.

Q: Are there commercial pressures in your current production system?

A: Not really. But this has its good and bad sides. If a film plays to an empty house, it doesn't necessarily mean the film is bad; in some cases the public may be guilty. My task as a director is not just to provide a nice evening's entertainment. The most important thing is to tell the audience something, to make people think, to initiate a dialogue. The most important moment in preparing a film is deciding what you wish to say. There are a lot of directors who have something meaningful to say, yet who lack the ability to put their ideas across on the screen. The lack of commercial pressure means that such a director may never develop or learn anything. An American director knows that the most important thing is to tell an interesting story. That is why American films are a good example for us. There *should* be pressure from the audience, since that pressure can be intellectual as well as commercial, particularly here in Poland, where our ambitions in the cinema are often much higher than our filmmaking capabilities. There hasn't been any interesting literature or painting in Poland recently; some music, perhaps, but it is film that provides the main current of artistic creativity. Anyone really interested in the arts is connected with film, and if you wish to say something political, film is the best means of doing so.

Q: Why is that?

A: I don't think anybody knows. A novel can end up in the wastebasket or the closet; it's too much of a private thing. To do a film you must have a screenplay accepted by the authorities, you must overcome a lot of difficulties, you must know how to fight for your ideas.

Q: Polish films have been based trad-

itionally on classic literary works, yet it seems that many of the new films are made from original screenplays.

A: That's true. The best literature in Poland today is found in screenplays. Nearly all the best films in recent years are original stories for the screen. This is especially true of the younger directors; they all prefer to write their own scripts. These directors are the great hope of Polish cinema. I can't overemphasize how inspiring and challenging it has been for me to work with them.

Q: Was the Polish film school you attended left-wing?

A: The school's founders were, of course. As for the students, it is hard to say, since for our generation the war and occupation were the only experience in life. That is why our first films all dealt with the war years. At an age when many start seeing films seriously, say about thirteen to nineteen years old, we could not go to the cinema because of the German occupation. I was very naive about films because of this; the first film that deeply impressed me was *Citizen Kane*. I first saw it during my second year at the Fine Arts Academy in 1948.

Q: Your early films, especially *Ashes and Diamonds*, are closely identified with the actor Zbigniew Cybulski. What sort of effect did he have on you?

A: Nobody has ever had an effect on me as Cybulski did. We worked together very often and very closely at the beginning of my career. He was my collaborator. We always discussed new films and developed the ideas for them together. Cybulski was the kind of actor who brought to films his own character, his own individuality. He was almost incapable of playing someone wholly invented by a writer; he always played himself. That's why he was so irreplaceable. Even after his death, I felt at first that he was still with me, planning my next film. I thought about him constantly. I was shocked when I realized that it was impossible to make another film with him, that his character would never again appear on the screen. At that instant I understood that each of us is exceptional; when someone dies, something unique disappears from the universe. There is no replacement for individual human nature. That is why all films about dead actors fail; another actor cannot play the character, even if the dead actor is played by an actor of greater talent. The truth is in the impossibility of replacement.

Q: Around 1960 you made your first 'contemporary' film, *Innocent Sorcerers*, a story about disaffected and cynical youth in socialist Poland. Its script was by Jerzy Skolimowski and it starred, among others, Cybulski and Roman Polanski. Was it well received by the Polish public?

A: Yes, it was accepted by the public, but not by the government. It was not released until a year after it was finished, and then it was very poorly distributed. It shocked the authorities in those times

because it depicted such new and unexpected attitudes.

Q: They objected to the film from a moral point of view?

A: Yes, it's almost funny now. For example, in the film the protagonist owned a new tape recorder. In one scene he had the recorder sitting on the floor by his chair, and as he sat he idly punched it on and off with his foot. The authorities cut this scene from the film because they were shocked to see such a nonchalant attitude displayed toward such a highly prized technical device. They thought it was a terribly immoral scene. Another example: in Jerzy Andrzejewski's short story, it wasn't very clear why the young boy — the protagonist — refuses the love of a girl. This boy was played by Tadeusz Lomnicki, a very good and thoughtful actor. He acted the part out for me in rehearsal, without the camera. It was clear immediately that the boy was a homosexual. He wanted to make love to the girl, yet he was afraid of something in *him*. As Lomnicki rehearsed it, I knew that it was right, that I should make the film that way. But I wasn't courageous or self-confident enough to do it directly or openly. In the official version of Polish reality, you see, homosexuality simply does not exist.

Q: So you felt the film was compromised from the beginning?

A: Yes. It was not even half what it should have been. Ironically, two or three years after the release of *Innocent Sorcerers*, a British film, *A Taste of Honey*, was released in Poland. Audiences understood immediately the homosexual character in that film; the situation was quite explicit. I believe, in general, that a lot of ideas originally born here are just not attempted, owing to moral obstacles, to the oppressiveness of old ideas and habits, and so on.

Q: Some Western critics have complained that your historical films are a form of evasion. Do you feel there is some truth in that?

A: No, not exactly. For instance, *Land of Promise* now appears to be a much more contemporary film than people realized when it was released in 1974.

Q: It dealt with a big strike in Lodz near the turn of the century, didn't it?

A: Yes. It was extremely successful, not only in Poland, but in all the socialist countries. It showed a basic life mechanism that hasn't existed here in many years. It was about competitive people, people whose success was connected to their activities and abilities. This was in sharp contrast to our present situation, where your own capabilities or actions are less important to your success or failure than are outside circumstances beyond your control.

Q: To judge from many recent Polish films, this state of affairs seems to have given rise to a great deal of opportunism and careerism in Polish society.

A: Yes. This is a problem that concerns us deeply. A career in our society is something very different from one in the West. You cannot become a celebrity here, as people can in the West; your scope is much more limited. To devote yourself completely to advancing your career, you must invariably stoop to rotten deals and swinish behavior; you must step on a lot of people. Honest people must expose and combat such a situation. It is important to defend the individual's identity and sense of integrity. It is important to defend ethical and principled values. These are vital themes for us; they can be seen in my film *The Orchestra Conductor*, in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Camera Buff*, and in all of Zanussi's films.

Q: What can film accomplish in society?

A: Less than filmmakers wish, but much more than the authorities expect. It can be very difficult to make your point, but, from the letters I have received and the people with whom I have spoken, I think I succeeded with three films: *Ashes and Diamonds*, *Man of Marble*, and *Rough Treatment*. Each film dealt with a subject that had never

been treated or spoken of openly, yet, there on the screen, audiences could see their own lives, their hardships, their misery. True, these films were only representations of reality, but the fact that they were openly shown indicates that the political authorities were not entirely afraid to discuss reality. To have a film on the borderline between the permissible and the impermissible — that is always a success. It is very important to draw large audiences to such films. Many ambitious and beautiful films, some of which are politically very inquisitive, are nonetheless exclusive and elitist, and hence unsuccessful.

Q: You mentioned *Man of Marble*. Was it released without cuts in Poland?

A: No. There was one scene cut. The young film director, played by Krystyna Janda, is with the son of Birkut in the Gdansk cemetery. They are looking for a grave, but are unable to find it. This, of course, means that Birkut was killed during the 1970 strikes in Gdansk.

Q: Were there problems in releasing the film in Poland?

A: Yes, but I was certain from the very beginning that it would eventually be released. The political climate at that time was such that there was a group against the film. But there was another equally important group — at least it was strong enough — that fought on my side for the film's release.

Q: *Man of Marble* was a great commercial success in Poland. Was *Rough Treatment* also?

A: Yes. It was very well received by the audience and by critics. What is particularly interesting to me is that it was also well received abroad, despite its rather heavy dialogue, and despite its rather unspectacular nature.

Q: Some critics were confused as to whether the main character was really in official disfavor.

A: I'm not surprised. The Polish audience, of course, understood it perfectly. I also learned that many French critics said the film was not only about Poland,

but about France as well. They had no problem recognizing the symptoms of this kind of *unofficial* disfavor — the kind that is vague and unclear, and that leads you to conclude that there is something wrong with *you*. This film does not describe a phenomenon that is unique to socialist countries, but rather one that can be found in all societies dominated by bureaucracies.

It would have been possible, of course, simply to portray directly what was happening. I suppose it would have been easy to invent some reason for the protagonist to be unaccepted suddenly by those around him. But that would have cut out all the important undertones from the film, and made it a tract or something, or just a depiction of an isolated event, without the atmosphere or the *process* of bureaucracy coming into focus.

Q: In *The Conductor* there is a sense that art has become a weapon of cruelty for the young conductor, in the way we usually think of politics.

A: Perhaps. I could have set this film in the political world, but I felt it was better to transplant the conflict into the realm of art. I wanted to show that there is a kind of freedom that comes from artistic creation. Anyone who doesn't have a feeling of liberty inside of himself is incapable of expressing it, or giving it, to others.

Q: In Kieslowski's *Camera Buff* there is an implicit notion that it is very difficult to be a successful filmmaker and, simultaneously, have a successful personal life. As a director who also has many organizational and political responsibilities, do you find it possible to have any life away from the cinema?

A: No, it is not possible to do much else when you are a filmmaker. To be a film director you must concentrate on filmmaking. There are moments when I feel that I have never experienced anything; I have only made films. If you are married, you must find a wife — or a husband — who is able to understand your priorities. You must find a mate

whose personality is so strong and self-assured that she or he will not be afraid of very often being in second place, so to speak.

Q: What do you see as the relationship between contemporary Polish cinema and the recent political events?

A: I think that Polish films of recent years, especially those of the trend called the 'cinema of moral dissent', have been particularly successful in reaching Polish audiences. These films testified to the growing crisis in our country and stress that a real dialogue must exist between society and the authorities. Of course, it would be absurd to claim a causal relationship between these films and the recent developments here in Gdansk, but it's not unreasonable to see a connection between them, if only of mutual concern.

Q: Will it be possible to maintain the close ties that seem to exist at the moment between the workers and filmmakers?

A: On the organizational level, if the workers achieve authentic representation, as they have demanded, then it will be possible. But if they are represented by bureaucratic leaders, as in the past, then there will be no point in continuing any connection. It will be important, of course, for filmmakers, on a personal level, to know the real situation and feelings of the workers. You do not have to be a worker to make a film about workers but you must know what you are talking about to make a film that speaks the truth.

Q: Do you feel that the artist has a responsibility to play a leading role in the transformation of society?

A: I consider myself a leftist, and I believe there is ample recent evidence to show that the working class itself is the most powerful leading force in Poland. But in a society such as ours, the artist *does* help shape opinions, and can function as a kind of conscience for the nation. In that sense, yes, we can and should play a leading role.



Gdansk workers bury those killed in the 1970 uprisings. The memory of past events is very much with today's militants (From 'Man of Iron')

Film Review

'Man of Iron'

Man of Iron is the kind of film which has an Oxford Street (admittedly art) cinema audience clapping respectfully at the end. It closes on a truly stirring drum-roll of revolutionary folk-song — and I'm usually pretty resistant to revolutionary folk-song. It's a song for a worker killed in the long fight for Free Trade Unions, sung as *Man of Iron* and his wife leave the roadside spot where his father was shot in the back by soldiers in 1970. They stride off purposefully, arm in arm, but she's skipping a little with pleasure, as the Gdansk Declaration has just been signed. It's the last day of August, 1980.

The strength of this film is in its immediacy and freshness — the freshness of the events it films — as Wajda says, "an historic event which is so close that we can reach out and touch it". Some of the best bits for me were just seeing the workers perching on the ship-yard walls! Its weakness is in its sentimentality (which includes a sentimental sexism) and the wordiness with which it incorporates the past into the present. Characters are constantly explaining themselves and their pasts. More is *said* than shown. For anyone who hasn't seen *Man of Marble*, to which this is a sequel, following the ins

and outs of the story is hard work. And *Man of Marble* is by all accounts far better shaped as a film. I felt that too much of *Man of Iron* was done through flashbacks, labouriously explaining the present. This stopped the present living as vividly as it might have done. I would have liked more of the drama of events.

INSTANT FACTION

Wajda started shooting *Man of Iron* in September 1980. It was finished early in 1981, won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival and hit London, amidst

rave reviews, in September. A speedy production, designed to capture the excitement of the Polish breakthrough. Wajda weaves documentary footage from the 70s and from August 1980, and clips from *Man of Marble*, into his fictional narrative. The result is a 'real-life' documentary, personalised through focusing on the fictional characters of degenerate, despicable little Winkel, the sell-out journalist, and the embittered but idealistic Man of Iron, Maciej Tomczyk, who drops out of Polytechnic to work in the shipyards like his father, Man of Marble — all this with a love story plonked on top.

Historic fact and Wajda's fiction are further mixed in by using scenes and even dialogue from real life, reconstituting crowd scenes to include his actors, and having Lech Walesa and Anna Walentynowicz make guest appearances in the story. Lech Walesa is, for instance, a witness at Maciej and Agnieszka's tiny church wedding. "As this is a democratic marriage," Walesa smiles sweetly, handing them a white flower each, "You'll share these democratically." (when did he last clean the lavatory...!)

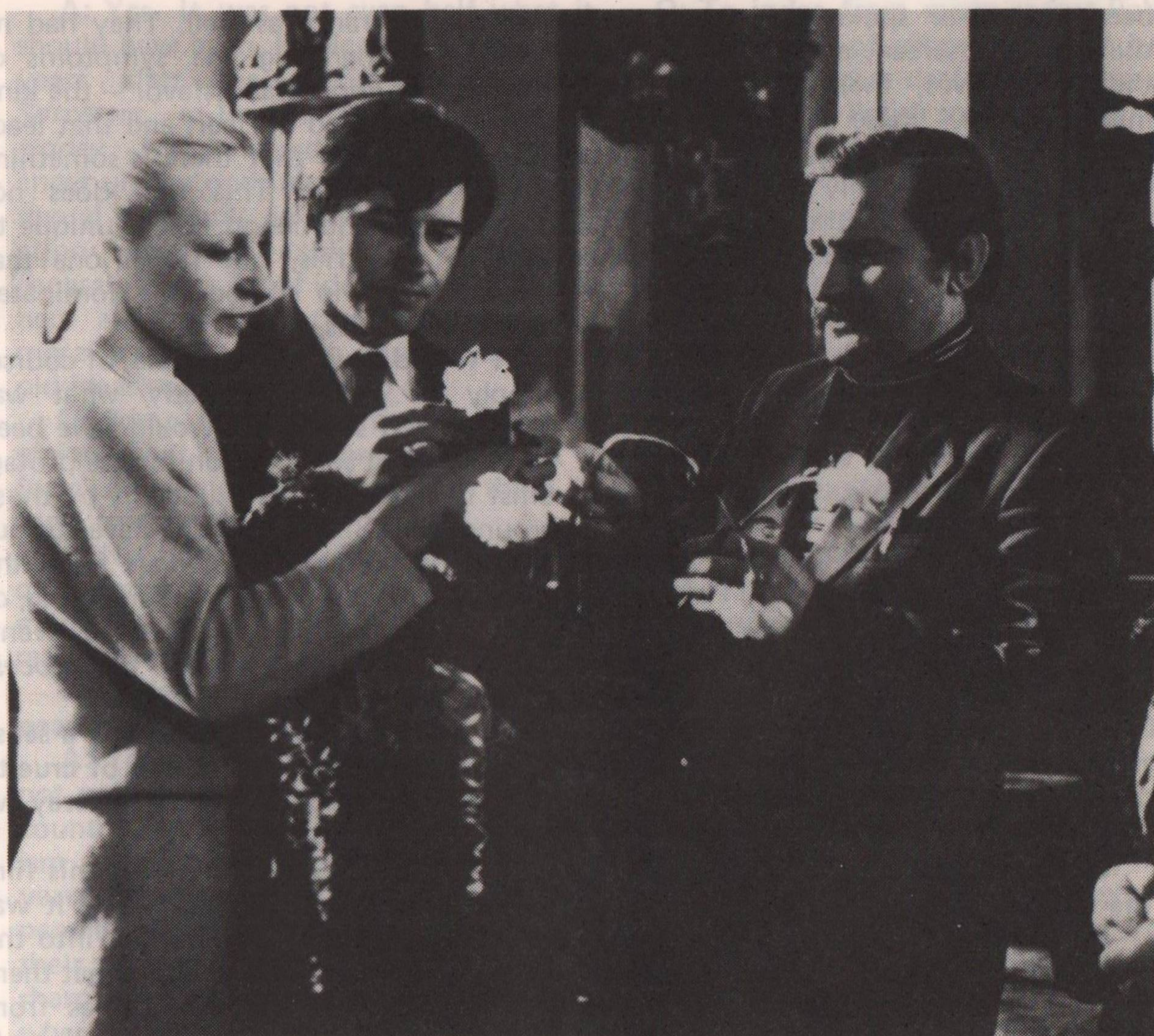
FRAGRANT FARTS

The film *is* impressive, charting both Solidarity's sudden eruption and the long buildup to it (though it plays down the role of radical intellectuals in that ground-work). Wajda is now head of the film section of Solidarity, and his commitment, enthusiasm and optimism shine clear.

The film makes obvious why Solidarity was necessary in terms of police and political repression, outbreaks of violence and everyday intimidation, state-owned unions ("When the director farts, they say how fragrant it is"), lack of freedom to organise or even make complaints. It doesn't bother to show the economic collapse which also spawned Solidarity, or try to show divisions or debates within the new union. It's a simple statement of the need for and feeling of August '80. The emphasis is on workers, then students, then workers, then both together, sweeping forward, being beaten back, and finally breaking through. "No lie can prevail for long," says Birkut, Man of Marble, back in 1968, and his words are repeated later by a Solidarity activist.

Winkel, slightly radical journalist turned conformist radio producer turned informer, shows the way the lie shaped some people. He's sent to Gdansk to "nip the legend of Maciej in the bud". He's supposed to dig up the dirt and send it back to his Warsaw bosses for defamatory TV programmes. Of course he's reluctantly won over by the sincerity of the people he meets. Early on, a police officer shows Winkel a photo — "I know her" "She's under arrest" "It must have been somebody else". The officer laughs contemptuously at Winkel's cowardice.

The trouble with Winkel is that he's too much a caricature — funny, yes; it's good to see him drop his precious bottle of vodka in the hotel bathroom and soak it up with a floorcloth, squeezing it into a toothmug and retching as he gulps it down — the strike committee has banned alcohol. As he grovels on the floor, the local TV is announcing that this is *not* a counter-revolution, that 'we' must have a responsible dialogue — the party struggling to keep up and to keep control.



Lech Walesa makes a guest appearance at *Man of Iron's* wedding. He hopes it will be democratic. But women have little presence in Solidarity and at the moment there is little sign of feminist consciousness in Poland.

But journalists weren't literally paid spies, on huge, secret expense accounts. They were paid journalists, 'just doing their job'. The bribery and spy movie intrigue at the beginning are not justified by the plot. Making Winkel's situation so extreme lets Wajda off the hook of showing how all journalists and most artists were incorporated into the state structure — though some, like himself, did do their best to go to the borderline of the permissible, while holding on to top positions.

THE AGE OF THE TRAIN

And so to my other problem with the film, what I called its 'sentimental sexism'. The most embarrassing moment in the film is when Maciej and Agnieszka run into each other's arms at the railway station — she's tried to leave him and go back to her own life in Warsaw, but "he's a man you can't leave". It's a real *Love Story* scene — I'm surprised it didn't switch into slow motion.

Another disappointment is when the Gdansk Declaration is actually signed. Wajda dramatises the emotion of the moment by having Agnieszka fall into Maciej's arms again. It has a certain logic, as the strikers had insisted on the release of arrested strike supporters, among them Agnieszka. But I really wished Wajda could have found another way to get across the mass feeling of exhilaration. Couldn't the events have spoken for themselves more strongly than that? It's as if the lovers' embrace (or rather, the outsider woman finding shelter in the strong arms of her husband, the firm centre of the action), symbolises the people's success; the historic breakthrough. It seems a shame to fall back on that.

SEXIST SYRUP

In *Man of Marble*, Agnieszka is active and pushy, rushing about with her camera,

nosing into everything, uncovering the story of Maciej's father. Falling for Maciej changes her, and her life. Now she is meant to be calm and mature. Some of her long explanation to Winkel of herself and her four years with Maciej is very moving. She explains how coming to Gdansk, after having been kicked out of the state film company, shifted her whole perspective — she gave up ambition and the uneasy search for success. Some of it is quite touching — the way she laughs a little, privately, when she says, "Maciej asked for my hand". But some of it made me uneasy: "Now I can tell you what welding a double hull entails," she says proudly — but before she knew what wielding a camera entailed, and that's worth something too. 'Maturity' as a woman seems to mean sinking herself into Maciej's identity — "You meet a man and you just know you have to have his child" (why?); "I've never been religious, but after I met Maciej and all those people, I realised it had to be a church wedding" (why?). It seemed like a romanticisation of love and the family, playing up to Catholic conservatism, and a romanticisation of the honest, iron working class (with Agnieszka as the bourgeoisie sinking into the proletariat as well as woman sinking into man).

In Wajda's *Rough Treatment*, I felt that our hero's wife's 'betrayal' — going off with a younger man who took more notice of her, even if her was a schmuck — was seen as equivalent to the decay and hypocrisy of the whole system, which betrays him too. So a stable family equals honesty. Here the Free Woman finds her proper place — and is fulfilled. One line summed it up — their flat was raided, they were threatened, and she says, "I broke down — then we spent our first night together". Mine wasn't the only hollow laugh in the cinema.

Jill Nicholls

Women in the 50's... thinkworkers...

Only Half — Way to Paradise
Elizabeth Wilson
Tavistock Publications £3.25p

The women's movement has recently seen a revival of interest, a re-evaluation of the relationship between mothers and daughters. Elizabeth Wilson's new book puts many of those discussions in a historical context by writing about the period when our mothers were young. Of course, it is a qualitatively different read from the social and political history, but there is some of the same fascination.

The first thing Elizabeth Wilson does is to dispel the idea that women's issues were not talked about, or fought over in the period after the 2nd World War. It was surprising to me how many of the same campaigns seemed to be there, around such issues as the recognition of housework as work, in struggles over equal pay and education for women, in efforts to democratize marriage. What there doesn't seem to be is a sense of a struggle which could be seen as feminist — which could create a new culture by challenging the values of the old. Elizabeth Wilson explains this by emphasizing the drive towards consensus politics at this time, which had its reflection in a consensual culture. Britain had been shaken by the war, and the need was for everyone to pull together to create a new Britain. The collective culture which arose out of this was the imposition of middle-class values at the expense of those of both the working-class and feminists (and the post-war wave of immigrants).

MUTE RESISTANCE

In fact, by a strange inversion, many of the most vocal women actually argued for a re-emphasis on the old division of labour, seeing themselves as feminists by virtue of supporting women's traditional attributes of nurturing and caring. Although understandable, it is a dangerous position to take since from there it is only a short step to finding women in the same mute position of stubborn resistance that they have occupied since patriarchy began. This is indeed what happened. Women did not cease fighting for their rights, but it tended to be expressed in high divorce rates, in women's participation in CND and to be reflected in the

work of women novelists, particularly Doris Lessing. A specifically feminist organized movement dissolved into various groups although the Women's Freedom League, a breakaway suffragette group that represented militant feminists, continued until 1961. There was not a consciously aggressive and optimistic feminist culture, which could challenge sexual roles and definitions.

The range of Elizabeth Wilson's book is wide enough to include different aspects of society and culture and the ways in which they affected women. However, I have two criticisms in relation to this project. The first is that sometimes she finds it difficult to distinguish aspects that particularly affect women, especially in relation to the more specifically cultural chapters. This is not very serious, as the information about the past-war period is fascinating in itself, but it is clear that the absence of women is in itself telling. The second, more serious criticism, is that she does not have a chapter that gives the political economic history of the period she is covering. It would have been difficult to do concisely, but as it stands the implication, intended or otherwise, is that this area of political life has no relevance to women.

TWO MOVEMENTS

Her final conclusion is that socialism and feminism, while being closely interlinked, are not the same movement. In tracing out the history of women's struggles and consciousness, Elizabeth Wilson is emphasising the continuity and growth of feminism. She is critical of the attempt to make a new socialist, feminist politics rather than respecting the integrity of each perspective. However, she is also aware that the women's movement has reached a new state of development, but is not a new immaculate conception without a history. One point she makes forcefully is the way in which the women's movement loses sight of its history and then has to unearth the same roots again and again. "This necessity for each generation of feminists to go over the same ground, to turn back to history, to literature, and to political economy in order to rediscover women's oppression — testifies the extent to which this history of women and their oppression

never has become part of a known 'cultural heritage'."

Elizabeth Wilson's book gives us the opportunity to find out more about the women's movement and women's consciousness in our mothers' time.

Sarah Martin

Living Thinkwork
by Michael Hales
C.S.E. Books £3.50

In 1976, a small jolt was delivered to the American left in the form of an article by Barbara and John Ehrenreich entitled "The Professional Managerial Class". The Ehrenreichs argued against older notions of increasing class polarity and instead maintained that a class which had real control over other people's working lives and living conditions but no actual ownership of resources, was developing. I am one of the class profiles that the Ehrenreichs were describing — I design computer programs which direct and define the labour processes of others — and have come to agree with the Ehrenreich's premises.

Mike Hale's book, through personal narrative derived from his experience as an ICI research analyst and through theoretical analysis, attempts to place the professional managerial class (PMC) in the context of the production process. Hales develops a theoretical model, preconceptualization, which emphasizes the "thinkwork" aspect of production and the class that performs the "thinkwork" tasks. The role of design workers — i.e. engineers, software designers, systems analysts, programmers, research analysts, etc. — in the production process is to employ their collective knowledges in developing systems of production which are presented to factory workers of VDU clerks as a material fact. In my own case, this means designing a computer system that ultimately requires approximately 350 clerks (most of them women) to punch keys at VDU terminals for 7½ hours a day.

DESIGN PROCESS

As Hales points out, this aspect of production — the design process — has been neglected by Marxists since the material results are so difficult to see. Kilos of mail or reels of magnetic tape are not the products of a design team's labour. Instead a design worker determines how many people and machines are required to carry out a process

and what that process will actually be.

The design worker, or thinkworker, brings to the design process his knowledge, convictions, sense of his own professionalism and power and his perceptions of the nature of work. The thinkworker's subjective sense of his role in the design process, which has of course been influenced by bourgeois culture, effects the production process that the non-mental worker is confronted with.

Hales' focus on production design demonstrates where considerations of cultural and personal life factors are likely to be crucial. A thinkworker, as someone who experiences a personal life dominated by a phallocracy and organised by capital, determines the working lives of others. We cannot change the production process without understanding how modes of work are influenced by culture and personal life.

MANAGEMENT CONTROL

Having been employed as a systems analyst in this country and in America, I have noticed how the fact of a less entrenched technocratic ideology in the PMC affects the working lives of non-mental labourers. For example, a software designer in this country tends to do exactly what is asked of him. In America, the same designer would not only present the VDU user with a succession of green flashing screens and prompting signals to key in data, but also provide management with a printed hourly record of the number of keystrokes each operator has made as well. Such decisions are frequently not made at the level of higher management but at the level of a design worker who is acting on his self-perceived professionalism.

In focussing on the design aspect of production, it becomes clear that the design process is a central focus of disparate activities. Any revolutionary strategy must evaluate this aspect of production which is conveniently placed to disrupt industrial processes and it must also analyse the consciousness of the PMC workers involved in design. I have to add the proviso, however, that capital is already trying to ease its vulnerability in this area. In the computer industry a new form of systems organisation is being developed that discards the old centralization techniques in favour of distributing computer

..... and municipal socialism in the 20's.

hardware, data storage and data access across offices and locales in order to make the system less vulnerable to the effects of sabotage and industrial action.

Like any successful exploration of relatively new terrain, Hales' book raises just as many questions as it answers. We need more understanding of how the PMC's own culture is a culture within a culture. When I lived in the U.S., a country which surely has the most visible PMC in the world, it seemed that the PMC was developing its own cultural ideology — an ideology heavily invaded by consumer culture. Any detailed class profile of the U.S. would reveal that most of the "alternative" leisure industries have been aimed at the PMC. By "alternative" I mean all those extra-working day pursuits that the PMC has adopted but the traditional working class has ignored. Zen, Est, Gestalt, Acupuncture, Esalen Massage, Rolfing, Open Marriage and whole foods are all coping strategies organised by capital to help the average PMC member face a job that's usually far beneath his/her abilities.

The PMC worker is capital's best consuming unit since the nuclear family. Newly divorced, s/he's an ideal consumer requiring another house, car, colour T.V. etc. For capital, the PMC's role as consumer even supercedes his role as a worker.

The model PMC worker harbouring the amazing delusion that h/she is liberated in some way, is capital's ideal worker as well as ideal consumer. A thorough consumer of commodities and leisure activities, h/she is particularly aware how unsatisfactory working life is. The American air traffic controllers are not the first workers to strike purely over conditions of stress. The largest private employer in America (AT&T) has had several wildcats, not over pay or hours but over the quality of work.

Hale's book is a useful preliminary exploration of terrain largely ignored by Marxists and dismissed by many socialist activists in favour of increasingly less plausible models of class formations and labour processes. As the proportion and visibility of the PMC increases and as the impact of "thinkwork" intensifies in the present era of automation, it will become vital for socialists

to consider the analytical tools that Hales offers.

Maria Flores
POPLARISM 1919-25
by Noreen Branson
published by Lawrence and Wishart (London) at £2.95 (paperback).

This book, written by a labour movement historian, is the account of the confrontation between the left-wing Poplar (in East London) council and successive central governments in the period 1919-25. It is both inspiring — on most issues the council won decisions on points over central government — and depressing — since it is clear that things have gotten much worse for the socialist movement since the days of Poplarism rather than better: for instance, the surcharge imposed on the Clay Cross councillors in 1972 (a contemporary Poplar) was not annulled by the 1974 Labour government whereas in 1923-24, a *minority* Labour government did annul special laws that the previous government had passed against Poplar.

SOCIALIST VISION

Of course, the role of local government has changed much in the 60 years that separate us from the Poplar events — unemployment rates are no longer fixed locally, gas and water are not under local control but the fixing of wage rates for council workers — one of the main issues of confrontation between Poplar council and the government — is still very much a contemporary issue and was an important part of the events of Clay Cross where left-wing Labour councillors in setting wage rates for council workers defied a government pay freeze. It is quite amazing to learn that Poplar councillors were committed to an egalitarian and feminist perspective and that one of their first acts in coming to power was to raise the minimum wage for all their employees to £4 a week: this meant a wage rise of 25% for many male council workers but one of 70% for most women council workers — it represented a commitment that was visionary for its time. Not surprisingly, in 1924, when the Law Lords ruled against Poplar's 'excessive' wages this vision was attacked. Lord Atkinson ruled that the councillors would be failing in their duty if they allowed themselves to be guided . . . by some eccentric principles of socialist philanthropy

or by a feminist ambition to secure equality of the sexes in the matter of wages'. As *Lansbury's Labour Weekly* pointed out at the time, such judgements drop easily from the lips of people on £120 a week which was the going wage for judges in 1924.

INCREASED VOTE

The reasons for the electoral and wider political victories of the left in Poplar are two-fold. Firstly, they remained committed to socialist policies. In all local elections in this period, there was a tendency for the Labour vote to decline *except* in Poplar and one or two boroughs where Labour councillors campaigned on a left-wing platform. As George Lansbury put it (*Daily Herald*, 8th April 1922):

'It is only outside Poplar that Poplar's woes appear to be realised. Poplar labour people won their tremendous triumph at the LCC and the Guardians elections because the rate-payers knew that the morning and evening stunt press were simply lying. In other places, the damnable iteration about 'Poplar's bankruptcy and frenzied finance' deceived thousands of people, some of the 'very elect' even being carried away by the mere repetition.'

The second reason for their success was the fact that Poplar councillors took many steps to make sure that local people (their potential supporters) were involved in the campaigns. They arranged public meetings, insisted that visits by government ministers to Poplar were not held behind closed doors and made themselves as accessible to their constituents as possible. As Branson points out, the fact that most of the women councillors were housewives was a great help — it meant *"that they often took on very special responsibilities. Thus Minnie Lansbury used her home as a 'surgery' and every morning between nine o'clock and half past ten people flocked to her house to consult her. The work of all the women took them into active contact with other women in the borough, whether through Maternity and Child Welfare Committee and the rather make shift clinics and welfare centres which had been opened after the war, or in other ways."* *Poplarism 1919-25* describes well the struggle at the institutional level but time after time the author's dislike of 'extremists' surfaces. For instance,

Sylvia Pankhurst, the Unemployed Workers' Organisation (UWO) and the *Workers' Dreadnought* are all dismissed by Branson as unreasonable spoilers when they protest at a decision (taken under pressure) of Poplar council to cut unemployment allowances. Certainly, Poplar councillors were exceptional in their commitment to improving the life of their constituents but they were still working within the system and Branson is much too intolerant with those, like Pankhurst, who continually felt the need to remind the Poplar councillors of the limitations of what they could achieve. And both Pankhurst and Lansbury would have agreed that much more typical of Labour councils then (and today) was Herbert Morrison's Hackney where the aim of the Labour council was to be *more efficient* not more socialist. The history of the labour movement contains Poplar 1919-25, Little Moscovs and Clay Cross but these are memorable *because* they are the exceptions. The norm, which is a less inviting subject for progressive historians, is the shoddy paternalism and (sometimes) corruption that characterises boroughs that have been Labour for a long time — like East London today. In 1919-25, the rot was just beginning to set-in; but all the signs were there.

STATISM

What *Poplarism 1919-25* totally fails to do is to locate the events of Poplar within the context of a continual erosion of the power of local government in relation to central government. Such an absence is all the more surprising since the Left has traditionally supported (though far from consistently) this growth of central government powers — this support reflects its association of socialism with *statism*. Under the impetus of the new New Left (yes, we are having an effect), things are changing — the socialist movement is beginning to see the essential contribution *decentralisation* makes to socialism. The resolution of the decentralisation-statism issue is at the centre of the relationship between local and central government. *Poplarism 1919-25* provides us with essential information of how a previous generation of socialists dealt with this relationship. It leaves to its readers the task of making comparisons with the present.

Pete Ayrton

IMPERIALISM

Bill Warren. "Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism"
Verso £3.95

Although Marx spent many years analysing the economic contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, he never elaborated a theory of imperialism and his works only mention it in passing. And although Marx exposed the contradictions of capitalism, he never elaborated a theory of its necessary economic collapse. Luxemburg tried to tie up these two loose ends, arguing that there had to be a limit to capital's ability to accumulate and that the ongoing process of imperialist expansion was in response to the limitations that capital was facing within the metropolitan centres. It has since been demonstrated that imperialism is not the only or necessary solution to the problem of guaranteeing the continuation of the process of accumulation. There are other processes.

Despite its limitations, however, Luxemburg's theory remains the only truly Marxist theory of imperialism. All other theories of imperialism, irrespective of whether they claim to be Marxist or not, owe little or nothing to Marx, can in no sense be logically derived from any part of his theory and do not address themselves to the contradictions of capitalism, like realisation of surplus value, overproduction, underconsumption, etc, which Marx analysed.

NO MONOPOLY OF TRUTH

The various theories of imperialism that are around need a touch of sympathetic magic, or at least some sleight of hand to make them look as though they have something to do with the theories of Marx. In fact several of these theories involve assumptions that run directly against Marx's theories. Including Lenin's. Now there is no point, nor justification in assuming that Marx was right in everything and that therefore all the theorists of imperialism are wrong. There is, however, a certain amount of clearance work that is necessary before the subject of imperialism can sensibly be discussed. Firstly, no theorist, including Marx, has a monopoly of the truth. Secondly, no theorist can justifiably assume that there is a basic Marxist theory of imperialism over which we can agree, whilst disagreeing only over some of the details; there is no agreement within Marxism on what imperialism is. Thirdly, any theory has to relate to the real world if it is to be of any use at all; too many Marxists in recent times have seen fit to produce theoretical contributions which only have any meaning in terms of their relation to other theoretical contributions and the real world of exploited humanity somehow gets left out altogether.

The present debate between Marxists about the nature of imperialism has produced a degree of scholasticism, leading to fruitless forays into Marxology (the pseudo-science of what Marx *really* wrote, or worse, what he *meant*), stupid arguments that assume a world of single causes, and a singular unwillingness to spoil the debate by reference to anything so mundane as an empirical fact or two.

Over the last ten years there have been a large number of books and articles published by Marxists about imperialism. A large part of the muddled debate that has ensued as a result is indicative not only of a slavish attitude to Marx the theorist but also shows an unwillingness to come to grips with his theories, and it leads in most cases to the pathetic little game of discovering quotable passages which can be produced as purported evidence for the thoroughbred Marxist status of a point of view which often as not owes more to Hobson than Marx.

WARREN'S OPTIMISM

Bill Warren suffered from a fatal illness but he was a political optimist right up to his death almost four years ago. He drew hope from his understanding of the world. His book has been completed by John Sender, working from drafts in various stages of completion.

Warren's book devotes the first 200 pages to a criticism of the icon of Lenin's theory of imperialism and more recent offerings like dependency theory. The final third of the book

A FALSE STARTING POINT

analyses the "illusion of underdevelopment" in the light of a number of statistical measures. I shall therefore divide my remarks into a section on Warren's theoretical argument and a section on his empirical research.

Warren contends that in so far as Marx and Engels had any theory of imperialism, they believed that it was a historically progressive force, that the spread of capitalism to the farthest corners of the globe would undermine feudal and quasi-feudal social relations. Marx actually did wax eloquent about the progressive role of British imperialism in India:

"England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating — the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia."

And Engels regarded the French conquest of Algeria as a "fortunate fact for the progress of civilisation".

Warren goes on to show how Lenin managed to turn Marx upsidedown in his pamphlet on imperialism and how this reversal eventually formed the basis of Comintern policy. He goes on to argue that more recent contributions to the theory of imperialism, like neo-colonialism, underdevelopment theory, dependency theory etc are no more than versions of Lenin's revisionist model.

"In effectively overturning Marx and Engel's view of the character of imperialist expansion, Lenin set in motion an ideological process that erased from Marxism any trace of the view that capitalism could be an instrument of social progress even in pre-capitalist societies . . . the proposition that imperialism was reactionary, in Marxist terms, could only be sustained by clouding the issues of ambiguity, by distorting history and rejecting some fundamental precepts of Marxist economics." (p48)

Warren devotes the next 35 pages to a tightly argued and convincing demolition job of Lenin's "Imperialism". I suppose there are people around who regard such a position as heresy though to me it seems more like tilting at windmills. However, Warren provides a useful service in following through the more recent history of Lenin's views, specifically in the service of Soviet foreign policy and more generally in the unquestioned assumption of the marxist and liberal left that national liberation movements are progressive and always have to be supported.

WHO IS PROGRESSIVE?

The contradictions can be neatly captured by reference to Iran. Warren would undoubtedly have argued, along with Marx and Engels, that the Shah's regime was historically progressive in so far as it engineered the growth of capitalism and the destruction of traditional life. They would equally have argued that the rule of the mullahs is entirely reactionary. Lenin, along with most Marxists today, would argue the opposite, that the Shah was a bastion of reaction, and that irrespective of the atrocities against the Iranian left, the mullahs are objectively the vanguard of social progress. This is precisely the official Soviet position, and that of the Tudeh Party in Iran which they support. Western Marxists, who are used to having their cake and eating it whilst surveying the world scene from their armchairs, tend to do a quick sleight of hand in order to condemn both the mullahs and the Shah.

The contradictions become more complex if we look at the Rhodesian UDI situation. Some years ago I remember being condemned for arguing that in Marxists terms, the Smith regime was historically progressive. I reached this position by applying the dependency theory of Gunder Frank — that those parts of the periphery most closely tied to the centre are the most underdeveloped, and that development is only possible when the ties between centre and periphery are weak. To the extent that sanctions actually worked, it was clear that the Rhodesian white settler class was provided with an excellent form of unsolicited protection for their national industries against foreign competition which could lead to autonomous growth. When independence and majority rule came, the people would inherit a genuinely national capital less dominated by multinationals than the economies of other newly independent states.

CATCH ALL TERM

At the same time, it is clear that Warren would have also argued that the Smith regime was progressive in this sense — it encouraged the greater penetration of capitalist means of production within Zimbabwe. But Warren would have come to this conclusion for reasons that are precisely the opposite of Frank's. The origin of the theoretical contradiction lies in the definition of imperialism itself. Marx and Engels never defined it as a distinct phenomenon. Lenin defined it as "(1) monopoly capitalism; (2) parasitic or decaying capitalism; (3) moribund capitalism". Despite the fact that the second and third definitions are slogans that have nothing to do with Marxist theory, and the first definition merely defines imperialism as "a specific stage of capitalism", which is a bit of a tautology, Lenin provided the basis for a world view. Very few people — apart from the far right — try to describe the world without using the word "imperialism". The term has become an enormously successful organising slogan, a catch-all term for almost any exploitative relationship across national boundaries. As such, it is a useless concept for theoretical analysis and can only produce a dialogue of the deaf.

OVER SIMPLIFICATION

Whilst Warren's contention that imperialism is historically progressive and that this is the only acceptable Marxist position involves a gross over-simplification of what is in the ragbag, he



"...any society that has a significant peasantry has not been revolutionised by capitalism."

is right to emphasise the contradiction between Marx and Lenin. Given his position, I do not understand why he did not pay more attention to Luxemburg.

BAD ARGUMENTS

Now that Warren's empirical analysis, in which he tries to prove that imperialism has resulted in the development of capitalist relations of production wherever it has penetrated. The first problem here is what constitutes evidence of capitalist relations of production? Warren jumps to a very simplistic answer by deciding to look at increases in gross domestic product (GDP). I see no good reason for believing that has anything whatsoever to do with capitalist relations of production. The argument presumably goes like this: capitalist relations of production result in an expansion of material production which can be measured in terms of GDP so wherever there has been an increase in GDP there must be capitalist relations of production. Compare that argument with this one: wherever there is a fire there is a fire engine so fire engines must cause fires.

Other indicators that Warren chooses to use are life expectancy at birth and infant mortality rates. Had he used figures for life expectancy of five years olds he would have come up with a completely different picture. Medical technology can make massive and rapid differences to infant mortality rates but life expectancy of adults is subject less to medical factors and more to general societal ones. In many countries (in-

cluding the USA) the life expectancy of adults has actually gone down in the past decade. The problem is that Marxist theoretical categories, like the capitalist mode of production, cannot be measured or even identified by the use of statistics gathered for the exploitative uses of bourgeois institutions. Almost anything can be "proved" or "disproved" by the judicious selection of UN or World Bank statistics. Marxist analysis can only be developed with concrete descriptive material. Warren proves nothing in the final Chapter of his book.

Having argued that Warren has not used the right indicators to prove or disprove his thesis that imperialism has spread capitalism to the farthest corners of the globe, it is necessary to at least sketch out what the indicators ought to be. That requires a definition of capitalism. Well the fundamental defining characteristic of capitalism is that all human labour becomes a commodity, to be bought and sold on the market. And once labour has become a commodity, the products of labour no longer belong to the labourer but to the capitalist who bought the labour. All else follows from these simple characteristics. Following on from this, I would argue that any society that has a significant peasantry has not been revolutionised by capitalism. Warren actually accepts this early on in his book —

"Lenin held that . . . the heart of the bourgeois-democratic revolution was the agrarian question, i.e. the disposition of the feudal landowners. In other words, the class central to the bourgeois-democratic revolution was the peasantry, whose emancipation created the social basis for the development of the bourgeoisie." (p90)

There is a massive difference between a peasant and an agricultural labourer. Once peasants have become agricultural labourers the product of their labour and of the soil and the sun (through photosynthesis) are of course the property of the capitalist farmer. Peasants, on the other hand, can appropriate what Marx called "the free gifts of nature" as part of the product of their labour. In other words, capitalism involves the alienation of people from the material world and places the capitalist market between people and nature. They have to buy food rather than grow it. Capitalism cannot successfully accumulate capital until the capitalists have taken control of these "free gifts of nature". This is the precondition for the growth of capitalism and it can be seen that those countries where the peasantry has been left largely as a peasantry, whilst a small working class has been created to provide labour for a capitalist industrial sector have indeed failed to accumulate capital. This is not to argue that the peasantry is not exploited of course, and this review is no place to pursue these arguments. The point here is simply that such considerations have nothing to do with GDP or GDP/capita.

PROVOCATIVE THESIS

Warren's thesis is certainly provocative and his theoretical argument is worth following through if only to demonstrate once and for all that Lenin's theory of imperialism has nothing much to do with Marx. On the basis of the statistical data presented in the latter part of the book it simply is not possible to conclude what Warren would like to conclude — that there has been a massive penetration of capitalist relations into the production processes of the world periphery. Of course there are places where this has taken place — like S Korea, Singapore, S.E. Brazil and Nigeria. There are also places where the economy is now more dependant on the export of cash crops or minerals than it was at the turn of the century — and the list is endless. The point is that the term "imperialism" includes just about every exploitative relationship and they are very different. The logic of one type often conflicts with the logic of another type. I doubt whether the type of exploitative relationship which Warren argues is the only aspect of imperialism is the dominant form of exploitation at the periphery and the sooner we get away from monolithic, monocausal explanations and start teasing out all the complex and contradictory elements of imperialist practice, the better equipped we will be to deal with imperialism politically instead of in the pretty uncritical populist way that the left presently engages in.

Certain types of imperialism are historically progressive but Warren has set us up on the horns of a false dilemma which is more likely to generate further scholastic argument than clear analysis.

SEX AND THE NEW RIGHT

Letter from America

The following is a long letter to Big Flame written by a woman who recently travelled around America and talked to American socialist feminists. She had also read the articles on the US in the last two issues of the journal, so her comments are reproduced as a continuing discussion of events in America and Britain and their relationship to each other. In her writing, Wendy Clarke specifically describes the anti-feminist backlash of the new right and our burning need to have a coherent response.

(Three American articles in particular have informed her writing, as have discussions with American socialist feminist Barbara Ehrenreich.

- 'The War Against Choice' by Deirdre English in *Mother Jones* Feb/March '81.
- 'Abortion — Which Side are You On' by Ellen Willis in *Radical America* Spring '81.
- 'The Women's Movement: Feminist & Anti-Feminist' by Barbara Ehrenreich in *Radical America* Spring '81.)

Many people already know of the phenomenal growth of the Right in the US — and how the focus of the right wing backlash is on the question of abortion and the attempts to make a foetus — from the moment of conception — a human being with full legal rights. Reagan believes that "everything in our society calls for opting that they [foetuses] might be alive". Once Congress decrees when life begins then foetuses are protected by the constitution and women who miscarry or abort could be accused of murder.

The Right is not a unified entity — and some of the more manipulative anti-abortionists are clear that they have chosen the question of abortion simply because it's a weak spot in liberal armoury with ample scope for political propagandising by the right. Others on the right, quite correctly see abortion as a central tenet of the feminist movement. To attack abortion rights is to attack everything feminist, left, or with any whiff of sexual liberation or revolt against the patriarchal authoritarian values of the 'traditional family'. (The Catholics are in an anomalous position; some of them are very embarrassed by the New Right's obsession with abortion. They are rightly worried that the New Right's political opportunism may discredit religious concern.)

"Clearly abortion as a means of birth control is going to encourage sexual activity. It is the ultimate out for sexual irresponsibility. A teenager can have an abortion and her parents will never hear of it." — Daniel O'Steen. Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life.

MIRROR 'FEMINISM'

Some anti-abortionists use 'feminist' arguments to outflank women's arguments for choice (this is true in this country too — and SPUC and LIFE are becoming increasingly more sophisticated in appealing to the 'natural' instincts of women to care and have concern for the foetus — and to change society so that men show greater concern for mothers. Meanwhile, you'd better struggle on alone with your pregnancy and then offer the baby up for adoption.)

"The cliché we've heard most often is 'A woman has the right to control her own body'. I agree. Let her exercise control — before she gets pregnant. But do not ask the taxpayers of America to pay the price when there is a failure to exercise control by forcing taxpayers to subsidise the ending of lives of unborn children as a convenience to adult women." — Eldon Rudd, Arizona Republican Senator.

In other words — blame the victim, forget that it takes two to produce a baby — and hide behind the myth of infallible contraceptives. The argument from the right now goes that a woman who gets pregnant in this day and age is just plain feckless (or really secretly wants to be pregnant) and why should the poor man have anything to do with the consequences.

This isn't just a North American male chauvinism. It's true here too for some men, their interpretation of the women's movement and the sexual 'revolution' means more fun with fewer responsibilities, legal obligations or financial ties. One of the more obnoxious illustrations of this tend is the judge in Dundee who refused a young girl maintenance from the father of her child saying that because of the existence of the Pill no woman now ought to get pregnant unwillingly.

Ellen Willis in 'Abortion — Which Side Are You On' writes of many men in the US and some women — on the left and in the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) — arguing positions which are parallel to those of the Right. In a slightly different,

but equally dangerous political debate in this country, around the Abortion Campaign, the left came close to opening up space for the right in the discussion about time limits and the viability of the foetus debate. Discussing the point at which a foetus becomes a child is interesting and morally exciting — but when a woman has no rights in controlling her own life and body, and no economic equality and independence, it is a luxurious and dangerous diversion to debate foetal viability.

Abortion is crucial for the WLM because without safe, legal free abortions and good contraceptives women will always be defined as child-bearers and rearers and not as real people in our own right, capable of making decisions as autonomous human beings. If we can't control our own bodies what power for self determination and choice do we have? We refuse to be victims of our biology and in challenging the notion of 'biology as destiny' we open up new horizons and possibilities for ourselves.

MOTHER NATURE AS ROLE CONSTRICTION

The 'feminist' anti-abortion position in America, as outlined by Ellen Willis, stems from the romantic female chauvinist position which glorifies femininity and anything which women 'do naturally'. 'Feminist' anti-abortionists argue not only that abortion exploits women because it allows men to 'escape the consequences' of their sexuality, but that artificial contraception is sexist because it imposes male technology on the female body. This view implies that women are properly defined by their child bearing function, that women should not try to separate sex from procreation, that sex is something men selfishly impose on women, and that it's better to bear unwanted children than to give up a pregnancy. Whilst such a political position has not to my knowledge been expressed in this country, there is a growing influence in the WLM of ideas about women's closeness with nature and an antagonism to anything technological as male that could be a framework for this tendency.

I also think that our political situation is sufficiently different to the US for the question not to be seriously posed here about which side the Left is on in the abortion discussion. And I think that there is one major reason why that is. The pro-abortion movement in this country has maintained a grass root activism which is capable of organising a mass based pro-choice movement in defence of the '67 Act. In the States, the 1973 Supreme Court decision which 'legalised' abortion, meant according to Deirdre English that "the victory, it turns out, took place before the battle". Women's hideous experiences of illegal abortion remained private and hidden — from one another, from men, from the state. Since the Supreme Court decision went in women's favour there was no need for the kind of feminist pro-abortion campaign we have seen mobilising here against White, Benyon and Corrie. There was no need for the mass speak-out of women testifying to illegal abortion that took place in Western European countries like France, Spain, and Italy. And there was no public forum for women to grapple with the all too common and overpowering sense of guilt which often follows an abortion. For many women, having an abortion is the first time in their lives that they have consciously made a choice about their own lives, and in favour of themselves. Women often would want to continue their pregnancy and have the child they are bearing but know they can't face continual poverty, poor