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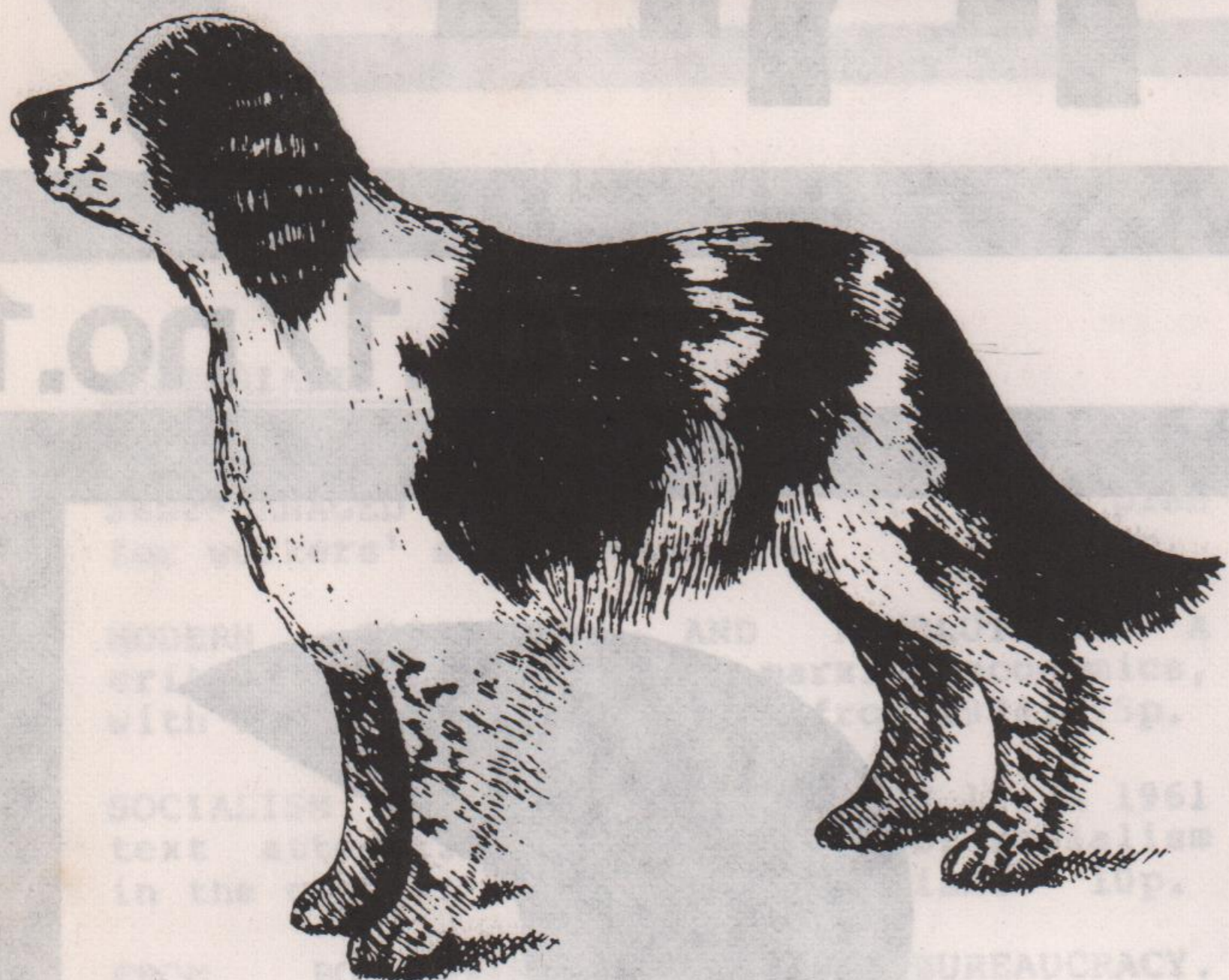
new series

vol.1/no.1

**WE'RE
BACK!**

40p

CONTENTS



Apologies are due to our long-suffering subscribers for the length of time it has taken to produce this magazine. An explanation of what has been going on is given in the editorial. Inevitably the burden of producing a journal falls on a few people and takes up quite a lot of time. We intend to produce regularly, on a quarterly basis. This depends on you writing to and for us!

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CONTRIBUTIONS

We welcome unsolicited copy, which should preferably be typed, double-spaced, on A4 paper (this helps us to work out how much space it will take up). We reserve the right to edit material received, including correspondence, though we will leave it alone if requested. We guarantee that we will return any unused material with an explanation.



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EDITORIAL

About ourselves

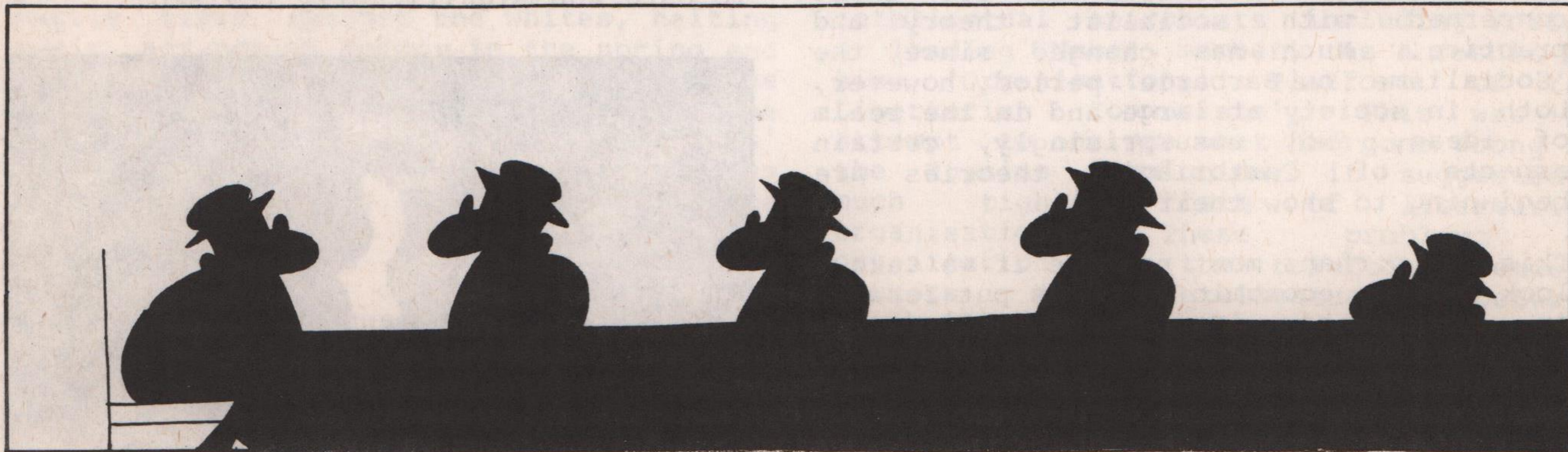
As you have no doubt realised from the wording on the cover, this is the first in a new series of Solidarity magazine. It has been produced in London by an editorial group drawn from the national Solidarity organisation, a small libertarian grouping based on the platform 'As We See It'.

Many of our readers will be a little surprised by the appearance of this magazine. Nearly a year has passed since the suspension of 'Solidarity for Social Revolution', our previous publication, and rumours of Solidarity's total collapse have been widespread in libertarian circles. Quite apparently, such rumours are rather exaggerated. There have, however, been a number of changes in our composition and priorities, and a word about our recent past is in order - not, it must be emphasised, because we share the Leninist sects' delusions of grandeur, but rather because we believe it a matter of principle to be as open as possible about our internal affairs.

So what's been going on? Put briefly, Solidarity, in common with many small political groups with their roots in the 1960s, became increasingly fragmented and disillusioned as the seventies wore on. This came about partly as a result of changes in society at large which challenged aspects of our theory and practice, partly because of a growing feeling of inadequacy in the face of the professionalisation of leftist theoretical discussion, and partly because of a sense that the existence of an informal hierarchy prevented the group from functioning as it should. By 1979 it was clear that the group was gradually splitting into three informal tendencies, each with its own particular interests and priorities. One group, composed of ex-members of the group Social Revolution

(which had merged with Solidarity in 1977 after extensive discussion) and based on the Manchester Solidarity group, was moving closer and closer to a Marxist left communist position as a response to the invalidation (as they saw it) of Solidarity's rejection of classical Marxist crisis theory. A second faction, which included many of Solidarity's longest standing members, was meanwhile becoming more and more critical of what they saw as Solidarity's refusal to face up to the ghettoisation of much of the area of political contestation which had grown up (and had been supported by Solidarity) in the late sixties and early seventies: the feminist movement, the gay movement, the 'alternative society', and so on. The third tendency, centred on London Solidarity, was concerned mainly with the continued development of a libertarian critique of Leninist theory and practice.

These three tendencies managed to co-exist reasonably happily for a while, and the tensions between them generated much lively debate. At the same time, however, there was a growing awareness that on one hand we seemed to be merely talking to ourselves, and that on the other many of our differences were not being adequately resolved. Slowly but surely disillusionment set in. In summer 1980, a number of people associated with the second tendency mentioned above resigned from the group: although their reasons for doing so were not publically given, it was clear that they felt Solidarity had become a mere minor appendage to the leftist ghetto. This batch of resignations was followed by a major disagreement over the extent to which we should support the Polish trade union Solidarnosc. Eventually the row was more or less sorted out, but not before another storm broke over the suggestion by two members of London Solidarity that



we could avoid isolation by joining the Labour Party. Here the problem was not so much that anyone else agreed with their proposal than that of how it should be dealt with: those around the Manchester group called for immediate expulsions, while the London group preferred to settle the matter by friendly debate. After a number of heated exchanges, the two people advocating joining the Labour Party left Solidarity, and a conference decided that membership of Solidarity was incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. By this point, however, morale had reached an excruciatingly low ebb, and by late 1981 it was obvious to all concerned that the divergences of political style and orientation within Solidarity made some sort of regroupment advisable.

Two proposals for such a regroupment emerged. The first, put forward by members of Manchester Solidarity, argued that Solidarity had become 'too broad to act in a unified way, but too narrow to act as a network of debate and communication', and concluded that the national organisation should be dissolved, so as to enable us to

concentrate on initiatives (at local, national and international levels) involving a wider variety of libertarian, left communist and autonomist groups and individuals. The second proposal, by contrast, argued that although Solidarity was undoubtedly going through a difficult patch, the problems of its theory and practice were not insurmountable, and the group could still make a substantial contribution as a publishing group, producing a magazine and some more pamphlets. After a ballot of all members on the dissolution proposal, in which only nine people bothered to vote (six against dissolution, one for, and two abstentions), those who supported dissolution resigned from Solidarity to produce 'New Ultra-Left Review' (now renamed 'Intercom'), leaving about thirty of us to make plans for Solidarity's future. The magazine you are now reading is just the first fruit of these plans: it will be followed both by further issues at quarterly intervals and by a number of pamphlets on a wide variety of topics. As ever we welcome your comments, contributions and money, and we hope you find our efforts useful and enjoyable.

Making a fresh start

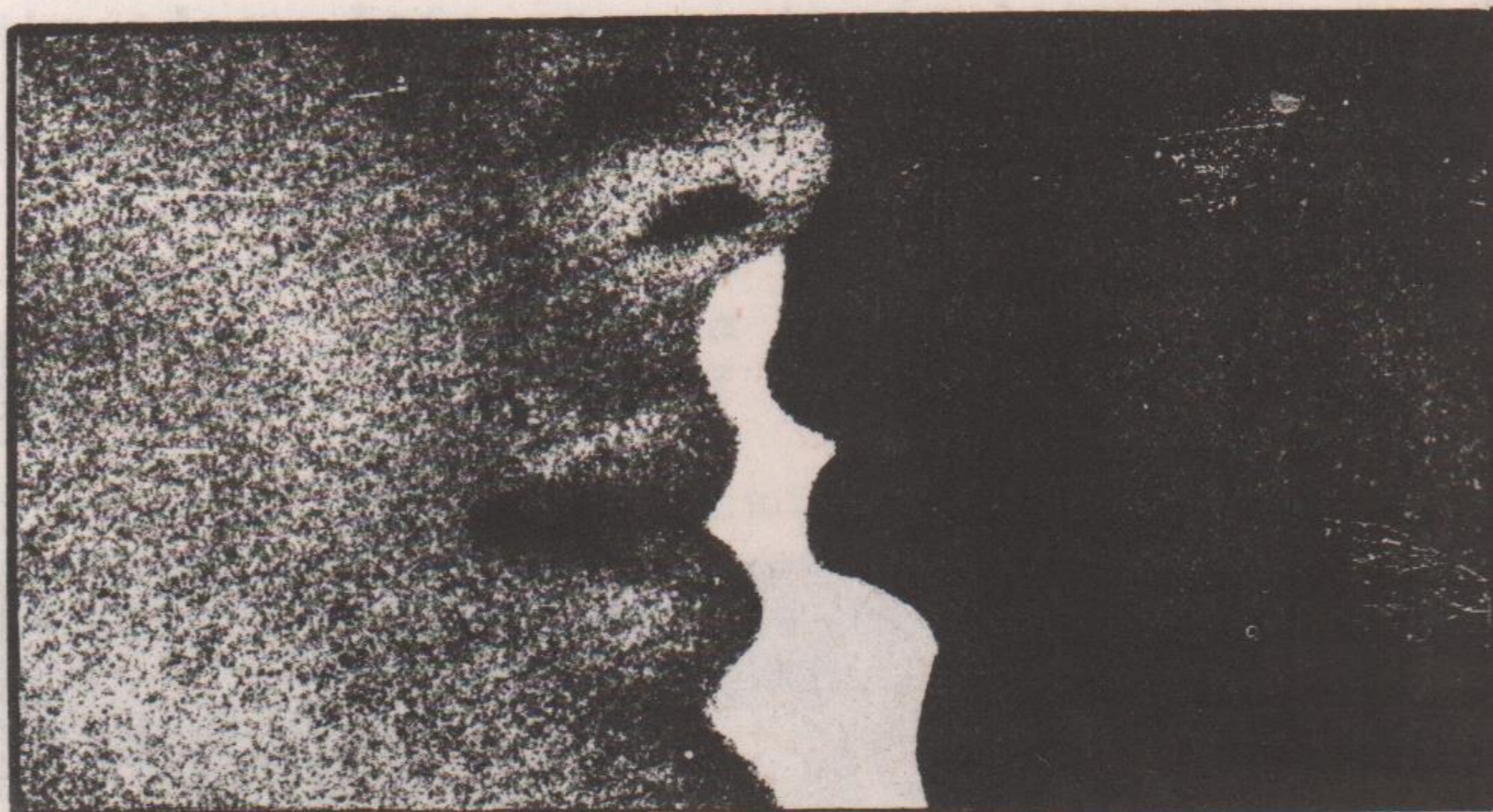
'Without the development of revolutionary theory there can be no development of revolutionary practice' Castoriadis 1949

Solidarity was formed in 1959 and the group developed its perspectives for the most part during the 1960s. Probably the greatest single influence on this development was the work of the French theorist Cornelius Castoriadis (also known as Paul Cardan) which appeared in the journal 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' between 1949 and 1965. Over the years Solidarity published a significant selection of Castoriadis' texts in a series of pamphlets, and these, far more than the programmatic statements 'As We See It' and 'As We Don't See It', came to characterise the group's orientation towards the world.

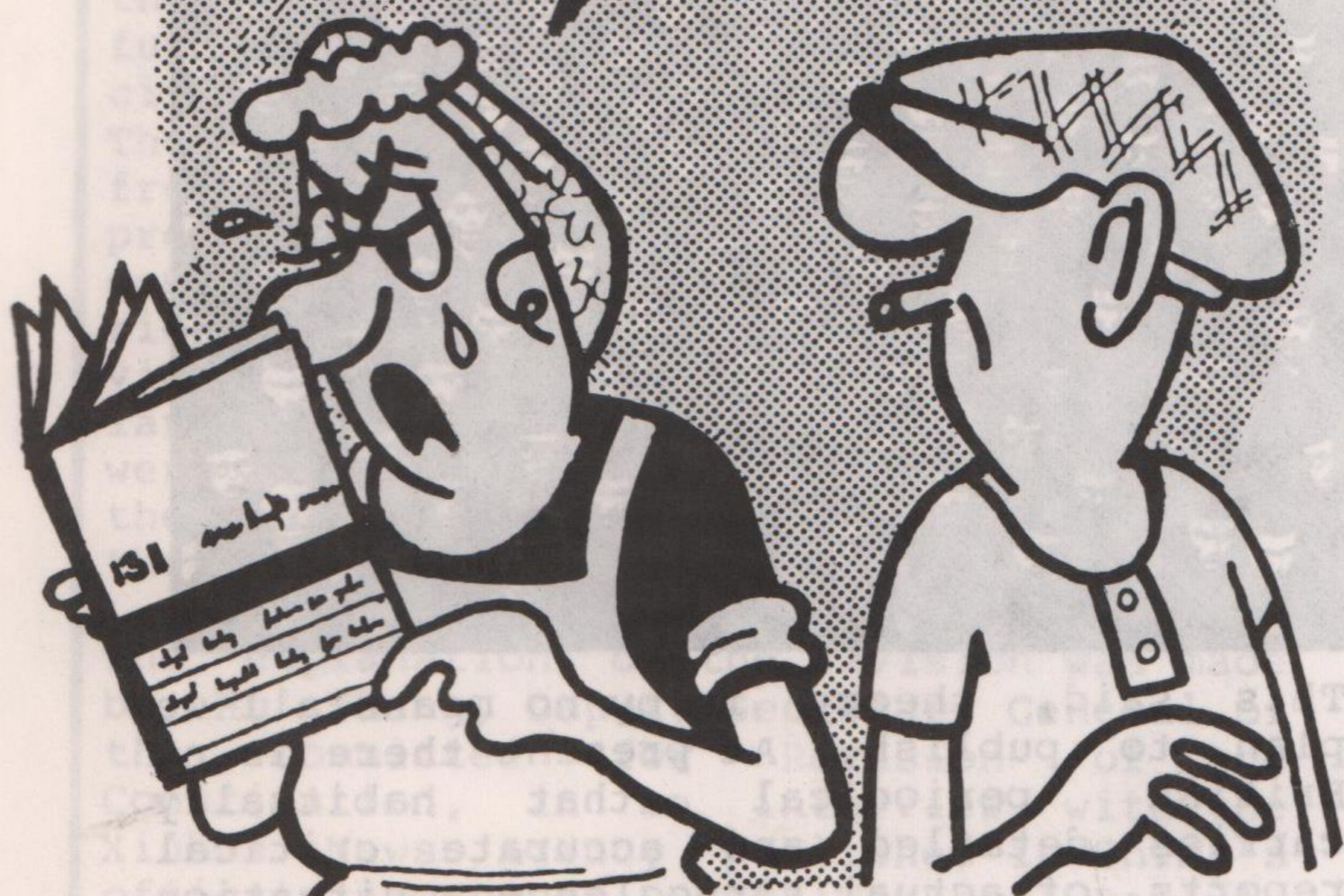
In many respects Castoriadis' 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' writings have stood the test of time very well: they certainly demand the continued attention of all those concerned with socialist theory and practice. Much has changed since the 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' period, however, both in society at large and in the realm of ideas, and, unsurprisingly, certain aspects of Castoriadis' theories are beginning to show their age.

This is perhaps most notable if we take a look at the economic analysis put forward in the essay 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' (1). Written in 1959, at the height of the unprecedentedly sustained economic boom which followed the second world war, it presents us with both a

continuingly relevant critique of the scientific categories of classical Marxist political economy, and a projection of certain trends within modern capitalism which has been somewhat overtaken by events. Specifically, it seems from the vantage point of 1982 that 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' overestimates the stability of the Western ruling classes' success in 'controlling the general level of economic activity' and 'preventing major crises of the classical type'. Today almost every national economy in the industrialised West is gripped by a profound and prolonged recession. Unemployment has risen to levels inconceivable twenty, fifteen or even ten years ago, the level of industrial output is stagnating and the Keynesian consensus which lay behind governmental policies in the boom years appears to be in tatters. Quite obviously these changed conditions demand that Castoriadis' account in 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution' be brought up to date and significantly revised.



THESE BOURGEOIS
INTELLECTUALS MAKE
ME PUKE!



Castoriadis' economic projections are not the only parts of his theory which have become problematic with the passing of time: there are also difficulties to be faced in his rejection of marxism as a whole and in his espousal of a councilist paradigm of revolutionary practice. When Castoriadis asked in 1964: 'Where since 1923 (when Lukacs' "History and Class Consciousness" was published) has anything been produced which has advanced marxism?', he was taking a stance which, though provocative (since it effectively dismissed the work of such theorists as Gramsci, Korsch, Pannekoek, Marcuse and Sartre), was certainly defensible (since whatever advances had come from Reich, Gramsci et al had been almost totally submerged in the appalling idiocies of marxist orthodoxy). In other words, it was possible in 1964 to take 'marxism' to mean 'vulgar marxism' - it could be identified with 'Marx-Engels-Kautsky-Lenin-Trotsky-Stalin thought'.

Today such an identification is less easy. The submerged unofficial marxist tradition has been rediscovered, and there has been a dramatic growth of new marxist theory, at least some of which cannot be dismissed with a casual gesture. Of course, the rediscovery of the unorthodox marxists of the past has led to much sterile fetishisation of 'sacred texts', and most new marxist theory has been execrable - particularly in Britain, where the Althusserian poison administered in massive doses by 'New Left Review' paralysed the minds (though not unfortunately the writing hands) of a large section of the left intelligensia for more than a decade. What is more, any advances within marxist theory have been effectively ignored by the majority of the activist marxist left, who remain imprisoned by a conceptual framework which is beneath contempt. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that it is now far more difficult to argue an informed rejection of the content of marxism than it was twenty years ago. For such a

critique to be rigorous, it would have to contend not only with the dire orthodoxy Castoriadis so efficiently laid to waste, but also with the far more sophisticated work of both the unorthodox marxists of old and such contemporary theorists as Habermas, Lefebvre, Gorz, Thompson, the Italian autonomists and the many marxist feminists.

This is not to claim that a critique of marxism which goes beyond an assault on vulgar marxism is impossible. Nor is it to deny the contributions made by Castoriadis to such a project, particularly in his post- 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' writings. Neither is it to argue that a rejection of the marxist label on grounds other than a critique of the content of all self-professed marxist theories cannot be justified: a strong case can be made for refusing the mantle of marxism because its assumption by even the most relevant of theorists serves to reinforce the faith of the crudest Leninist in the fundamental correctness of his or her idiotic and dangerous beliefs. All the same, the fact remains that many of the developments in marxist theory over the last two decades deserve our critical attention: one of the tasks of this new series of Solidarity magazine will be to attempt to assess their worth.

If developments in the theoretical sphere have been massive since Castoriadis wrote in 'Socialisme ou Barbarie', so too have changes in oppositional social practice. The developing general tendencies of the latter - towards the adoption of new forms of workplace struggle in the face of the changing character of work and the continued degeneration of traditional working class organisations, and towards the opening up of new areas of contestation outside the conventional limits of the class struggle - were grasped by Castoriadis with a remarkable prescience (2). Perhaps unsurprisingly he had, however, little to say on the possibility of this 'new movement' being integrated and effectively neutralised by adapting capitalism. And today, when 'workers' self-management' (albeit in a hideously distorted form) is advocated by every established political party, the 'youth revolt' has become the passive consumption of the products of the entertainment industry, and 'feminism' is as much the ideology of the upwardly mobile career woman as it is the basis for a genuinely oppositional movement, this silence is clearly inadequate.

What is more, Castoriadis retained a vision of a post-revolutionary society run by workers' councils (3), the usefulness of which has been seriously brought into question by precisely the growth of contestation outside the sphere of production which he predicted. Workers' councils are perhaps a crucially necessary part of any self managed socialist society: but to consider them as the organisational basis of such a society - as Castoriadis and with him Solidarity have tended to suggest - is to fall prey to the productivist illusion

which characterises so much crude marxist theory and practice.

Now the increasingly apparent outdatedness of certain parts of our theory does not in itself justify our beginning a new series of Solidarity magazine. Indeed it could be - and has been - used as an argument for disbanding Solidarity. Quite obviously we believe the obsolescence of certain elements of our theory is less a cause for despair than an invigorating challenge. But why is this?

Well, firstly and most importantly, we do not think that those of our ideas made questionable by the passage of time are anything like the totality of our perspective, nor do we see them as the foundations of our politics. Although our critique of existing society and of traditional programmes for changing it needs to be further developed, it remains essentially sound enough to act as a springboard for such development. There is not the space here to elaborate upon this assertion. We can only state our convictions that the current world recession does not invalidate our critique of classical marxist crisis theory; that the sophistication of some modern marxism cannot relegate the tired old platitudes of marxist orthodoxy; that the fate of the new social movements does not necessitate a retreat from our emphasis on contestation outside the traditional politico economic sphere; that the inappropriateness of councilism to modern conditions does not undermine either our critique of the tendencies towards bureaucratisation deeply embedded in the theory and practice of traditional working class organisations and parties of the left, or our emphasis on self activity in struggle.

Secondly, we believe that whatever development is required is well within our capacity. This is not to pre-empt the necessary process of discussion: we have no magic formulae up our sleeves, nor would we wish to have. It is, however, to state that, unlike too many on the British libertarian left, we are not afraid of critical thinking.



This said, theory is by no means all we plan to publish. At present there is no British periodical that habitually carries detailed and accurate critical reports of actual struggles - a situation which stems largely from the left's quite innocent (though harmful) preoccupation with forcing the complexities of real life into simplistic and outmoded interpretative frameworks, but which is also the product of a predilection for 'tactical' distortions of reality. We aim to do all we can to rectify this state of affairs, by publishing in-depth second hand accounts and first hand testimonies of contemporary social conflicts, in industry and elsewhere.

Our older readers will recognise our twin priorities of interrogating radical social theory and investigating the practice of oppositional social movements as being very much those of the old 'Solidarity for Workers' Power' journal published by London Solidarity from 1959 to 1977, when Solidarity fused with the group Social Revolution. It must be emphasised that the similarity of objectives does not mean that we are motivated by some escapist nostalgia for the 'good old days'. Even though 'Solidarity for Workers' Power' was a more incisive and valuable publication than its successor 'Solidarity for Social Revolution', it was hardly perfect even in its time and its time has now passed. We are prepared to learn from our history, but we have no desire to use it as an emotional crutch.

Notes

1. 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', Solidarity book.
2. see 'The Crisis of Modern Society', Solidarity pamphlet 23.
3. see 'Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-managed Society', Solidarity pamphlet 40.

MARX AND THE CURRENT UNEMPLOYMENT

by John King

This paper was written for a Solidarity economics dayschool in Lancaster last year. Its theme is the problems posed by the present global crisis for those revolutionaries who reject marxist economics. Cardan's claim that capitalism has overcome its economic contradictions has proved, at the very least, to be premature. Mass unemployment is the most obvious symptom of these contradictions. I suggest in the paper that Marx's own

theoretical account of unemployment is full of problems, and that his modern disciples do not, therefore, have all the answers. At the same time, the conceptual framework provided by the marxian theory of capitalist development remains a useful starting point for an analysis of the current crisis that transcends Marx. At any rate, no-one has yet come up with a better one.

Marx always argued that capitalism and sustained full employment were incompatible. Indeed, this belief formed an important element in his theory of revolution: the proletariat, forced to choose between mass unemployment and socialism, would surely opt for the latter. It was also of decisive importance in the growth of marxism as a political and intellectual force, first in the 1880s and then (most strikingly) in the 1930s. By way of reaction, the quarter-century of full employment after 1945 almost buried marxian economics under a mountain of neo-Keynesian synthesis.

Just how persuasive those syntheses were may be illustrated by the following example. Rather less than twenty years ago, neo-Keynesian economists began to debate the level of unemployment which was required in order to eliminate inflation. One of them, F.W. Paish, came to be regarded as a pessimist by asserting that a substantial increase in employment would be necessary...to around 2½% of the labour force! (1)

The full extent of the growth in unemployment since then is shown in the Appendix. The increase has been much greater in the U.K. than in any other comparable capitalist country, but similar trends are evident in most parts of Europe and in North America (though not yet in Japan). As for the future, a recent econometric survey forecasts an unemployment rate for Britain of 15-16%

by the middle of the decade (2). In historical terms, this would be on a par with 1930 (16.1%) and 1935 (15.5%). (3)

One of Marx's most important economic predictions seems to have been fully vindicated. Had the old boy been told that the centenary of his death would see perhaps one in seven of the British working classes out of a job, he would have been surprised only that capitalism had lasted so long. Whether his political economy is capable of explaining the current unemployment is, however, another question. I attempt to answer it (in rather guarded terms) in the remainder of this paper.

The crucial point to stress at the outset is that Marx distinguishes two types of unemployment. The first is generated by technological change in the normal course of capitalist development. It is not a problem for capitalists, because it does not imply under-utilisation of capital. On the contrary, by preventing real wages from rising in the course of accumulation it helps to maintain profitability, and thus to support the pace of economic growth. This might be termed technological unemployment. The second type is the result of capitalists' inability to 'realise' through the sale of their commodities the surplus value contained in them. It is associated with declining output, excess capacity, and falling profits, and may thus be termed crisis unemployment.

with immigration) has permitted any significant growth in the supply of labour power.

To summarise: the demand for labour power has probably increased faster than Marx expected, while the supply has grown much less rapidly than before. For these reasons technological unemployment has not been a normal feature of accumulation to anything like the extent that Marx expected. One important qualification is in order at this point. Marx's analysis does seem to apply to the Third World, where the supply of labour power is growing at an unprecedented rate, and where the displacement of traditional methods by Western technology has generated massive and apparently permanent unemployment. As capital becomes increasingly mobile, so the lure of cheap and docile workers attracts multinational investment away from the metropolitan capitalist countries, and there is a growing tendency towards the international equalisation of the reserve army of the unemployed.

There is one further reason for doubting that the new technology has very much to do with the recent upsurge in unemployment, and that is the suddenness of the increase. Growth in the organic composition of capital must be a gradual process, given the size of stock of constant capital in relation to the annual additions that can be made to it through accumulation (6). In the longer term Marx may prove to be right; but not yet. Technology may be a major barrier to the restoration of full employment, but it is not the cause of its disappearance. The current unemployment, in short, is essentially crisis unemployment.



Marx regarded technological unemployment as the child of the Industrial Revolution, which for the first time in human history saw the rapid and continuous replacement of workers by machines. As dead labour replaces living labour, so constant capital grows in relation to variable capital, and the organic composition of capital increases (4). For any given rate of accumulation of total capital, this means a decline in the demand for human labour power. If the supply of labour power is unaltered, unemployment will grow, and this, to repeat, will occur as a feature of stable and profitable economic growth.

Many people interpret the 'new technology' of the micro-processor revolution in precisely this way, with the industrial robot being to the late twentieth century what the steam engine was to the mid-nineteenth. The analogy immediately throws up a problem. If Marx was right about technological unemployment, why hasn't unemployment risen steadily over the last 150 years? Closer to the present, the period from 1945 to about 1970 was one of extremely energetic technological development, in which the foundations were laid for the spectacular technical advances of the past few years. It was also an era of sustained full employment. How could this be?

There are, in fact, two flaws in Marx's argument. Firstly, although the 'technical' composition of capital certainly has risen considerably, the organic composition, in Marx's sense of a ratio of values, may not have risen at all. The number of machines (or horse power) per worker may increase, but if the value of each machine falls fast enough the value of constant capital per worker may also decline. Technical improvements in the industries which make machines inevitably tend to reduce the quantity of labour required to make (or 'embodied in') each machine, and thus reduce its value. This need not result in a lower (or constant) organic composition of capital, but it may do so (5).

Secondly, even an increasing organic composition of capital need not produce rising unemployment, if the supply of labour power is itself growing less rapidly. During the Industrial Revolution the supply of labour power to the capitalist sector of the economy increased at a furious pace, for two reasons: population growth was fast, and the destruction of the petit-bourgeoisie swelled the ranks of the proletariat in the way described by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto. Today the position is very different. In most advanced capitalist countries zero population growth is in sight, and the self-employed are relatively few in number. Since 1945 only the increasing employment of married women (together



The best way to approach Marx's analysis of economic crises is through his discussion of the circulation of commodities. Consider a representative capitalist who possesses a given sum of money-capital, M . He converts it into commodity-capital, C , by purchasing means of production (machinery, raw materials, and so on) and labour power, which form the constant and variable capital needed for production. If all commodities sell, in aggregate, at prices equal to their values, M and C will be equal in value.

In the course of the production process workers perform surplus labour and thereby create surplus value for the capitalist. The value of the output of newly-produced commodities, C' , is therefore greater than the value of the capital with which he began (C), and the difference between C' and C is equal to the amount of the surplus value which has been produced. The capitalist now completes the circulation process by selling his commodities, receiving in exchange a sum of money, M' , equal to their value. He is better off than he was at the beginning by an amount $M' - M$, exactly equal to the surplus value generated in production by the surplus labour of his workers ($C' - C$).

This circulation process may be illustrated as follows:

Stage 1: purchase of commodities
 $M \rightarrow C$

Stage 2: production process
 $C \rightarrow C' [c + v]$

Stage 3: sale of commodities
 $C' \rightarrow M' [c+v+s]$

(c : constant capital; v : variable capital; s : surplus value)

The distinction between Stages 1 and 2 is an analytical rather than a chronological one, and is not always easy to maintain. The price which workers obtain for their labour power, in particular, tends to be determined simultaneously with production rather than in advance of it, and it seems a little artificial to make a rigid distinction between the struggle over wages (which involves 'exchange', and is part of Stage 1) and the struggle over the pace of work (which is part of 'production', and belongs to Stage 2). Note also that, strictly speaking, the diagram should depict a spiral rather than a linear process. The circulation of capital has no recent beginning, and no immediate end, and is carried out on an ever-increasing scale. The capitalist's sale receipts (M') are used to purchase commodities of value C' in the form of larger amounts of constant and variable capital, which allow the extraction of larger amounts of surplus value and thus the production of new commodities of value C'' (greater than C'), and so on.

Marx goes into this process accumulation, or expanded reproduction, in great detail. His aim is to show how it may fail to operate smoothly, and how economic crises will occur. Difficulties may arise at Stage 1, if capitalists cannot purchase means of production or labour power except at prices which exceed their values (so that C is less than M). There may be problems at Stage 2, in the production process: it may prove impossible to compel the performance of surplus labour sufficient, in relation to the amount of capital employed, to maintain the rate of profit on that capital (so that there is a decline in the ratio $s/[c+v]$, which is equal to $[C' - C]/C$). Finally, at Stage 3, capitalists may be unable to find sufficient customers, and may be forced to sell their commodities at prices below their values. In this case M' is less than C' , and capitalists are unable to 'realise' the surplus value contained in the commodities that they possess.

The effect of any of these difficulties is to lower profits ($M' - M$), and hence to reduce the rate of profit on capital ($[M' - M]/M$). As the aim of capitalist production is profit, and not the direct satisfaction of human needs, a decline in the rate of profit will tend to interrupt the expanding spiral of circulation which has been described (7). Capitalists will be likely to suspend or reduce their purchases of means of production and labour power. This will create unemployment directly, but it will also have indirect effects which may be of much greater importance. One capitalist's purchase of means of production is another capitalist's sale of output. If capitalist A reduces his purchases from capitalist B, B will encounter realisation difficulties and cut down on purchases from C and D, who will in turn reduce their purchases... The resulting decline in output, which will become cumulative and is both the cause and effect of decreased profits, gives rise to crisis unemployment.

This is less a theory of crises than a conceptual framework within which such a theory might be developed. Marx's own ideas on the specific causes of crises (and thus of crisis unemployment) were notoriously rich, diverse, unintegrated, and - occasionally - contradictory. There is, therefore, no single marxian theory of crisis (and very little point in another detailed examination of Marx's writings in the hope of finding one there). There exists only a set of interpretations and embellishments, more or less in keeping with the spirit of Marx's own speculations. They may be classified according to the analysis of the circulation process. Some locate the fundamental cause of crises in the first stage of that process, some in the second, and some in the third (8).

At the first stage, the most important question concerns the purchase of labour power (9). A rapid rate of accumulation

may tilt the balance in the labour market in favour of the working class and push up real wages above the value of labour power. (It may also effect the production of surplus value if it enables workers to resist the intensification of work). This is unlikely to be permanent, for the resulting crisis would replenish the reserve army of the unemployed and force real wages back down again. Some economists have attributed to Marx a theory of the capitalist trade cycle which hinges on successive phases of growth and contraction in the reserve army and on their implications for wages, while Glyn and Sutcliffe's well-known account of the 'profit squeeze' made a rather similar case (10). Comparable problems may arise in the purchase of imported raw materials, and may indeed help to produce upward pressure on money wages as workers struggle to preserve their living standards against the inflationary effects of, to take the most obvious example, higher oil prices. Weisskopf's recent empirical study found the interaction of material prices and wages to be the most important cause of the declining profitability of U.S. capitalism.

Marx himself placed more stress on the second stage, the process of commodity production. If technological progress really does increase the organic composition of capital (an issue discussed in the previous section), it will produce a declining rate of profit as well as an increasing level of technological unemployment if the rate of exploitation (or rate of surplus value, the ratio of surplus to necessary labour) rises less rapidly than the organic composition (12). Marx regarded this tendency for the rate of profit to fall as a prime example of the contradictory nature of capitalist production. Intense competition between capitalists requires them to engage in continuous and rapid innovation. New techniques, highly profitable at first, increase the ratio of dead to living labour (constant to variable capital). But profit is derived from the unpaid or surplus portion of living labour, and so the accumulation of capital undermines its own foundations. This may lead to stagnation. More plausibly, from Marx's viewpoint, it will generate cyclical fluctuations in production and profits. As the rate of profit declines, accumulation slows down and a crisis is provoked; in the aftermath the pace of technological change is reduced, the organic composition ceases to grow so rapidly, the rate of profit recovers, investment increases again, and the cycle repeats its course. Among modern marxian economists this is by far the most popular version of the master's theory of crises.

It was not always so. The compulsive search for markets played a central role in the theories of imperialism developed by Luxemburg, Trotsky, and (perhaps) Lenin, and classical marxism in general concentrated on the third rather than the

second stage of the circulation process in its search for the causes of economic crises (13). There are two reasons why capitalists may be unable to realise all the surplus value contained in their commodities, so that M' falls short of C' . The first is general under-consumption, above all by the working class, and the second is the existence of disproportionality between the different departments or branches of the economy. Disproportionality results from the anarchy of the capitalist market, from the absence of any social control of production other than that provided, so precariously, by the market itself. It can spark off a general realisation crisis if dispondency spreads (as it easily may) from sectors where demand is deficient to those where it is adequate or even, initially, excessive. The possibility of under-consumption derives from the effects of unemployment directly on the jobless and indirectly through the depressed real wages of employed workers. Unless the restricted purchasing power of the masses is offset by ever-expanding consumption or investment expenditures by capitalists, a general deficiency of demand (to use a rather appropriate Keynesianism) is inevitable. Baran's and Sweezy's Monopoly Capital is the best-known modern version of marxist underconsumption, though they would not appreciate the title (14).



IV

Evidently there is no shortage of approaches to the theory of crises which can, very broadly, be described as marxian. Ambitious syntheses of all or most of them can be constructed, like those of Ernest Mandel (15). In fact it could be argued that there are too many theories, both in the sense that almost any coherent account of the current crisis must contain elements from one or other of them (so that it becomes impossible to separate the pure marxist sheep from the bourgeois goats) (16), and in the equally important sense that some of these elements are mutually inconsistent. For example, technological progress that raises the organic composition of capital is supposed to have two further consequences: an increase in unemployment which holds down real wages, and a reduction in the rate of profit. But it is almost impossible to construct a model of rational capitalist behaviour in which an innovation is adopted which lowers the rate of profit without an increase in real wages (17).

That part of Marx's work which deals with the tendency for the rate of profit to fall is actually by far the weakest part of the entire analysis. In addition to the problem raised in the previous paragraph, it is also open to several further objections. First, there is another important (but very technical) question of logical consistency which is bound up with the notorious problem of the transformation of values into prices of production (18). Second, the 'counter-acting tendencies' specified by Marx himself may well be sufficiently strong for the rate of profit to increase over very long periods of time. There is, therefore, a crucial indeterminacy at the very heart of the argument (19). Third, what little hard evidence there is fails to support the theory: if the rate of profit has in fact declined in the long term, it has been as the result of a tendency for the rate of exploitation to decline in the face of a constant or even decreasing organic composition of capital (20). Fourth, the very fact that the argument is a long-term one, so that any decrease in the rate of profit will be a gradual rather than a sudden process, suggests that it cannot readily be used as the basis for a theory of crises, which are inherently short-term phenomena.

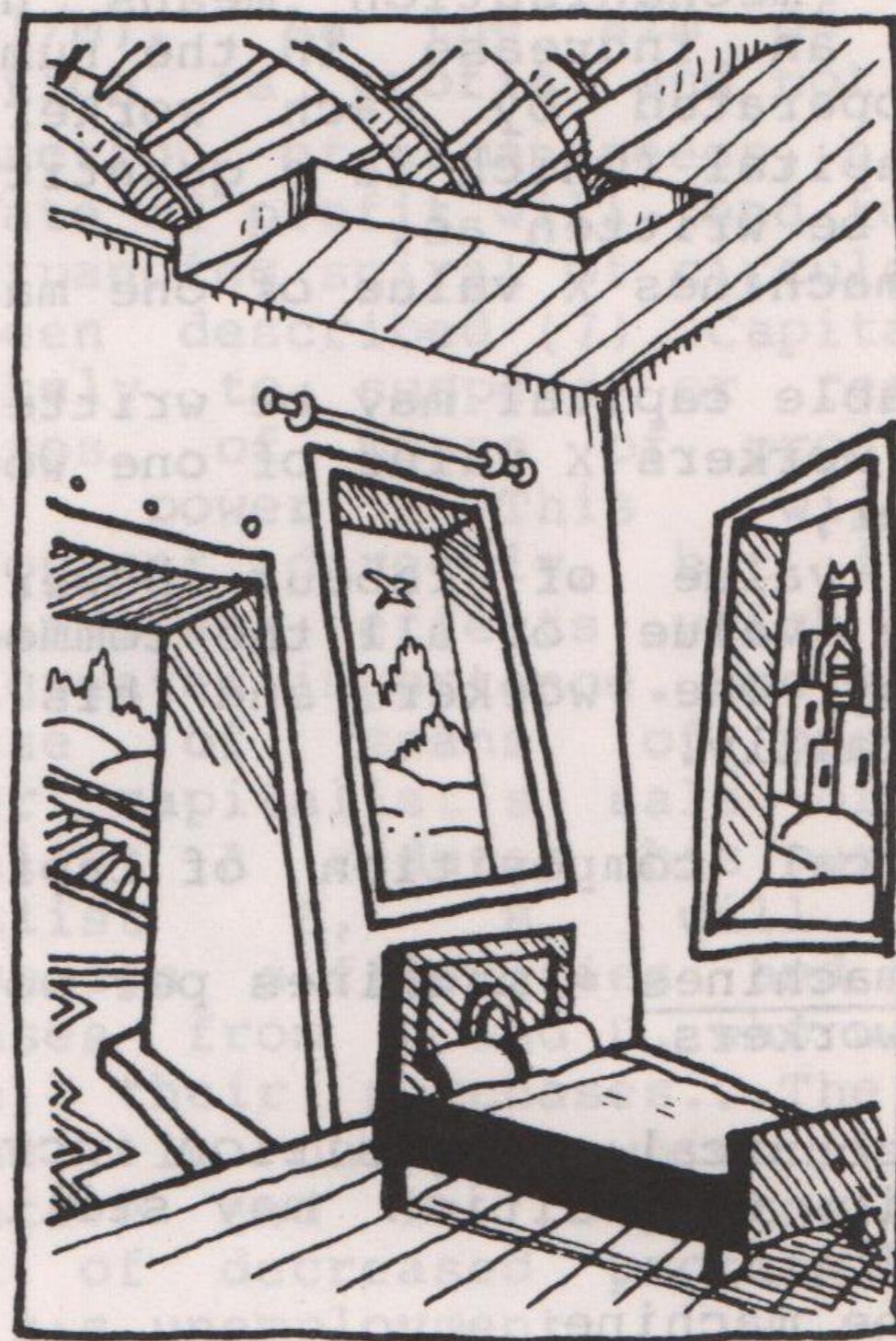
A more acceptable marxian theory of crises might be based on the first or third stages of the circulation process. One rather appealing model combines elements of both (21). Capitalist economics, according to this model, walk on a knife-edge. Either unemployment is too high, and real wages too low, in which case surplus value cannot be realised and a crisis of underconsumption ('type I crisis') sets in; or unemployment is too low, wages are too high, C falls below M (22), and a 'type II' crisis begins in the first stage of the circulation process. Only by chance will the correct balance be struck and accumulation continue smoothly. It might be argued that the 'long boom' of 1945-1970 was the (transient) result of such a happy accident. The present recession, then, might be seen as a classic and inevitable type II crisis from which eventual recovery will be prevented only if reductions in real wages are so great that a type I (underconsumption) crisis immediately follows it.

This extremely sketchy account leaves a large number of unanswered questions. Two of the most important have already been hinted at - the significance of the new technology and the internationalisation of the reserve army of the unemployed need no further emphasis. A persistent, nagging doubt concerns the degree to which the current recession has been deliberately contrived by capitalist states under monetarist or neo-monetarist influence, and thus may represent an engineered type II crisis intended to avert or overcome a type I crisis threatened by working class militancy. This doubt affects the prognosis. Perhaps

Michael Kalecki was wrong to predict a 'political business cycle' (23), and should instead have anticipated a long period of stagnation induced by capitalist fear of an unruly international proletariat. We shall see.

V

To sum up, I suspect that Marx was right, but not always for the right reasons. It looks very much as though capitalism is inconsistent with sustained full employment (and also as if it will be sustained full employment rather than capitalism that gives way). But inability to control wages is more important than inability to halt some inexorable rise in the organic composition of capital, and crisis unemployment is (as yet) far more significant than technological unemployment. The contradictions of capitalism are social and political, rather than economic in the narrow sense. Fully to understand the current unemployment, it will be necessary to transcend Marx.



Appendix: U.K. Unemployment as a Percentage of the Labour Force, 1950-1981

average	1950-4	1.7
	1955-9	1.7
	1960-4	1.9
	1965-9	2.1
	1970-4	3.0
	1975	4.1
	1976	5.7
	1977	6.2
	1978	6.1
	1979	5.7
	1980	7.4
	June 1981	11.1

Source: British Labour Statistics, Historical Abstract 1886-1968 (1950-68); British Labour Statistics Yearbook 1972 (1969-71); ibid. 1976 (1972-76); Employment Gazette, November 1980 (1977-79); ibid., July 1981 (June 1981)

Notes

1. F.W.Paish, 'The Limits of Income Policies', in F.W.Paish and J. Hennessy (eds.), Policy for Incomes? (London, Institute for Economic Affairs, 1965).

2. ITEM, Guardian, 4 August 1981

3. British Labour Statistics, Historical Abstract 1986-1968 (London, HMSO, 1971), table 160, p.306.

4. The organic composition of capital is defined as the ratio of constant capital to variable. It will simplify exposition to assume that both constant and variable capital turn over exactly once a year, so that the stock of capital is equal to the flow which enters each year's output of commodities. This assumption is relaxed in (6) below.

5. Suppose, again for simplicity, that all machines are identical, so that increasing mechanisation means nothing more than an increase in the number of machines operated by each worker. Then constant capital (which is a quantity of value) can be written as:
number of machines X value of one machine

Total variable capital may be written as:
number of workers X value of one worker's labour power,
where the value of labour power means simply the value of all the commodities consumed by one worker and his or her dependent family.

The technical composition of capital is defined as:
$$\frac{\text{number of machines}}{\text{number of workers}} = \text{machines per worker}$$

If the technical composition increases, the organic composition may still fall, if the ratio:
$$\frac{\text{value of one machine}}{\text{value of one unit of labour power}}$$

falls faster. This follows from the definition of the organic composition given in the previous footnote, which can be rewritten as:
$$c = \text{number of machines} \times \text{value of one machine}$$

$$v = \text{number of workers} \times \text{value of one unit of labour power}$$

Whether the value of machines actually does fall faster than the value of labour power, and if so at what rate, will depend on the relative rates of technical change in the two departments of the economy (department I produces machines, department II produces commodities for workers' consumption). Readers who can cope with algebraic formulations of this argument are referred to A.Heertje, 'An Essay on Marxian Economics', in M. Howard and J.E. King (eds.), The Economics of Marx: selected readings (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp.219-232.

6. Very crudely: the stock of constant capital is perhaps four times greater than the annual flow of net output which it is used to produce. Few capitalist economies invest more than one-fifth of their net output (after allowing for depreciation); in Britain at present the proportion is less than one-tenth. Thus the fastest that the stock of constant capital can grow is at the rate of $(1/4) \times (1/5) = 5\%$ per annum. It is most unlikely that such an increase will affect the organic composition of capital to any significant extent in the short run, certainly not to the extent needed to explain (for example) the doubling of unemployment in Britain between 1979 and 1981.

7. The occurrence of crises does not entail that investment is an increasing function of the rate of profit in the long run, but only that capitalists tend to postpone their expenditure plans in the short term in anticipation of a subsequent recovery in the rate of profit.

8. For a related classification of marxian crisis models see E.O. Wright, 'Alternative Perspectives in Marxist Theory of Accumulation and Crisis', in J.G. Schwartz (ed.), The Subtle Anatomy of Capitalism (Santa Monica: Goodyear, 1977), pp.195-231, and T.W. Weisskopf, 'Marxian Crisis Theory and the Rate of Profit in the Postwar U.S. Economy', Cambridge Journal of Economics 3, 1979, pp.341-378.

9. Assuming that there are no realisation difficulties, the purchase of commodities from other capitalists is irrelevant: if the price of one such commodity rises above its value (because of the monopoly power of the seller, perhaps), the losses of the purchaser are exactly offset by the gains of the purchasing capitalist, and total profits are unaffected.

10. See M.H.Dobb, Political Economy and Capitalism (London: Routledge, 1937), especially pp.121-123, and P.M.Sweezy, Theory of Capitalist Development (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp.149-150; also A.Glyn and R. Sutcliffe, British Capitalism, Workers and the Profit Squeeze (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), and A.Glyn and J. Harrison, The British Economic Disaster (London: Pluto Press, 1980).

11. Weisskopf, op.cit., pp.370-371.

12. The rate of profit is defined as the ratio of surplus value to total (constant plus variable) capital, or $r = s/[c+v]$. Divide the top and bottom of this expression by v, and write $k = c/v$ for the organic rate of composition and $e = s/v$ for the rate of exploitation. Then:

$$r = \frac{s}{c+v} = \frac{s/v}{c/v+v/v} = \frac{e}{k+1}$$

from which it will be seen that r will decline whenever k rises or e falls. As we have seen, Marx expected the organic composition to increase over time. But e, the rate of exploitation, is also likely

to increase, since technical progress reduces the labour time necessary to produce a given quantity of wage-goods. Unless real wages rise, or the working day is reduced in length, surplus labour must thus increase, and with it the rate of exploitation. Marx's argument is that it must eventually rise at a decreasing rate, so that in the long run the rate of profit must fall. For a simple non-mathematical exposition and critique, see R.L.Meek, 'The Falling Rate of Profit', in Meek, Economics and Ideology and Other Essays (London: Chapman and Hall, 1967), pp.129-142.

13. For Trotsky, see for example R.B.Day, Leon Trotsky and the Politics of Economic Isolation (Cambridge U.P., 1973), pp.12-13; this makes a nonsense of his followers' dismissal of such arguments as superficial or unmarxist. Luxemburg's scathing rejection of the declining rate of profit deserves to be quoted in full: "Thus there is still some time to pass before capitalism collapses because of the falling rate of profit, roughly until the sun burns out" (K.Tarback (ed.), Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital, by Rosa Luxemburg and N.I.Bukharin (London, Allen Lane, 1972), p.77n).

14. P. Baran and P.M. Sweezy, Monopoly Capital (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

15. E. Mandel, Late Capitalism (London: New Left Books, 1975), and The Second Slump (London: New Left Books, 1978).

16. A point rather brutally made in Athar Hussein's review of The Second Slump, 'Symptomatology of Revolution', Economy and Society 9, 1980, pp.348-358.

17. For an exceptionally thorough treatment of this question, and a review of the debate on the falling rate of profit in general, see P. Van Parijs, 'The-Falling-Rate-of-Profit Theory of Crisis: a rational reconstruction by way of obituary', Review of Radical Political Economics 12, 1980, pp.1-16.

18. Very crudely: the rate of profit defined by the formula $r = s/[c+v]$ is in general not the rate of profit which would prevail in a capitalist economy where all commodities sold at 'prices of production' which guaranteed all (competitive) capitalists the same rate of profit on capital. This is true a fortiori when account is taken of joint

production: see I. Steedman, Marx After Sraffa (London: New Left Books, 1977), and J.E. King, 'Value and Exploitation: some recent debates', in I. Bradley and M.C. Howard (eds.), Classical and Marxian Political Economy: Essays in Honour of R.L. Meek (London: Macmillan, 1982).

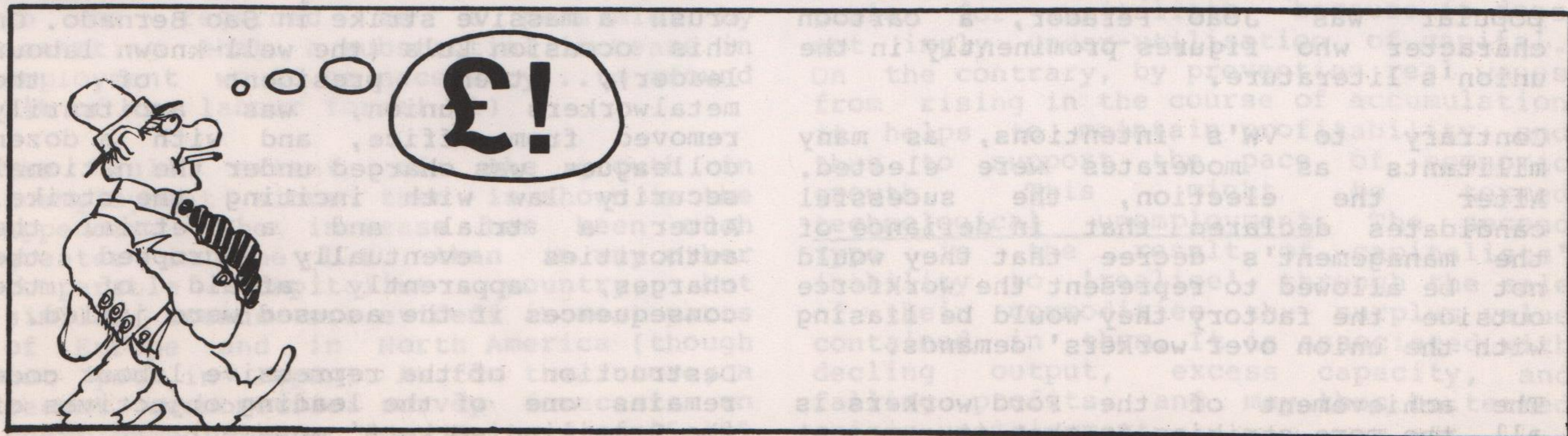
19. See the articles by Meek and Parijs previously cited. An algebraic demonstration is given by P. Cardan, Modern Capitalism and Revolution (London: Solidarity, second edition, 1974), Appendix and Appendix to the Appendix.

20. Violent liberties have to be taken with marxian economic categories in order to assimilate them to data collected by bourgeois government statisticians. This can be taken as justification for making no attempt to relate Marx's arguments to the historical evolution of capitalist economies. Alternatively, and preferably, the best can be made of a very bad job, and analogies can be drawn between the organic composition and the capital-output ratio, on the one hand, and between the rate of exploitation and the share of wages and salaries in national income on the other. Some international data for these categories are provided by E.H. Phelps Brown and M. Browne, A Century of Pay (London: Macmillan, 1968), especially Table 32, p.335. In very broad terms they bear out the remarks made in the text.

21. M. Bronfenbrenner, 'Das Kapital for the Modern Man', Science and Society 29, 1965, pp.419-438.

22. The production of surplus value may also be affected (so that the difference between C' and C declines) if workers are able to reduce either hours of work or the intensity at which they work, as the fear of unemployment recedes. There is strong evidence that the first of these factors, at least, has been important at some points in time. See J.A. Dowie, '1919-1920 Is In Need of Attention', Economic History Review 28, 1975, pp.429-450, for a convincing case that the attainment of the eight-hour day in 1919 was a major contributor to the subsequent (extremely violent) crisis.

23. M. Kalecki, 'Political Aspects of Full Employment', reprinted in E.K. Hunt and J.G. Schwartz (eds.), A Critique of Economic Theory (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp.420-430.



Ford workers dent Brazil's labour code

Ford workers in Brazil won a historic victory in February when they forced the management to give in to their demands for an elected factory committee - the first in a company of any significance in Brazil. Their success dents the country's repressive labour legislation, one of the chief aims of which is to prevent workers organising at the workplace.

A de facto committee was already active at Ford's major Brazilian plant in the Sao Bernado industrial suburb outside Sao Paulo; it was elected last year to coordinate a series of stoppages, especially over sackings. The new committee, which represents production but not white-collar staff, consists of ten sector representatives plus two officials of the Sao Bernado metalworkers' union who are also Ford employees and subject to election.

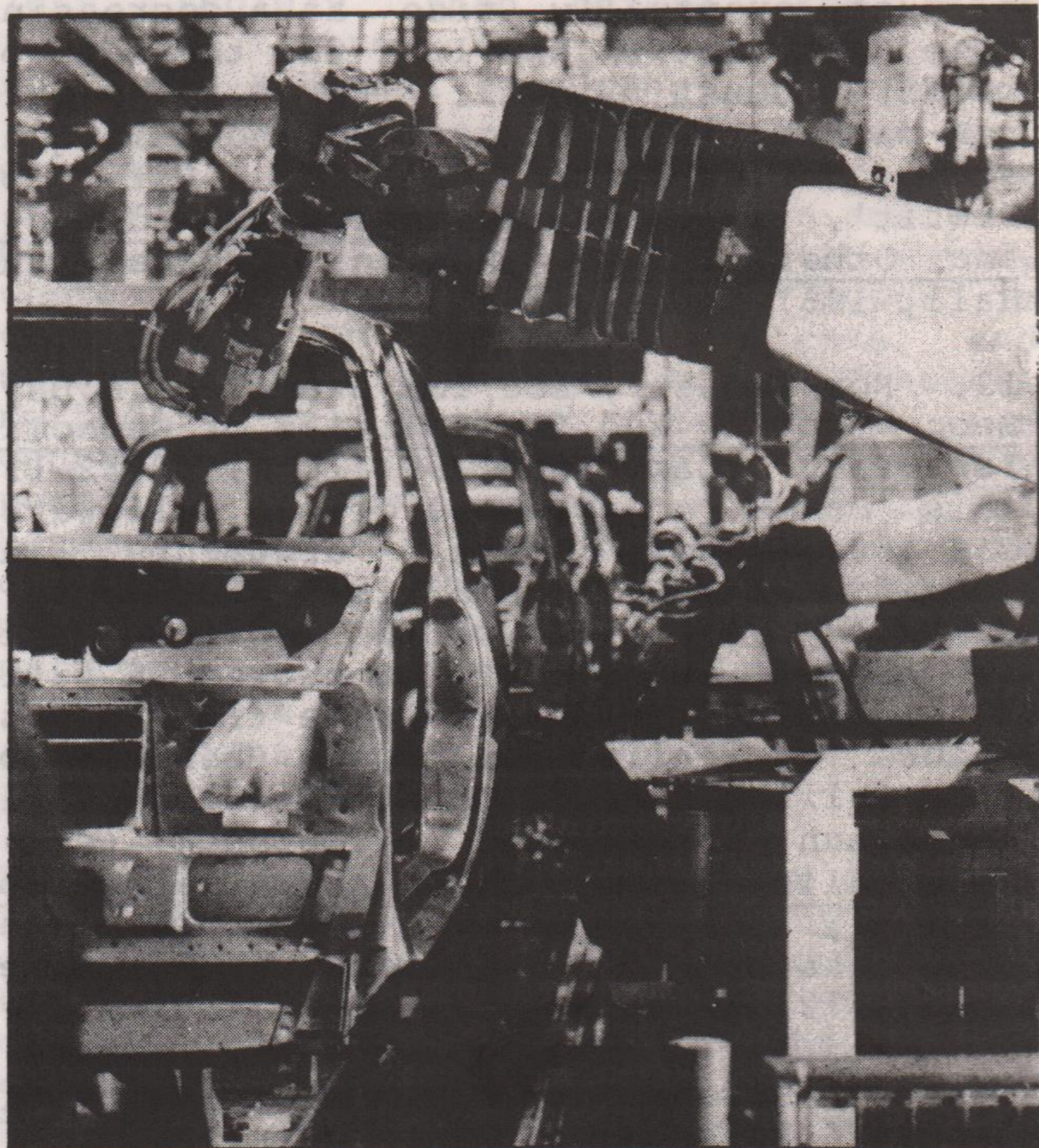
The committee will negotiate with the management on all matters affecting the workforce. Its members are to hold office for two years, and are guaranteed job stability for one year after their term of office ends.

The Ford agreement was not perfect, commented Jair Meneguelli, president of the Sao Bernado metalworkers, but was certainly beyond comparison with the management-inspired systems of representation set up at other firms. This was a reference to a system introduced in 1980 at the nearby Volkswagen plant, which is apparently based on the workers' participation schemes in force at VW's German plants. Under this scheme, the function of the 23 elected representatives, who are supervised by a management-appointed committee, is to communicate workers' demands and suggestions to the industrial relations manager.

But even this scheme, clearly designed to give management early warning of shop-floor dissatisfaction, ran into worker resistance. When the first elections were held, a massive 53% of the 42,500-strong workforce refused to vote or spoiled their papers. Many voted for fictitious characters, of whom the most popular was Joao Ferador, a cartoon character who figures prominently in the union's literature.

Contrary to VW's intentions, as many militants as moderates were elected. After the election, the successful candidates declared that in defiance of the management's decree that they would not be allowed to represent the workforce outside the factory they would be liaising with the union over workers' demands.

The achievement of the Ford workers is all the more striking in that it comes at



a difficult time for the workers' movement, with a recession in full swing, and mass sackings and lay-offs common. More significantly, it represents an important breach in Brazil's labour legislation, which has remained virtually intact since it was established almost 50 years ago under the populist dictator Getulio Vargas. Drawing heavily on Mussolini's corporatist model, the labour code is favourable to workers in small ways (which in practice are often ignored by employers) but its main thrust is the control and restriction of workers' self-organisation, both at the workplace and in the unions. Its success in this respect was acknowledged by the military regime which when it seized power in 1964 maintained the legislation almost intact (the only major change was the abolition of job security in response to the demands of multi-national corporations). No changes were made in 1979, when the regime introduced its policy of limited political liberalisation (the so-called abertura). The abertura was not intended for workers, as was made abundantly clear in 1980 when the army was sent in to crush a massive strike in Sao Bernado. On this occasion Lula (the well-known labour leader), then president of the metalworkers union, was arbitrarily removed from office, and with a dozen colleagues was charged under the national security law with inciting the strike. After a trial and a retrial the authorities eventually dropped the charges, apparently afraid of the consequences if the accused were jailed.

Destruction of the repressive labour code remains one of the leading objectives of the Brazilian workers' movement.

Chinese workers' rights attacked

Two days before May Day 1982 the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China announced a drafted revision of the State Constitution. In the new draft of Article 45 (on the fundamental rights and duties of the citizen) the right to strike is omitted. The original text read "Citizens enjoy freedom of speech, correspondence, the press, assembly, procession, demonstration and to strike, and the right to speak out freely, air their views fully, hold debates, and produce large posters" (the last four of which were abolished in September 1980 after the brief liberalisation which followed the overthrowing of the 'Gang of Four').

The explanation of the revision was made by Hu Sheng, Deputy Secretary General of the Committee for Revision of the Constitution, in an interview with the Xinhua News Agency published in China's official newspaper, the 'Workers' Daily', on 30 April of this year. Hu told his fascinated readers,

"...experience in the past years has proved that the democratic management of enterprises can be improved and strengthened by various means under a socialist system. In order to safeguard their own rights and interests, prevent the damage caused by bureaucratic activities on the part of the enterprises' leaderships, and promote the sound development of those enterprises, working people can utilise other means than strikes to support their demands and to achieve their aims. To strike is not only disadvantageous to the State, but also harmful to the interests of the workers. Therefore, the right to strike has not been included in the draft of the revised constitution".

The history of attempts to democratise the management of enterprises in China is one of failures. These attempts have all been confined to placing managerial structures under the strict control of the Party and enlarging only to a small

extent the number of people participating in the decision-making body; for example, the introduction of Party Committees to replace one-man management as the authority in the factories in 1956, the "two participations, one reform" system to mobilise workers during the "Great Leap Forward" in 1958, and the "revolutionary committees" installed after the Cultural Revolution in all factories as a pseudo-form of mass participation in production. These 'democratisations' were in reality either by-products of the political campaigns launched by the Central Committee from above, or intended as a means to check the power of and effect a purge in the ranks of technical workers during the former anti-intellectual orientation of the Party. To this day the Chinese ruling class has never allowed any sort of genuine democratisation in production.

The promise of 'democratic management of enterprises' made by Hu Sheng has been shown to be false not only by past history but also by the Chinese version of the Polish crisis - the period before the Chinese Democratic Movement was suppressed because of the growing strength of the workers' wing within it. 'Workers' Daily' (18 February 1981) revealed that workers from various cities such as Shanghai, Wuhan, and Xi An had issued demands for independent unions of the Polish type, free from Party control. There was growing discontent with the factory bureaucrats, especially among the female workers whose complaints were always ignored, and often the whole work force went on strike for several hours. Consequently managerial personnel had to negotiate, and the local party secretaries undertook 'self-criticism'. As a result 38,000 enterprises out of 4,000,000 in the nation as a whole were reported to have set up "Workers' Representative Councils". The members of these councils were elected by the workers, but the council had to be under the Party's leadership. The candidates for election were preferably members of the Party or 'model workers'. Many activists of the CDM participated in these elections but were suppressed. The authorities forcefully stated that the workers' demands were attempts to stir up trouble and to undermine one of the cardinal principles of the regime, the leading role of the Communist Party.

Deprived of the right to strike, workers can resort to no other means to bargain for their rights. Under the system of bureaucratic rule, workers' strikes pressurise the authorities into improving workers' rights, but now the authorities are deaf to the people's voices; the 'four big rights' referred to above have been abolished and the unofficial journals have been suppressed, their



writers and editors arrested. There no longer exists in China any channel for people to express their grievances.

The concept of 'democratic management of enterprises' as used by Hu Sheng is an extension of the 'Workers' Representative Councils' as a means of pacifying the workers' discontent. It is as ridiculous as a commentary which appeared in the People's Daily on 9 January concerning an incident involving mineworkers in Liao Yuen, Jilin province, in northwestern China. Shift leaders demanded a 10 yuan rise (about \$6) and when management refused the whole shift walked out. The commentary stated "There has been a marked change in the spirit of the workers after their re-education...The most basic thing is to install in the workers a feeling that they are masters of the mine and of the nation". With the official ideological "education" the authorities tried to placate the workers' discontent and to confuse them as to their real interests, but their beautiful words could not disguise the realities of workers' lives, not even when some officials were sent from their comfortable offices to work underground for a few weeks in a ritual show of egalitarianism.

Last February the militant workers of the Tai Yuan steel mills demonstrated that the right to strike is of the utmost importance in bettering working conditions. Single workers, as well as having very low incomes, are undernourished by the factory canteens. Married workers may be living separate from their husbands or wives and only meet them once or twice a year, and consequently have family problems. In addition, such families living apart are not protected by medical care. Thousands of Tai Yuan workers held meetings to discuss their problems and sent representatives to meet factory officials and raise their demands. The talks went on for three months with no effect, and the workers decided to strike. The local authorities launched a campaign against them, claiming that the workers had exaggerated mistakes committed by the Party. The workers, however, quoted the paper's official slogans "Let us workers take our fate into our own hands", "If you want political democracy, you can't just expect it to fall down from heaven", and "Down with the bureaucratic class". They also advocated abolition of the one-party dictatorship, and the fight for democracy and freedom. A group of dissidents were arrested and accused of forming an 'underground party'. They were sentenced to imprisonment for two to three years. But the Tai Yuan workers continued the struggle for several months.

The CDM was suppressed in April 1981, but strikes again broke out in the southwestern city of Kunming in October. In the Electricity Transformer Factory the workers held a sit-in strike for three days in protest against the factory cadres who had occupied the workers' new

housing estate with their relatives and friends, and as a consequence the party secretary, the factory director, and the chairman of the union were all forced to 'self-criticise'.

The two recent workers' strikes show that strike action is the effective weapon in fighting against corrupt bureaucrats. The Chinese working people must not surrender this weapon to their rulers. The blind investment of the bureaucratic economy has driven China into severe economic crisis*. Trying to implement a policy of reducing capital-intensive construction projects, the rulers have kept wage rises for workers in heavy industrial sites lower than average. 10 million such workers have either lost their jobs or are waiting to change to other work. There are now 2,600,000 unemployed workers in China. The inflation rate is high; 5.8% is the official figure but it is unofficially estimated at nearer 20%.

Chinese workers, with a low standard of living, and facing such problems, will not tolerate the activities of the privileged ruling cadres like those of Kunming and elsewhere in robbing the wealth of the labouring people and taking their rights to dissent and to strike. As the workers of the Tai Yuan steel mills put it,

"From the strike of Hong Kong urban workers and coolies in 1858, to the February General strike of 1923, to the victory of the proletarian revolution led by the CCP, countless revolutionary martyrs have shed their blood to pave the way for the victory of the revolution".

China must be run by the Chinese working people. All socialists believe that the workers' right to strike is the weapon of the social dynamic towards social transformation and the ending of exploitation. Let the whole world's working class protest against the reactionary act of abolishing our Chinese fellow workers' right to strike! Solidarity with workers' struggles inside China!

*For example, the construction of the giant Baoshan steel complex was planned to cost 5 billion US dollars. However, the estimates were so poor that the actual cost had reached 9 billion dollars before the project was cancelled half way through. This led to the loss of 2 billion dollars' worth of foreign trade contracts as well as the cost of raising loans for compensation payments.

The above article is based on a leaflet produced by the Hong Kong Association for Solidarity with the Chinese Democratic Movement, to whom we are grateful. They ask that the issue be raised within the unions and that protests are directed to the Chinese government. The Association can be contacted at T.T.M. P.O. Box 60071, Hong Kong.

BOOK REVIEWS

"NESTOR MAKHNO IN THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR"
by Michael Malet (Macmillan, £25)

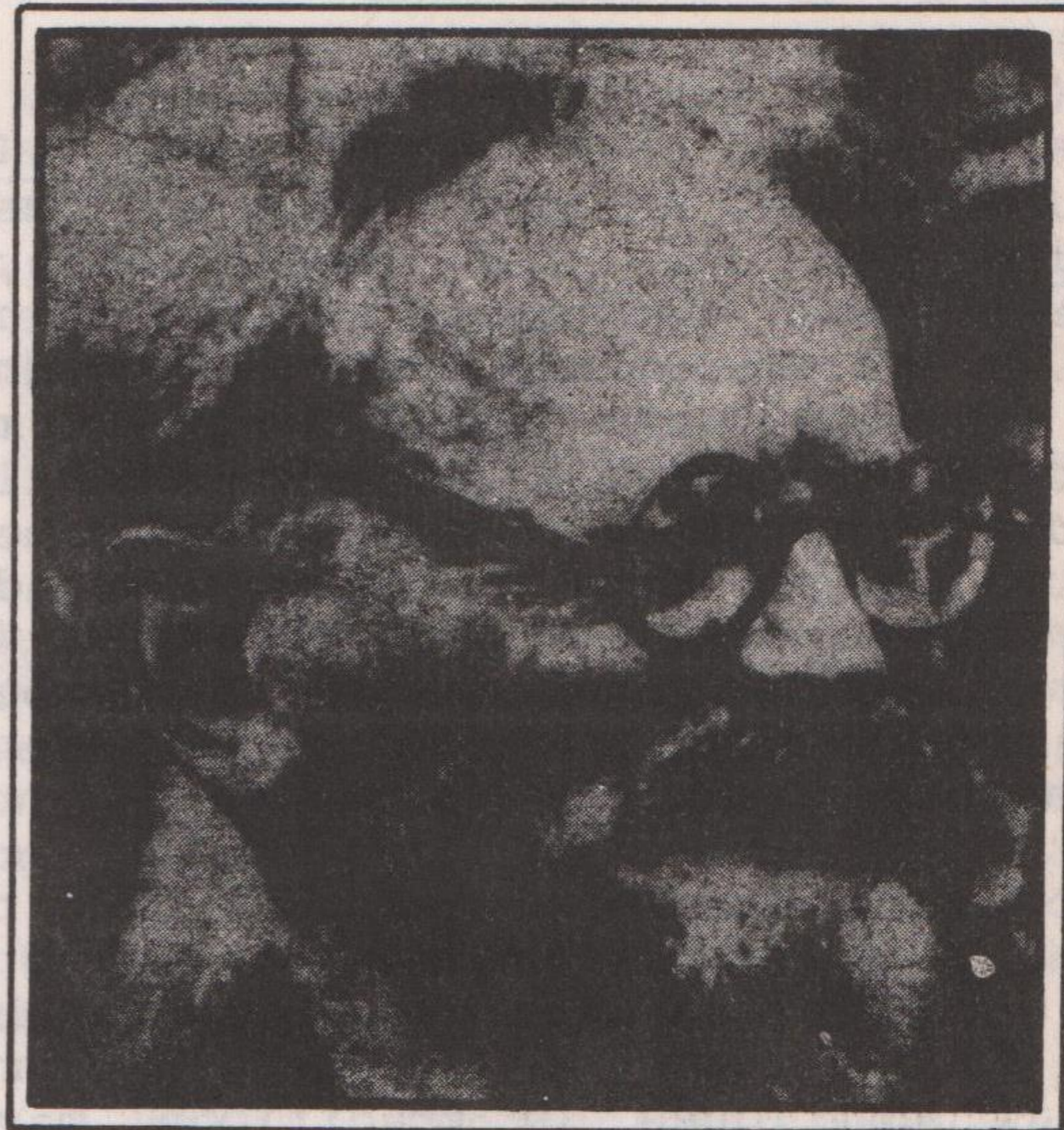
History is usually the history of the victors. Rarely, if ever, is it that of the vanquished. Unlike many ruling classes, the Soviet Communists have been extremely conscious of history and have therefore set about establishing as accepted fact a historical mythology in which they are the heroes and their opponents, whether of the right or of the left, are the villains. And so it is that for many, both pro- and anti-Communist, the history of the Russian Revolution and the struggle of the workers of Russia and of the countries of the Russian empire has become the history of the Soviet Communist Party. From time to time one or another of the heroes falls from grace or is rehabilitated (usually posthumously) and Soviet history becomes ever more falsified.

Happily, the record is being set straight by the painstaking efforts of historians in the West. Slowly but surely the truth about the Russian revolution, about the Bolsheviks and their relationship to the working class, is beginning to emerge. History is being demystified.

An excellent example of this process is the work under review. The product of many years of exacting research by a man warmly sympathetic to his subject, it clearly shows that Makhno, far from being the Kulak bandit and fomentor of pogroms of Communist mythology, was a dedicated fighter for freedom who took on all comers, Red and White, in his bid to establish a genuinely libertarian communism in his Southern Ukrainian homeland.

Tracing Makhno's political development from his involvement with the local anarchist group in his native town of Hulyai Pole, the book shows how he emerged as the leader of a peasant-based guerilla army which took to the field of battle first against the Whites, halting their advance on Moscow in the spring and summer of 1919, and then against the might of the Red Army. It shows too the treacherous nature of the Communists' dealings with Makhno; when his army was needed as an ally against the Whites he was lauded to the skies, but once the White danger was over the Communists deliberately set out to destroy him, using as their excuse his refusal to obey an order to go to the Polish front. (Even if he had wanted to he could not have, as many of his men were sick or wounded). In later years, when he himself had fallen

from favour, Trotsky, the then Commissar for War, attempted to justify this disgusting duplicity by claiming that the Makhnovists were "...perhaps well meaning but definitely ill-acting". What a comfort that must have been to those who were shot down in cold blood by their erstwhile comrades!



The book also sheds some interesting light on the thorny problem of organisation, which bedevilled libertarians then and bedevils them still. The intellectual anarchists of the Nabat Confederation tended to be critical of Makhno - in particular they criticised his drinking habits - and in Hulyai Pole the Nabat group remained separate from the peasant-based group. At one time relations became so strained that Makhno's secretary, Popov, threatened to "fill in" leading Nabat members Teper and Baron. Baron was later to say that he would prefer to vanish into a Soviet prison than endure the "terrible atmosphere" of the Makhno movement. It is, however, to Makhno's credit that he always campaigned for the release of anarchist prisoners, including Nabat members, and for their freedom of intellectual activity. In exile, Makhno again came into conflict with intellectual anarchists including Volin, a leading Nabat member, as a result of his 'Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists'. This was an attempt to analyse what had gone wrong in the Russian Revolution; it suggested a much tighter form of libertarian organisation. These problems of organisation, of the relations between workers and intellectuals, between thinkers and doers, still remain unresolved, and we are still haunted by the ghosts of the Russian revolution - an event which will one day be seen as the biggest ever set-back for socialism.

Despite nearly seventy years of Communist rule, the libertarian idea is not dead in Russia, nor - despite the efforts of the Communists and their Trotskyist and other breakaways - is it dead in the West. There is much we can learn, positive as well as negative, from the experience of the Makhno movement, and for many years to come Dr. Malet's book will provide the necessary information. Unfortunately, at

£25 it is too dear for most people to buy (it could also have done with some maps and pictures) so get it from the library and bombard the publishers with requests for a paper-back edition. And perhaps one day when the painful lessons have been learned there will be neither victors nor vanquished, but only free men and women.

T. Liddle.

"THE FRENCH NEW LEFT: AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY FROM SARTRE TO GORZ" by Arthur Hirsh (South End Press, £3.95)

This book is at once both welcome and infuriating. On the credit side, it presents for the first time in clear English a reasonably accurate account of some of the main ideas of the major thinkers of the post-war French new left. At the same time, however, the framework within which this largely commendable exegesis takes place is extremely weak: and the few attempts to move beyond exegesis into critical appraisal are even weaker.

'The French New Left' is split into three parts. The first, and longest, deals with "the intellectual origins of French new left social theory as it emerged from the radical critiques of traditional marxism carried out by Sartre, Henri Lefebvre and Cornelius Castoriadis in the period 1945-1968". Hirsh's reconstruction of the ideas of these three theorists is generally good, but he is rather too concerned with demonstrating a convergence of their perspectives to give a completely adequate account. Areas of agreement are explored in depth while disagreements and differences are treated cursorily or not at all.

This is not to deny that there is a common thrust in the arguments put forward by Sartre, Lefebvre and Castoriadis. Each was undoubtedly concerned with attacking the scientistic pretensions and economism of orthodox marxism, and each came sooner or later to oppose Stalinism from the left (though here it should be noted that Sartre did not cease fellow-travelling with the French CP until 1956, and Lefebvre was a member until 1958 - a marked contrast with Castoriadis, who had broken with the Stalinists during the war). Nevertheless, this shared antipathy to scientism, economism and Stalinism is by no means the whole story. On one hand, Sartre, Lefebvre and Castoriadis developed their ideas from different starting points and consequently had particular intellectual interests, while on the other there were a number of fundamental differences of opinion which were never resolved - particularly over the questions of the revolutionary party and the usefulness of marxism to modern revolutionary theory. Hirsh plays down such divergences,



however, tending to see the different emphases to be found in the work of these writers as "sides of the same coin", and argues that any overt disagreements were trivial. Thus, to take just one example, Castoriadis' rejection of marxism is taken by Hirsh to be much the same in content as Sartre's or Lefebvre's case for a critical revision of marxism - according to Hirsh, the difference is merely that each writer has "different conceptions of what marxism is", with Castoriadis falling into the trap of caricaturing marxism. This seems to me to be little more than a means of side-stepping the issues involved in Castoriadis' critique of marxism as a mystificatory ideology: unfortunately, it is an all too typical piece of evasion.

Hirsh's attempts to demonstrate a convergence of the perspectives of Sartre, Lefebvre and Castoriadis is, then, somewhat dubious. We do, however, get an idea of his reasons for making the attempt in the second section of the book. This concerns itself with "the explosion of May 1968", which is treated by Hirsh as the "hour of reckoning" for the 'new left social theory' he claims to have identified: quite apparently, his convergence thesis is a means of enabling him to pack everything into a neat bundle ready for history's judgment. Of course, since May 1968 was a failure, it revealed the weaknesses of 'new left social theory', giving rise to an ultra-scientific backlash (structuralism) in the realm of left theory, and reducing 'new left social theory' to the status of a "vague influence" on the new social movements of the seventies - feminism, ecology, and self-management.

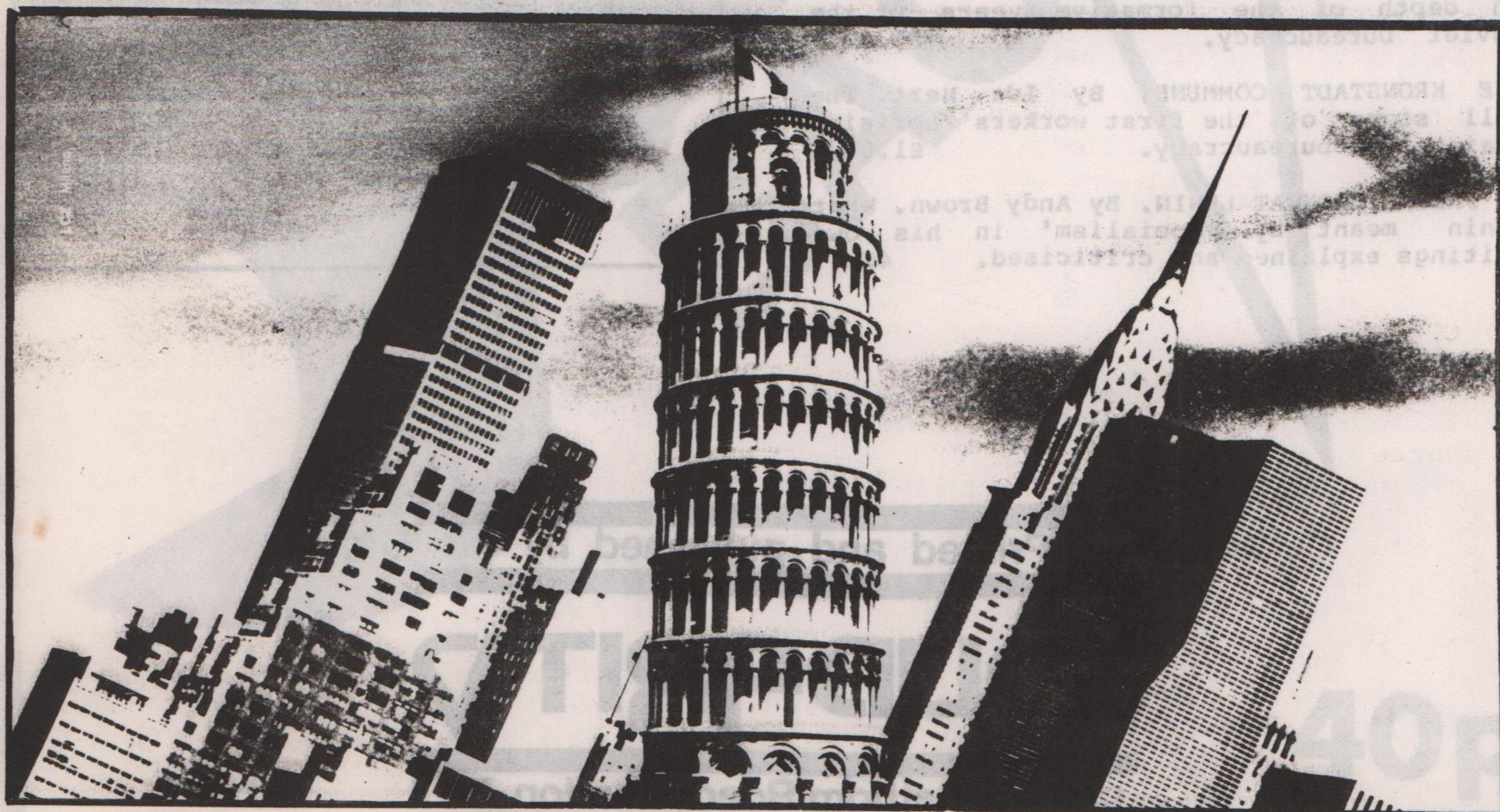
There is, admittedly, a degree of plausibility in this schema, since the structuralist craze which dominated French intellectual life in the early seventies had at least something to do with the defeat of the May movement, and the "new social movements" have undoubtedly been influenced by the ideas of the pre-'68 new left. But the general line of argument is ridiculously simplistic, relying as it does on a crude periodisation of French intellectual life which ignores both the pre-'68 existence of structuralism and the post-'68 work of Sartre, Lefebvre and Castoriadis, and a ludicrous identification of the May movement with the ideas of three intellectuals which is fair neither to the intellectuals nor to the movement. May 1968 was many things, but it cannot realistically be viewed as the once-and-for-all empirical test of the theories of Sartre, Lefebvre and Castoriadis, the results of which were the simultaneous consignment of their ideas to the dustbin of history and the ushering in of the structuralist brave new world - it just wasn't like that.

Once again, though, we discover Hirsh's motivation for distortion in the third and final part of his book. Here he charts the rise and fall of structuralist marxism (personified by Althusser and Poulanzas) and investigates the diversion provided by the 'New Philosophers' before finding salvation in the eclecticism of André Gorz, voice of the "new social movements" and, if we are to believe Hirsh, the theorist whose synthesis avoids "the ultra-subjectivist mistakes of 'new left social theory'" and "the ultra-objectivist errors of Althusser and Poulanzas". French intellectual history since 1945 is thus revealed in its true colours as a series of perfatary remarks to Gorz, a dialectical movement which reaches its apotheosis in 'Ecology as

Politics' and 'Farewell to the Working Class'. Somehow I just cannot swallow this, not least because Gorz' work strikes me as pretty tepid opportunism, never quite managing to shake off the chains of economistic marxist orthodoxy in spite of its author's ability to jump onto every bandwagon going (for a further elaboration of this point, see Murray Bookchin's review of 'Ecology as Politics' in issue 46 of the American journal 'Telos'). But even if Gorz did not leave me cold, there would be good reasons for objecting to Hirsh's over-schematic presentation: the retrospective rationalisation which characterises his approach is itself intensely problematic, a distortion of the complexities and irrationalities of history.

Perhaps, though, I am being a little too harsh, since for all its faults 'The French New Left' does manage to present a myriad of complex ideas in a clear and readable form, itself no mean feat. As such, it can be recommended, though not without the qualification that its structure and conclusions must be handled with extreme care. Maybe the best bet would be to read Hirsh's book in conjunction with Gombin's 'The Origins of Modern Leftism' (published by Penguin in 1975 but now out of print) and Poster's 'Existential Marxism in Postwar France' (Princeton University Press, 1975). Although neither of these works have the scope of Hirsh's, and though both are flawed in their own ways, they could act as counters to the worst excesses of 'The French New Left'. Even then, however, I fear that the reader will get a far from adequate overview, which is a pity, because so much of postwar French leftism remains interesting and relevant to this day.

L.ERIZO



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(The last three pamphlets were originally published together in French as parts 1-3 of 'Marxisme et theorie revolutionnaire').

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