



# Revolutionary Socialism 1

The Journal of Big Flame

40p

**ARGENTINA  
PERSONAL LIFE**

**CRISIS IN THE LEFT  
ELECTIONS**

**PORTUGAL  
MIDDLE EAST**



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## Revolutionary Socialism

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## REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

This is the first edition of a new journal which takes the place of the previous *Big Flame Journal*. As Big Flame opens itself outwards in an attempt to create a new revolutionary socialist organisation, it was felt that a new journal should be created as part of this development. Thus the International Section is already under the direction of an editorial board whose membership consists also of individuals from outside Big Flame. The journal will serve as a forum for debate as well as containing analysis from Big Flame. We would welcome responses to articles and also to Big Flame's recent pamphlets on Trotskyism and Education. We would also be most interested to receive offers of original contributions to the Journal. Anyone involved in Big Flame's general political project and interested in joining the editorial board or collaborating in any way should contact us.

## COMMENT

Since the beginning of Phase One in August 1975 the working class has been hit by a decline in living standards and a rise in unemployment that has been without precedent since the thirties. Yet these attacks on the working class have until now (June 1977) met with little organised opposition. During the first nine months of Phase Two (starting in July 1976) earnings rose at an annual average of 10% whilst prices increased at an annual rate of 17%. This represents a decline of 5.6% in living standards. In this period there have been no breaches of the wage limits.

In 1975, when the wage freeze was brought in, the government promised that by the end of 1976 inflation would have been reduced to less than 10%. In fact the lowest rate (13%) was reached in July 1976. Since then inflation has increased steadily to 17% in May 1977. In addition unemployment, which remained surprisingly stable in the first half of 1977 rose sharply in June to a post-war high of 1.45m. It is estimated that 20% of this year's school-leavers will still be unemployed in a year's time.

If these figures on their own are not enough to shake the faith of the most fervent of the government's supporters, then the economic outlook is even bleaker. The Callaghan government's hopes of a strong reflationary push from the USA, which would carry the British economy along with it, have long since been dashed. The British situation, which is simply one of the most acute manifestations of the crisis in international capitalism, is marked from the standpoint of state economic strategy by two contradictory problems. Firstly, with inflation still extremely high, how is it possible to improve demand, in order to stimulate growth and jobs, without causing even greater inflation, which in turn will provoke a massive wage explosion. Secondly, how is it possible to create jobs when investment is made in technology which only increases productivity, leading to a *decline* in the number of jobs when productivity is increasing faster than the growth in the economy — as is happening at present in any case. As *The Times* sees the problem in the world context (22.6.77): "Given the slow but steady improvement in world productivity, such a trend must lead to still higher unemployment and is likely to have the most serious political and social consequences."

### The Working Class Response

The response of the working class so far has been distinctly muted. The loss of jobs and services resulting from cuts in public expenditure has been difficult to resist, to a large extent because of the Trade Union leadership's obvious unwillingness to organise a national struggle against cuts which were the direct result of government policies which they support. Resistance has therefore generally been as localised and fragmented as the cuts themselves. Similarly the few challenges to the government on the wages front, such as the Leyland toolmak-

ers, have been put forward by the participants as falling within the terms of Phase Two.

However this situation is rapidly changing. There is little possibility of persuading even the TUC to accept a specific figure for wage increases under Phase Three. All the TUC feels able to offer is support for a 12-month gap between pay increases and even here its ability to enforce such a rule is doubtful. On the economic front the TUC is badly exposed because of the continuing rise in unemployment and inflation and the cut-backs in social spending. But even on the 'political' front the TUC has been relatively marginalised over the question of worker-directors, which has fallen foul of the pact with the Liberals. Thus despite two years of solid support for anti-working class policies the TUC has very little to show for it.

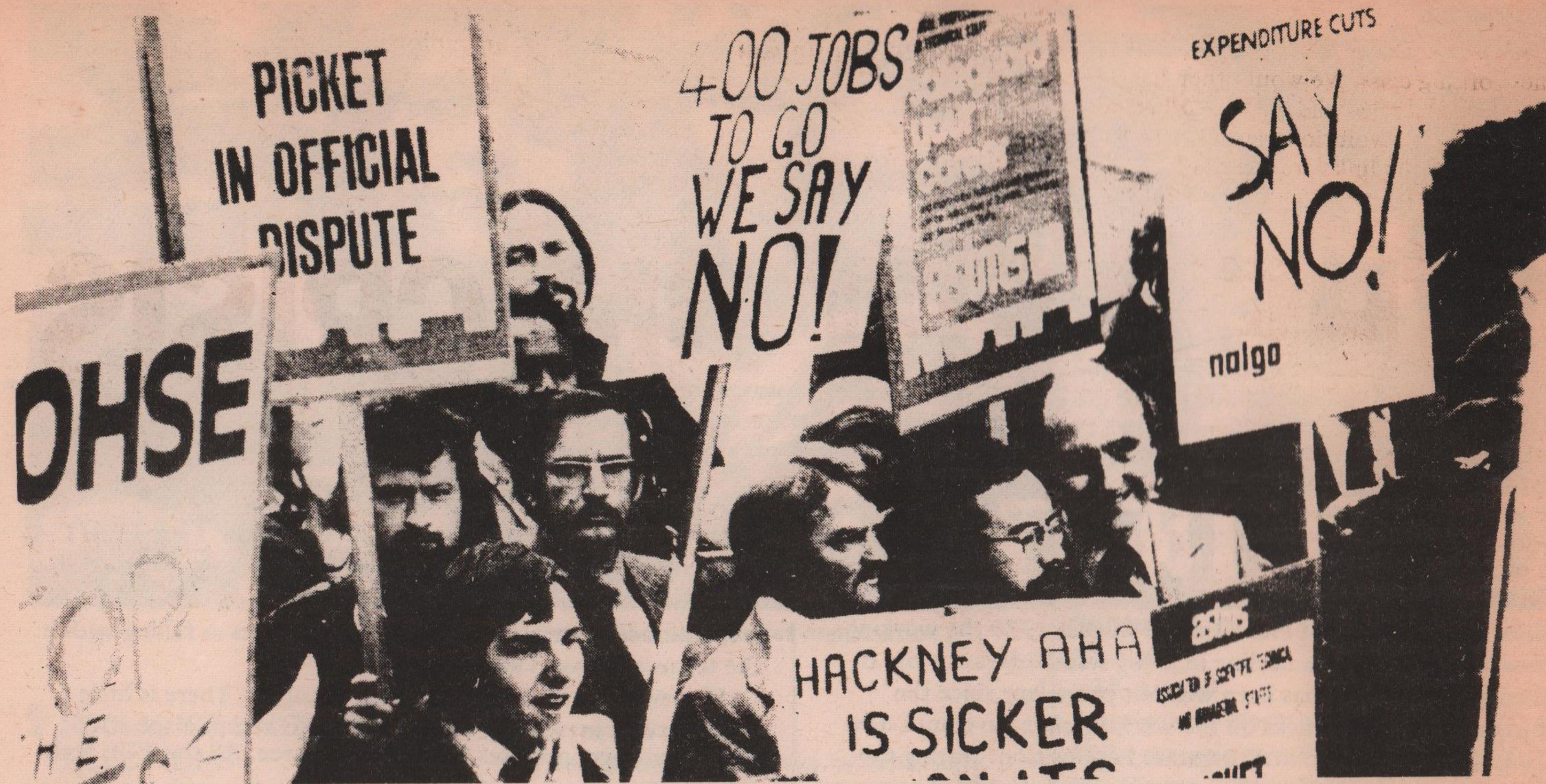
Despite the clearly growing resentment at declining living standards, worsening social services and increasing unemployment the ruling class will continue to support the TUC, even in the call for an "orderly return to free collective bargaining". With the evaporation of their hopes that tight wage controls could be implemented in Phase Three, their strategy now is to apply even more stringent money controls and restrictions on public expenditure which will have the effect of giving a further boost to unemployment. It is estimated that at least 100,000 local authority jobs will go in the coming period due to cuts already planned.

The dominant element in the ruling class still believes that a Labour/TUC government is the only way to contain the developing working class revolt on the wages front. They are worried that a right-wing Tory government would provoke a degree of resistance in the working class that would be more dangerous politically than under a Labour administration. Therefore Callaghan may still have backing to stay on in office with Liberal support until 1979. However the government's parliamentary situation is so precarious that any one of a number of factors could bring the Tories to power at any time.

Whatever happens at the parliamentary level there remains the key question of the likely developments in the class struggle. The first half of 1977 saw growing combativity in the working class. With the number of disputes increasingly sharply the dominant issue has been one of restoration of differentials for skilled workers (eg the Leyland toolmakers). Also the resistance to closures has been strengthening and many factories and hospitals have been occupied.

The present situation, marked by occupations, mass picketing with police confrontations, and increasing generalisation of the struggle, shows various similarities to 1972. That year started with Upper Clyde Shipbuilders occupied and with the mass flying pickets which won the miners' strike, and similar tactics during the building workers' and dockers' strikes. However the context in which we are operating today is very different.





Apart from the obvious difference that we are now fighting a Labour Government backed by the TUC rather than the Tories as in 1972, the main difference is in the economic and political situation. In 1972 there was still space within capitalist development to launch a 'mini-boom' in 1973 which even in early 1975 was still yielding pay increases even larger than the rise in inflation. Now no such space is available. Despite recent improvements in profit levels, resulting from the cut in workers' living standards and partly from North Sea Oil, there is still not enough room in the economy to bring about the massive investment which is regarded as necessary to provide a sounder footing for capitalist development.

In the early and mid-seventies, and even during Phase One of the recent wage freeze, the low-paid benefitted relative to other workers. Now the emphasis by government and unions alike is on restoring differentials, letting the low-paid bear the brunt not only of inflation but also of the cuts. The strategy is to reverse the trend in the early seventies towards equal pay rises and instead modify the formula of the sixties to include an element of "self-financing" productivity deals and "kitty-bargaining". The aim of all this is to divide the working class and to link wages in workers' minds to profitability and productivity thus off-setting a unified fight-back.

Unlike 1972 when the class struggle was dominated by major sectors of workers in national struggle (miners, dockers, etc) the key working class confrontations of 1977 have been marked by their localised or sectional origins and the small size of the work-force involved. Previously little organised sections and workplaces have been in the vanguard of the class (Trico, Grunwicks). Accompanying this has been a tendency towards "decentralisation" of struggles with the most important struggles under Phase Two starting at the local level on the shop-floor under the leadership of the stewards and rank-and-file, rather than the big national confrontations under national union control which characterised the key struggles of the early and mid-seventies. The union leadership's main problem, as at Grunwick, has been to seize and then keep the initiative from the rank-and-file. Elsewhere, as with the Leyland tool-makers, the union leaders have been the principle opponents of the workers.

Previous generalised class offensives, as in 1969 (Ford workers, steel workers), in 1972 (miners, dockers), and in 1974/5 (miners etc), have shown the central importance of genuine vanguard sections of the class. The effect of these previous vanguards was generally to break through govern-

ment wage control policies. After the strong sectors had won, others could follow that much more easily. However it is an open question where new vanguards will emerge from. Firstly, previous key sectors such as the car workers have been hit over recent years by various attacks on shop-organisation (through increased mobility and flexibility, sackings, increased discipline etc). Secondly, the ruling class is well aware of the dangers of allowing such vanguards to emerge and is devising tactics to prevent it — like 'concessions' to the miners on productivity payments and pensions.

### Grunwicks

Grunwicks may prove to be a pointer for the new vanguards that may now emerge. Changes in the nature of these key vanguards have taken place since the early seventies. Most important has been the emergence of the low-paid, women workers and black and immigrant workers, the clearest example of which can be found in the struggles in the hospitals. These sections have been increasing their power inside the working class, not only because they have been in the forefront of the struggles against low pay and the cuts, but also because they are not so deeply entrenched in traditional union attitudes of sectionalism, adherence to procedure, domination by union officials, and so on. Their lack of a long trade union history is thus as a strength as well as a weakness.

It is in this context that the Grunwick strike is so important. As a test of the combativity in the class, the support the struggle has won from other sections shows the degree of latent militancy that can now be mobilised given the right conditions. At Grunwick, unlike most struggles against the cuts, the issue was straightforward (union recognition), the dispute could clearly be won, and solidarity support could be very effective. (The struggle is still continuing at the time of writing). Clearly the dispute has served as a national focus for the working class — the first such focus since the start of Phase One in 1975.

Such a dispute as at Grunwicks achieves its significance, not through direct economic power as is the case with many sectors (miners, steel etc), but through strengthening the self-confidence of the class as a whole. It is in this respect that the Grunwick strike is significant and hopefully this struggle can point the way, in terms of combativity, self-confidence and class solidarity, for the upcoming struggles over pay and the cuts which will herald the start of Phase Three.

Paul Thompson

# THE LEFT IN CRISIS

The left has responded in various ways to the challenge posed by the developing crisis. This article examines the recent turns made by the major left organisations and concludes with an outline of Big Flame's thinking behind its own project to create a new revolutionary organisation.

The British Left is going through its most interesting and vital stage of development since the war. A number of organisations are simultaneously going through crises, yet putting forward various projects for new or changed organisations. The Communist Party is trying to pull together new forces around a re-written 'British Road to Socialism.' IS (International Socialism) has become the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and hopes to 'solve' the problem of the revolutionary party by massive growth. The IMG (International Marxist Group) are oscillating between trying once again to regroup the orthodox Trotskyist left and a more ambitious project of "a unified revolutionary organisation". With some modesty we would also point to our own project, decided by our conference in October 1976. *Big Flame* is committed to investigating the formation with others of a new larger revolutionary socialist organisation, which if formed we would dissolve into.

We believe that these re-assessments and projects are strongly influenced by the changing conditions of struggle. After years of stalemate, with actions by different sections of the working class helping to provoke deeper crises, the ruling class launched a total counter-offensive. This offensive caused a retreat by the working class because the struggles and strategies remained trapped within the period of expansion and sectional struggle. The Left was caught cold in this process, able to do little to reverse the trends. It is one thing to castigate the reformist leaders for their 'betrayals', quite another to have the power to build an alternative. The Left is not deeply rooted inside the mass of the working class and much of its own strategies are historically outdated. The re-assessment is one aspect of coming to terms with this lack of power. We turn now to a closer examination of the major projects.

### THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The CP is in a general political decline, manifested by falls in membership (1), newspaper sales, serious resignations (Jimmy Reid, Max Morris etc) among other things. Not surprisingly they have not rooted this in the hopelessly inadequate strategy of relying on Left Labour and Union leaders. Instead the CP believes they are not reformist enough. The publication of the 'British Road to Socialism' (BRS) takes the party more clearly

than ever in this direction. It presents further development of the 1951 version and confirms their acceptance of 'Euro-Communism' (semi-independence from Moscow and discrete dropping of the essentials of Marxism-Leninism, such as dictatorship of the proletariat etc.)

Some aspects of the growing distance from revolutionary marxism are particularly pathetic. Socialist democracy is put forward as "involving far greater participation by the people in the running of the country." (Lines 32-33) Parliament can be transformed into "the democratic instrument of the will of the vast majority of people," (Line 1104). A touching faith is shown in the "British Constitution" to enable the "carrying through of drastic and necessary reforms.." (Line 1460) without interference. All this is too much for the traditional and possibly growing Stalinist opposition who attempt to combine revolutionary principles of class struggle with an abject defence of the policies of the Soviet Government. If they split from the CP, as seems likely, they will weaken the present leadership and open possibilities for further realignment amongst the left. However such a split will not be able to make any significant impact either on the left or in the working class unless they break from their Stalinist tradition.

The party has its newer ideologists these days and they are key to its political strategy. It is not our aim to make a critique of the content of the BRS, but to examine its relationship to aspects of the CP's organisational direction. Because, despite general decline, the CP is growing in one section: the intelligentsia. Attracted by a sizeable working class membership and a licence to do their own thing, sections of the intelligentsia, including feminists, are being won over. They are an important weapon in re-establishing some political credibility that can be a basis for a CP resurgence.

One indication of this is that for the first time the CP is publishing some serious critiques of the revolutionary left (2). There are some easy targets in the more simplistic predictions of revolutionary fervour and lack of analysis, characteristic of much of Trotskyism. But the pretentious sophistication of the new CP intelligentsia functions both as an abject apology for traditional CP politics and as a justification for their own role (3). The consistent theme of these articles is an attack on so-called 'economism' or 'economic reductionism' and an assertion of the primacy of ideology as the basis of capitalist domination of the working class, using Gramsci as a supposed



'legitimation'. This neatly fits the schema of the BRS which retreats further from confronting ruling class power by proletarian power. The problem of advancing to socialism can then be switched to a gradualist concept of establishing the ideological hegemony of the working class, with the party having a largely propagandist role. Concentration on the primacy and autonomy of ideology is also a vital component of the CP's strategy of growth among the intelligentsia. By separating off ideological/cultural spheres, CP members can happily work away as long as they don't challenge the Party's central strategy of working class organising.

Not that there is much danger of that, in fact the leading new ideologists generally stand on the right of the party (4). For instance there are sections of the CP who don't want to stand candidates against Labour in the elections. While this evokes sympathy from the leadership it cannot be as yet accepted as it makes a mockery of believing in the parliamentary road!

There is another aspect which can win support among the intelligentsia and that is emphasising the breadth of the movement. The BRS consciously emphasises a wide working class, the importance of the womens liberation movement and the necessity for tackling cultural — ideological problems. The critiques also pertinently attack the workerism of groups like the SWP. However the CP stress on these questions is in a decisively reformist context. A wider and changed composition of the working class is seen as part of the 'Broad Democratic Alliance' that can win socialism. By simply inserting new sectors inside the working class (scientists, teachers, social workers etc) the BRS short-circuits the essential political problems that have to be overcome. Alongside them in the Broad Democratic Alliance will be the 'small capitalists' and virtually anyone who is outside the ranks of the big monopolies.

Similarly the real political contribution of autonomous movements (women, black etc) towards a revolutionary unification of the working class is never dealt with. While the womens' movement is mentioned many times it is still relatively separate from central CP strategy and analysis (5). For instance the BRS (line 465) repeats the traditional analysis that:—"Only socialism can overcome the basic contradiction from which every aspect of the crisis flows. Socialism replaces private ownership by public ownership. The basic contradictions of society are removed."

This limited view of crisis and socialism is precisely what the womens and black movements have fought to re-define by inserting sex and race as central dynamics in the ending of capitalism and the process of building socialism. The cosmetic job the CP has done on these issues cannot disguise the fact that the BRS is an organisational project largely separate from building working class power. It is also one that given the CP's size doesn't even make sense as a reformist strategy (unlike Italy and France). They may as well dissolve into the Labour Party as some on the right of the party no doubt favour.

#### THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

As for the SWP, its transformation from IS is presented by its leadership as not simply the creation of a party, but *the* party, albeit in embryonic form. The movement from an organisation to a party depends among other things on a degree of centralisation of politics and organisation and a national presence among vanguard elements of the class. It is probable that the SWP has the basis to form a party. *The* party however, even in embryonic form presumes a qualitative leap in the class struggle which unifies the mass vanguards and creates the necessity for an organised expression of the new situation. This is clearly a non-sense in Britain today and the SWP leadership should realise that the party cannot be announced; it has to be fought for long and hard and debated in the mass struggle.

The recent heavy-handed sectarianism of the SWP is a consequence of this mistake political position. IS was often sectarian in the past, and sometimes for understandable reasons. Some left united fronts were a waste of time and the endless Trotskyist oppositions that tried to organise inside IS can be a diversion from building revolutionary politics. Political solutions are always characterised as a return to the orthodoxy of

previous eras and the factionalism is so often counter-productive to attracting working class militants. But the recent sectarianism is of a different stamp, conditioned as it is by the assertion that the SWP are the only real revolutionaries. This is disastrous for the Left as it splits and demoralises our already small forces. For instance the SWP students (NOISS) refused to join the Socialist Students Alliance to contest NUS elections. The SSA is a grouping that is the most developed united front for many years in the student arena and has a real potential for attracting independent socialist forces. Instead the SWP commented in Socialist Worker:

"NOISS, the student affiliate of the SWP, gave the lead to the far left in proposing motions and speaking. But when it came to elections votes were divided between it and the Socialist Student Alliance, which attracted those people not yet fully prepared to commit themselves to revolutionary politics." But the SWP attitudes are even more disastrous for the class struggle. Two notable examples are the National Abortion Campaign and the elections. The SWP have jumped in and out of NAC, depending on how they saw its current usefulness. Their sectarian and manipulative attitudes reached a height when the SWP organised a separate abortion demonstration after the official NAC one. As for the elections, from the first two by-elections contested their attitudes show they had a very mistaken notion of the purpose of standing revolutionary candidates. After the first results were announced in Newcastle Central and Walsall Socialist Worker's comments were:-

"The elections have proved of incalculable value in building our campaigns. First 56 people have joined the IS." The refusal to talk to, let alone co-operate with, the IMG in Stechford to get a joint candidate is a logical continuation of seeing elections simply as a chance to recruit and push general socialist propaganda. We are opposed to neither. However the overwhelmingly dominant function of a campaign is to develop the class struggle, which is *never* synonymous with building one organisation, no matter how important. This means building local organising on specific and national issues and bringing together a coalition of militants on an action programme that will carry on the struggles.

The SWP have traditionally called for a Labour vote, until there is an alternative. They now believe they are building that alternative. The SWP now believe their argument is with the Labour Party and Communist Party. But they are on a loser if they think that the SWP, even many times bigger, can be an alternative to Labour. This is not simply a case of history and size, it is a mistaken conception of what alternative we are presenting in elections. The alternative we must present is between class struggle and bourgeois parliamentary politics, not between the Labour Party and our organisations. The healthy distance that they have always kept from reformism and a clear rejection of entrism is also in danger of becoming divorced from any tactical mediation in their approach to Labour.

The consequence of the current level of SWP sectarianism is that their party building will often be *at odds* with the struggle and the mass movement. Set-backs will be written off as a product of not working hard enough (eg. at Stechford) or what counts is the real revolutionaries who've joined the SWP. The more they retreat from base organising to party-building, the more they will have to rely on campaigns and general propaganda (6). Even the Rank and File Movement is now treated more as a half-way house to the party than as an organised expression of working class power (7).

The present orientation of the SWP is causing some dissension in the ranks. Dissidents, including long-time members, point to the fact that IS was built largely through being more open and fighting consistently for rank and file organisation. There is a great deal of truth in this, but we would be fooling ourselves if we agreed it was all new. Much is rooted in IS's traditional concepts of party and class. This has always suffered from three basic mistakes.

Firstly the development of the party has tended to be seen in linear terms. That is a model based on the extension of past tradition (in this case the early CP and the minority movement); imposing on and distorting the tasks of developing class struggle in today's very different conditions. The linear aspect also influences leaning towards a quantitative model of party-building. Despite having theoretical positions which

allowed for possible fusions in struggle, IS largely acted as if it were the embryo of the party which would grow by a simple process of recruitment.

Secondly there is the problem of workerism. IS has always expressed in extreme form the view that only the industrial working class counts and has power. Therefore it has failed to build itself in a genuine interaction with the strength and political importance of the autonomous movements, particularly of women. Participation in such movements and in united fronts had generally been opportunistic and recruitment orientated, thus doing a disservice to the whole of the Left.

Thirdly, there is a limited concept of internal organisation. After a loose structure in the beginning, internal democracy gradually receded. The movement is littered with people expelled, 'excluded' or disillusioned with IS and not just Trotskyist oppositionists but many good working class militants. Power has become more concentrated from an explicit leadership theory which sees a 'hard centre' co-existing with a relatively 'soft' wider membership as the best recipe for growth, passed off as "Leninism". The resulting highly undemocratic regime is described by one long standing member of IS, Martin Shaw:

"none of the major changes in recent years in IS — the launching of the Right to Work Campaign, standing candidates for elections, launching of the SWP itself — have been discussed by a conference of the organisation, but have been decided by a purely full-time Central Committee of ten." (Letter to the *Leveller*, April 1977).

It would be disastrous for the Left if the SWP became a more sophisticated WRP, regarding itself as the centre of the universe. We hope that the SWP will start talks with the rest of the Left on things like elections, but existing trends are not hopeful. It is far more likely that changes will only happen if the SWP are outflanked by other organisations or struggles, so that sectarianism is shown *not to pay*. Fortunately there is evidence that this is happening. In the elections as at Stechford it has not simply been the success of non-SWP revolutionary candidates, but the fact that many working class people are challenging the sectarianism and divisions on the Left in the campaigns. Along with the success of the Socialist Students Alliance, has been the Socialist Teachers Alliance: a genuine alliance, including many non-aligned militants. Meanwhile 'Rank and File' is rapidly declining, with whole branches leaving or going over to the STA (eg. Hull, Sheffield). (8).

#### THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP.

As for the orthodox Trotskyist left, the IMG functions as the main reference point. There is little doubt that Trotskyism has been in crisis in the last few years. There have been numerous splits, fusions and further splits within any fundamental questioning of the political basis of the orthodoxy. The IMG have not been unaffected by that crisis. It is divided internally and at one time appeared to be losing strength in a number of areas where it has been traditionally strong. Yet it remained sufficiently distanced from the search for purity to avoid the worst effects. They have consistently put forward initiatives that, whatever other criticisms we have, have been largely open and principled, and have therefore gained in strength and credibility.

Their election campaigns are a case in point. From the start they argued for a campaign based on class struggle, open to militants, local organisations and other political tendencies. This is why BF supported Brian Heron in Stechford and other IMG candidates in London. Having participated in the campaigns we can confirm that they were run in a very open way: for instance weekly meetings open to all activists on a one person-one vote basis: and the campaigns have proved of use in building local struggles and organisation, particularly in the Asian community. The success of the campaign was largely for these reasons. As Tariq Ali explained:—"The reason for our higher vote is essentially because of our united front approach." (Red Weekly 6th April — Open letter to Paul Foot).

The election example is not an isolated case. IMG initiatives in relation to the Socialist Teachers and Student Alliances show an open and non-sectarian approach. It is vital for the whole of the Left in this period in trying to turn the tide of



John Sturrock (Report)

retreat in class struggle that campaigns like this are built. This involves a consistent commitment to building the mass movement and IMG show some signs of a 'turn' towards these tasks, having achieved little success with what remains of the entrism.

However such an orientation sits uneasily with what remains of the strategy. The decision to partly re-enter the Labour Party has meant that considerable resources are spent in the time and effort of militants inside often moribund structures, with little reference to building independent class struggle. It is ironic for instance that IMG Labour Party members cannot canvass for their own candidates! And the danger of entrism is that class struggle is channelled inside the reformist organisations. This danger is added to because IMG still over-emphasises working inside the depths of the unions and labour movement: resulting in a fair amount of resolution-mongering and sustaining of organisations of 'paper' delegates. The result is that it is often the independent left wingers in things like the SSA or Cut Committees that push for mass initiatives and action, sometimes clashing with the IMG in the process.

Finally the IMG's non-sectarian approach and commitment to the unity of the left is distorted by their attitude towards regroupment. Traditionally, and until very recently IMG's project was to re-group the Trotskyist left. However this has proved a fairly fruitless task. The smaller groups are extremely hostile and have a history of defining differences on ideological grounds small enough to baffle the outsider. So in the new conditions, with large sections of the Left becoming more open and non-sectarian and small sections of the class becoming increasingly open to revolutionary politics, but repelled by fragmentation and sectarianism, IMG



have moved on. They now have a more open paper, ‘Socialist Challenge’, which calls for “a unified revolutionary organisation,” It is no secret that they see rich pickings in the likes of of *Big Flame* and the Workers League (9). We are sorry to disappoint IMG but neither our “best elements” nor anybody else are likely to join. We will discuss and work with IMG, as we are doing over the elections. But aside from general political differences, we disagree with using the slogan “for a unified revolutionary organisation” in this period. Firstly as such a development is impossible it has a diversionary effect. What one should be seeking is *maximum revolutionary unity in action*. Secondly, despite its new ‘open’ turn, IMG tends to identify revolutionary marxism as synonymous with Trotskyism. Other revolutionary tendencies have to be given labels — *Big Flame* has been given ‘centrist’. This ideological monolithism will not help a genuine long-term process of unity. Finally, the whole concept of ‘re-groupment’ needs to be criticised because it sees the building of revolutionary organisation too much as simply the merging of groups — a process that often has only a very tenuous connection to the general struggle. It also reduces the impact of revolutionary politics because building the organisation is not properly fought for inside the masses.

#### BIG FLAME

BF’s project for a new organisation is conditioned by the relative weakness of our forces, compared to the political tasks we think are necessary. It is quite clear that the main reason for the retreat of class action in the past couple of years is the inability of the working class to break from the ideological hold of reformism and traditional models of organisation, demands and struggle. The initial acceptance of the social contract by the unions and labour movement forces showed the tremendous hold of the trade unions over labour rank leadership over the working class, which is a product of the historical lack of independent class organisation. Even the sporadic opposition to the Social Contract was usually in terms of a sectional special case or differentials. The exceptions were precisely those sectors which were less trapped within traditional models: women workers (eg. at Trico’s) and some public sector workers often fought hard and in a *mass* way. Their willingness and ability to go beyond reliance on the Labour Party and union machines and to be general, not sectional need to be spread to the whole class. But this process, already beginning, can be accelerated by the formation of a clear political tendency based on a *mass political approach*. This tendency can be broadly characterised as:—

\*\*\* Rejecting entrism and over-dependence on routinised union activity, seeking to build independent class organisation and power. Movement first, party second.

\*\*\* Locating its activity in the community and social sphere, not simply the factory, in response to the changing composition of the class.

\*\*\* Fully supporting and helping to build the autonomous movements and independent organisations of women and black people which are based on defining and organising around existing divisions in the working class. Such movements and organisations, to be seen as essential to *unite* the class. Also recognising the importance of the ideological struggle, alongside the fight at the point of production.

\*\*\* A non-sectarian political method, for maximum unity in action. A dynamic and non-authoritarian relationship between vanguard organisation and working class and within the vanguard organisation.

\*\*\* Firmly anti-imperialist, attempting to make international struggles relevant to the experience of the British working

class: not imposing universal models of political strategy and abstract international links.

BF does not see itself as the sole representative of this potential tendency. For reasons related to the growth of the Left and class struggle in Britain this tendency is highly dispersed in local groupings, autonomous movements and other left organisations. This is why despite BF growing in numbers and in terms of national political presence we want to be part of creating a new organisation. Some say it is too early and they may be right. But we would point to two positive factors. Firstly, the period of retreat is ending. A quickened momentum in struggle would accelerate the possibilities and tasks connected to such a new organisation. Secondly, the response to our manifesto and proposals already indicates that there are many militants, inside and outside organisations who are feeling the need for a new organisation of forces.

We realise that it will take a considerable time to pull together a *mass politics tendency* in and around a new organisation. The basis has to be built over time and in a process of joint co-operation and activity between the forces involved. It also has to be flexibly related to the unfolding of class struggle. It is difficult to predict what forces it can bring together. But within a year it may be possible to have laid the basis for a new organisation whose mass work should enable it to bring in wider and wider layers of activists, currently disillusioned with left organisations. Our project may be less predictable than the others mentioned — it is certainly a new experience on the left and there are many areas which are at the moment unclear. But we believe it has two great strengths. Our concept of a new political tendency recognises the richness of experiences and political histories that will have to be combined and rooted in the tasks of building a revolutionary organisation in Britain today. Also we think our project is the one that rests most unambiguously on the building of working class power and the mass movement in all its manifestations.

#### NOTES

- (1) The CP’s official membership declined from 32,916 in 1967 to 28,543 in 1973. In 1967 the YCL’s membership was 5,642, by September 1976 it was under 2,000. Sales of the Morning Star are also declining, as are the number of CP votes in elections.
- (2) These include: Geoff Roberts ‘The politics of the IMG, Aspects of a critique,’ Marxism Today December 1976. Roberts ‘The Strategy of Rank and Filism,’ Marxism Today February ‘76. David Purdy ‘Soviet Union, socialist or state capitalist? A Marxist critique of the International Socialists.’ (pamphlet).
- (3) The piece by Roberts on ‘Rank and Filism’ is an elaborate defence of the CP line that it is ideology that separates trade union leaders: being divided into left and right trends. Purdy similarly defends the traditional CP line that Russia is socialist, despite ‘imperfections.’
- (4) Some (eg. David Purdy) favour incomes policy, for example.
- (5) A similar point was made by Sue O’Sullivan in her criticisms of the CP majority on the Red Rag Journal, in her letter of resignation.
- (6) Paul Foot’s book ‘Why you should be a socialist’ which is central to the SWP’s growth strategy, is a perfect example of this. Excellent agitational material is combined with a complete identification of solving every problem by joining SWP and accepting the general arguments for socialism. A real anti-capitalist strategy is absent.
- (7) For an interesting analysis of this, by some people who started the Rank and File Movement see Socialist Voice No. 3 April 1977 ‘Building the Rank and File’ — they are now in Workers League.
- (8) Since this article was written a long critique of the SWP by Martin Shaw, now ‘suspended’ from SWP for supporting united left candidates in elections, has appeared in ‘Red Weekly’ 26th May 1977. Despite some differences, this is a very fine article which is a much more in depth critique than ours could be, given his experience.
- (9) See article in the ‘Leveller’ June issue.

John Howell

# SOCIALIST UNITY AT ELECTIONS

Over the past year there have been important changes in the left’s orientation towards elections with the major socialist organisations making a priority of electoral activity. However differences have emerged over the form such activity should take. The following article argues why electoral activity is important and explains Big Flame’s support for the idea of a unified and broadly-based electoral campaign.

The past year has seen a spate of activity among most sections of the left on the question of the strategy to adopt over elections. What is perhaps surprising is the speed with which the main groupings on the left have entered the electoral arena.

#### The Political Context

The question of whether to put forward candidates at elections has to be seen against the background of the present political situation. “Electoral activity” (ie that branch of politics as associated with the reformism of the Labour Party and the belief, shared by the majority of the Communist Party, that you can use Parliament to bring about socialism) has been popularly regarded as existing in a realm of its own, divorced from the daily struggle. ‘Politics’ has been portrayed as synonymous with electoral activity and been looked at in terms of voting percentages, ‘swings’, parliamentary seats and so on. The revolutionary left has correctly founded its organisations on the basis that no fundamental change in the system can be made through the channels of parliament. Socialism cannot be legislated from on high but has to be fought for from below.

At the same time as this correct perspective was shared by all sections of the revolutionary left another negative idea gained currency. This was a neglect of electoral activity to the extent that it was equated with a belief in a parliamentary road to socialism.

In Britain the revolutionary left is far weaker than in France and Italy. For a large part this is a result of reformist ideology in the working class, and also the economic nature of most working class struggles since the war. This situation was conditioned by the post-war stability given to the international capitalist system by Keynesian economic policies and the ability of western capital to continue its imperialist domination of the world market through neo-colonialism.

It is precisely this economic and political stability which has been broken under the impact of the struggles of the working class and masses in the industrialised and underdeveloped

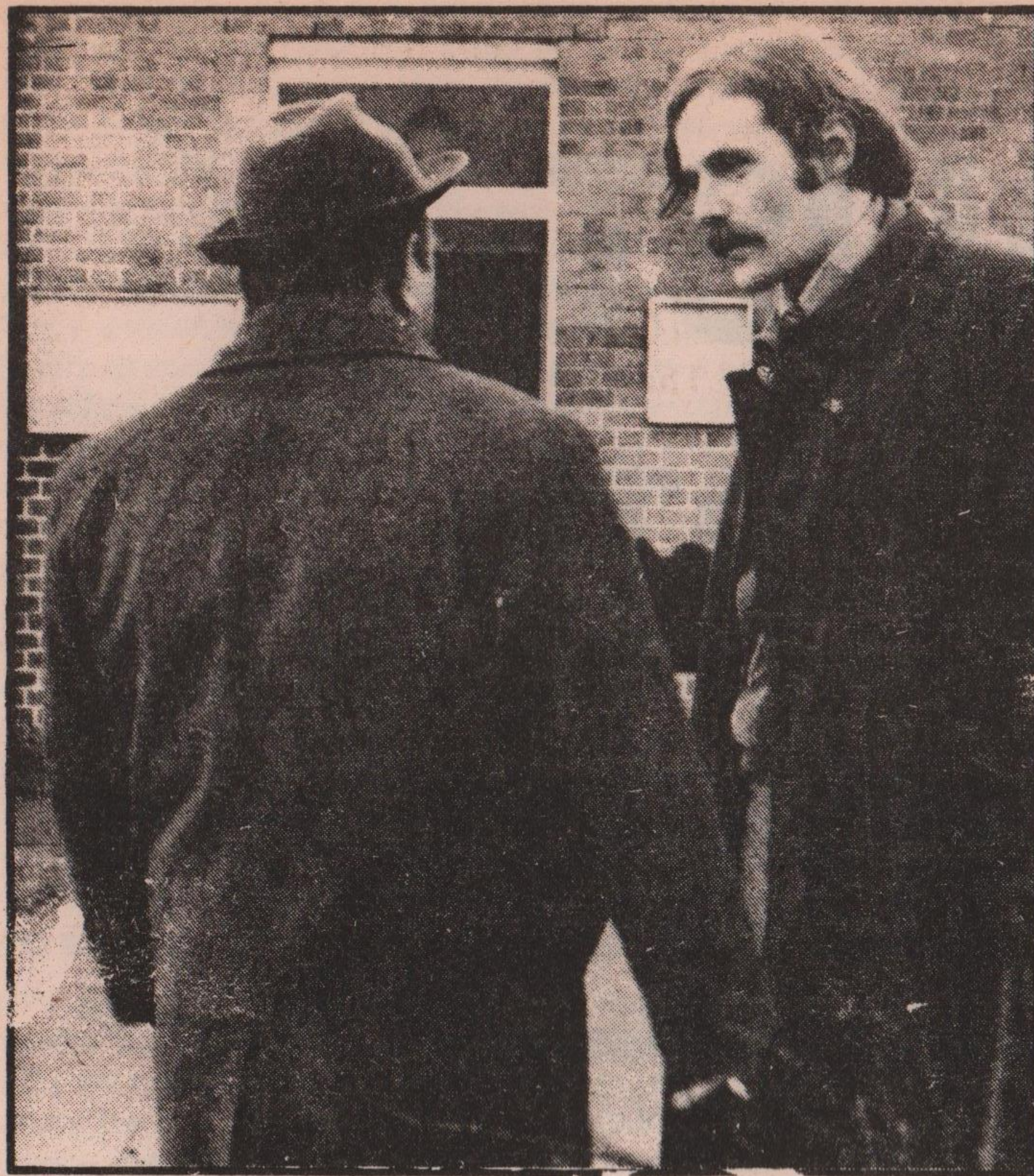
countries. These struggles have intensified the contradictions internal to the capitalist system. The material basis which has conditioned the current involvement of revolutionaries in elections is the break-up of the economic stability that was successfully established after the second world war. It was this stability, combined with a generalised economic growth, that seemed to justify the reformist belief that capitalism was somehow permanent.

Internationally the main countries comparable to Britain (France and Italy) have both seen unbroken rule by conservative governments. The traditional absence of a social-democratic party in power, like the Labour Party in Britain, has created the space for the build-up in strength of the “Euro-Communist” reformist CPs. In these countries the reformist forces of the left have yet to exercise power over a prolonged period. Thus they have yet to clearly show to the mass of the working class in those countries a blatant anti-working class politics and an inability to make progress towards socialism.

In Britain the situation is the reverse. The Labour Party has been in government three times since the war and on each occasion has disillusioned and alienated sections of the working class, including its own activists. As it becomes clearer and clearer that the Labour Government is incapable of providing any way forward for either the working class, or even for British capitalism, we are witnessing a potentially historic shake-up in the British political system.

The stage is set for a massive defeat for the Labour Party at the next election. This defeat will be marked by abstentions on the left, by increased nationalist votes in Scotland, and to a lesser extent Wales, and increased votes for the fascist parties in England. From this defeat it will be more difficult than after the 1970 election for Labour to adopt a left face even against a far-right Thatcher administration, at least whilst preserving a facade of unity between the right-wing Callaghan





IMG candidate Brian Heron canvasses in Stechford.

Photo: G.M. COOKSON (Red Weekly)

leadership and the left, whose foremost ideologue will be Benn.

It is conceivable that in this new situation the long-anticipated realignment of the major political parties will take place and that some new centre party or coalition will be formed. Whatever eventualities may be the fundamental fact is that the monolithic nature of British politics, with the dominance of the two major parties, is starting to break down. The pact between Liberal and Labour Parties may well be a precursor of future reactionary coalitions.

The historical context in which we are operating today is marked by a profound crisis of politics and organisation inside the working class as a whole and among socialist activists and militants in particular. The separation of 'politics' from 'economics' is deeply rooted and has manifested itself also in the strategies of the revolutionary left who have often tended to give the impression that real advances to socialism could be made simply through better trade union militancy and with better trade union leaders.

In this process, the left neglected relatively the fact that the domination of bourgeois ideas in the working class is deeply rooted — through the education system, the family and a myriad of other purveyors of bourgeois ideology. Nor could such questions as racism and sexism be relegated to some secondary status, subordinate to a supposedly 'socialist' consciousness, which is in fact little more than good trade unionism or support for the Labour Party. The recent growth of the fascist right, gaining much passive support and, no doubt some activists as well, from the ranks of hitherto solid Labour voters, shows clearly how such questions as racism are far from secondary.

For revolutionaries the task is to root our analysis of the working class in actual daily experience, not in some idealised model. In relation to elections it is quite clear that the working class as a whole equates 'politics' with elections. It is at election time that it is 'permissible' to discuss openly the question of politics and it is at election time that the full force of the media is focussed on giving the impression that elections are what politics is about. Thus if revolutionaries wish seriously to intervene for the long-term allegiance of significant layers of the working class then they cannot ignore the question of intervening in elections.

Similarly, the nature of the crisis means that wide sections of the working class are seeing that some total political perspective is needed to counter the divisive propaganda coming from the Labour Party and Trade Union leaders. It is inadequate or impossible to counter these arguments effectively simply at a local level. Instead the whole question of a programmatic approach, linking local struggles in a general framework, is posed.

The ability of the left to meet this need is restricted by two factors. First, the left has to be able to construct a meaningful programme which successfully meets the real needs of the class yet without succumbing to utopianism or reformism. Secondly, the left has to be able to organise its forces so that it is able to make some serious impact at a mass level, and not merely be localised in particular areas and workplaces.

For this to actually happen it is clear that, from our present starting point, the left is going to quickly have to do some radical rethinking. Until recently most of the left did little mass work in proportion to its size and level of commitment. Although things have improved over the past two years the general lack of implantation of revolutionaries inside the working class is a crucial weakness.

The importance of electoral activity in this context should be clear. Because elections, particularly general elections, are about all areas of politics and engage the mass of the working class in discussion of politics this could well be the touchstone of the left's ability to make the essential transformation from fringe activity to something capable of offering some viable organisational and political framework to wide layers of militants.

## The Working Class And The Labour Party

The tendency since the war has been for people to vote Labour as the lesser of two evils. This is demonstrated, first by the massive Labour abstentions in the 1970 general election and in the current local and parliamentary elections, and, second, by the historical decline in the total Labour vote from its peak in 1945.

This does not mean that the working class is not dominated by reformist ideas — far from it. What it means is that there has been a material basis for these reformist ideas: first, in the relative economic gains of the working class; and, second, in the increased tendency for the state in all its aspects (education ideology, media etc.) to more totally condition the thinking of the working class and break down class consciousness (eg through the destruction of working class communities). It is precisely this material basis which is today being eroded.

The question of support for Labour should be seen as a question of tactics and not one of principle. Both "principled" positions on Labour, abstentionism and automatic support, ignore the fact that elections are actually linked to class struggle. This was most clear in the February 1974 election when the basic issue was one of support for the miners' strike. *Big Flame's* slogan then was "Vote Labour, our weakest enemy", which had the merit of both recognising the importance of the election result to the struggle of the miners, whilst at the same time indicating the true class nature of a Labour Government. To repeat such a slogan today, after a period of completely pro-capitalist policies, would be to misread the situation. Even some Labour activists understand this and, whilst not yet breaking organisationally with the Labour Party, realise that a strong revolutionary vote and presence would help them in their struggle to strengthen the socialist current inside the party.

In the context of massive popular hostility to the Labour Government and the possible electoral decimation of the Party at the next election the tactical commitment of resources to fight within the party is likely to be completely counter-productive. Similarly the advantages of creating some electoral alternative, viable in organisational terms, outside the Labour Party should also be clear. Those organisations like the IMG with with forces committed inside the Labour Party are likely to find such a strategy misplaced.

Despite the possibility of further gains inside the Labour Party at constituency level the ability of the revolutionaries to turn these forces to effective use at the level of organising action against a Tory government is likely to be severely limited. The 'carrot' of a significant shift to the left inside the Labour Party after the next General Election is likely to prove a political mirage. *Political* power in capitalism is about the respective power of the working class in relation to the bourgeoisie. Parliamentary and electoral power, including power within such an important party as the Labour Party, is ultimately nothing without real organisational forces on the ground — not power to pass resolutions at conferences or on this or that committee.

## The Attitudes Of The Left

What then of the rest of the left? The Communist Party, whose commitment to the parliamentary road should make it a serious force in elections, has shown since the war its incapacity to mount any left challenge to Labour. Whilst the general forces on the left have grown dramatically over the past ten years the CP's electoral strength has witnessed a continual decline since the war, when it last held parliamentary seats. The anxiety of its leadership to increase its commitment to "Euro-Communism" shows that it has no desire to change its basic orientation as a prop to the left in the Labour Party. Its hostility to the revolutionary left and its continued capitulation to bourgeois forces was recently shown at the Stechford by-election when it advocated a vote for the right-wing Labour candidate, who was a manager at Leyland and stood on an anti-immigration platform, against the two revolutionary left candidates.

The CPs vote is still declining, despite its recent attempt to broaden its base, and at the local council elections in May it was noteworthy that the CP polled fewer votes compared to the revolutionary candidate where both stood, thus-making nonsense of the CP leadership's arrogant dismissal of the revolutionary left. It was also clear that, despite the urgency of the fight against fascist parties, the CP has been completely unwilling to stand candidates at recent parliamentary by-elections for fear of being similarly 'defeated', but this time in the glare of publicity, by a revolutionary candidate.

## Socialist Workers Party

As for the principle organised force on the revolutionary left, the Socialist Workers Party, their policy has been to stand SWP candidates in parliamentary by-elections in working class areas, whilst ignoring local elections, including significant 'local' elections as for the GLC in May. They intend to stand enough candidates at the General Election (more than 50) to get television time. They have also refused, at leadership level, even to discuss collaboration with other revolutionary organisations on a joint slate at elections.

The reasoning behind the SWP position is that you cannot have united fronts at elections because you have to fight on your organisation's full programme. Therefore, they imply, joint electoral activity would demand, as a precondition, organisational fusion. In fact, of course, nothing of the sort is implied by joint electoral campaigns. The fact is that the SWP leadership sees elections as simply another chance to recruit and build the party. This attitude stands in stark contrast to the recent history of electoral alliances between revolutionary organisations in Europe, where even those organisations with whom the SWP has some links, and which are larger

than the SWP, have participated in joint slates. The SWP position thus runs completely against the main trend in Europe and has no precedent in revolutionary politics.

Fortunately the sectarianism of the leadership is not matched matched at the base, and already some local branches of the SWP have taken small initiatives towards supporting candidates of other revolutionary organisations as well as expressing interest in the possibilities of joint slates.

## Towards Unity Of The Left At Elections

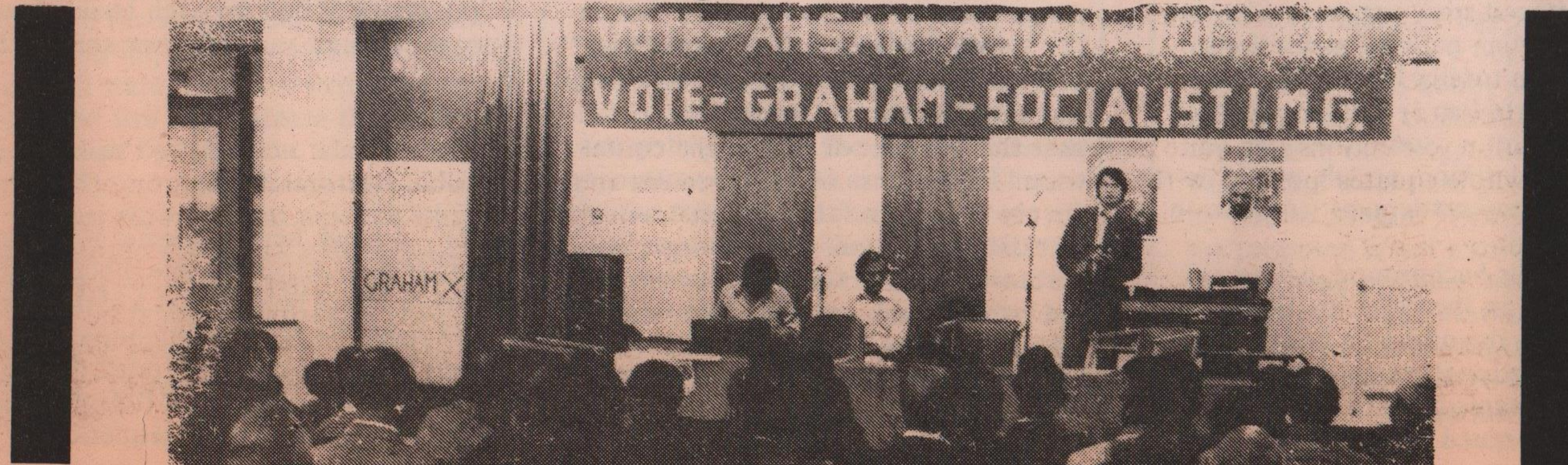
The starting point for a socialist alternative at elections is the recognition that in the eyes of the working class the left is both small and needlessly divided amongst itself. Against a generalised right-wing offensive from the Labour Party leadership, as well as from the Tories and the fascists, the left will have to fight hard to increase its own support and hold back a developing tide of reaction. The task is to use the space afforded us by the political and economic crisis to encourage and organise a generalised fight back by uniting forces around a minimum socialist programme. Real opportunities have been opened up by the crisis and by the inability of the reformists to offer any meaningful way forward. The job and responsibility of the left is to seize such opportunities.

An important yardstick for the success of an electoral campaign will be the ability to involve significant numbers of unorganised militants as well as womens groups, black organisations, housing groups and other rank-and-file working class bodies. Electoral activity, because it encompasses all areas of politics, could be an important catalyst for the unifying of these different sectors, through mutual support for struggles as well as activity for a common electoral programme. In this process it is to be hoped that we can reduce the gaps that

separate revolutionary organisations, individual militant, local groupings, and the presently unorganised vanguards of the working class.

The election itself should be seen as a focal point for a wide range of activities. Whilst the question of the size of the vote is important and a test of whether the left can gain some wider legitimacy in the eyes of the working class, the main aims are: first, to build the class struggle and, second, to draw together as many forces as possible, both individuals and organisations, in order to carry forward the struggle. Local campaigns would distinguish themselves from those of the reformists by organising with those in struggle, rather than simply trying to gather votes. For this reason it is clear that the best candidates will be activists with standing in the local community or labour movement. The question of whether such candidates are members of revolutionary organisations or not is secondary.

The joint initiative of *Big Flame* and the IMG to call an open conference in October to found the campaign for *Socialist Unity* at elections will be an important step if forces on the left are to be united around this issue. It will be particularly crucial for all those forces outside of the mainstream of the revolutionary left to come forward and help create a campaign which may then be able to stimulate and inspire layers within the working class to take up their struggles in a more unified and collective way. This may in turn prompt some radical reshaping of the forces on the left. Instead of the continuing roads of regroupment amongst the organised revolutionary left we may then see some significant 'regroupment' within the working class which would involve militants aligning themselves more firmly alongside the forces of the revolutionary left.





# INTERNATIONAL SECTION

## THE MIDDLE EAST —WHAT KIND OF SETTLEMENT?

by Mousa Hadidah

For ten years the Middle East has been an international flash-point. This article, written before the May Israeli elections, dissects the complex of interests at work in the Middle East and makes important comments on the nature of Israeli/US relations. In particular the article presents an incisive analysis of the question of the 'Palestinian homeland', which has long divided the Palestinian movement.



Soon after the Yom Kippur war of October, 1973, it became clear that the US — now the only great power having any real presence in the Middle East — was preparing to set the seal on its absolute hegemony in that region by imposing on it a pax Americana, a "peaceful settlement" of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was then widely believed that one ingredient of such a settlement would be the creation of a "mini-Palestine", a sovereign Palestinian Arab state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, territories occupied by Israel since the June war of 1967. The reasoning behind this assumption was simple: without such a state (at the very least) Palestinian national aspirations would remain totally frustrated; the Palestinian problem — the very heart of the ME conflict — would continue to fester; the Palestinian people would go on fighting and any settlement would soon be destabilised.

Against this background, a deep rift occurred within the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the umbrella body of the Palestinian national movement. A minority, which came to know as "the rejection front", argued that to accept, even

temporarily, anything less than the liberation of the whole of Palestine would amount to a sell-out. The majority in the PLO, on the other hand, maintained that it would be foolish not to seize the one bird which was being offered just because there are two in the bush; besides, a mini-Palestine could serve as a useful base for the eventual liberation of the rest of the country.

Contrary to some simplistic reports, this rift did not coincide with the divisions between left and right, but cut across them.<sup>(1)</sup>

Among the rejectionists there were genuine anti-imperialists who pointed out that in the present circumstances a mini-Palestine, though formally sovereign, would in fact be so emasculated, so heavily controlled by Israel and Jordan and so dependent on imperialism, that it would be little better than a Bantustan and not much use as a base for further struggle. Some rejectionists, however, motivated not so much by radical anti-imperialism as by radical nationalism, even to the point of chauvinism, were totally opposed not only to the present Zionist State of Israel but to any kind of Israeli-Jewish national existence; they felt therefore that any partition of Palestine, albeit temporary, must be rejected because it would imply at the very least a tacit recognition of the existence of two national entities in Palestine.

Among the PLO majority leaders there were certainly some who were simply lured by the prospect of cushy ministerial and bureaucratic armchairs in the mini-state to be. However, many members of the majority — including followers of Naif Hawatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, generally regarded as the most left-wing group in the PLO — were motivated by quite different considerations. The overthrow of Zionism and the total liberation of Palestine, they pointed out, are long-term aims, which will take perhaps several decades. But the masses in the occupied territories cannot wait so long. They are not only oppressed as a conquered people, but their lands are rapidly being colonised by Israel. They need to be delivered quickly from the Israeli yoke. Nor can they agree to being handed back to Butcher Husain of Jordan, whose rule would hardly be

(1) I use the terms "left" and "right" here only in a relative sense. The PLO is as a whole petty bourgeois democratic-populist. No part of it is truly "right wing" in the sense of being reactionary. On the other hand, the socialist, and even marxist, pretension of some organisations within the PLO is for the most part at the level of mere rhetoric. The leadership of all constituent parts of the PLO have at various times made questionable deals with some of the Arab regimes, and are more or less dependent on them.

less oppressive. For them, a mini-Palestine would fulfil an urgent vital need. Moreover, while this state, in the present circumstances, would initially be very weak, circumstances and existing balances of powers are not eternal and can be made to change.

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Even while this debate was at its early stages, there were a few revolutionaries — some in the Palestinian movement and some in the Matzpen group inside Israel — who kept pointing out that both sides were taking for granted a fallacious assumption. Most rejectionists, as well as most followers of the PLO majority, shared the belief that a formally sovereign mini-Palestine<sup>(2)</sup> was actually part of the American blueprint for a Middle East settlement, and that therefore such a state was on offer. Both sides were assuming that all the PLO had to decide was whether to accept this offer or reject it. But this assumption was based on an inadequate appreciation of one of the constraints to which American Middle East policy is subject. To explain this constraint, we have to say a few words about the nature of US-Israel relations, as well as about the reason for Israel's staunch opposition to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state, however small.

Shortly after the 1973 war it became crystal clear that the ruling classes in virtually all the Arab countries had moved firmly into the US sphere of influence. A strong neo-colonial bond had been forged between the Arab bourgeoisie and US imperialism. Like all neo-colonial bonds, it is essentially a partnership — in which the local ruling class and foreign imperialism are respectively junior and senior partners — for the joint exploitation of the local working classes. And like all such alliances, it is inherently problematic; it is in continual danger of being upset by two different forces. First, the local ruling class — the junior partner — may make a bid to increase its share of the cake. Second, the exploited masses may rise against both local and foreign master.

American-Israeli relations, on the other hand, are quite different. Far from these relations being based on economic exploitation, Israel is actually subsidized by the US to the tune of about \$3000m. (ie, about \$1000 for each Israeli-Jewish man, woman and child) per annum. In

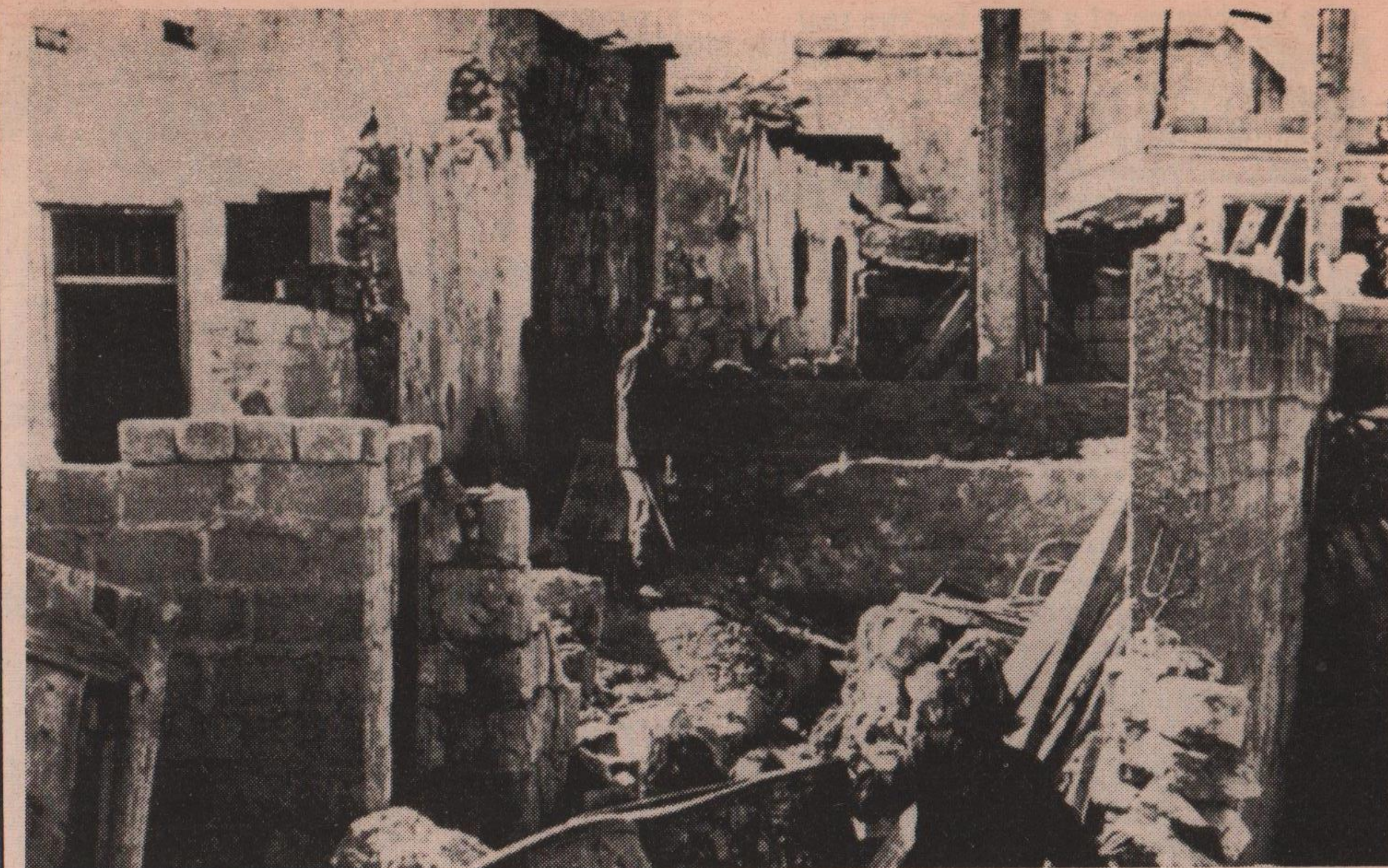
(2) I speak here of formal sovereignty rather than independence, because few people could believe that a state of such size could be truly independent. However, even formal sovereignty must not be dismissed as a mere legal fiction. It has very important real consequences.

return, Israel is expected to serve as an armed guard defending and protecting imperialist interests in the region. In contrast to the Arab ruling classes, the Zionist establishment is therefore a really reliable and secure ally of the US. Thus, the new links forged between the US and the Arab ruling classes are not going to replace the special and privileged relationship with Israel. On the contrary — because of the fragility of these neo-colonial links, the services of the trustworthy Israeli gendarme are if anything of greater value now for American capital than they have been so far.

Any dog-trainer will tell you that if you want your watchdog to be really aggressive, as an effective watchdog ought to be, then the worst thing you could do is to break its spirit and subdue it by over-harsh treatment. For the same reason, American policy must handle Israel with great care and understanding. While the US is not necessarily committed to grant Israel's every whim or to help satisfy to the full Zionism's voracious expansionist appetite, certain core interests which Israel considers most vital must be guaranteed.

Now, from a Zionist point of view the opposition to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state, however emasculated, is absolutely fundamental. This opposition is not based on short-term military considerations but on long-term historical ones, which concern the very nature of the Zionist claim over Palestine. This claim is absolutely exclusive — "A land without a people (Palestine!) to a people without a land (the Jews)" — and cannot be reconciled with the recognition of Palestinian Arab national rights over, or even in, the Holy Land. For unavoidable reasons of *realpolitik* Israel may agree to concede sovereignty over part of Palestine to an external power, say Jordan. Such a concession is, as far as Zionism is concerned, in any case purely pragmatic and temporary; and Israel always reserves the right to "liberate" such conceded territories as the need or possibility arises. But to allow the establishment within Palestine of a sovereign national entity of the indigenous people — that would undermine the whole self-justification and legitimization of the Zionist enterprise. A concession of this kind would be historically irreversible. More over, though that state may initially be small and weak, there is no telling what changes might take place in the more distant future. The balance of forces, and the borders, between that state and Israel — like any other balance of forces, and any border between states — will be subject to the vicissitudes of future history. After all, had Israel itself not started as a small state, and later expanded by sword and fire to dominate the whole of cisjordanian Palestine, the Sinai peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights?

It is for these reasons that the whole Zionist camp, the Israeli government as well as the opposition (with the exception of some small marginal *verligte* elements) is united in adamant rejection of the very idea of a "third state" between Israel and Jordan.



Destroyed Palestinian houses.

The Americans, as far as their own *direct* interests are concerned, could perhaps have agreed to the formation of a sovereign mini-Palestine — bound and shackled to them and their Saudi junior partners. However, for reasons explained above, US policy must respect Israel's deep-seated objections to any such thing.

But if the Americans have no intention of presenting the Palestinian people with a sovereign mini-Palestine on a silver platter, might not the demand for such a state be used in a revolutionary way? To accept a state as part of an imperialist deal is one thing. To demand it as a challenge, in order to expose the nature of the proposed imperialist settlement, is quite another. To be sure, no revolutionary could propose the mini-state as a solution to the Palestinian problem — for it would in fact solve little. Rather, it could serve as what some would call a *transitional demand* — a slogan which would correspond to an immediate urgent need of the masses (in this case, the people living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) and at the same time would direct these masses to a confrontation with their oppressors, who are not planning to grant even this quite modest demand.

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With the accession of President Carter and his administration (backed and sponsored by the Trilateral Commission) preparations for a ME settlement were geared up. It is generally felt that the weakness of the regimes in some of the most important Arab countries (notably Egypt whose masses are in rebellious ferment against their abysmal misery which grows deeper daily) makes the stabilisation of the region imperative for maintaining and consolidating the new order of total American domination. So 1977 may well be the year of decision.

By mid-March, the general outlines of the American blueprint have become rather clearly visible. Territorially, Israel will probably be made to disgorge more than any leading Zionist would willingly offer; the pre-1967 borders will be offici-

ally restored "with some, fairly minor, modifications". However, at Israel's insistence, "security lines will not necessarily be identical with the legal borders". This means that various arrangements will be made beyond Israel's official borders — demilitarisation of some areas, positioning of Israeli or "international" forces in others, etc. — as rivets of the new imperialist order. While the Carter administration would like the settlement to be reached within a year or so, they allow about eight years for its gradual implementation — territorial withdrawals, new politico-military arrangements and all. At the end of that period, it is envisaged, normal diplomatic relations will exist between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and the borders will be open to the movement of cheap Arab labour power into Israel and the export of "Israeli" technological products (more precisely, US products partly manufactured, finished or assembled in Israel) into the Arab countries.

But what about the Palestinians? Surely, without giving them some kind of state no settlement can be made to stick; but (as explained above) Israel's intransigent refusal to allow them any sovereignty in Palestine must be respected by the US. The American way out of this dilemma was indicated by Mr Carter in mid-March, when he "met the people" of Clinton, Massachusetts. "The Palestinian refugees must be given a homeland," he said. Notice the use of this deliberately vague term, "homeland", in principle it might mean anything from zero to a fully fledged state. What it is actually supposed to mean could be gathered from various pronouncements of Egypt's President Sadat. Since the very beginning of the year, Sadat — no doubt playing dummy to ventriloquist Uncle Sam — has repeatedly uttered the "suggestion" that the Palestinian mini-state should be "formally tied to Jordan". In effect, what is being proposed is not a sovereign state but a Palestinian province within a Jordanian (or perhaps Syrian-Jordanian) federation. Apparently, it is hoped that the Palestinian leadership can be bullied by the Arab regimes into accepting this shadow



of a semblance of a state for the real thing. And, given sufficient American pressure, Israel may be made to see that this is not a state but a mirage.

Of course, the whole deal bristles with more "ifs" than there are thorns on the Palestinian prickly pear cactus fruit. There is no more than even chance that the Americans will actually manage to pull it off.

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In mid-March the Palestinian National Council — the nearest thing the Palestinians have to a parliament — met in Cairo for its long-delayed thirteenth session. The mood was sombre. The civil war in Lebanon had taken a terrible toll, and the Syrian intervention had chained and manacled the Palestinian guerrilla forces. One of Syria's main aims was of course precisely to beat the Palestinian movement into submission, so that it would have to accept less than a sovereign mini-state.

In the conference, the old rejection front was a shadow of its old self. George Habash, its main leader, is a sick man; Ahmed Jibril, another important rejectionist leader, had in the meantime been exposed as a Syrian puppet. Moreover, the rejection front has lost more in the Lebanese debacle than the PLO majority. The main rejectionist stronghold was among the refugees in Lebanon, who would stand to gain little from a West Bank mini-state.<sup>(3)</sup> After the Lebanese defeat, the centre of gravity of the Palestinian struggle shifted into the West Bank, where the rejection front has little support. But perhaps the most important reason for the subdued mood of the rejectionists was that there is no point in "rejecting" something which is not on offer anyway.

The PNC confirmed Yasir Arafat's lead leadership, gave him authority to take part in peace talks (provided conditions are right), and reiterated the Palestinian demand for self-determination and national sovereignty.

The old split between rejectionists and non-rejectionists has died the death of irrelevance. A new split is emerging — between those who would be ready to accept the consolation prize of a non-sovereign mini-Palestinian province, and those who would not. The latter include many more than the old rejectionists; and, perhaps ironically, one of the most effective counter-demands with which they may try to prevent a sell-out will be precisely the demand for a sovereign mini-Palestine. A measure of the strength of this "new rejection front" is the fact that the PNC has resisted strong pressure from Sadat & Co., and has not inserted in its resolutions any mention of the proposed "ties with Jordan".

Be that as it may, the near future bears little comfort for the Jews' Jews, the disinherited and dispossessed Palestinian people.

(3) The original homes of most of these refugees, from which they had been driven in 1948, were in the Galilee, which would remain part of Israel.

## PORTUGAL — THE IMF, SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE RIGHT.

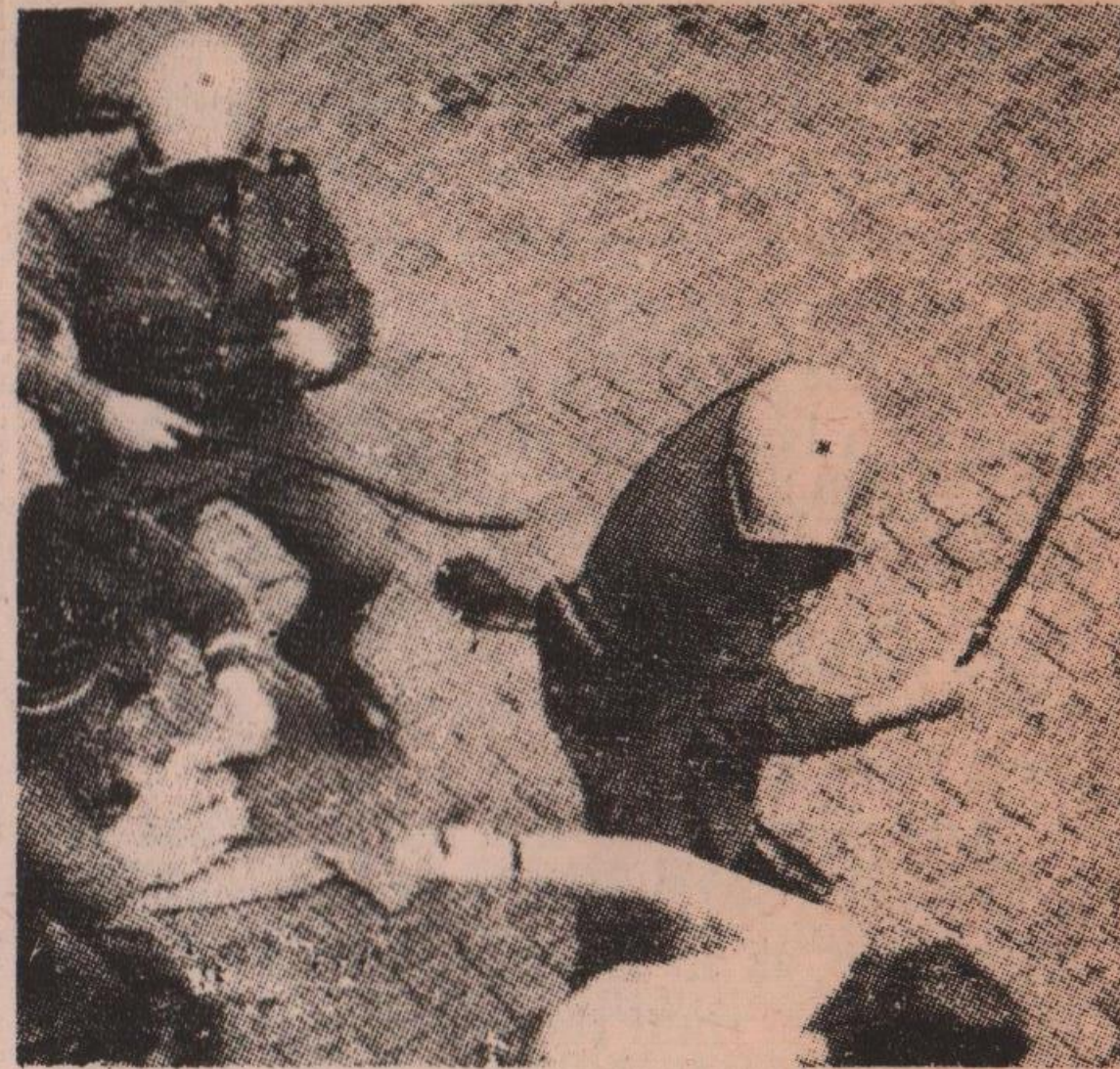
by Alvaro Miranda

Whilst the heady days of the Portuguese revolution have long since passed the situation remains unstable. Although the working class has shown increasing militancy further moves to the right are likely. Central to this is the deepening economic crisis. In this article *Alvaro Miranda* looks at the political situation in the light of the economic strategy of Portuguese and international capital.

The recent economic measures announced by the Socialist Party (SP) Government in Portugal have highlighted the similarities between certain aspects of the situations in Portugal and in Britain. In both countries there are social-democratic governments claiming to represent the working class facing a deep economic crisis: high inflation, high unemployment, a crisis of private investment, flight of capital and a chronic balance of payments deficit. Both governments have resorted to international loans in order to attempt to stabilise the short term situation. The loans have been subject to strict conditions which mean that economic policy is being dictated by the international capitalist institutions. The aim is to restore the profitability of capitalism at the expense of the working class. Italy too has been subjected to similar measures.

The economic background against which Soares has been seeking a \$200 million loan from the IMF, to be followed by a \$1.5 thousand million loan by an international consortium in which the US will have the lion's share, is indeed grim. The balance of payments deficit for Portugal was \$1.1 thousand million, compared with \$760 million in 1975, an increase of 45%. Inflation is running at 25% a year, with a tendency to rise. Unemployment is officially estimated at 15% and unofficially (including sub-employment) at 25%. As a consequence of the conditions imposed by the IMF, the government introduced its stringent austerity measures:

1. a devaluation of the escudo of 15%.
2. a return of the factories under state intervention or workers' self-management to their former owners, even those who had fled the country or been guilty of economic sabotage. (This does not, however, include nationalised concerns.)
3. compensation to shareholders of nationalised industries at a rate based on the average price of shares in the last three years before the Lisbon stock exchange was closed.
4. re-opening of the Lisbon stock exchange on 3rd March 1977, which had been closed since April 1974.



5. liberalisation of the law governing foreign investments and the repatriation of profits.
6. an increase in purchase tax to 12%.
7. an increase in petrol prices to nearly £2 a gallon.
8. limiting wage increase to 15%.

According to *the Economist* (5th March 1977) "the IMF was probably right to press for devaluation: cutting real wages looks like the only quick way to cutting down on imports and getting Portugal's exports competitive again." Devaluation, however, is unlikely to have any such effect. It will sharply increase import prices and since the majority of the imports are food, essential raw materials (including oil) and machinery, these will be passed to the consumer in higher prices, thus increasing the rate of inflation. On the other hand, nearly 30% of Portuguese exports are textiles and clothing which have been severely hit by the imposition of import controls and the restriction of quotas introduced by the Common Market in 1975. The EEC textile industry is still pressing for further restrictions on imports. Thus the reduction in the export price of textiles is unlikely to increase sales significantly and will probably lead to a reduction in their export earnings.

The value of Portuguese exports amount to only 45% of the value of imports. Devaluation therefore could well increase further the balance of trade deficit. The balance of payments deficit has traditionally been rather smaller than the trade gap due to the effect of the remittance home of savings by the two million Portuguese emigrants in Europe and America and the invisible earnings of tourism. Devaluation will undoubtedly increase these invisible earnings, but the inflow of this money which is not invested in the productive sectors of the economy but simply increases demand, will thus further add to the rate of inflation. It is therefore certain that by the end of 1977 the rate of inflation will have exceeded the 30% mark.

The strategy of cutting real wages rests on the assumption that wage increases can be kept significantly below the rate of inflation. In order to do this, the Government policy is to limit all wage

increases to 15%, whilst simultaneously announcing the introduction of a new "industrial relations act" significantly curtailing the right to strike. But the weakness of the SP in the Portuguese trade union, recently underlined by their failure to set up a second trade union federation based on the "Open Letter" group of trade unions which they dominate, will make their task a very difficult one. Even some of the SP-led unions have been in open conflict with the government. Some 600,000 building, post-office, glass and pottery, travel agency, bakery, textile and metal workers have been involved in struggle, including various forms of industrial action, over the negotiations of their national agreements. Whilst the PCP, (Communist Party) which controls most unions, is not interested in pushing the struggle to the point of provoking a government crisis, the eroding effect of inflation on the standard of living and the militant mood of the rank and file afford it little leeway. But the struggle will be kept to each isolated sector separately and a general strike will be avoided.

Whilst the SP grapples with its hesitant measures to fulfil the wishes of international capital, significant sections of the Portuguese ruling class, in alliance with Western military circles, are preparing for the failure of SP strategy. The extreme right is becoming increasingly active in Portugal. Its attack is two-pronged: to create a civilian mass base, and to increase its hold over the armed forces. On the civilian side, in addition to the already notorious MDLP-ELP of General Spínola, a new grouping, the MIRN, led by ex-General Kaulza de Arriaga, (an ultra of the Salazar/Caetano regime), has appeared. General Galvão de Melo, a member of the first post-April 25th (Conservative) Junta and "independent" member of parliament elected on a CDS ticket, has been attempting to rally the whites returned from the ex-colonies.

The terrorist right, linked to sectors of the PSD (Social Democratic Party, the new name of the PPD), and the CDS, has also been very much in evidence. Bomb explosions are almost daily occurrences in Lisbon. Recently it was discovered that Major Mota Freitas, commander of the Oporto police, was one of the ring leaders of the terrorist right. He was publicly defended by the military commander of the Northern Region, Brigadier Pires Veloso. During the military celebrations of the 25th November right wing coup, Mota Freitas appeared on the platform besides Pires Veloso. Subsequently, however, the evidence of his involvement was so overwhelming that Mota Freitas was arrested. Pires Veloso nevertheless retains his command of the Northern Military Region. One of the most notorious activists of the terrorist right, Correio, was recently arrested. During his trial he was able to walk out of the court and disappeared. Practically all the PIDE agents have also been released.

The military right wing has been systematically purging left officers and placing the "moderate" Group of Nine under attack, accusing them of left wing ex-



tremism. Thirty two officers, all of them with significant roles in the overthrow of fascism on the 25th April 1974, are under suspension and will be brought before the Higher Disciplinary Council of the Armed Forces, made up largely of officers closely associated with the fascist regime. Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, strategist of the 25th April operations, Major Corvacho, commander of the Northern operations on the 25th April and later commander of the Northern Military Region, Major Tome of the military police, Major Dinis de Almeida, of RALIS, the "Red Regiment" of Lisbon, are among those accused. They will be tried in secret according to the Code of Military Discipline of the fascist regime.

But the new targets of the right are the once "moderate" Group of Nine officers around Major Melo Antunes. These officers have now lost most of their operational commands, but retain a shaky majority in the Revolutionary Council. They are attacked daily in the press, now overwhelmingly right-wing, as a dangerous communist front.

The strategy of the right has been to obtain sufficient strength in the Armed Forces to be able to carry out a constitutional coup through the declaration of a State of Emergency by Revolutionary Council and/or President Eanes when the failure of the Soares Government became totally apparent. There are, however, a number of obstacles in their path. Firstly, President Eanes has been somewhat of a disappointment to the right-wing by his failure so far to break completely with the Group of Nine. His recent appointment of a lieutenant colonel, Loureiro dos Santos, as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, thus ignoring normal military hierarchy, has caused a great deal of consternation amongst the right wing. Secondly, the majority that the Group of Nine still retain in the Revolutionary Council makes it difficult to use the Council for the purposes of a constitutional coup.

But most important of all is the fact that the attempts to re-impose the fascist Code of Military Discipline in the army after three years of comparative freedom have met with a lot of rank and file re-

sistance which has put into question the reliability of the troops. A much publicised recent revolt in a regiment at Estremoz in Southern Portugal in which the soldiers refused their rations is symptomatic of the unrest that still exists. There were also reports that individual soldiers taking part in this year's military parade to commemorate the 25th April responded to shouts of "Soldiers always, always on the side of the people" from the crowds lining the streets by giving the clenched fist salute. Members of the guard of honour surrounding the official platform at the celebrations are also said to have broken ranks to pick up carnations thrown to them by the crowd and place them in the barrels of their guns. The plan to streamline the army by reducing the conscript element and gradually moving towards a much smaller professional army have been proceeding at a slow pace. Only the regrouping of the most reliable troops under a NATO brigade with modern weapons is nearing completion.

President Eanes has been manoeuvring on a different strategy, more in line with the dominant Western thinking. Foreseeing also the failure of the Soares Government, Eanes is increasingly taking political initiatives. He took a leading role in the recent ministerial re-shuffle. His objective at the moment is to apply pressure for a widening of the Government to the right. If this fails, Eanes is prepared to announce a Government of National Salvation made up of hand-picked individuals, but with the parliamentary support of the PSD, CDS and at least a section of the SP. Such a Government, helped by a strengthened state apparatus, of which the recently announced new secret police will be an important part, would be able to undertake repression of the working class to back up its stringent economic measures, whilst at the same time retaining the facade of a parliamentary democracy. In this context, the statement by Mario Soares given to an Oslo newspaper is already ominous: "We do not undertake repression because we are socialists. But if there are too many provocations I will give my place to someone else who will not hesitate in doing so".



# MONTONEROS AND THE LIBERATION OF LATIN AMERICA

In this major article on the political situation in Argentina Christopher Roper argues that Argentina is central to the revolutionary struggle against imperialism for the whole of Latin America. In particular he analyses 'peronism' in its changing historical contexts and describes the importance of the dominant revolutionary force in Argentina today — the Montoneros. The political character of this movement, which has very wide support in the Argentinian working class and is the main threat to the Videla dictatorship, should be reassessed by the left. This article hopes to initiate discussion of a movement which is central to an understanding of the potential for revolutionary change in Latin America.

## SECTION A

### THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF ARGENTINA: 1. Latin America and Britain

Since the Chilean coup in September 1973, Latin America has become a presence in British politics. The principal expression of this has been the Chile Solidarity Campaign, which succeeded to an extraordinary degree in mobilising sectors of the labour movement, and in forcing the government to take actions which it would not normally have considered. In particular, the British ambassador was withdrawn from Santiago following the torture of a British doctor (Sheila Cassidy), and a substantial number of Chilean refugees, including members of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) have been allowed to enter Britain and received financial assistance to settle with their families. These exiles have played their part in raising consciousness of Latin America in Britain and in maintaining an active solidarity movement.

The special impact of the Chilean coup on British consciousness was due partly to the feeling that similar fates could await left-wing governments should they be elected in Britain, France or Italy. This was the particular preoccupation of the Communist Party, which threw itself into the Chile campaign with great energy from the beginning. At the same time, the Nixon administration was entering its death agonies in the United States, generating an institutional crisis which produced revelations of corruption and the abuse of power at the heart of the empire. These included the publication of the ITT memoranda which conclusively demonstrated how the United States government and the multinational companies had conspired against President Allende and the Unidad Popular.

### 2. The Continental Perspective

One lesson of the past three years is that Chile is not an isolated phenomenon, and that unless the political groups doing work around Chile develop a continental perspective, the whole Chile Solidarity movement will be reduced to the condition of the Spanish Republican government in exile during the Franco years — little more than a pious expression of respect for the past. Although events in Chile were conditioned by particular circumstances of Chilean history, they also form part of a very clear chapter in the history of United States imperialism in Latin America.

For different reasons, both the Communist and the Labour parties in Britain have refused to make a clear anti-imperialist analysis of what is happening in Latin America. The groups organised to bring pressure on the Labour government to follow the precedent established in the case of Chile, with respect to equally repressive regimes in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Uruguay, have had only limited success. For instance, Uruguayan refugees in Argentina suspected of past connection with the Tupamaros have not been granted visas. It is not clear why they are considered differently from the MIR, especially since their organisation is virtually defunct. The Labour government defended the state visit of President Geisel of Brazil in March 1976 with the argument that Brazil was a functioning democracy. There is no immediate prospect of establishing a refugee programme for Argentina similar to the one which has existed for Chile. There has been no condemnation of the Scottish Football Association for sending a touring team to Argentina or Brazil, whereas both parties have vociferously condemned the decision to include Chile in the tour.

Both the Labour and Communist parties prefer to keep the focus exclusively on Pinochet and human rights abuses in Chile, without giving any consideration to the role of the United States in Latin America as a whole. In fairness, it should be added that there is a major struggle against this line inside the Labour Party, but this has no impact on the actions of the Labour Government. The Communist Party line stems directly from the Soviet Union's posture on Latin America. Moscow seems determined to avoid another major confrontation with the United States in the Western Hemisphere; the rules of detente do not permit 'another Cuba'.

### 3. The Soviet Position

Apart from continuing to support Cuba economically and militarily, the Soviet Union has nothing to offer revolutionary forces in Latin America. A recent article on Latin America by a Soviet academician (Le Monde Diplomatique, February 1977) demonstrated this quite clearly. There was no mention of Argentina, where the Argentine Communist Party is actually supporting the Videla junta, and most of the writer's examples were drawn from the 1950s and 60s, with long references to what happened when Eisenhower and De Gaulle visited Latin America. The way forward, he suggested, was the emergence of progressive military regimes, as in Bolivia, Honduras, Panama and Peru. He did not mention the fact that the forces of imperialism have been quite capable of blocking or purging progressive sectors of the military in all these countries. Soviet enthusiasm for a military road to socialism in Latin America dates from 1968/69, when reformist military regimes came to power in Panama, Peru and Bolivia. The existence of divisions within the armed forces of Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia encouraged the elaboration of the theory, which presumed the existence of progressive sections of the armed forces opposed to US imperialism. It also found an expression in the trust reposed in the Chilean armed forces by President Allende.

It would be absurd to deny that there are important contradictions within the armed forces of Latin America. Faced by a traditional oligarchy content to serve the interests of metropolitan markets through the export of primary products, the military may well play a progressive role. This was the case in Peru, where the military government, which came to power in 1968, destroyed the power of the coastal sugar growers and fishmeal producers, implemented the most radical land reform seen in Latin America since the Cuban revolution, brought a large part of the mining industry into the public sector, and attempted to initiate a programme of decentralised industrialisation. These reforms, brought in from above, set off a process of popular mobilisation, which the military government refused to accept.

By 1973/74, the more reactionary sectors of the military were preparing to abort the process. A deepening financial crisis combined with the failure of the progressive officers to build any popular base for their project led to the erosion and then the collapse of what some called 'the Peruvian Revolution'. Today, the conservatives are firmly in command and the progressive officers purged. Several had to go into exile last year. Nevertheless, voices on the Peruvian Left still argue that the military government, with all its limitations, played a progressive role in the process of the past eight years.

But to move from the recognition of contradictions within the military to basing all one's political hopes on the ascendancy of the progressive sectors of the armed forces seems suicidal. In Uruguay, the Communist Party continued to court the armed forces in 1974 and 75 while hundreds of its militants were rounded up, jailed and tortured. In Argentina today, against all the evidence, the Communist Party still professes to believe in the progressive intentions of General Jorge Videla. The Communist Party blames the 'ultra-Left' guerrilla organisations for provoking the violent repression of the working class by the government. Perhaps the most serious consequence of Moscow's refusal to recognise the bankruptcy of its analysis of political developments in Latin America is the constraint it places on Cuba. The victory of the Cuban revolution 18 years ago remains the most important advance by popular forces in Latin America since the war. The Cuban leadership certainly does not share the Soviet analysis of Latin America; Fidel Castro's prophetic gift of a submachine gun to Allende



was a good demonstration of that. But Cuba is too dependent on the Soviet Union to oppose openly the orthodox Communist line in Latin America, and therefore cannot provide clear leadership in the development of an anti-revisionist line.

### 4. The British Labour Party and Latin America

The analysis contained in the 1976 Labour Party programme is considerably better informed and more progressive than the article of the Soviet academician referred to above. But even with Labour in power, it has almost no impact on the government's actions. Brazil remains Britain's closest ally in Latin America, whether there is a Conservative or a Labour prime minister in Downing Street. Since Suez, Britain has not had an independent foreign policy, least of all in Latin America, where British embassies are little more than annexes of the United States' embassies, and British intelligence officers run errands for the CIA. The Labour Party will continue to pay lip service to the causes of human rights and parliamentary democracy, but if it ever challenged the fundamental interests of United States policies in Latin America (or anywhere else in the world, for that matter), it would run into a brick wall.

### 5. Imperialism in Latin America.

The impotence of the Communist and Labour parties in the face of imperialist advances in Latin America places a great responsibility on the independent sectors of the Left to develop a clear analysis and course of action. The question has a great deal of relevance to our own political situation in Britain. The Communists were quite correct to perceive the possibility of a military coup in Europe following the election of a strong left wing government. They could have taken the analysis further and pointed out that Europe is subject to the same marginalising forces of international monopoly capitalism as Latin America; Britain is slotted into the same international division of labour as Argentina. It is quite a simple matter, requiring no profound knowledge of economics, to understand the aims of imperialism in Latin America and to see how recent political history is consistent with them. They are:

1. To prevent the penetration of Latin America by the Soviet Union (super-power rivalry);
2. To prevent the emergence of independent or socialist regimes which threaten the security of foreign investments, supplies of raw materials, or the convertibility of profits into hard currency;
3. To open the continent for the expansion of foreign manufacturing industry, maintaining wage levels below those prevailing in the metropolitan industrial centres;
4. To control the supplies of raw materials originating in Latin America;
5. To open the continent as a market for goods manufactured by the multinational companies.



The list is not set out in any order of importance. The first and second objectives are necessary to achieve the last three. These strategic goals may at times be in contradiction with one another. In order to prevent the emergence of a socialist or nationalist government, it may be necessary virtually to destroy one particular country as a market for the multinationals or as a manufacturing centre. The methods used to control natural resources are changing. It is more efficient to control some countries through the mechanism of debt to international banks than through direct ownership.

In pursuit of these objectives: Cuba was placed in diplomatic and commercial quarantine for 13 years following the revolution and had to survive constant harassment and sabotage, not to mention a full-scale invasion in 1961; military coups were organised in Brazil and Bolivia in 1964; the Dominican Republic was invaded by the US marines in 1965; the Peruvian military government was subjected to a loan boycott from 1968 as a result of its reforms, which threatened Rockefeller and Grace investments; coups were organised in Bolivia (1971), Uruguay (1973), Chile (1973), and Argentina (1966 and 1976). This is a partial list of the more flagrant and recent instances of United States aggression in Latin America. The Alliance for Progress, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation of American States and the Latin American Free Trade Association, along with hundreds of other inter-American institutions, serve the same ends.

Told in this way, it could seem as if imperialism was still firmly in the saddle, with no prospect of a major shift in the balance of forces. Cuba remains the only country engaged in the construction of socialism in the Western hemisphere, and its development is circumscribed by its isolation and its dependency on the Soviet Union. The combination of blockade and detente has effectively limited its support for revolutionary forces in the rest of Latin America. The death of

Che Guevara in Bolivia in 1967 virtually marked an end to Cuban efforts to stimulate the development of rural guerrilla 'focos' in the different countries of Latin America. Guerrilla forces survive, but without much prospect of influencing national politics, in Colombia, Central America, Venezuela and Mexico. Guatemala is the only country in Central America where the guerrillas are still a significant presence. The virtual destruction of the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the collapse of armed resistance in Brazil suggested to some observers that urban guerrillas were equally vulnerable in the face of really determined and ruthless repression. The lack of any effective resistance in Chile following the coup was another motive for pessimism; a popular government with broad support among the masses was destroyed in less than a week.

## 6. Resistance to Imperialism

The other main currents of the international Left do not have much to offer, either. The marxist-leninist parties which had habitually followed Peking were confused by China's apparent enthusiasm for Pinochet. Trotskyist comrades, who marched through the streets of London chanting 'armed road, only road' following the overthrow of Allende, decided that in Argentina, where the armed road was actually being tried, it was not appropriate. The main tendencies of the international communist movement have nothing to offer Latin America. Inside Latin America, resistance to imperialist domination is fiercest in Argentina. The militant resistance of workers and the armed revolutionary organisations since the military coup of March 1976 has tended to reinforce Guevara's judgement that Argentina was the key to the liberation of the South American continent. Comparing the strength of resistance in Argentina with what is happening in neighbouring countries, many Latin Americans are having to re-evaluate Argentine political history in search for an explanation. It is an urgent task for socialists in Europe to undertake this task also, as otherwise it will be quite impossible to build an adequate solidarity movement with what may develop over the next few years into a major challenge to the hegemony of the United States in the western hemisphere. How central this can be gauged from the fact that 75% of all investments by multinational companies in the third world (Asia, Africa and Latin America) are in Latin America.

## SECTION B ARGENTINA:

### 1. Britain and Argentina

British understanding of Argentina is fatally warped by events occurring before, during, and immediately after the second world war. During this period, Argentina ceased to be a quasi-colony of Britain. In 1933, the Vice President of Argentina, on a visit to London, said: 'From an economic point of view, Argentina is an integral part of the British empire'. The British press was, as a whole, bitterly hostile to Argentina's quest for independence, and understanding of the process, even on the Left, is distorted by British imperial propaganda.

Not only had British capital played a dominant role in developing many sectors of the Argentine economy during the nineteenth century, but British immigrants (the Anglo Argentines) formed a kind of 'white settler' upper class in and around Buenos Aires. The British owned the railways and vast tracts of Argentine land. Through their banks, merchant companies and shipping lines, British interests dominated the country's foreign commerce. London was the principal market for Argentina's wool and meat.

The collapse of the financial markets of the world in 1929 led to immediate hardships for Argentina. Commodity prices tumbled, and so did demand for Argentina's principal exports. The Gross Domestic Product, per capita, fell by 20% from 1929 to 1933. The Argentine government, not unnaturally, looked to London for assistance. This assistance took shape in the Roca-Runciman pact, which established a quota of British beef imports for Argentina, but contained a number of clauses, which were highly damaging to Argentine national interests. These included:

1. Argentine meat packing companies should ship no more than 15% of the quota; the remaining 85% was to be shared between British and North American companies.
2. All money earned from Argentine exports to Britain should be reserved against payment of Argentine debts to Britain (in fact, earnings from beef exports were almost exactly equal to the dividends remitted to their shareholders by the British-owned railway companies).
3. Tariff barriers to British exports to Argentina were to be lowered.
4. Limitations on the remittance of capital and profits by British businesses in Argentina were to be lifted. Such remittances had been frozen. Foreign exchange was to be found partly from sales of beef (see #2 above) and partly from a new British loan to Argentina.
5. Public transport was to be coordinated and controlled so as to protect the British owned railways and tram companies from the competition of road transport.

In an important complementary measure, the Argentine government established a central bank, which was closely supervised by a Bank of England delegate, who for several years had more influence on the making of economic policy than did the titular minister of finance. The Roca-Runciman pact is recalled here in some detail because it goes far to explaining the strong anti-British currents of Argentine nationalism. There was little enthusiasm in Argentina for the Allied cause during the second world war. All over the world, people who had suffered under British imperialism hoped that the Axis powers would be victorious; and all over the world, British propagandists used the smear that such people were 'fascists' or 'pro-nazi'. It was crucial to subsequent developments that Moscow-line communist parties all over the world aligned themselves with British and United States imperialist interests following the German invasion of Russia. In Latin America, the communist parties played a leading part in a many countries in breaking strikes and opposing other popular movements which began to develop during these years as a result of the preoccupation of the metropolitan powers with their 'world war'. This led to the Argentine Communist Party supporting the coalition of right wing parties which opposed Peron in the 1946 elections, and the Cuban Communist Party's support for the Batista dictatorship.

### 2. The Origins of Peronism

In Argentina, in 1943, there was a military coup, which had much in common with the movement led by the colonels Neguib and Nasser in Egypt in 1953, or the Latin American reformist military governments mentioned earlier. Such movements are not socialist; they are often authoritarian, and may well end by being repressive, but they cannot usefully be compared with European fascism of the 1930s. Colonel Juan Domingo Peron was minister of labour in this government. At a moment when the Communist Party was using its influence to hold back the unions' struggles for higher wages, Peron was happy to give workers free rein in their struggles with the British dominated businesses.

This was not the only reason for Britain's unhappiness with Peron. The neutrality of the colonels in the most important country (at that time) in Latin America was perceived as a direct threat to the Allied cause and no efforts were spared to bring the new government into line. A combination of allied pressure and the jealousy of his colleagues led in 1945 to the sacking and imprisonment of Peron. On 17 October 1945, an event took place which was to change the course of Argentine history. Peron's allies in the trade union movement, urged on by his future wife Eva Duarte, organised the largest demonstration ever seen in Buenos Aires. More than a million workers, some say two million, invaded the centre of Buenos Aires, demanding the freedom and reinstatement of Peron.

Peron was released and immediate elections were promised. Peron's candidacy was opposed most vigorously by the US ambassador Spruille Braden, allowing Peron to campaign on the slogan 'Braden or Peron?' Peron had no political machine to support his candidacy and relied on the trade unions and on direct contact with the people. He was elected against the

opposition of almost every existing political party. The Communists insisted on seeing him as a fascist and his supporters as lumpenproletariat. The Communists, like many subsequent commentators, made the mistake of looking at peronism principally in terms of Peron, attempting to state the ideology of peronism on the basis of what he said or wrote. Obviously, Peron has a place in the history of peronism, but the true protagonist was the Argentine people. For the Argentine working class in 1945, it was quite clear that Peron and not Braden (and the Communist Party) represented their class interest. This explains a later slogan which has baffled many a European or North American visitor to Argentina: 'Neither Yankee nor Marxist — Peronist'.

### 3. Peronism and Marxism

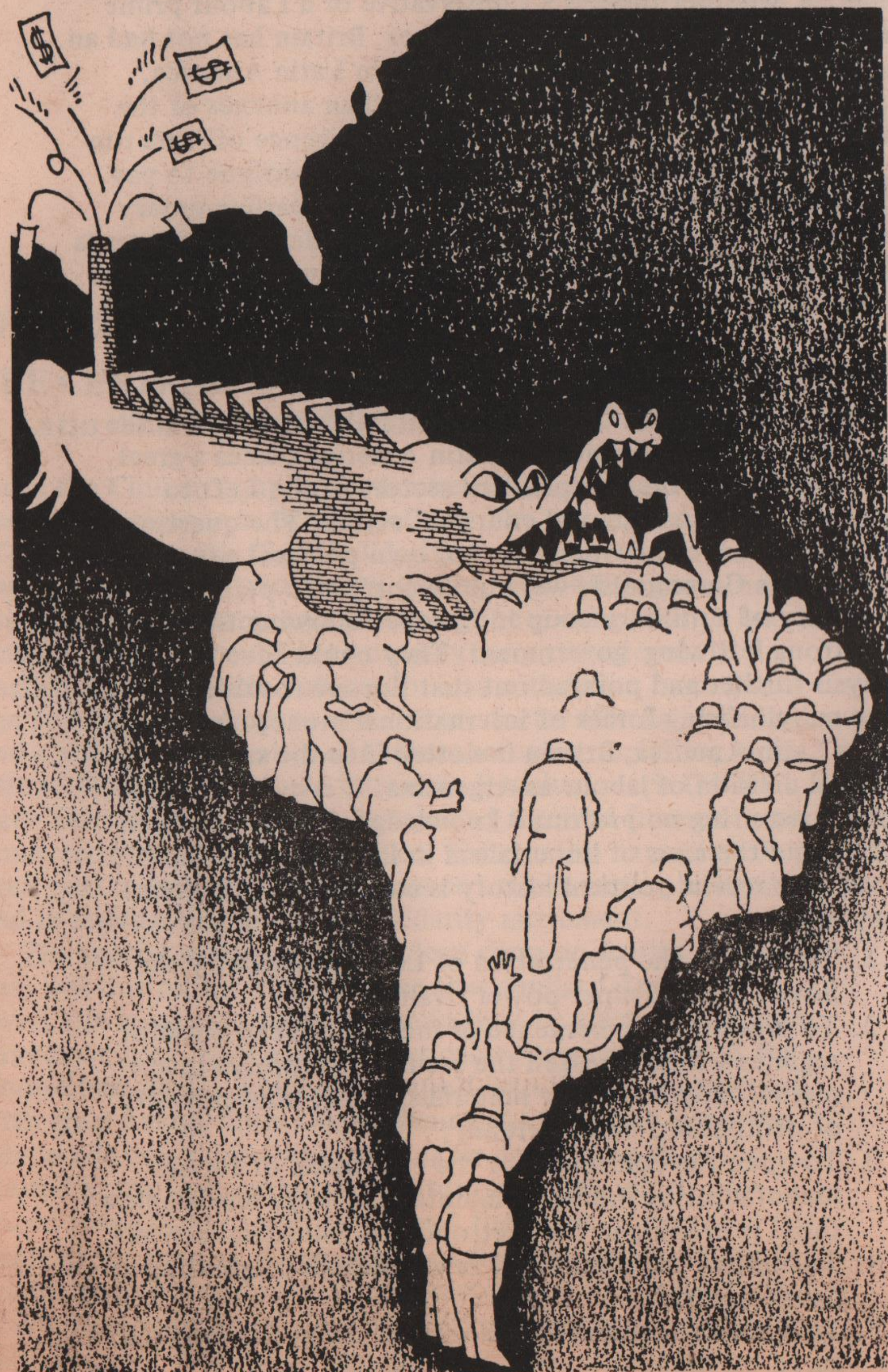
The rise of populist/nationalist movements in Latin America in the years immediately after World War II can be understood only in terms of the abject failure of the communist parties to provide a clear alternative strategy. Much that has been written on the subject of Latin American nationalism or populism takes as its point of departure the premise that if only the Latin Americans had not been deceived by false prophets like Peron, they would have developed truly socialist and revolutionary leaders. A great deal of this comment is extremely patronising and implies that the marxists have the answers, which they will be happy to communicate when the nationalists/populists come to see the error of their ways.

The great breakthrough made by some Argentine marxists in the years after Peron's overthrow was to understand that one road forward was to recognise the historic blunder of the Argentine Communist Party in 1945, and to assume the political identity of peronism as the starting point for a new process of national liberation. This line of thought was first developed by John William Cooke, Peron's personal representative during the first period of peronist resistance (1955-58). Cooke developed close relations with the leaders of the Cuban Revolution, convincing Guevara to revise his judgement of peronism, and attended the OLAS conference in Havana in 1966. Cooke's writings were a powerful influence on the peronist youth movement, out of which the Montonero organisation developed in the late 1960s. The Montoneros eventually coalesced to embrace the entire spectrum of revolutionary peronism.

An important source of misunderstanding, for non-Argentines is the fact that the Montoneros never describe themselves as marxists, but always as peronists. This led many people to search for the 'basic peronist-marxist dividing line' (to quote one critic of an earlier draft of this article). The search is hopeless because peronism and marxism are different kinds of things. Marxism is a political philosophy, whereas peronism was a mass movement without a clear philosophy. Many people who assumed the political identity of peronism during the struggle against the military dictatorship of 1966-73 were extremely well instructed marxist revolutionaries. But for ordinary Argentine workers, marxists are communists, and communists are the people who have constantly opposed popular struggles in Argentina.

### 4. Peronism in Power

The first period of peronist rule is too complex to be dealt with in any detail in an article which is attempting to synthesise a large sweep of recent Latin American history. As the Montoneros themselves recognise, there were important internal contradictions to Peron's project in 1945. However, it was characterised by major advances in social legislation and the emergence of one of the most powerful trade union movements in the world. The unity of the trade union movement in the Confederacion General del Trabajo (CGT), which is roughly equivalent to the TUC in Britain, was achieved in a fairly ruthless fashion, trampling on the rights of rival organisations. Peronist tactics were little different in this respect from those employed in other countries. The unity of the CGT, however, has been an important element in allowing Argentine workers to resist subsequent efforts to coerce them. Repeatedly over the past 30 years, the Argentine trade union movement





has thrown up new generations of leaders to replace those who have either been coopted, imprisoned or liquidated by the government. It is sometimes forgotten that the most corrupt and bureaucratic of Argentine trade union leaders usually won their positions by leading major struggles against the bosses or against the government. During the past year, 1976/77, faced by the hostility of the military junta to any manifestation of trade unionism, some of the bureaucrats are rediscovering their capacity for militant action. Despite draconian anti-strike legislation, the imprisonment and sacking of rank and file leaders, and the kidnapping and murder of active trade unionists, major strikes have succeeded in paralysing Argentine industry during the past six months.

During the first peronist government, women won the vote, and wage earners enjoyed a larger share of the national income than at any time before or since. The dynamism of the process during Peron's first term owed much to Argentina's wartime export earnings, high commodity prices in the aftermath of the war, and a process of import substitution stimulated by the unavailability of manufactured goods from Europe. The revolutionary character of the process was stimulated by Eva Peron, who was always more committed than her husband to the ideal of radical social change: 'Peronism will be revolutionary or it will be nothing', she said, and advocated the formation of armed workers' militias to defend the social gains made during the years of prosperity.

### 5. The Fall of Peron

The army refused to accept Eva Peron as candidate for vice-president in 1952, when her husband was elected to a second term. These were the last free elections to be held in Argentina for more than 20 years, which is ironic when one remembers that all Peron's successors and the world press referred to him as 'the former dictator'. Eva Peron was already desperately ill with cancer at the time of the elections and she died within a few months at the age of 33. Following her death, with the terms of trade turning against Argentina in the wake of the Korean war, the political process lost much of its vigour. By 1955, the treasury was empty and Peron had lost the support of both the army and the church. A right-wing conspiracy (based on the same spectrum of oligarchic and foreign interests as overthrew President Allende in Chile 18 years later) organised a successful coup d'etat in September 1955.

Initially, the working class did not mobilise in defence of Peron. Many workers had become disenchanted with the government during the second term, and his most loyal supporters were disconcerted by his hasty flight from the country on a Paraguayan gunboat. Peron always made the somewhat unconvincing claim that he withdrew in order to prevent a civil war with thousands killed. If the incoming government had played its cards correctly, the political career of Peron might have ended there and then. But the 'liberating revolution', proclaimed by the country's new rulers, proceeded to repress the working class in the name of stamping out peronism. Working class resistance to repressive measures became synonymous with peronism. Workers were dismissed from their jobs; thousands of trade union officials were imprisoned and tortured; militant workers were victimised and often killed; and the CGT was placed under a military administrator. It became a criminal offence to mention even the name of Peron, and the body of Eva Peron was snatched from the trade union headquarters, where it had lain since her death, and was smuggled to Italy, where it was buried under a false name.

There are parallels between the repression of 1955/56, supported again by the Communist Party, and the repression of 1976/77. They explain a recent remark of Mario Eduardo Firmenich, the secretary general of the Montonero Party, when he said: 'We are now more peronist than ever'. General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, the author of the repression, was the Videla of his day, a moderate man devoted to 'democracy'. An attempted peronist uprising in June 1956 led to mass executions. Lorry loads of workers were taken to garbage tips on the outskirts of Buenos Aires and machine-gunned to death, a foretaste of the tactics of the Triple A twenty years later. One of the few survivors of the 1956 massacre, Julio

Troxler, was one of the first victims of the death squads in 1974. In 1958, elections were held, but peronists were not permitted to participate as candidates. Their votes elected President Arturo Frondizi, a Radical, who had promised to legalise the peronist movement if he were victorious. When elected he failed to honour the agreement he had made with Peron, but when elections were held in 1962 for provisional governorships, peronist candidates were permitted to stand. Their victories in all the most important and populous provinces provoked a military coup. The following year, with peronist candidates again excluded, new presidential elections were held and another Radical, Arturo Illia, was elected with less than 25% of the total vote. Peronist abstentions clearly proved that elections were an empty farce without peronist participation.

### 6. The Military Dictatorship (1966-73) and Armed Resistance

The weak Illia government was overthrown by the military in June 1966. The incoming president, General Juan Carlos Onganía, made no secret of his corporatist intentions, and his determination to establish a lasting government. If fascism were ever an appropriate label for a ruling political group in Argentina, it was then. With the electoral road to popular government apparently closed indefinitely, small groups of many different backgrounds began to consider the possibility of armed resistance to the dictatorship.

There was already a tradition to build on. The Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (FAL), which was one of the first groups into the field during the Onganía period (and one of the most efficient in military terms), had its origins in a group inside the Communist Party during the 1950s, which had discussed ways of recovering the party for the revolution. The first Peronist resistance had involved the building up of sabotage groups, and John William Cooke, who had coordinated the groups, was also involved in embryonic attempts to organise guerrilla groups. An Argentine journalist, Jorge Masetti, who had worked closely with Guevara in Cuba, attempted to establish a rural foco in northern Argentina in 1964. In Tucumán a small group of peronists, calling themselves the Uturuncos, acquired some notoriety in 1960. But they were quite unprepared for guerrilla warfare. More advanced military tactics were being developed among a group of right wing nationalists, the Tacuara. This group subsequently split into right and left groups. Several of the left Tacuara found their way into the Montoneros, but the most famous, Joe Baxter, played an important part in founding both the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the marxist-leninist Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) in Argentina. He died in a plane crash in Chile during the Popular Unity government of Allende. At the same time, throughout the 1960s, many young Argentines had been travelling to Cuba to learn the lessons of the revolution (both political and military). These pilgrims included both peronists and non-peronists. One such group, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) were prepared to link up with Guevara in Bolivia (1966), but his death in 1967 put paid to this plan.

Although most members of the FAR were dissident Communists, they declared their solidarity with peronism. It was a period of military and political cross-fertilisation, which makes any attempt to reduce the politics of the guerrilla groups into terms of peronist or marxist quite meaningless.

To describe oneself as 'peronist' in 1966 or 1967 was not to subscribe to a particular political philosophy, but rather to affirm one's opposition to the dictatorship, and to declare one's solidarity with Argentine workers, who still identified themselves as 'peronist'. At the same time, in some Argentine cities (notably Córdoba) working class leaders who were not peronist did emerge. The most notable example was Augustin Tosco. But such leaders worked closely with the peronist workers and never fell into the sterile anti-peronism which characterises most foreign marxist analysis of Argentina.

## SECTION C

### 1. The Emergence of the Montoneros

Armed resistance was not confined to the guerrilla groups, it also found expression in popular uprisings in a number of Argentina's principal cities. By the end of 1970, the popular resistance had virtually broken the ability of the military to govern, and by that time the guerrilla groups were not particularly strong or well organised. It is against this background of political and military effervescence that the emergence of the Montoneros must be understood.

In early 1970, the Montoneros were just another of the many groups beginning to surface with the aim of waging urban guerrilla war against the military junta. Unlike many of the other groups, they had a clear political strategy. This was in essence to provide revolutionary socialist leadership to the mass movement, which called itself peronist, during what they characterised as a 'prolonged, popular war' of National Liberation. They knew that Peron was actually in contact with General Aramburu, the sworn enemy of peronism, negotiating the downfall of General Onganía and the latter's replacement by a centre-right alliance, which would have the backing of both Aramburu and Peron, an historic reconciliation. The Montoneros — there were only about a dozen of them at the time — decided to kidnap Aramburu, and to submit him to revolutionary justice for his crimes against the people in 1955-58. The operation was coolly carried out in broad daylight. The Montoneros, disguised as army officers, knocked on the door of Aramburu's flat and asked him to accompany them. He agreed, thinking it was part of the conspiracy to overthrow Onganía. He was tried, condemned to death and executed. The Montoneros then wrote to Peron, who was living in exile in Madrid, asking for his approval for their act, which was received with rejoicing among the peronist working class. Peron had no choice but to approve.

With this first operation, the Montoneros achieved a number of different things:

1. They cut short the Peron-Aramburu conspiracy;
2. They destroyed Onganía, who was suspected by Aramburu's friends to having been involved in the killing of their champion;
3. They established a clear link between the armed struggle against Onganía and the first peronist resistance of 1956-58;
4. Their action was clearly understood and accepted by the Argentine working class as a whole; and
5. They secured the endorsement of Peron, thus committing him to support for the resistance.

### 2. The Collapse of the Dictatorship

Yet outside Argentina, the political significance of their coup was barely understood. Within weeks, Onganía was shunted aside to be replaced by the even more unpopular General Roberto Levingston. A more clear-sighted general, Alejandro Lanusse, seized the presidency in 1971 and proclaimed the need to heal old divisions in order to head off the growing danger of civil war, and perhaps revolution. With this in mind, General Lanusse sought a settlement with Peron. He also attempted to get the better of Peron and to ensure that Peron would not return to dominate the political process. But Peron, nearer 80 than 70, had taken on a new lease on life. By supporting armed resistance to the military dictatorship, Peron had given legitimacy and a degree of unity to that resistance. At the same time, Peron established his own political credentials in the eyes of a generation which could hardly remember his first governments. The non-peronist Left in Argentina believes that Peron was brought back to Argentina in 1972 as 'the last card of the bourgeoisie', to undertake the task of pacification in which the military had failed. This does not accord with the facts for the following reasons:

1. Neither the bourgeoisie nor the trade union bureaucracy worked for the return of Peron in November 1972. Lanusse did not believe he would come.
2. Peron was expressly prevented from standing in the



March 1973 election. Why? if he was the last card of the bourgeoisie.

3. The army attempted but failed to place conditions on the transfer of power in May 1973. They failed because of the strength of popular mobilisation.

The same blindness which led the orthodox marxist Left to dismiss the events of 1945, led them to misinterpret 1973. At the same time, the Montoneros had made important errors of interpretation. They played a leading part in the election campaign which resulted in the victory of Hector Campora Peron's personal representative. This experience led them into a kind of euphoria, believing first that Peron was a 'socialist leader' (as far from the mark as believing him to be the last card of the bourgeoisie) and second that the trade union bureaucrats, who had been castigated as traitors by Peron before his return, could not reestablish their power and influence. As the Montoneros subsequently recognised, both errors led them into a era of triumphalist expectations which were soon dashed to the ground.

### 3. Peron's Return

But to return briefly to November 1972, the leadership of the peronist movement at the time of Peron's first return consisted of four heterogeneous elements:

1. The nominally peronist trade union bureaucracy, which first attempted to prevent the return of Peron and then hastened to swear undying loyalty to the returning exile.
2. Three of the four most important guerrilla groups in the country — Montoneros, FAR and Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas (FAP) — described themselves as peronist, even though this meant something different in each case.
3. Former peronist politicians, who had virtually been on the sidelines since 1955. They had fared variously and developed in many different directions, covering the entire political spectrum. All they had in common was their past: They had been joined by a number of other professional politicians who saw short-term dividends in a peronist restoration.
4. Peron's personal entourage from Madrid, which included: Isabel Peron, a dancer he met and married when in exile; Jose Lopez Rega, an ex-policeman who was called private secretary but was effectively Peron's valet, and Raul Lastiri, Lopez Rega's son-in-law. None of these three had shared in Argentina's peronist experience in any direct way during the period 1945-55, yet they were to emerge as dominant figures following Peron's second return in June 1973, and more particularly after his death in July 1974.

At that moment, the only one of these four groups with any power of popular mobilisation was the armed resistance. Peron nominated Hector Campora, who had the confidence of the Montoneros, to represent the Peronist movement in the March elections. His candidacy was opposed by the trade union bureaucracy and by many of the veteran peronist poli-



ticians (even though Campora was drawn from their ranks). Peron's personal entourage did not object as they were rightly convinced of Campora's total acceptance of Peron's authority. Peron's gamble paid off and Campora was elected by an indisputable margin, with almost twice as many votes as the runner-up. The influence of the resistance movement was manifest in the first act of his government on the day it took power, 25 May 1973. All political prisoners were released. The great majority of them had been active in the resistance. The new government's platform was extremely radical in terms of its determination to win back control of the economy from the transnational companies, which had assumed a dominant role in Argentina during the preceding 15 years. The government was also committed to limiting the power of the great landowners, who have always acted as a brake on Argentine development. These two groups, the multinationals and the landowners, were to return to power in March 1976 as the principal sponsors of the military government of General Jorge Videla.

Once the elections of 1973 were won, however, and President Campora installed, Peron's priorities changed. He saw that the 'revolutionary tendency' within the peronist movement had the initiative. This was clearly going to lead the new government into a major confrontation with business and agricultural interests, and therefore, ultimately, with the armed forces. Later in the year, he was to say to his more radical supporters: 'Do you want them to do to me what they have done to Allende?' This quite real fear was probably uppermost in his mind during most of 1973. At the age of 77, he had no intention of setting off on his travels again. He wished to die as an honoured elder statesman..

#### 4. Peron and the Montoneros

Furthermore, his wife and Lopez Rega saw there would be no place for them in a revolutionary Argentina. Peron joined in their machinations to betray the popular forces which had secured his return. While the armed groups had come out into the open and were growing rapidly into mass organisations, the Right was preparing a counter-offensive. Lopez Rega's first move was to turn the welcome prepared for Peron's second return on 20 June 1973 into a massacre. Heavily armed squads of fascist gunmen fired indiscriminately into the columns of people marching behind the banners of Montoneros and the FAR. The next step was to secure Campora's resignation. He was replaced by Lopez Rega's son-in-law, Raul Lastiri, while preparations were made for the election of Peron.

Once again, Peron needed the armed organisations to mobilise the vote, and Lopez Rega was sent away for a time. Peron was duly elected, with his wife Isabel as Vice President. Peron began to cultivate the old CGT bureaucracy, including those leaders who had worked most closely with the military governments. He also allowed the CGT to launch a campaign against 'marxist infiltrators' in the peronist movement. It was during this period that Montoneros and FAR joined together to form a single organisation, keeping the name Montoneros. The most favoured slogan during the mass rallies of that period was: General, why is the government of the people so full of traitors?

Although Peron seemed to want nothing more than a quiet life, the Montoneros had always recognised that the period of Peronist government would be one of intensive struggle inside the movement. However, as noted above (Section C, No. 2) the Montoneros had wrongly analysed the balance of forces, especially with regard to Peron's personal position. The internal struggles of the movement, with the Montoneros constantly losing ground, left little time for coherent government. Furthermore, Peron's health was cracking under the strain. On 1 May 1974 at a mass rally in Buenos Aires, he again denounced the 'youthful extremists' who had taken over the movement. This was the signal for more than half the 100,000 people present to march out of the square. Peron's next speech, on 12 June, was an attempt at reconciliation. He returned to the theme of liberating the country from imperialism, and assured his followers: 'My only heir is the People'.

#### 5. Montoneros Return to the Resistance

But the Triple A was already claiming its first victims, and Peron had not many days to live. His heirs were perhaps the people, but their inheritance was a bitter one. He died on 1 July 1974. The government was swiftly brought under the exclusive control of his widow, now President, and Lopez Rega. Anyone with a progressive record was sacked from the government, and the death squad stepped up its murderous work, killing workers, lawyers, priests and journalists, and driving thousands more into exile. In September, the Montoneros and all the mass organisations which followed their political line returned to clandestine operation. Many of the people who had joined the organisation in its moment of triumph the year before dropped away, others followed an opportunistic line and continued to work with the government. But the essential connections had been made. The organisation, which had its beginnings in the late sixties as tiny conspiratorial groups of Catholics, left peronists and Marxists, was by the end of 1974 firmly rooted in the Argentine working class, and increasingly recognised as the basis for a revolutionary party which could provide the vanguard of a process of national liberation under working class leadership.

The Montoneros, like many others, saw the late General Peron, and the leadership he exercised over the Argentine working class, as the key to Argentine politics during the late 1960s. While Peron lived, it was impossible to challenge his personal ascendancy, even though the Montoneros could and did question his judgement. From the moment of the Aramburu kidnapping, by their acts, the Montoneros challenged Peron's strategic leadership of the working class movement. By working from inside the peronist movement, and exploiting its internal contradictions, they proposed to emerge after Peron's death at the head of a restructured movement, which would have the mass base of peronism, but would be aimed at changing the 'existing system of dependent monopoly capitalism to an independent socialist system'. They never accepted Peron's version of the class alliance, nor his 'third position' between capitalism and socialism. In all their documents, they have argued that national liberation from imperialism would be achieved only under 'the explicit and organic leadership of the working class'.

Since their return to clandestinity in September 1974, their work has concentrated on building up an armed militia, based on factory and neighbourhood organisations, and on strengthening the semi-clandestine trade union organisations which have been necessary during a period of increasing repression of the working class. The Montoneros believe that the leadership of the Argentine revolution can be assumed only by 'those who have been peronist'. This is explained at some length by Mario Eduardo Firmenich, the top leader of the Montoneros, in an interview which was published in English by the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) in January 1977. If the Montoneros have indeed succeeded in grafting the ideology of revolutionary socialism onto the still living memories of peronism, then it is possible that their assertion will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

#### 6. Montoneros and the ERP

The other internationally known organisation which lays claim to providing the Argentine working class with revolutionary leadership is the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT), which formed the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) at almost the same time as the Montoneros was first formed. The PRT was for a time linked to the Trotskyist Fourth International (USFI), but this association ended in 1973. Today, the PRT defines itself as a Marxist-Leninist party. The most important differences between the two parties from the beginning have concerned their different analyses of peronism. The PRT was always strongly anti-peronist and its propaganda always emphasised the need to reject peronism, which had proved a false road for the Argentine working class. Even though the PRT has softened its line in this regard, it is still an obstacle to the two parties, working together.

From this original difference stem a number of others. The most important for people outside Argentina is perhaps the different understanding of international solidarity. The PRT have a much more classically Bolshevik belief in the assistance which can be expected from international proletarian solidarity. Despite all discouragements, they still look to Cuba and the Soviet Union for support. They played a leading part in forming the Junta Coordinadora Revolucionaria, which groups the Chilean MIR, the Tupamaros, and the Bolivian Ejército de Liberación Nacional with the ERP. The Montoneros are sometimes accused of being narrowly nationalist, but this is not the case. They are just sceptical about how much assistance can be expected from abroad. They believe that the assistance will only come when it seems probable that they are going to win. They are anxious to build closer relations with other revolutionary forces in Latin America, but they regard the JCR as being largely a paper organisation, since the Tupamaros and the ELN barely exist. They feel their difference with the Argentine Communist Party virtually precludes active assistance at the present time from countries with a close relationship to Moscow. They point to the fact that the Soviet Union is doing its best to pretend that Argentina does not exist at the present time.

There is also an important difference concerning the formation of a revolutionary strategy and winning its acceptance by the masses. The PRT-ERP's position is essentially a crude version of Lenin's position as set out in 'What is to be Done', with the revolutionary party bringing the strategy to the masses from the outside. The Montoneros emphasise the dialectical process in which the strategy will emerge out of interaction between the party and the masses.

In the middle of 1976, the two parties agreed to form a coordinating body, to be known as the Organización de Liberación Argentina (OLA) (the acronym spells the Spanish word for wave). But this represented little more than an agreement on paper. The agreement had been reached shortly before the death of the leader of the PRT, Roberto Santucho, in July 1976. But from the beginning there were difficulties. Some senior members of the PRT regarded the alliance in terms of Mao Tse-tung's alliance with the Kuomintang —with themselves in the role of the Chinese Communist Party leaders. The PRT wanted full ideological clarifications as a prelude to total fusion, while the Montoneros argued that such clarifications could only be reached in practice, by the people rather than by the Montonero or PRT leaders.

The worst aspect of the differences is that they tend to become distorted and magnified outside Argentina. It is inside Argentina and not abroad that the organisations will resolve the outstanding contradictions which stand in the way of uniting the revolutionary forces. When that unity has been achieved, the revolution will be well on the way to victory. Unity would make the task of building international solidarity far easier. Committees working on Argentina still have to cope with a crude anti-peronism, which objectively assists the enemy, and which feeds on the political divisions among the forces of the resistance in Argentina. People sometimes try to evade this issue by saying they do not regard the Montoneros as peronist, which is quite absurd as the Montoneros themselves still regard themselves as peronist. In terms of the kind of mass work the Montoneros believe to be possible at the present time, they say: 'We are more peronist than ever'.

The situation is perhaps easier to understand if one remembers that although PRT and Montoneros are the principal revolutionary organisations today, they emerged from a complex political culture, in which there were literally dozens of variants of peronist and non-peronist revolutionary projects, with every kind of intermediate position between those of the two main tendencies. The commitment of an individual militant to a particular organisation is unlikely to have been based in the first instance on a judgement that organisation X was better/worse than organisation Y. It is more likely to have depended on specific factors governing family, workplace, school or college, and neighbourhood. Inevitably, peronism, as the dominant working class political movement, provided the point of departure for an overwhelming majority of Argentine revolutionaries. Looking at the situation from outside Argentina, one sees only the principal organisations, as if these had been the only options, sharpening the contrast

between the two.

#### 7. Montonero Strategy

The Montoneros' strategy is to prepare for a protracted military and political struggle, in which their political line will gradually establish its hegemony within the Argentine working class. Simultaneously, they will build up a specialised military force, which will eventually be able to defeat the regular army in battle. Since they see no possibility of establishing liberated areas in Argentina, the guerrilla army has to be hidden among the people. In the first Montonero documents on military matters, one finds 'the idea of a regular urban army, which could be expanded without limit until it was capable of engaging and defeating large formations of the enemy army'. They now see this as having corresponded to a linear (not dialectical) concept of the accumulation of power. They are now concentrating instead on developing military cadres — 'the officers and non-commissioned officers of the popular army, who will be capable of building the army on the battlefield, incorporating recruits and organising them, in order to lead them to military victory. In other words, the army of the masses is built during the insurrection and not before'. (Firmenich, interview, mid 1976).

This is applying military concepts to the kind of popular uprisings which characterised popular resistance to the last military dictatorship in 1969-71. It means that definite limits are now being placed on the military structure, limits which 'derive from the evaluation we (the Montoneros) make of the likely participation of the masses in local insurrections in every zone'. The military advance of the Montoneros will be conditioned by the mass movement. Their leaders expect militant strikes and demonstrations, which could develop into insurrectional actions of limited duration and with limited goals. These events will be the culmination of a process of working class mobilisation which began about six months after the military coup of March 1976. They believe the popular counter-offensive will begin in the first part of 1978, with two years being 'the maximum period, not the minimum, for the duration of the enemy offensive'. Given the degree of repression, it is hard to make any objective assessment from the outside of the balance of forces after a year of military government. It is fair to say that while the Montoneros remain highly optimistic, despite heavy casualties, most other observers on the left believe the armed forces have crippled the Montoneros' operational capacity.





## SECTION D

### THE PERIOD SINCE THE VIDELA COUP.

#### 1. Background to the Coup

As late as October 1975, there were many people who argued that the armed forces were not going to seize power in the immediate future. Senior army officers argued they were better off with the government of Isabel Peron incurring political odium, while they got on with the business of repression. It was argued that a coup would drive thousands of people into active collaboration with the armed resistance. There were also disputes inside the armed forces as to what kind of coup could be launched. Many people warned of the international isolation suffered by Chile, and the heads of multinational companies like Fiat said they had no desire for an economic programme along Chilean lines.

On the other hand, there was clearly an urgent need for the ruling class to do something to control a deteriorating situation. There is some evidence that the United States (Kissinger, in particular) advised Videla in October that the armed forces must bring the situation under control, no matter what the cost of lives. Videla's response, at a meeting of Latin American generals in Uruguay, was to say that as many people would die as might be necessary to restore order. According to interviews with State Department officials, this determination was taken in Washington, without even consulting the United States ambassador in Buenos Aires. Senior executives resigned from Fiat in October to advise Videla personally on the kind of economic policy which might be followed.

At least four factors led the military to make the coup when they did. The first was the failure of the opponents of Isabel Peron, in Congress and in the unions to agree among themselves on a formula for co-government with the armed forces. Second, was the evident advance of the Partido Peronista Autentico, grouping the main political forces which had secured Campora's election almost three years before. It was no secret that the Autentico party, which held its founding congress in Cordoba in November 1975, responded to the leadership of the Montoneros. This could not be said publicly as Montoneros was a banned organisation, but everyone knew it for a fact. Any election without the participation of Montoneros would be as empty a farce as elections without Peron had been during his lifetime. Third, the advocates of a *pinochetazo* (ie. a Chilean style coup) demonstrated just before Christmas that they were not willing to wait until Videla gave the word. An air force mutiny just before Christmas was not easily contained and it became clear that if Videla did not move decisively, he would lose control of the process. Finally, the last months of 1975 were marked by increasing military activity on the part of Montoneros and the PRT. This last factor was probably the least important of the four, except insofar as it strengthened the hand of the more openly fascist elements of the armed forces.

In general terms, it has been said that Isabel Peron was removed from the presidency because she and her government proved incapable of controlling the advance of popular forces in opposition to her increasingly repressive rule. Again in general terms, the armed forces and their allies, both nationally and internationally, were agreed on the need to break the militancy and strength of the working class. This general intention has not varied since Peron first rose to power on the crest of working class advances in the mid 1940s.

There have been many attempts to repeat Peron's own strategy of building a political career through an alliance between the military and organised labour. This was the aim of General Lonardi, who actually overthrew Peron in 1955, but fell in turn to Aramburu within two months; it was the aim, too, of Onganía in 1966 (but not of economy minister Adalberto Krieger Vasena, who appeared on the scene in 1967); and finally, it was the project of President Alejandro Lanusse in 1972. All efforts subsequent to Peron's have failed.

This may be attributed in part to the fact that Peron had greater political imagination than the others, and was prepared to take risks in encouraging popular mobilisation. But that

would be an excessively personalist view.

The working class had made political advances in the context of peronism, which made it impossible to re-run the original version. The only way the political inheritance of peronism could be exploited was to advance from those same limits which peronism itself had reached in 1952, when Peron had to decide whether to allow the mass movement to advance towards socialism or begin to restrain it. The Montonero strategy from the beginning was to test those limits, developing popular mobilisation to the point at which Peron would definitely lose control of the movement. This was not a strategy likely to appeal to senior generals, who saw only the fruits of Peron's political ascendancy and did not understand the underlying dialectic.

#### 2. Contradictions in the Ruling Class

Videla himself stands in the tradition of generals and politicians, who in theory want to find a new political settlement, which would allow capital to dominate labour without bloodshed and open repression. This is what he means when he says he is in favour of 'representative, federal, parliamentary democracy' — an ideal which is constantly waved in the face of foreign journalists and politicians. Two major obstacles to the realisation of this aim by Videla or anyone else are the internal contradictions of the Argentine ruling class, and the militancy and political consciousness of the Argentine working class.

The major contradiction within the ruling class is between the interests of agriculture and industry. Both sectors are penetrated by and tied to foreign capital, so it is not fundamentally a contradiction between foreign monopoly capital and national capital. This is not to say that there are not nationalist capitalists who resent the hegemony of the multinationals; there are, but this is not a fundamental contradiction. The contradiction between industry and agriculture is expressed in the fact that agricultural exports (fundamentally meat and grain) account for over 90% of all Argentine exports, but only 10% of the Gross Domestic Product. The relatively small class of large landowners do not have a fundamental interest in the maintenance or development of the internal market. For them, a Chilean or an Uruguayan solution would be perfectly acceptable.

The industrialists, on the other hand, whether they are multinationals like Fiat or Argentine manufacturers, view the experience of Chile, where local industry has virtually collapsed in a welter of bankruptcies, with something akin to horror. This explains why the major disputes inside the military junta during its first year have not been about repression (the murder, torture and arrest of thousands of people), but about economic policies. The newspapers which represent industry have furiously attacked economy minister Jose Martinez de Hoz, who is a major industrialist but basically represents agrarian interests. At least, he represents transnational capital (he is a close friend of David Rockefeller, president of Chase Manhattan Bank, and is a director of Pan-American World Airways) and sees Argentina as basically a food-producing country in a new international division of labour. The agrarian interests have not been entirely happy either. Martinez de Hoz was not their first choice.

Within the armed forces, the Army has the greatest interest in industrial development as it actually owns and manages a substantial proportion of the country's basic industries, including the country's largest steel company, Somisa, the ninth largest company in the country and a major supplier to the automobile industry. Since Latin American army officers have long since absorbed the Bismarckian law that a country's military potential is proportional to its industrial strength, it is really not surprising that the army should be alarmed at developments which could leave Argentina permanently trailing in the race with Brazil for regional hegemony. At the time of the coup, the army did not have much choice in economic terms, as the country faced massive payments on its outstanding foreign debt in 1976 and needed about US \$1,500m. to see it through. Martinez de Hoz could get the money, provided he implemented the IMF austerity plan (indebted countries, for the use of!).



Mario Eduardo Firmenich (centre), Secretary General of the new Peronist Montonero Movement, at the launching press conference in Rome, April 1977. Firmenich, the most wanted person in Argentina, had just left Argentina.

The navy has quite enjoyed observing the army's discomfiture and has often seemed to be actually sabotaging official efforts to maintain a balance between the conflicting sectoral pressures. This is not because the navy responds to agrarian interests, although in Argentina as elsewhere in Latin America it is the most 'aristocratic' and hence the most reactionary of the services, but because of essentially inter-services rivalry. The administrative division after the coup gave the army roughly 55% of the available jobs, the navy 25% and the air force 20%. In addition, Videla was both a member of the ruling junta and President of the Republic. The Navy has been pressing for an equal share of power, and Admiral Emilio Massera, the commanding officer of the navy, has thinly veiled ambitions to occupy the presidency. The only way the navy is likely to achieve its goals would be for the army to divide, with one faction seeking naval backing. It is this, more than any deep ideological division, which has led the Argentine armed forces to present a somewhat disunited front to the world.

Although the Argentine industrialists are currently discontented and some multinational companies may even be losing money in Argentina, the real burden of the present economic policy is falling, as always, on the working class. Real wages have been reduced by more than 50% over the year following the coup. Trade union activity has been more or less outlawed, and the right to strike has been eliminated. If the government's plans for 'economic rationalisation', as recommended by the IMF, are fully implemented, more than half a million people will be put out of work this year, in a country with about half Britain's population. In the face of this policy, the working class has responded with massive resistance, in the form of production slow-downs, strikes and sabotage.

#### The Montonero Programme

The Montoneros were in the midst of re-organising themselves as the Partido Montonero when the coup came. Their main initiatives last year have been to draw up a political programme, which will provide the basis for discussion with other political forces in the possible construction of a front for national liberation, and to launch the Confederacion General del Trabajo en la Resistencia (CGTR) — a clandestine trade union organisation. The political programme is not 'fully socialist', but the Montoneros argue it is the 'only viable programme which could lead to the construction of socialism'.

The programme covers all aspects of national policy in outline, and is substantially more radical than, for example, the policy of Popular Unity in Chile. The Party recognises that the programme could not be carried out without a people's army to defend the political decisions involved. These include the expropriation without compensation of the land and industrial holdings of the oligarchy, the provision of free health care and free education, and urban reform, which would prevent anyone owning more than two houses (one too many?).

The CGTR is a major initiative, which has already borne fruit in the major strikes which occurred during the first year of military dictatorship. The clandestine organisation provided leadership, logistic support, and coordination. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the strikes would not have been possible without the CGTR. This is not a Montonero front organisation. The CGTR is based on clandestine factory committees of workers disposed to play an active part in resisting the ban on trade union activity. The political composition of these committees varies from factory to factory and depends on the representation of the different organisations on the



shop floor. The launching of the CGTR on this basis is seen by many as a measure of the Montoneros' new confidence and political maturity.

The major question today is whether the military are going to be successful in reducing Argentina to the state of prostration which has been imposed on Chile and Uruguay. There is no let up in the killings, and there is no doubt but that the Montoneros suffered heavy blows in 1976 and the first months of 1977. Important figures from their national leadership have been killed, as well as a number of other well-known militants. Thousands of working-class prisoners are crammed into prisons and concentration camps. Liberal commentators in the bourgeois press are already proclaiming the defeat of the Montoneros, consigning them a place in the history books alongside the Tupamaros of Uruguay who never recovered from the repression of 1972.

In April 1977, the Montoneros organised a press conference in Rome to launch the Peronist Montonero Movement. This is a front including both the Montonero Party and the Authentic Peronist Party. With Mario Eduardo Firmenich as secretary general, and veteran peronist leaders on its council, the new movement represents the synthesis of the original popular revolt of 1945 with the clandestine resistance developed by the Montoneros in the 1970s. Firmenich recognised peronism as the source of Montonero politics, of its errors as well as its virtues. The appearance on the same platform of Oscar Bidegain, former governor of Buenos Aires province, and Ricardo Obregon Cano, former governor of Cordoba province, with the Montonero leaders is almost a guarantee that the military will be unable to produce a bourgeois electoral solution out of the hat to again defraud the people of Argentina. Buenos Aires and Cordoba between them hold almost half the population of the country, and Bidegain and Obregon Cano can claim to be the most popular electoral figures in the country after ex-President Hector Campora. This electoral strength is just one aspect of the battle, and cannot be seen in isolation from the struggles of factory workers to build up the CGTR, or of the Montonero army to strike military blows against the repressive forces.

If the Montoneros are correct in their analysis, the new military government will be no more successful than that of 1966-73 in remaining in power. Like that earlier experience there will be a number of changes of guard in the presidential palace before the way is again open for a return to civilian government. This will not be a revolutionary government, but like the Campora government is likely to provide the Montoneros with a period in which they can build up their forces and accumulate political strength. Without making specific predictions, one can look forward to a period of continuing instability, and not the 'stability' imposed elsewhere in the southern cone of Latin America.

Both the Communist Party and the United States government make much of the image of Videla as the 'moderate' or 'soft' general, surrounded by 'extremist' 'hardliners', who would be far more repressive should they ever come to power. It's a subtle argument for supporting the status quo: 'Don't

rock the boat; it's even colder in the water'. In fact, there is not too much more that Videla could do in the way of repression, so it is really irrelevant whether or not he is 'fundamentally a decent man who dislikes violence', as one reporter put it in March 1976.

The Montonero view is that fundamentally any change would weaken the government and will therefore be welcome, even though it is unlikely to lead in the short run to any slackening of the repression. They reckon to face as many casualties during the second year of military rule as they did during the first year. They are well aware that even if their strategy for national liberation is finally successful, the war will not be at an end. A socialist and independent Argentina would be an intolerable threat to imperialist interests in the rest of Latin America. It would provide a viable base, with autonomous supplies of food and energy, for liberation struggles in Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay — and eventually Brazil. Although it might be difficult to imagine the United States intervening directly, there is little doubt that Brazil would be quickly into the field. Even though the Montoneros were quite narrowly nationalist in at least some of their origins, the reality of Argentina's situation has forced them to develop a continental perspective.

Their first priority is to develop relations with revolutionary forces in neighbouring countries, and then in the rest of Latin America. In other parts of the world, they see the newly liberated states of Asia and Africa as their natural allies — also the liberation movements which are still struggling against imperialism. Perhaps because Argentina was virtually a British colony up to 1945, Montoneros feel a particular affinity to the Irish and have a strong sympathy with the struggles of the Irish people against British oppression. They see no hope of support from the Soviet Union, for the reasons outlined earlier in this article, and the best they can hope is that Moscow will stop giving effective support to the junta. In fact, in the countries of the Northern Hemisphere, they see the impact of solidarity as having more to do with inhibiting and neutralising support for the junta than with producing significant support for revolutionary forces in Argentina.

One effect of the repression in the southern part of Latin America has been to disperse progressive and revolutionary Latin Americans over the face of the globe. It is possible today to maintain contact with most of the principal political movements in Latin America through their sympathisers and representatives in Europe or the United States. This could and should be an immensely creative process and might help British revolutionaries toward the unfulfilled task of re-evaluating the last hundred years of British history, including the fatal impact of British mercantile imperialism on the newly independent republics of nineteenth century Latin America. The importance of Argentina in that story will soon become apparent and perhaps the groundwork will be laid for collaboration between revolutionaries in both countries against ruling classes who have been working together for more than a century and a half.



## REVIEWS

### Family, Capitalism and Personal Life Eli Zaretsky Pluto Press £1.00

"Some people have the idea that a YCLer is politically minded, that nothing outside of politics means anything. Gosh, no. They have a few simple problems. There is the problem of getting good men on the the baseball team this spring, of opposition from other ping-pong teams, of dating girls, etc. We go to shows, parties, dances and all that. In short, the YCL and its members are no different from other people except that we believe in dialectical materialism as the solution to all problems." (p. 126)

This quote, from a 1939, University of Wisconsin Young Communist League Bulletin, may seem ludicrous, but its underlying assumptions can still be heard in the talk of most male leftists today. The way of thinking as though the whole world is to be seen from the male point of view, the reduction of the problems of everyday life to ping-pong and sex, and, above all, the assumption that a tube of dialectical materialism (liberally applied according to the Party's prescription) will cure all diseases in the body politic.

We haven't come so very far since 1939 when it comes to discussing the political problems of personal life. The women's movement has made a start, but too often it has reproduced the introverted, bourgeois psychological way of thinking, concentrating on personal feelings and relationships without any real connection with the position of people outside the movement. Only the socialist feminists have tried to give the argument a materialist basis, and have begun to relate to the situation of working class women. Even then, it has been too easy for the male left to sit back and leave this work to the women, and socialist feminists have not yet forced the discussion into the general political arena. So Zaretsky's book is extremely welcome.

The material in this book originally appeared in 1973, as a series of articles in the interesting West Coast magazine 'Socialist Revolution', and so the book does not read as a single sustained argument. Zaretsky is dealing with a series of inter-related issues: arguments with the radical feminists; marxism and psychoanalysis; early work in the politics of personal life (Fourier and Engels); the situation in Russia and China; and the relationship between the capitalist economy and personal or family life.

The last point is the core of the book and, although the whole thing is only 143 pages so there's no excuse for not reading it in full, it's worth summarising his argument. He starts off by arguing against the current tendency to separate the family

from the economy, maintaining both that the pre-industrial family was a productive unit and that modern housework is labour which is essential to the economy. Early capitalists gave the production of goods a high moral status and, because it was a basic unit of production, the family also came to take on high status. While the rules which governed family life restricted women, they were also respected because they were essential to the family's economic welfare.

A new ideology of family life was set by the section of the bourgeoisie who engaged in small scale production, working its own property, during the 16th and 17th centuries. Puritanism, in contrast to Catholicism, encouraged material, emotional and sexual activity — though within the strict confines of family life. The home also became the focus of religious instruction and worship. Competitiveness, self interest and possessiveness were, by the 18th century, regarded as 'basic human nature'. But the potentially disruptive effects of this acceptance of social conflict were checked by the ideology that the family was "a little Church, a little State", the basic unit of the social order. Self consciousness, awareness of one's inner psychological life, was emphasised by Puritans and other sects, since it was only "inner purity" which guaranteed salvation. So, by the beginning of the 18th century, the basis for our present attitudes towards family life was beginning to be laid.

But the present status of women had not been established. While women were excluded from economic life outside family production, they had high status within the home. Housework was deemed like any other work "a calling from God", and the wife was the husband's companion. In fact, during the English Revolution (mid 17th century) women played a major role as preachers and organisers. But since the family was seen as the basic unit of society, and since man was the unquestioned head of the household, the issue of women's equality was muted until the late 18th and 19th century when the bourgeois family declined as an independent unit for production.

Factory organisation destroyed the bourgeois family as a productive unit, and this led to major changes in the way family life was understood. Factory work required rigid time-keeping and a disciplined and methodical work programme completely divorced from family or personal responsibilities. *The family came to be seen as a refuge from this brutal and mechanical world.* This separation of work and home was paralleled by the view that women's realm was the family (the emotional, personal and human world) while men's was work (rational, hard, mechanical).

This march of history was resisted by

the early feminists and by romantic artists and radical writers. The early feminist movement grew out of the protest of middle class women at being confined to the home, and of working class women against their exploitation at work. The artists and writers spoke for the progressive side of petty-bourgeois individualism in its humanistic challenge to the degradation imposed by large scale capitalism. The early socialist movement, spearheaded by Marx and Engels, gave a new turn to these protests by arguing that there was no need for a programme for female emancipation and the transformation of personal life, since these would automatically follow from the abolition of wage labour and the socialisation of production.

Various developments took the steam out of the critique of capitalism, and left the socialist movement divorced from a politics of personal life. The rise in standard of living of the working class throughout the later part of the 19th century allowed personal consumption to become a substitute for satisfaction at work. The intrusion of public or private institutions into aspects of life once based on the family (eg education, health) intensified the trend for family life being divorced from economic and social life. The family, stripped of its role as producer, in the process of being stripped of its role as carer and socialiser, now becomes a key factor in the capitalist economy because of its role as consumer. The family is an essential market for commodity production. Since work has become meaningless to the vast majority of people, family life has become the only possible source for happiness and personal satisfaction. In capitalist society, happiness is easily equated with the possession of status-enhancing goods — an equation constantly hammered home by the media.

But people are not entirely duped by such phoney 'solutions' to the problems of living in capitalist society, particularly when the economic crisis makes the possibility of possessing these luxury goods increasingly remote. Nor are the growing batteries of institutions designed to patch up personal life — from sex clinics to social work — proving very effective.

Zaretsky says that the socialist movement has failed to harness the political potential of the crisis in personal life because it fails to see capitalism as an integrated social system. We have restricted the meaning of 'the economy' to 'the production of surplus value', and we fail to see that the family, while it does not produce surplus value, is essential to the economy because it is one way that people meet their basic material needs. Thus most socialists cannot distinguish the specific oppression of women from the general oppression of the working class. Instead, almost every programme for female liberation follows Engels in demanding that women are made able to join the waged labour force — thus ignoring the position of housewives and children.

This separation between the 'political'





world of waged work, and the 'subjective' (and supposedly non-political) world of family life has been nurtured by both capitalism and by the divisions in the socialist movement since the mid 19th century. The attempts by utopian socialists like Fourier to establish 'free' communities which met all human needs, including emotional and sexual, for men and women, were undermined by Marx and Engels' view that the capitalist mode of production had to be revolutionised before meaningful human relationships could be established. But Engels failed to analyse the emotional, ideological and psychological life of the family, and he accepts the sexual division of labour. Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin took Engels as the final word and the Communist parties dismissed the bohemian free love experiments of the early 20th century as petty bourgeois, despite their claim to be socialist.

The socialist movement, in general, is still in this impasse, and shows little sign of developing theory or practice around the question of personal life. It has failed to recognise the changes in modern capitalism — the creation of a separate sphere of personal life by increasing leisure time, raising the standard of living, and instilling the idea that personal satisfaction should be a substitute for work satisfaction. But there is an increasingly obvious contradiction in this idea of personal life. The traditional idea of a stable, emotionally satisfying family is being undermined: the economic basis for patriarchy (the family as a productive unit) has been removed, so the father's role is under fire; women have achieved a measure of economic and social independence; youth have acquired a separate culture and identity; sex has been effectively separated from reproduction. But, because socialists have not recognised the personal crisis as an area for political work,

a mixed bag of pundits have stepped in with their mystifying 'solution' — Masters and Johnson, RD Laing etc.

Zaretsky ends with his conclusions for political work. He argues that the family can only be transformed "as part of the general transformation and destruction of the capitalist economy. This requires the united efforts of all working people, including housewives". Socialists must have a practical programme for the transformation of social relations, and Zaretsky recommends Mariosa Dalla Costa's *Programmatic Manifesto of Housewives in the Community* (Socialist Revolution No.9) which calls for the socialisation of housework, involving men and women, within the context of revolutionary organisation in the workplace for a 20 hour week. Zaretsky urges socialists to criticise personal life and demonstrate politically that capitalism can never meet our real human needs.

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There is a lot more in this short book, and it is essential reading for anyone who is interested in a revolution which changes our personal life as well as the economic organisation of society. Academics will find fault in some of the historical detail, and there are a number of gaps. It would have been, for instance, interesting to read about sexuality, family life and the status of women in the working class family during the industrial revolution.

But it is more important for us to try and continue the discussion about the role of revolutionaries in the transformation of personal life. The problem is not just a theoretical one — though it is essential to deal with the arguments about the 'biological family' and patriarchy put forward by the non-marxist feminists and their male fellow travellers. We have to begin to develop practical demands and activities which highlight the crisis in personal life;

we have to offer alternatives which help right now; and we have to think about the kinds of arrangements we want to create during the revolutionary process.

This kind of political work and thought has been going on for some time in the libertarian movement, and it is a great pity that their work has not been properly documented. In its dizzy heights in 1973-4 the libertarian movement set about revolutionising its members personal lives and liberating housewives from the burdens of theirs. We were instructed to destroy our tendencies towards the nuclear family, to live communally, and to eat, shit, fuck and cry with as many people as possible. 'Non-exclusive relationships' and collective childcare were compulsory, and those who couldn't take the strain were told they were unliberated. Creches, playgroups, food co-ops and street markets were organised for the working class housewives who were condemned to family life, and lacked our leisure and disdain for comfort. Free schools, community transport and squatting we call part of this attempt to build the revolution now, in our everyday lives.

It's easy to laugh (or cry) at some of the excesses of libertarian personal politics. But they were among the most stimulating developments in political practice in the past few years. They cannot be shoved aside with the scornful tag of 'utopianism' or 'petty bourgeois individualism'. Most revolutionaries have to find ways of dealing with the extraordinary demands made by having three fulltime jobs: waged work, housework/childcare and political work. For some collective living (preferably without libertarian moralism) is the best solution. For those who live in families, other members of the organisation have to be made aware of the extra material and emotional problems that arise, and have to find ways of helping out. Otherwise, revolutionary politics will remain the province of the single, the childless, and the youthful. We have to get away from the assumption that comrades' personal problems arise from their individual inadequacies; we have to understand and deal with them politically. And we have to be far more sensitive to the needs of children.

Nor are these problems confined to members of revolutionary organisations. In the working class as a whole, the crisis is acute. Family life is falling apart, mountains of tranquilisers and anti-depressants are being swallowed, violence in the house and on the streets seems to be increasing. The fascist organisations deliberately appeal to the personal horrors and longings of ordinary people — their personalised hatred of blacks, their longings for stability and order. Punk rock appeals to the sense of personal outrage in working class youth ("I'm used, used, used" sings Generation X) and combines their desire to ignore the world ("I'm a member of the blank generation") and to revolutionise it (eg the Clash's "White Riot").

More money and a shorter working

week is the basic minimum demand of the working class. We would then have the means to relax and enjoy ourselves more. But as revolutionaries we have to ensure that the links are clear between material and personal demands; we have to be aware of the historical fact that revolutionising the mode of production does not necessarily ensure a revolution in the position of women, in the role of the family, or in personal relationships. Our leaflets, newspapers and meetings have to demonstrate that our personal lives are not separated from our working lives; that we want to transform the nature of work so that, for example, we can have a decent sex life and see more of the kids; that we want to transform the family and socialise housework so that women are no longer oppressed and men can have the liberating experience of relating to children.

But we must not confine ourselves to propaganda alone. We must be politically rooted in the areas where we live, in which case our work in the community requires collective childcare arrangements. Other activities — campaigns for nurseries or parental influence on education, food co-ops, women's discussion groups — all help people get outside the depressing aspects of personal life, help us see that others share the same problems, and help us begin to feel that we have some power to change things.

Zaretsky's book helps us see that the crisis of personal life is rooted in capitalist society. Our task is to develop a practice which relates to both personal and material needs, to bring about fundamental change in that society. Max Farrar.

## THE SOCIALIST CHALLENGE Stuart Holland Quartet £2.95.

Stuart Holland's book represents the most coherent and detailed statement to date of the economic thinking of the Labour Party's left wing. Its significance is heightened by two further factors. First, Holland's own experience as advisor to Labour Ministers. At one time he worked for Wilson at 10, Downing Street. More recently, he was joint author of Tony Benn's White Paper "The Regeneration of British Industry" when Benn was in charge of the Department of Industry. Thus his 'inside' knowledge of Government is considerable, and he was a key figure in shaping Labour's economic policy up to the 1974 elections. Second, with the Government struggling for its survival, Holland's ideas do give the Labour left (the Tribune Group and supporters of Benn) a seemingly plausible counter strategy to contrast with Callaghan's. If revolutionaries are to present a credible alternative to the Labour left and the Communist Party (whose economic programme is very similar), then we have to provide a critique of Holland and Bennism.

## Changes In Capitalism

The main strength of the book lies in the author's analysis of the changes in capitalism since World War II, when Western European Governments adopted the ideas of the economist John Maynard Keynes in an attempt to avoid the big slump of the 1920's and 30's. This involved increased public spending, a variety of aids to private industry, and tax measures to raise consumer demand and provide for full employment. But Holland argues, 'the recent acceleration in the trend to monopoly and multinational capital has eroded Keynesian economic policies and undermined the sovereignty of the capitalist nation state.' (p.9) This trend has resulted in the rise of what he calls "the new mesoeconomic power" — that is the power of the massive multinational companies. These companies have a major influence on the economy, as a whole, unlike the smaller firms predominant in Keynes' day.

Holland shows how a fairly small number of these giant firms effectively control the commanding heights of business. This is a tendency which Marx noted a hundred years ago, but which has only taken on massive worldwide proportions in the last generation. 100 firms control half of all manufacturing output in Britain; 75 firms control half the country's overseas trade. It is the power of these firms, says Holland, which must be tackled head on by any socialist Government.

The book details the ways in which companies (BP, Ford, ICI, Unilever, Chrysler, GKN etc) are increasingly able to bypass national Government policies. They plan their activities on a global scale, and are quite happy to shift investment from the UK to other countries where labour might be cheaper, or Governments more favourable. Their multinational structure enables them to juggle their accounts so that neither Governments nor employees really know their true profits. "A properly multinational company", notes Holland, "is in a position to declare whatever profit it chooses anywhere in the world."

The multinationals can avoid tariffs put up by developing countries, and taxes in the industrialised ones. They can render ineffective a whole range of policies designed to help the balance of payments, at a cost of thousands of millions of pounds to taxpayers. One of the main devices is 'transfer — pricing'. This is the means by which the companies charge imports to themselves from foreign subsidiaries at prices far higher than their real value. They then syphon the difference between the competitive price and the transfer price abroad, often to a foreign tax haven. Such manoeuvres raise the national import bill, fuel inflation, and, by avoiding UK tax, reduce the amount available for spending on housing, education, health etc.

The activities of these super-league firms are, for the author, at the centre of Britain's economic crisis. They push up inflation, distort regional balance, create

unemployment (through shifting plant and using labour-saving machinery) and undermine Government attempts at demand management. Moreover, the private sector dominated by these firms is heavily subsidised by the state. In 1972-3 this subsidy was running at around £2,300 million, or £8 millions a day. Holland shows how this makes a mockery of strategies, like that of the present Government, for aiding private industry. For past experience has shown that such policies neither bring about the kind of new investment required, nor give long-term help to the depressed regions, nor benefit the consumer through reduced prices. Holland's damning conclusion is that, "in practice, the private sector in Britain is failing the nation on a massive scale, and represents a deadweight on the backs of the working class people, who, through taxation, subsidise distributed private sector profits." (p. 69) The book also shows how the same is true, only on a much more serious scale, for developing countries. Unless we confront this new multinational domination, he says (p.134) "Governments will be forced into an increasing confrontation with organised labour. In their attempts to make the prevailing system work, they will employ wage controls, anti-trade union legislation, attempts to limit the effectiveness of strike action, and the other trimmings of proto-fascism."

## So What Can Be Done?

Holland's solutions are radical, but by no means revolutionary. His proposals draw heavily on the experience of the state holding companies in capitalist Italy, and the ideas of liberals like JK Galbraith. The main features of his plan appeared in Labour's "Programme 1973", and in watered down forms in the 1974 election manifestos.

Briefly, what Holland (and the Labour Left) is proposing, is the nationalisation under workers control of 20 to 25 of the top 100 companies, under the direction of a National Enterprise Board. (Much stronger than the present NEB). And a series of compulsory planning agreements covering all the big firms. "On average, four to five firms control the upper half of 20 of the main 22 industrial and service sectors of the economy. One in four to one in five of these firms must be socialised through new public ownership and control if we are to begin the critical transformation of the private meso-economic sector." (p. 160)

The form public ownership will take could vary from firm to firm — shop stewards forming the majority on the main board in some firms, or perhaps just controlling a supervisory board in others. The crucial point is that the nationalisations extend right across the range of industries and services. A determined socialist Government could then use this new public sector of 'leading' firms, together with the planning agreements to exert a key leverage over the rest of the economy. (Other firms would be forced to follow the newly public-owned 'leaders' who would



have access to public money for new plant etc which would raise productivity). The resulting growth would it is said, be largely free from inflation, would help to end regional imbalance, and would create new funds for welfare spending.

The tension between central planning and workers control at the level of the plant — a critical problem in every attempt at socialism to date — would be overcome by the Planning Agreements. By having workers representatives bargaining with Government and management at regional and national level around these agreements, the various parties could agree on objectives which would marry up their different perspectives and interests. The ‘books’ would be opened, and workers would still retain the right not to sign the agreements (which would cover such topics as investment plans, manning, pricing etc) and to take industrial action.

Holland calls his approach a strategy for “revolutionary reforms.” He points out the similarity between Labour’s 1973 programme and those of the French left (the Communist and Socialist Parties’ Common Programme) and the Italian Communist Party. But the big question which remains unanswered is how does he see a Labour Government actually implementing his proposals in full? Similarly, in view of Chile, how will the French and Italian CPs effect a revolutionary transition by reformist means?

In Chile a Government tried to do very much what Holland advocates. It nationalised many firms, encouraged workers self-management, tackled unemployment and sought to use the new public sector to promote all round growth and higher living standards for the poor. But sections of the army/air force and civil services combined with the bourgeoisie and the CIA to topple the Government and institute a ruthlessly repressive right wing dictatorship. All that Holland offers to counter any such possible ruling class response here is unionisation of the army and attempts to get solidarity from workers in France and Italy.

“Socialism By Results”

The book does make some references to the need for workers to be involved in the transition to socialism. But the emphasis is decidedly on the Government delivering the goods — what Holland calls “socialism by results”. And this points to the most serious weakness both in Holland’s ideas and the thinking of the Labour left in general. That is their inability or unwillingness to build a mass movement for socialism outside Parliament. Willingly or not, leftwing MPs are forced by the trappings of Parliamentary politics into reformist modes of operating. (“Don’t do anything which threatens Labour’s majority” etc). Their main line is to argue the need for “winning the Labour Party to left policies”. In opposition of course, the left-wing usually gains influence and even wins temporary concessions (eg. the 1973 Programme). But this only has the effect of reinforcing illusions in the possibilities of changing Labour into a socialist party. Labour leaders have

always used the rhetoric of socialism. Holland himself justifies his perspective of abolishing class divisions by noting that it is “nothing more than traditional labour policy”.

What is sadly lacking in the book is a clear analysis either of Labour’s limitations or those of the trade unions. The latter is particularly significant in view of the key role assigned to the unions in Holland’s transition.\* The danger is precisely that which Holland warns against in the book — that a half-hearted implementation of the kinds of policies he advocates will result only in strengthening the present capitalist system. Only a powerful working class, able to act independently of the Labour Party and union leaders, can take advantage of the kind of space offered when Benn was at the Industry Department.

There is no doubt that socialists do need analysis and specific policies for dealing with the multinationals at the national level. But where Holland misses out is on how to connect the daily struggles against these companies which workers are already fighting with a mass movement which can get those policies effectively implemented. Phil North

\* A good critique of the kind of position Holland puts forward on the unions can be found in Richard Hyman’s essay “Workers Control and Revolutionary Theory” in the Socialist Register 1974, edited by Ralph Miliband and John Saville. There is a reply to Hyman in the Socialist Register 1975. For the best arguments on the nature of the Labour Party see Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism (Merlin Press, 1972) and David Coates’ The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism (CUP, 1975).

CONSIDERATIONS ON WESTERN MARXISM

NLB £4.00

The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci  
New Left Review 100 £1.00  
Perry Anderson.

Considerations On Western Marxism

To all Marxist theorists there comes a terrible moment when he/she is forced to ask him/herself the question ‘did I get the relation between theory and practice right?’ Throughout this book, Anderson is asking himself this question — though the process is certainly not an open one.

The argument of the book is that after a ‘high’ period which included such all-time greats as Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Bukharin etc, Marxist theory lost its vitality and fell away. It became dominated by ‘Western Marxism’, a tradition that reflected the defeats of the revolutionary movements of the ‘20s, the rise of Fascism and World War II. ‘Western Marxism’ which is a concept that Anderson has invented to lump together Gramsci, Lukacs, Benjamin, Marcuse, Della Volpe (who?), Horkheimer (who?) etc. is shown to be an

intrinsically pessimistic tradition that reflects its failure to sustain an on-going (organic) link with the class struggle.

In fact, what Anderson calls ‘Western Marxism’ is a collection of individuals — many of whom have nothing in common with each other. On the one hand, it contains revolutionary Marxists whose contribution to revolutionary theory and practice is very important (Gramsci, Korsch, Lukacs); on the other hand, it includes academic Marxists like Della Volpe, Althusser, Adorno whose contribution to revolutionary theory and practice is of little consequence — it also includes an almost — Marxist like Sartre who for many years has shown that it is possible to be an involved intellectual.

By lumping all these individuals together, Anderson has performed an act of considerable intellectual dishonesty — the result of which is an attempt to discredit Gramsci, Korsch and Lukacs; the process is known as ‘guilt by association’. And its not as if Anderson does not know what he is up to; for he writes (page 45) ‘Gramsci is the single exception to this rule—and it is the token of his greatness, which sets him apart from all other figures in this tradition’. Whenever Anderson discusses Gramsci he is ‘the exception that proves the rule’ — in fact what it is proving is that Gramsci has little in common with Althusser or Della Volpe, which should be obvious to anyone who has read and studied them.

The purposes of the book are not obvious because the message at the end— ‘go back to Marx, Lenin and Trotsky’ comes across muffled. One of the purposes is to take a few stripes off Gramsci and Lukacs — and there is nothing wrong with doing that — but the way it’s done can only convince the converted. At the same time there is an element of self-criticism running through the book. It has a particular twist in that it is Anderson himself who, as leading light of the New Left Review, has been responsible for the publishing of the works of Althusser, Della Volpe, Colletti, Poulantzas etc in the English language — and not only of publishing them but of trying to ram them down our throats in the particularly arrogant ‘house style’ that has become a trademark of the New Left Review. Of course, I am not arguing that there is something wrong in making these mediocre texts available as long as we are clear about the process of selection that is going on because the New Left Review and New Left Books have a definite bias in what they publish. Their material comes from two main sources— 1. Active and academic Trotskyists — the writings of Anderson, Mandel, Blackburn, Lowy, Deutscher (I&T) etc. All of these writers are in (or close to) the Fourth International and reproduce in a stylish and predictable way the analysis of that tendency. Of course, they very rarely announce their kinship to the Fourth International and like to appear in the Review as ‘independent non-aligned Marxists’.

2. Intellectuals of European communist parties — Althusser, Balibar, Colletti, Poulantzas, Della Volpe are members of this group. Their function as intellectuals is to give a ‘left cover’ to the policies of class collaboration being put into practice by the ‘Euro-communist’ Communist Parties of Europe. They are the philosophers of the ‘historical compromise’ — for instance much of the writings of Poulantzas are devoted to the problem of class alliances and reflect the attempts of Euro-communism to justify its policies of forming alliances with state-sector management and ‘small and middle’ capital. Of course, the writings of this group are often in conflict with the official line of the Communist Party they belong to — that’s what makes them a left cover — but the parties have an effective blackmail over these intellectuals — the power to take away their social position.

At the same time as the New Left Review has filled their pages with this mixture of Euro-Communism and Trotskyism, they have very deliberately excluded from their pages authentic, important voices of Marxism:

1. The ‘Monthly Review’ tradition of Sweezy, Baran, O’Connor, Braverman etc which for many years has been developing a Marxist analysis of contemporary Marxism that starts inside the process of production (see especially Braverman’s magnificent ‘Labour and Monopoly Capital’). It is true that this tradition contains errors of under-consumptionism and third-worldism — but their emphasis on the primacy of economic factors are a welcome relief from the super-structural obsession of the New Left Review.

2. The ‘Euro-Maoist’ tradition which can be taken to include writers like Bettelheim, Sohn-Rethel, Sofri who attempt to incorporate the perspectives of the Chinese revolution into their analysis of contemporary European capitalism (and the USSR in the case of Bettelheim). You would not expect a mixture of Euro-communism and Trotskyism to have anything but hatred for Maoists, and this is in fact the case — they are non-persons for the New Left Review. And it follows that organisations like Lotta Continua, Gauche Proletarienne, OCT that have attempted to embody the lessons of the Cultural Revolution are non-events. For Anderson, the choice is clear (page 44) ‘Either the theorist could enroll in a Communist Party and accept the rigour of its discipline. . . The opposite option was to remain outside any party organisation whatever, as an intellectual freelance. . .’. This is the choice as Anderson from his position of world-weary Trotskyist sees it, but for many of us there is a third alternative — to be a militant/ intellectual in one of the many revolutionary organisations of the New Left that have come into existence since 1968. These organisations have problems but they represent infinitely more hope than being ‘an intellectual freelance’ or a gagged member of a class-collaborationist

Communist Party.

All writers, even Marxists, put a bit of themselves into the books they write and ‘Considerations on Western Marxism’ is no exception. It reflects the choice made by one intellectual — to cut himself off from the ongoing class struggle.

No doubt, we all should be grateful to the New Left Review for the Marxist works they have made available — but at the same time we should be very critical of the arrogant, elitist manner in which they continue to make these works available.

The Antinomies Of Antonio Gramsci

This more recent essay by Anderson contradicts the position taken in ‘Considerations of Western Marxism’ and is a much better contribution. The pompous flash style is still there, but gone are the endless references to irrelevant Marxist academics. In this essay, Anderson correctly locates Gramsci and Lukacs where they belong — with Luxemburg, Lenin, Bordigha and Trotsky (page 78) and begins the task of assessing how useful Gramsci’s writings are for us today.

Anderson spends an unnecessarily long time picking at the different ways in which Gramsci formulated his central concept of ‘hegemony’, but his conclusion is correct — that although Gramsci realised that in the last resort what maintained the bourgeoisie in power in a democracy was force and violence, he too often neglected this to concentrate on the need of the working-class to impose its cultural domination (hegemony) as a central part of the revolutionary process. As Anderson put it “Revolutionary strategy in Gramsci’s account becomes a long, immobile trench-warefare between two camps in fixed positions, in which each tries to undermine the other culturally and politically. There is no doubt that the danger of adventurism disappears in this perspective. . . But what happens to the phase of insurrection itself?”

Anderson’s interpretation of Gramsci is an important counter-balance to the Euro-communist ‘recuperation’ of Gramsci. For the Communist parties of Europe (including the CPGB) are trying to make Gramsci the creator of the peaceful road to socialism — a bitter irony when you remember that Gramsci was physically destroyed in a Fascist jail. Gramsci, together with Luxemburg and Bordigha, is of central importance to us today because they saw clearly that a revolutionary strategy that would be successful in the developed capitalist societies of the West could not be the same as the strategy used successfully by the Bolsheviks in Russia. The revolutionary theory and practice that we are developing must incorporate some of Gramsci’s ideas without forgetting that the final confrontation will be violent and brutal. The idea of a ‘peaceful transition to socialism’ should be kicked into the dustbin of history; if we don’t do it, the forces of repression sure will. Peter Anderson.

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