

September/October 1982

Volume 7 No 5

75p

International



**Tony Benn
& Alan Freeman**
Debating Socialism

Ken Livingstone
Lessons of Labour's
GLC

**Hilary Wainwright
& Dave Elliott**
New Trade Unionism

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WAY FOR
LABOUR?***

***MIDDLE EAST AFTER BEIRUT
PLUS
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International

is published by supporters of
the Fourth International in
Britain. Signed articles do not
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Typesetting, design, camerawork
Lithoprint (TU) Ltd, 329 Upper Street,
London N1 2XP. Tel 01-359 8288

Printers
Lithosphere, 205 Pentonville Road,
London N1.

Publishers
Cardinal Enterprises, 328 Upper Street,
London N1 2XP.

ISSN 0308-3217

LESSONS OF BEIRUT

As we go to press news is still emerging of the extermination of the population of two Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut by the Lebanese Phalange under the cynical eye of the Zionist army commanders. The grotesque irony of an alliance between self-confessed Nazis and the Israeli High Command, combined with the savagery of the bombardment of Beirut and now the wholesale massacre of Palestinians, fully exposes the real nature of the Zionist state: an artificial colonial state created with the backing of imperialism, and based on the suppression of the rights of the indigenous Palestinian people.

It also reveals the barbarity of imperialism in intervening to shore up its interests against any anti-imperialist threat. Just as the British ruling class received unanimous backing for its murderous assault against the Malvinas, so the imperialist powers refused to condemn outright the Zionist 'Peace for Galilee' invasion of Lebanon.

Elsewhere in the journal we review the prospects for the Palestinian struggle after Beirut. In this editorial we would return to the theme we have stressed in recent months — the failure of the Labour Left, including Tony Benn, to break from support for Israel is indicative of a fundamental flaw in its conception of socialist politics. There can be no strategy for socialism in Britain which does not start from the integral role of British imperialism in maintaining the international status quo, including

the bolstering of the Zionist state.

Active internationalist support for those struggling against their oppressors — be they the imperialist powers or their Stalinist props in the post-capitalist countries — must increasingly be the cornerstone of socialist policy, as the imperialist crisis deepens.

It remains to be seen whether the latest atrocities in Lebanon hypocritically condemned by Reagan and Thatcher, will either force a new understanding of the Palestinian cause or expand the insular vision of the Labour Left. The debacle of Labour's stance on the Malvinas, which even proved electorally debilitating, has nevertheless brought forward but one motion attacking the line of the Front Bench to this year's Labour conference.

The successive inability of the Labour Left to rally unconditional support to the just struggles of the peoples in Poland, Argentina and Palestine continues the long tradition of at best turning a blind eye to Britain's centuries-old domination of Ireland.

Any vision of Labour's forward march, or of the future of working class politics must break from any attachment to notions of the progressive character of British imperialism, the Western Alliance, or for that matter of the Stalinist impersonation of socialism. It must re-establish the notion of international socialism. Beirut has once again reminded us of the grizzly alternative of barbarism.

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We make no apology for this issue concentrating overwhelmingly on the strategic questions under debate between the Labour Left and revolutionary Marxism: Alan Freeman and Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone's reply to our critique of the GLC's record, a socialist alternative to the Labour Party's new economic programme, and articles by Hilary Wainwright & Dave Elliott and by John Ross on the British labour movement. We hope this issue will provide much food for thought on the issues currently being discussed throughout the labour movement.

We have therefore reduced our reviews section in size for this issue and held over some international articles for future publication.

Meanwhile we would urge all our readers to do two things. First, to register for our Debating Socialism Weekend scheduled for 23/24 October in London

(see back page for details). Second, to take out a subscription to the journal. It ensures that you receive your copy regularly and helps the journal's precarious finances. Our thanks to those who donated to our recent financial appeal. One donor has offered to match every pound offered to us by other supporters, as an incentive to help boost the size of donations. That means every pound you give us will really be worth £2. So dig deep in your pockets, and send us a sub and a donation.

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DEBATING SOCIALISM

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Alan Freeman & Tony Benn at the ICA debate

TONY BENN & ALAN FREEMAN

The publication of Tony Benn's *Arguments for Democracy* and Alan Freeman's *The Benn Heresy** has attracted widespread interest on the left. We reprint below a substantial section of the discussion between the two authors at a recent seminar at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.

* Tony Benn *Arguments for Democracy*, Penguin Books, £1.75 and Alan Freeman *The Benn Heresy*, Pluto Press, £3.50.

Tony Benn: I can summarise what I want to say like this: I've been in parliament for thirty-two years this November, in Cabinets for eleven years, on the National Executive for twenty-two years; and in the course of that experience, I've had the opportunity of studying power at a fairly high level.

I've become increasingly aware as the years have gone by that the public explanation for what was wrong, which is publicised by every newspaper from the *Times* to the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror*, with others in between, that we are a nation of unproductive people, lazy workers, and inefficient managers, doesn't correspond to my own experience. What I've found, by contrast, is that power in Britain is exercised at a very high level, very discreetly, that it's become very internationalised, and that the claim that we make for ourselves, that we are the most democratic country in the world, simply isn't true.

Therefore, in the course of a number of speeches, I've tried to analyse what exactly is wrong, where power really lies, and what we might do about it. The more I've thought about this, and argued the case, the more I've become persuaded that the British establishment and the international establishment — which has great influence over British politics — is much more frightened of democracy than it is of socialist rhetoric. Top people can live with socialist rhetoric, with preachers on Sunday talking about a fair and decent society, so long as it doesn't get into Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and

Saturday — that's no threat to anybody. But when you start asking people how they got their power, where they got it from, by what legitimacy they have it, how they use it, and insist that they be accountable for the use of their power, you frighten the living daylights out of the people who have a very considerable amount of power in Britain. *Arguments For Democracy* therefore aims to try and put the democratic items back on the agenda.

I think that's important for a number of reasons. First, I don't think we're going to solve the problems that now afflict people — unemployment, the destruction of the welfare state, the threat to peace — unless we put democracy back on the agenda. And if you do, then I must warn you, you will land yourself in a great deal of trouble.

I think that is about all I want to say by way of introduction, except to make some reference to the critique made by Alan. To be criticised from the Left is quite appropriate. Most of the criticism I get is from the Right, who present me as if I was a rebirth of Leon Trotsky. In fact I think sometimes Trotsky is presented as a premature Bennite. Alan has written this very sympathetic book, in the sense that he tries to understand what I have been about, and then at the end he says that I have underestimated the extent to which extraparliamentary power has historically been used to establish our rights, and that if I am serious about putting democracy back on the agenda, I've got to give more regard to those factors.

I'm not sure I disagree with that analysis: I think it's a very sensible analysis, and maybe by having a critique from the left, people will see more clearly the position that I occupy. I don't believe there are any revolutionaries in Britain: I don't want to insult Alan, but I've never met a revolutionary: there may be one or two about I haven't come across. I think what most revolutionaries are talking about is the need for the mobilisation of public support, to bring pressure to bear on our system of government to achieve greater democracy. Now I would call that a reform campaign, because I believe that Reform, with a capital R, has an honourable place in our history and has been brought back by pressure from the outside onto the system.

Pressure for change has always come from the bottom, and the House of Commons has always been the last place to discover what's going on, from the days of the suffragettes to the Reform Bill and so on, right the way through; parliament is the last stop on the shuttle service, and it always begins at the

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other end; and therefore to that extent I think the issues Alan raises are important and I look forward to discussing the book that he has written.

Alan Freeman: I would agree with the chair and with Tony that it is a critique from the left; I would disagree that there are no revolutionaries in Britain, and I would consider myself to be a revolutionary, but I'm going to give what I hope will be a provocative definition of a revolutionary: that is, somebody who actually seeks to establish a genuine democracy. One of the reasons that I wrote this book is precisely because in the Labour Party, Tony Benn has been one of the first people for a long time to actually put democracy back on the agenda. That enables us to open a much needed discussion in Britain. I say in Britain because the discussion has been continuing on the continent and America much longer, about how to achieve democracy, and what democracy is. And the definition of democracy I would like to give is in fact rule by the majority: that the majority of the population is actually taken up with the running of the country.

What interested me when I began writing the book, which is largely an attempt to explain how his arrived at his conclusions, is not so much what was going on in Tony's head, but what were the forces behind the evolution of Tony Benn's ideas? Two things struck me. There was a poll conducted just after the Deputy Leadership campaign, in which it was said that forty percent of Labour voters wanted Tony Benn to continue his campaign for democracy in the Labour Party and his challenge to the leadership. Now, this is a formidable number of people. In my view this number of people, if they had a party that was capable of representing their views and was genuinely accountable to them, would be capable of assembling a majority in the country. So you have a movement of tremendous scope, a massive movement of people: I wanted to ask, 'who are these people? What is Bennism?'

My conclusion was that it consists of people who are fighting for freedom, for rights: the right to work, the right of women to equality, the right to decent health care, the right not to be wiped out by a Cruise missile — rights which have been granted to us in a society which is not democratic but which grants us many freedoms, and which are now being taken away because the greed of the minority that actually runs the country, won't allow them to continue. Tony Benn has been the voice of these people in parliament and in the Labour Party.

Secondly, why is it that someone who persistently raises the idea of democracy, in a society which calls itself democratic, should be treated — and I make no apologies for the title — as a heretic; that is, as somebody whose views are so subversive as to be unacceptable to that society: beyond the pale, ruled out as if a kind of power mad, dictatorial power grab was involved, and not a reasoned statement of the demands of the kind of people for whom Tony Benn speaks.

Now, the only conclusion I can come to is the one which Tony himself has come to: that real power in this country lies with unaccountable centres such as the civil servants, the multinationals, the bankers who actually take the decisions and then impose them by means of a series of measures which I try to analyse in the book, on the allegedly accountable, elected parliamentary majority in the country.

That poses us, in my view, with a very old problem, one that is not changed by the arrival of parliament. What do you do when you are living under a power which you cannot remove, when that power begins to attack your freedom and your rights, or when you start to demand of it rights which you never had, and it's not prepared to grant them?

I think this is happening in Britain today. The means whereby our rulers were able to concede a number of very important freedoms, whose importance I don't deny, namely the strength of Britain's overseas investments, the strength of its role as a world power, are being eroded, and they are no longer able to concede these rights.

Is it possible to retrieve those rights simply by asking for a reform of the structures of that unaccountable power, or is it necessary to remove it and replace it by another power which is genuinely democratic, which is elected, which you can recall, which is not made up of a privileged public school layer, or a layer of people with money who have a special right to govern and who are concentrated in these unaccountable centres of power?

The problem is this: if you launch a movement which challenges that unaccountable power, will it use force against you to the extent that you must use force against it, and if you do so, if you overthrow that power and establish your own by an act of force, is that going to result in a new and worse dictatorship, something more repressive, less accountable, less democratic than before? My argument is that if you establish socialism, if you do away with private wealth, then you will have a more democratic power.

Finally, is this changed by the existence of parliament? I suggest that parliament is not such an ideal vehicle for achieving change as has been suggested. First, with whom does the power to recall parliament rest? If parliament is a genuinely democratic institution, then when it carries out a measure which we did not vote for it to do, we ought to be able to vote to remove it. This government has put 3.2 million people on the dole queue. We never voted for that. I never voted Tory anyway, and I don't suppose most people here did; but those people who did vote Tory didn't vote for that. Yet, who can remove it? As Tony Benn has noted, actually the Queen is the only person who, legally and constitutionally can remove it. In fact throughout history, since 1832, governments have been removed before their term runs out only by bankers. A run on the pound, and the 'loss of confidence of industry' is what actually recalls governments.

I think we should have the power to recall governments. I think the response of the TUC, for example, to the claim of the healthworkers, its response to a government which is refusing to concede these claims and is taking away our right to free health care, should be to say that by the kind of action the miners took in 1974 we are going to force the government to resign.

So, where does the right to recall actually reside? I think the electoral process on its own doesn't allow us to rusticate governments. Secondly, who actually administers the decisions of the government? At present a minority of civil servants who, through the fact that they carry out the government's decisions, actually acquire a power of veto. In the book I tried to explore the way in which workers in places like Kfrkby and Meriden encountered the power of the state pretending to act in the name of the government, but actually acting in the interests of those who want to preserve the property system. So, who acts in the name of the government?

The third problem is the present leadership of the labour movement itself. If you decide you want to fight for your rights, and that you are going to have to go to the point where you might overthrow the government, do you simply say, 'all right, we have no confidence in the present government; we're going to force it to change course'? Or do you say, 'we're going to take responsibility for our actions, and we're going to prepare to take on the administration of industry ourselves'? If the response to our actions is a boycott, a run on the pound, an attempted destabilisation, and so on, are we going to occupy factories which are closing and run them ourselves?

I think that if one looks at the plan which has recently been produced by the TUC and Labour Party Liaison Committee, the problem is that it seeks compromise and agreement with the employers, instead of saying, 'we are going to take on the running of industry and of society ourselves'. One can see that contradiction in a very obvious problem: the plan says that we will 'require the employers to reach agreement.' I don't know how you can require someone to enter an agreement. Either they agree, or they don't. And the problem is what you do if they

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don't agree? I don't think our rulers will agree to the reforms we are proposing. Therefore we will have to say, 'we will take responsibility. We want to win. You should go, we will replace you, and what we replace you with will be far more democratic than anything you have seen so far.'

Tony Benn: I think you've got to divide this argument, which is an important and interesting one, into its component parts. First of all one of the important problems we face is what I call the 'unfinished business' of earlier reforms. For example, we have no constitution establishing the rights of citizens. We are all 'subjects'. It's a word I find personally difficult to take. I would like to be a citizen. I am a subject, and so is everybody here. We are only allowed to elect one out of two houses of parliament. The ultimate power to dismiss a parliament before the end of its duration is the residual crown prerogative, which I raised in this week's *New Socialist*. I don't have to tell you that that could be a very important decision if, and I don't say you will, you had a hung parliament next time with three parties of fairly equal standing, it will bear on who is chosen.

Now the second problem is the growth of the power of Capital, both nationally and internationally, which is well beyond even our historic aspiration to control. The IMF for example, controls the purse. The Americans control the sword. I was brought up to believe that the House of Commons controlled the government by control of the purse and the sword, the annual budget and the annual army act. In fact, of course, the power of the purse and sword has moved out of this country altogether.

In association with that is the growth of the state. In the period of my lifetime from 1925 to 1975, the state in real terms has grown enormously, but the democratic component has remained the same. There are still 635 MPs trying to control a state which I think is a thousand percent bigger than it was in 1925.

All these are real problems. But having said that, if we had been meeting a hundred and fifty years ago before the Reform Act was passed, Alan might have had a case, because there are about a couple of hundred people here, and two percent had the vote. And there would have been four people in this audience, if this had been a representative gathering in 1832, who had the vote. And he could have made a very credible case.

What could we do? Women didn't have the vote — they didn't get it until 1918. Think how easy it was to preach revolution to women up to 1918 — they were extraparliamentary by birth, by sex. And yet actually we have achieved the capacity to remove governments.

The point I'm clinging to, because I think it is important, is that the ultimate power, the synthetic revolution which is the real importance of our democratic system, the power to dismiss governments is vested in people. And Alan overlooks the fact that Mrs Thatcher was elected. Now why she was elected is a political argument, which we can have. But the British people voted for her, and in fairness to her, she was fairly candid about her monetarism and anyone who thought about it might well have anticipated what would happen because it was all written up in advance.

So, I think revolutionary pessimism, which is the way I would classify Alan's position, is really, by a strange inversion of events, the thing that the establishment wants more than anything else. The establishment is very pleased when revolutionary pessimists come along, because it hopes that as a result no-one will try to do anything, because Alan has told them the whole democratic achievement is no good.

That's a danger: I'm not saying he means that, but that is a danger you have to face. If you demoralise your own supporters it's no good then talking about mobilisation. Well then, he says, we'll do it all by the health workers. We'll bring the government down, well OK. Supposing they do bring the government down. And then you have a different government. Are we going to have instant recall of the new government?

I don't think the revolutionaries have thought it out, and that's why I don't think they're revolutionaries. I think they are left-talking revolutionists. Just as they say I'm a left talking reformist — that's the great left phrase. And I think that the revolutionists' critique is an interesting one. But if you are saying to people that all you've struggled for over the centuries has really brought you nothing, then of course people will be quiescent, or they will explode in a sort of revolutionary adventurism, and that will lead to disaster. The problem is really a different one: it is persuading people of a different analysis, and then persuading them to vote for a different system. And that must be done, I believe, through the classic combination of

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parliamentary and extraparliamentary power.

And I say this in conclusion: the Conservatives have never had any embarrassment about extraparliamentary activity. They've used it for centuries. After all, William the Conqueror was the greatest example of extraparliamentary activity; and at Runnymede the barons were engaged in extraparliamentary activity: they brought about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of the barons, King John had to accept it. Historically, it's always been done in the Tory Party by the use of their power and control over capital — and later their control of the military and the media, which was once the Church and is now Fleet Street, to establish a commanding position.

We shouldn't be sensitive about extraparliamentary activity; I've never said that the House of Commons would do it by itself. But I think the combination of an elected government and the interests we represent would be capable of achieving the changes that are necessary. And I don't think that this critique has been either thought out, nor do I think it has the effect Alan intends. I think it's too pessimistic.

Alan Freeman: Let's ask what it is we are trying to persuade the people to do. Are we trying to persuade them that if Tony Benn was the government they would be better off than if Michael Foot was the government. Or is the only thing you are trying to persuade them that they would be better off under a Labour government than under a Tory government? I think the problem is that we are trying to persuade them of something very new in British politics — and this is what I call the revolutionary method — we're trying to persuade them that the only way their problems will be solved is if they govern themselves. That's a very different method from the method which the Labour Party has used for the last sixty years, because the Labour Party's method is to go to the people and talk to them about all the wonderful things it will do on their behalf; not the things that they can do for themselves.

The question you confront, if your message is this, and if you wish to give people confidence in their ability to run their own lives, is, 'will your government turn for its support, in order to implement its policies, to the Civil Service mandarins, or will it turn to ordinary working people and place its confidence in them?' For example, when the workers of Kirkby Manufacturing Enterprises occupied their factories, should it have sent a Civil Servant to negotiate with those workers, or should it have said: 'We are going to put a law through Parliament which says that what these workers is doing is legal, because we base our laws on the defence of the rights of ordinary people. Whereas according to your law, the law of the Civil Service and the multinationals, they are attacking private property, which the media priests defend, according to our law they are defending their rights and that is a higher law, and we're going to legitimise it.' If you take that step, then you have to say, 'the civil servants are going to be sacked'. And if another civil servant comes up, a representative of the workers, but who doesn't defend their interests then she or he will have to go too.

Those are the people that I am interested in recalling. I also don't believe that it's democratic to have, for example, a system of running a firm in which one third represents the workforce, one third represents the government, and one third management as proposed by Labour's Industry Act. I think we have to say the workers will have a majority in administering the firm, so that what we are talking about is a society actually run by the people who work in it.

Of course the government is only one aspect of that. The problem is what one does with the state. But let's return to the problem of the government. An interesting figure which I uncovered is that the percentage of people who voted Labour in 1974 was exactly the same as in 1979, to within .1 of a per cent. Yet in 1974 the result was a Labour government, despite the fact that it was a minority in parliament, and in 1979 there was a Tory government.

What determined that, in my opinion, was extraparliamentary forces, and not the change in the vote. That doesn't deny the importance of the vote. That doesn't deny the importance of the fight to win elections. But it means that other forces are brought to bear, and this has something to do with the result of the next election. How will we win the next election? In my opinion the present leadership of the Labour Party is frightened of winning the next election, and that is why they are trying to make the left wing a scapegoat instead of fighting the Tories. I actually believe that the best chance of winning the next election is if the TUC *does* call a general strike for the health workers, brings down the government, and creates a situation where our rulers know that they cannot govern us in this way, because workers are not prepared to accept the measures that they want to impose.

So, how do we give people hope? We say, 'we place trust in you, ordinary people, to take responsibility for your lives'. And we will take that to the point, not merely of saying, 'you have the right to resist, to pressurise the powers that be', as Tony Benn says, 'but also the right not to obey an immoral law; you have the right to create your own law. And if you are going to create your own law, you have to create your own state. Because it is the state that administers the law, and the only way you are going to solve the problem of democracy is this: to finish once and for all with states that are composed of a minority of people, states that are not elected, states that are not accountable. We want an *elected state*.' That's the problem of democracy that we've got to solve.

As for the vote, I would just point something out. There are many countries where people have the vote. The people of El Salvador have the vote. The people of Germany had the vote in 1933, they voted for Hitler. It became increasingly hard to vote for anyone else because all the parties were banned. So there are ways of interfering with the democracy of the vote that enable a tyranny to be imposed, in spite of the fact that we have the vote. What we have to look at is what goes with the vote to make a democratic society. My argument is that one also needs an elected, democratic state.

I do not believe we will be allowed to create such a state without being able to resist the violence of those who will oppose that because it will take away their privileges.

Tony Benn: First, I entirely agree with the point about governing thyself and I've never argued that if people vote Labour it will solve their problems. Indeed, I think one of the cruellest hoaxes the Labour Party could perpetrate on the British electorate would be to say that if you simply replace Tory ministers with Labour ministers and try and run the same system, that it'll work. One of the charges made against the views that I have is that I make it too easy; but if you analyse the argument, you'll find I'm saying that it's much more difficult than just replacing one cabinet with another.

But if I think very carefully about what Alan is saying: why didn't we change the law to allow workers to take over their factories? Well, in a sense we did by financing Kirkby, although it was killed. And it's no good blaming the civil servants for that, you know, there was a change of policy in the Department of Industry after 1975, and the cabinet wouldn't give Kirkby the money. And after all, the Tories do that, you see, and they're much cleverer. They want British Telecoms to be privately owned. So what do they do? They pass a law. At the moment there isn't a single private industrialist controlling British Telecom, and if they succeed, British Telecom will be owned privately.

That is what I would call an act of piracy, but they call it privatisation. But it is piracy legalised by law. Now frankly, when the workers of Kirkby or UCS took over their factories, the establishment called it piracy. But if we passed a law, we would have legalised the democratic development of industry. And Alan uses that to say that the whole parliamentary system is going to let us down. I think Mrs Thatcher's much clearer than you are. She says, 'I'll get there, I'll use the power of parliament to transfer power to the people I support.' That's

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the way she interprets parliamentary democracy. And I think she's right. I think that's what it is about. I happen not to be a supporter of the people she likes. But if we were elected and we used the power to make democratic rights more widely available, what's the objection to that?

Would we have to sack civil servants? I think that's a very narrow view. I think the problem with the Civil Service is that they do have a great deal of power, but you would be acquitting the Labour cabinet of its responsibility if you thought that my permanent secretary stopped it. My permanent secretary took a line that won a majority in the cabinet who wanted to stop it. And he played that majority off, got the policy stopped and helped no doubt to get the reshuffle to take place, but don't blame him because a determined Labour government wouldn't put up with that.

Now, then you come to the votes in 1974 and 1979. You know, it's not a very good argument, because what Alan forgot to say is that in 1979 a lot more people voted Conservative. There may have been the same number who voted Labour. But you can't say, 'I ran the race as quickly in 1979 as in 1974', and forget to say that somebody else ran it much quicker.

Now the general strike argument. I ask you to consider the question: did the miners bring down Heath? No. Heath decided to have an election, to beat the miners, and the British people wouldn't take it. But what if Heath had got an overall majority in March 1974? Do you imagine that the miners would have been able to hold out against a government that had received public endorsement?

You could even argue, using Alan's approach, that Heath could say: 'I personally had the House of Commons recalled. Because after all an early dissolution is the recall of parliament: the very thing you want. And when they were recalled, they all said, that Joe Gormley and Mick McGahey were wrong.' Can you imagine that the miners would have stood out against that? Not at all. Heath was beaten by the British electorate although the miners were engaged in a dispute that Heath tried to turn political. And, the more I listen to this, the more I feel that's dodging the question.

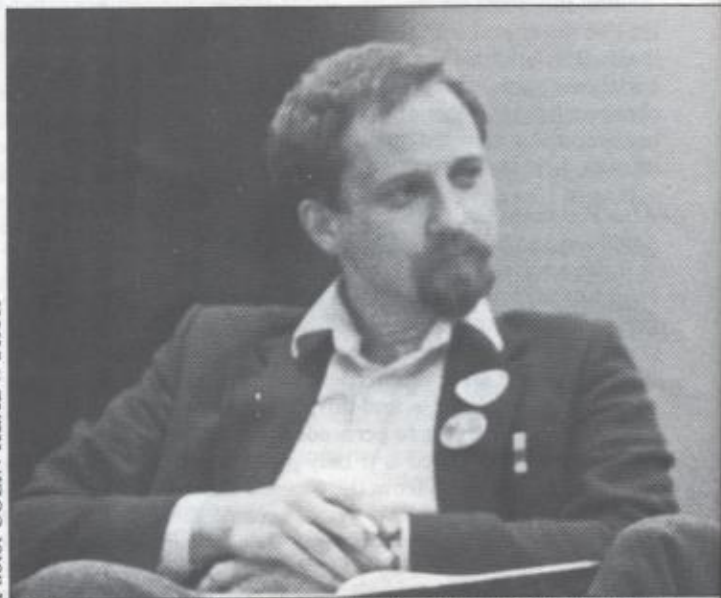
The real question is, how can you win a majority for real change, and not just a game of ins and outs? And if you are engaged in trying to get a majority for a real change, you've got to focus first of all on the day to day problems which concern people. I promise you the suffragettes were not engaged in a theoretical discussion about the role of the House of Commons. They wanted the vote as a route to power. And that's what the vote is. And you see this problem with — I don't know how to describe them because ultra-left sounds too extreme, but what I would call the outside left, or the non-Labour left — their problem is that they are inviting the labour movement which, by its extraparlimentary pressures did so much to establish the right to dismiss governments, to put the whole of that history on one side and to start on a new and untried route.

And frankly if you did come to power by these means, if you toppled a government by a general strike, the one thing you could be sure about is that you wouldn't have public support. And therefore when the government that got into power by a general strike got into difficulties, it couldn't mobilise public opinion. The public would think 'Not only have we got a government we didn't want, but it was forced on us by a particular group of people. When sacrifices are to be made, why should we rally to a government that has abandoned democratic rights? We want an election, and we're told we can't have an election because this government came to power by virtue of extraparlimentary activity.'

And that, really, is not just throwing away the baby with the bathwater, it's throwing out the whole house we've built, the whole structure we've created. You're saying to the suffragettes, 'your whole activity was a waste of time. The vote was nothing, it doesn't mean anything.' It's saying to the Chartists, 'what you did has unfortunately ended up as a cul-de-sac, and a fraud.'

Now, really what I think you're arguing, because I still don't think you're a revolutionary, is we've never used the power we've struggled for so hard to make the real changes: I'm with you on that. But if you're actually talking about the replacement of the albeit imperfect democracy that we've got by something that implies it is to be achieved by force and held by force, then I think you turn yourself from a potential majority — which is what I think we have in Britain to make change — into a tiny little minority. And if you minoritise democracy, or minoritise revolutionary democracy, then of course, you lose your audience, you lose your chance to win support. And that is what I think is the danger of Alan's position. That's why I want Reform with a capital R.

Photo: COLIN HEADWORTH



'If I took your analysis seriously, I would leave public life', Tony Benn

Q: if a Left Labour government does come to power, does Tony Benn really think that the establishment would allow it to implement policies which would democratise our society and shift the whole balance of power?

Tony Benn: Well, if I took your analysis seriously I would leave public life. If I shared your pessimism I wouldn't even try. You have to be careful you don't find yourself an unwilling agent of Mrs Thatcher, because what you actually said is: There is no alternative. You were putting forward a quite different motivation. Now I've just been launching this novel, a *Very British Coup*, which is extremely interesting and I hope will lead people to understand the nature of the challenge. But what I can't accept is that if you really meant to do it, you couldn't overcome these difficulties.

Now, if there was an attempt to destabilise a democratic government by force, then of course the use of force to save the democratic government is quite a different matter, and I have never said that I wouldn't be prepared to use force to maintain democratic power. Indeed, if I lived in a country where there wasn't a route to democracy like the one we had then I would be in favour of the use of force. Mugabe, after all, had to fight for fifteen years. But what ended Mugabe's civil war was the very thing Alan says is no use, and you imply is no use, adult universal suffrage. And if Mugabe was prepared to lay down his arms when he got the vote, why should we give up the vote in favour of going to arms.

Let's take the most sensitive question of all: the American bases. Would they go? Very important question. After all, we established a base in the Canal Zone in 1883, and I think we always promised to withdraw. Yet we only left in 1956. On the other hand, De Gaulle wrote a letter to President Johnson which was published in 1966, and they were out within a year. It would be a very big thing for the United States to

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destabilise Britain. I know they're trying by bringing sanctions to bear against Mrs Thatcher, on the pipeline.

And Mrs Thatcher has shown on this issue I might add a quite commendable resilience. She said she's been deeply wounded by an old friend. Well that's how the Tories describe their resistance to a minor attempt to destabilise Mrs Thatcher's policy, which is to create a few jobs and build a pipeline with the Soviet Union. If you really think that the establishment is as powerful as that, you're wrong. Because the one lesson I have learned is that the people at the top, although they do exercise great power, are absolutely terrified that democratic pressure will take away their power.

One of the great tragedies of the 1974-79 government was



that when we came to power, the British establishment was totally demoralised. I saw them, the CBI and so on, and it was Harold Wilson's great achievement to put some stuffing back into the British establishment. And when they left office they were so confident that they carried through a monetarist policy.

But don't overestimate your opponents. They really are very, very nervous. I think it must have begun with Wat Tyler, and continued with Gerard Winstanley. Every time they look at the British people, they're very, very nervous. And if democracy doesn't give you hope, I promise you it terrifies the people who have got power: because they have no legitimacy. We have to expose their lack of legitimacy. And once you do that, they really do fall all over the place. The trouble is that we haven't used the democratic power to its fullest extent. I'm sure it will be difficult. But Harry Perkins, the hero of *A Very British Coup*, failed because he hadn't read the novel *A Very British Coup*.

Alan Freeman: I must pull Tony up on one point. I'm not against universal adult suffrage, and nor is the revolutionary tradition in this country. In fact, throughout the nineteenth century, it was only the revolutionaries that actually fought for universal adult suffrage, and it was people who put rather a similar position to Tony Benn today who said that maybe this was going a bit too far at this stage, and maybe we should accept something like 1832 — a little bit short of that. I think there is an alternative, to extend the power of the vote: to the civil service, to the unaccountable centres of power that really govern our lives. We should say: 'We're going to do what we say we're going to do in regard to democracy. We're not going to get "nicer" civil servants, as if the early English revolutionaries went around saying we want a "nicer" king; we're going to get rid of them. And we're going to replace them by people who are accountable to our needs.' A Labour government that sets out to do that would be an alternative. It would finish

the unfinished business of the previous reforms by removing an obstacle to reform which, as we have seen, is capable of coming back viciously and wiping out those reforms.

Then there's a very important thing we have to say, which I think is really the meat of the debate. Tony Benn says that the big problem about revolution is this: what comes after? I absolutely agree with that. No-one who has any sense of responsibility for what we as socialists try to do can turn round and say that we can prove from the results of history that if you make a revolution the result is going to be a perfect democratic state. And the fact that because in order to take such dramatic steps you enter a new piece of history, you enter the unknown, that has always been the argument of the right wing against reform. What they say is, 'if you start fighting for reform, it's going to be impossible for you to win this without destabilising our power'. This was said by Burke in terms of destabilising the power of the monarch. Now it's put in terms of destabilising the new monarchy and its court, the civil service — this, they argue, will remove order. You will remove the remaining guarantees of the rights of the people. And therefore, they say, because the risk is that if you start to fight for reform, the result will be a revolution, don't even fight for reform. I think the argument that says, stop at the point where you risk overturning the unaccountable powers, because you don't know what will follow, that's the most pessimistic argument of all.

The reason the Labour cabinet, in 1974, did actually side with the civil servants and not with the Kirkby workers, is because it accepted that argument. We should not be frightened that if we fight for our rights and we come up against a power that resists us by means of force, that we may have to meet that force with an equal force, and we should not be frightened of the fact that that power will have to be replaced by a more democratic one.

But is this such an implausible idea? We don't have to speculate about the future. We already know that the trade unions possess structures that are, in general, far more democratic than those of the rest of society. What is so undemocratic about saying the trade unions should have the power the state has now?

Now, Chris Harman has attacked part of my book where I mention the democracy of the unions. Of course many unions are far less democratic than they should be. But are they less democratic than our existing democracy? If Chris Harman thinks so, then he shares the views of Maggie Thatcher.

Tony Benn: Well, what would happen if a government came to power by some means other than the established electoral process and then said we're going to get rid of the American bases; President Reagan would be rubbing his hands with glee, because he wouldn't bother to argue — well, first of all, they might destabilise such a government in exactly the same way as if it came to power through the vote, but the difference is that Reagan's campaign would be "to restore democracy" in Britain, which had gone because of a coup. And the army would do exactly what they did, if you came to power this way. But the truth is that a government that came to power that way would have lost its legitimacy.

The great value of our system is that at least we've established, in a limited way, in that area that governs the state, the power to sack people. I cannot visualise from what you have said, how you would sack the people who would take over other than by a process of public support and consent. And short cuts to change by consent are also short cuts to counter-revolutions without consent.

That's really the nub of the argument, although in fact if you're talking about the kind of society we'd like to see, I think there's a generality of agreement. We want a society where nobody has any power over anybody else unless they're accountable to the people over whom they have power for the use they make of it. That is the definition of democracy, and that extended into industry would mean workers' control, and so on. But I don't think there's a short cut to persuading people.

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AFTER BEIRUT

ROS KAPLAN & PAM SINGER

The Israeli invasion of the Lebanon and the subsequent spate of 'political' solutions to solve the Palestinian 'problem' have brought the Middle East back into the centre of world attention. Ros Kaplan and Pam Singer argue that this tragic defeat for the Palestinian liberation movement and the victory of Israel will have lasting consequences throughout the Arab East.

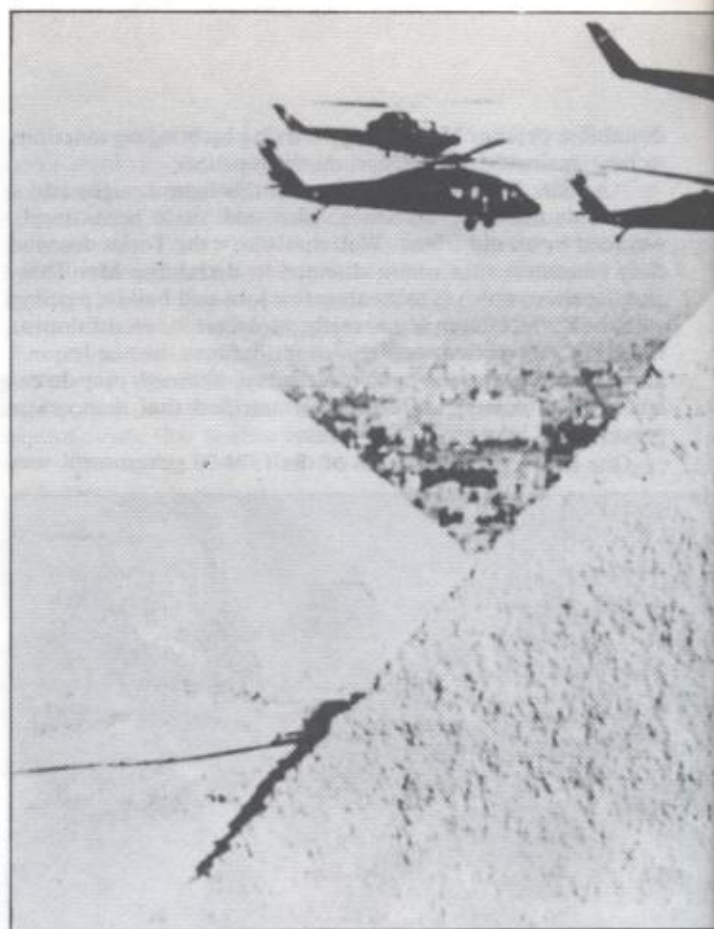
No one should underestimate the terrible devastation wrought by the Israelis on the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples in the last three months. Thousands of lives have been lost, tens of thousands of refugees created and a major Arab city all but destroyed. These facts as well as the obvious use of the invasion as a practice ground for the latest Israeli/US cluster and phosphor bombs highlights the politics and aims of the Zionist Israeli state and its alliances with imperialism. The war is far from over. A fascist government is being set up in Lebanon; the Reagan settlement plan and the subsequent proposals from the Arab leaders and the PLO at the Fez Summit as the basis for discussion with imperialism on the future of the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip), leading to some form of autonomy for the Palestinians, all heralds a new era for the Palestinian liberation movement and indeed the political map of the Middle East.

The aims of the invasion

On 6 June the Israeli army crossed the Lebanese border watched by the UN 'peace-keeping' forces. Sweeping through the south they destroyed villages, Palestinian camps and the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. The massacre continued with the siege of Beirut backed up by air and sea bombardment and the advantage of superior military hardware to that of the Palestinians, the Lebanese Left and the Moslem groups. Despite their military inferiority, the Palestinian and Lebanese people fought back heroically amid the deafening silence in the Arab world and the faint protests in the international labour movement, in the longest war Israel has had to fight.

The Israeli Zionist government stated the aims of the invasion clearly: to destroy the PLO, its leadership, armed units and infrastructure, to rid Lebanon of this 'terrorist force' and to make Israel's northern border safe from guerrilla attacks. Hence the name 'Operation Peace for Galilee'. But why was the presence of the PLO in Lebanon so threatening? And why attack now?

After the Israeli bombings of Beirut in July 1981, the US imposed a ceasefire agreement between Israel and the PLO. For the first time in the history of the PLO, chairperson Yasser Arafat, leader of the largest faction Fatah, was able to unite the numerous opposing political factions which make up the liberation movement into keeping this ceasefire. The PLO began to be seen as a serious political force, a legitimate negotiator with the US and the West on the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These areas had been under Israeli military occupation since the 1967 June War, (and civil administration since November 1981) which brought under Israeli rule the remaining areas of pre-1948 Palestine. For 15 years the Palestinians in these areas have led a long and bitter struggle against the Zionist occupation, the majority openly stating that the PLO is the 'sole legitimate representative' of the Palestinian people.



US helicopters in operation 'Bright Star', patrolling the Middle East 'problem'.

They refused to knuckle under to the intimidation and violence of the collaborators in the Israeli sponsored 'village leagues' — an Israeli alternative to the local pro-PLO leaders.

The failure of the 'village leagues', together with the most militant uprising yet of the local Palestinian population which gathered strength from December 1981 to this spring, alongside the general strike of the Syrian Druze Arabs in the Golan Heights, prompted the Israelis to take drastic measures. In the thinking of the Zionist leaders, if the PLO could be destroyed in their base in Lebanon, then Palestinian resistance in the Occupied Territories would be demoralised and leaderless (for the Israelis attribute every strike, demonstration and stone thrown by a five year-old to the directions of the PLO), thereby paving the way for total defeat of the struggle.

The invasion was also motivated by plans for the future of Lebanon itself. Expulsion of the Palestinians would leave the Lebanese left, the National Movement and the Muslim population in a position of weakness. The setting up of a Maronite Christian government, financed by Israel and friendly to the West, under the new President Bashir Gemayel, signifies the Israelis' success. One need only recall that Gemayel commands a 30,000 strong right-wing Christian militia. This puts the renewal of the civil war of 1976 on the agenda — only this time with a balance of forces overwhelmingly in favour of reaction, following the removal of the PLO armed forces from West Beirut. This is the scale of the Israeli victory.

'The Big Thing'

The elimination of the PLO and the securing of a puppet state in Lebanon were Israel's immediate objectives. But it is important to see certain longer term aims in this operation, aims which relate directly to the Zionist enterprise.

Zionism is the ruling ideology and policy of the state of Israel. The Zionist movement arose in the 19th century as a nationalist and essentially colonialist movement which sought to build an independent exclusive Jewish state. It achieved this with the help of imperialism in Palestine in 1948, at the expense of the indigenous Arab population, the majority of whom were to be expelled or eliminated. Marxists have explained that terri-



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Iraqi reactor and Beirut, the annexation of the Golan, the setting up of the Milson civil administration in the Occupied Territories all helped set the stage. And just as Israel annexed the Golan the day after martial law was imposed in Poland, it struck Lebanon when imperialism was preoccupied in the South Atlantic.

But Israel did not simply sneak up on imperialism when its eyes were averted. It has been testing the response (and the patience!) of its chief backer, the United States since the 1973 war, and has been able to get away with behaviour that is clearly unpalatable to the US. This is not because the US is timelessly and blindly behind Israel. US-Israeli relations are more complex and contradictory. To understand this, we must examine Israel's strategic role for US imperialism.

Although Israel has always had a pro-Western orientation, it was not until its stunning victory in the Six Day War (1967) that it was able to secure a privileged relationship with the United States. The defeat of Syria, Egypt and Jordan dealt a blow to Arab nationalism and its Soviet backers that transformed the balance of forces in the region. Israel proved its ability to serve the US as a reliable, stable military ally. This marked a distinct turn in US policy towards giving Israel unequivocal military as well as political support. There was a dramatic increase in military sales to Israel (before 1967, France was Israel's major supplier of weapons). And in the early 1970s, the US provided Israel with the technical expertise to produce advanced weaponry, which has since found its way to South Africa, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and other right wing or fascist regimes round the world. So it comes as no surprise that they support the fascist camp in Lebanon.

But 1967 also saw another development in the Middle East which produced problems for the US — the emergence of the oil-rich Gulf states as a major influence in the Arab camp, and as potentially important US allies. So in the 1970s, and particularly after the 1973 war, the US tried to build alliances with conservative Arab regimes, and to balance it against support for Israel and its other key ally, the Shah of Iran.

Carter even extended this 'even-handedness' to raising the question of the Palestinians, who were enjoying a certain international prominence after Arafat's dramatic visit to the UN in 1974. Indeed, in the mid-70s, it looked as if resolving the Palestinian refugee problem was key to imperialism securing its interests in the Arab East. It looked as if the PLO was a force to be reckoned with in negotiations on the future of the Occupied Territories. But two events occurred which overshadowed the Palestinian question in the eyes of imperialism.

The first was Sadat's declared intention to visit Jerusalem with a separate peace in mind. The prospect of the most powerful Arab army climbing down in return for a direct line to Uncle Sam made Carter drop the Palestinian issue except in very distant, vague terms, in order to accommodate Sadat's concerns. The terms of the Camp David agreement in 1978 saw the Sinai withdrawal as first priority, and the problem of Palestinian autonomy was deliberately shelved although only temporarily.

The second was much more crucial to the political contours of the Middle East: the fall of the Shah of Iran. The revolution in Iran in 1979 that demolished the most powerful and important pro-Western power in the Gulf caught everyone, even the US, off guard. It exposed clearly the vulnerability of these regimes, and the risks for imperialism. The US, with no other consolidated allies, was desperate to find a short term resolution to the instability of the region. The fall of the Shah put a premium on surviving, reliable local allies. The renewal of the Cold War meant that for the US, the Middle East was to be turned into a fortified bastion against 'Soviet expansionism' through the mechanism of the 'Rapid Deployment Force' — US direct military intervention via friendly bases in the Middle East. As long as Israel plays this key role, it has a certain room

ble though Jewish oppression has been — especially under the Nazis — nevertheless acceptance of anti-semitism as unique and inevitable, and therefore the building of an exclusive Jewish state, would provide no solution. Rather it would prove a trap for the Jewish people and do nothing to counter anti-semitism, which is a product of specific economic, historical and social circumstances.

The Zionist movement never put any boundaries on what 'should' constitute Eretz Israel (Greater Israel) and has since the 1950s looked towards southern Lebanon (geographically a continuation of the Galilee) for future territorial aggrandisement. The notion of 'secure borders free from terrorists' is merely a mask to hide this. It should be noted that already Arab workers from the southern Lebanon are being brought into Israel as cheap labour. Further, control of the Litani river will give Israel the water supplies it desperately needs.

Beyond the expansion into southern Lebanon, Israel has other plans, referred to and debated publicly in the Israeli press, as 'the Big Thing'. This plan involves the expansion of Israel towards some form of domination of all countries of the Arab East (namely Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq) along with the expulsion of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (currently nearly 1½ million people) into Jordan and the official annexation of their land by Israel. General Sharon is the main proponent for this plan, and the Israelis' ability to do this should not be underestimated. It has been made a great deal easier with the elimination of Syria's missile bases in Lebanon and the lack of international opposition to the war in Lebanon.

Imperialism and The Middle East

The timing and the ferocity of the assault are not due to the obscenely bloodthirsty nature of the Begin/Sharon team but a logical extension of Zionist expansionist policies in the area. In fact, the Israelis had been preparing this for some time. The 1978 bombings of Lebanon (Operation Litani) — where they installed and financed their stooge in the south, Major Haddad and his right wing militia, proclaiming a 'free Lebanon' (Haddad land) is free from the PLO — the 1981 bombings of the

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to manoeuvre. It can be as outrageous as it likes as long as it doesn't upset US moves towards Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the most likely new allies to be cultivated.

So while Begin and Sharon may have taken some risky gambles in Lebanon, they were able to assess correctly that the US was not yet in a position to ditch Israel. Unfortunately for Israel, the paradox is glaringly obvious. While Israel may be the most obvious short-term *military* solution for the US, it is also one of its most serious *political* problems. It is potentially the biggest obstacle to the United States consolidating relations with conservative Arab states — through its intransigence over negotiating with the PLO and its long term war with the Palestinian and Arab peoples. Although it is still too early to tell, it is just possible that with 'Operation Peace for Galilee', Israel has gone too far. The replacement of Secretary of State Alexander Haig, always lauded in pro-Israeli circles, with George Schultz, who has a more pro-Arab bias (not to mention huge interests in Saudi Arabia!) was the first indication of a significant shift in US policy on Israel. But this will partially depend on how the present crisis is resolved.

What Begin refuses to believe, is that imperialism can and will dispose of any ally that becomes more of a hindrance than a help. However, in the short term the US will continue to back Israel to the hilt.

The USSR and the Arab regimes

Israel also chose to invade Lebanon when Soviet influence in the Middle East was at its lowest point for 25 years, and Arab disarray at its highest.

While the Soviet News Agency TASS had the temerity to chide the Arab nations for not coming to the aid of the Palestinians, the USSR's strongest language against imperialism was expressed when it looked as if its embassy might be damaged by bombing. While major groupings within the PLO might be horrified at the lack of Soviet aid, and the pathetic showing of the USSR's only official ally, Syria, one only has to examine where the Palestinians fit into Soviet priorities to understand the nature of their 'commitment'.

The USSR's main concern is that there not be all-out confrontation with imperialism where it might be forced to intervene. Indeed, with its hands militarily and politically tied in Afghanistan, it is not in a strong position to play much of a role in the Middle East. In line with this, it keeps a tight rein on its Syrian ally not to provoke such a confrontation. Moscow is fearful for the shaky Assad regime, and cannot afford to lose its only official ally in the region.

Soviet involvement in the Middle East has always been purely tactical. It has never particularly given any principled backing to the Palestinian cause. (We mustn't forget that in the 1948 Zionist War of Attrition in Palestine, the Zionist army fought the British with Czech arms!) With its immediate support for the 1947 UN Declaration splitting Palestine into two states (one Jewish, one Arab), it effectively cut itself off from having much influence in the Arab world. It was not until Nasser decided to purchase Czech arms that the Soviet Union gained any foothold in the Middle East. And it was not until Egypt began placing the Palestinian question at the centre of its conflict with Israel that the Soviet Union became interested in the issue.

When Egypt expelled the Soviet presence in 1972, the USSR began direct arms supplies to the PLO as its unofficial allies. Even so, the Soviet attitude consists of reactions and counter-maneuvres provoked by whatever the US happens to be doing in the region. For example, it was not until the US secured Camp David, that the USSR decided to proclaim the PLO as the 'sole legitimate representative' of the Palestinian people. The position of the Soviet Union is clearly for a negotiated settlement (ie negotiated sell-out) of the Palestinian national question. It has nothing to do with the promotion of a class struggle, or self-determination for the Palestinian people.

What some may have found even more surprising than the

Soviet silence was the feebleness of the protests of the Arab regimes, 'conservative' and 'progressive' alike, who could not even muster impressive rhetoric against the Israeli invasion.

All the Arab states have their own problems. There is growing instability in Syria, with anti-regime feeling and uprisings that may extend beyond the Muslim Brotherhood. Iraq, already unstable, is now being attacked by a determined Iran, in a war whose consequences may be just as great for the region as the present one in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia, although rich, has never been politically or militarily strong. Its call for a one day general strike in solidarity with the uprisings on the West Bank came and went, and its attempt to get even minimal recognition for the eight-point Fahd plan has not met any success (although this should not be completely ruled out).

It is not simply their own internal weakness, or even their petty rivalries, that prevent these regimes from coming to the aid of the Palestinians. *It is because of the degree to which the Palestinian question is a destabilising factor and a radicalising influence, therefore a direct threat to their own positions, that they do not seriously aid the struggle.* When it comes down to it, Hussein's throne is more important to him than the 4½ million Palestinians scattered around the Middle East (including the 1 million in his kingdom). The immobility of the Arab regimes in the past three months is the latest in a long series of betrayals of the Palestinian revolution.

But even more sickening is what has just occurred at the 1982 Fez Summit. After years of confusion, after shamelessly allowing the PLO defeat in Lebanon, the Arab leaders have finally united on the corpses of the Palestinian and Lebanese people to cheer Reagan's proposal that they recognise the Israeli state and to revive the old theme of an autonomous 'capitalist' mini-state in the West Bank.

This should dispel any illusions of the existence now of progressive pan-Arab nationalism. Their rapprochement with imperialism could signify growing co-operation between the Arab regimes (including Egypt) and consolidation of the Arab bourgeoisies.

The PLO

After the shock of the Israeli victory in 1967, a new radical, Palestinian movement arose. Its mass base was the refugee camps, its theoreticians were intellectuals living throughout the Palestinian dispersion. It is in no way surprising that the leadership of this movement was overwhelmingly petty bourgeois and nationalist. Its tactics, elevated to a strategy, were commando/guerrilla actions — the military struggle against Israel assumed dominance.

The PLO organised *masses*, exclusively refugees, into an army. This army was unique in the Arab East in that it was a non-denominational army, based on a national struggle. But while it organised military activity it did not, for example, see its role as organising collective protests such as strikes, occupations, or even particularly demonstrations. It has put a very low priority on organising the activities of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories or those inside the 1948 borders, who play a significant role in the Israeli economy and who have suffered direct Israeli oppression for years.

Although parts of the Palestinian movement (the main groups being the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, PFLP and the Democratic Popular Front, DPFLP) realised the class nature of the struggle and the need to link up with the Arab masses against their own rulers, the bulk of the movement did not. Fatah, the largest group, assured the Arab world that it would not interfere in the 'internal affairs' of the host countries. Most Palestinians, conditioned by a nationalist outlook, looked to the Arab countries to support them, and did not develop any concept of helping their own struggle through helping the general Arab revolution. In Lebanon, for example, where they initially had tremendous support among Moslem workers and peasants, they lost a lot by failing to develop a programme to unite Lebanese workers and peasants with their

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cause. Ultimately, they had nothing to say other than 'support our cause', which, if you're a Lebanese peasant, eventually runs out of steam.

This direction of non-interference in the class struggle in host countries has not saved the movement from repression throughout the Middle East and expulsion by Hussein in Jordan 1970 (Black September) when its base was forced to move to Syria and then to Lebanon.

However, it is well to remember that ideologies have a material base; that it is practically difficult to exist without a homeland or single secure base and to accept no patronage from any non-socialist state, or to resist making compromises to obtain the aid needed to carry on the liberation struggle.

In Lebanon, the PLO after liberating the camps from the control and repression of the Lebanese right wing government in the early 1970s, built up an enormous organisation of armed units, a professional army, a bureaucracy — a state within a state developed, with the PLO running Palestinian hospitals, schools, training centres, social security, etc. In this way it never constituted itself as a guerrilla movement proper and neither was it a movement indigenous to Lebanon.

In the mid-70s, the moderate PLO decided to convince imperialism that it was a sufficiently respectable force to negotiate with. Its new strategy aimed to gain diplomatic recognition and international support, and to secure a mini-state on the West Bank — as opposed to the rejectionist current which refused any negotiated settlement for part of Palestine but wanted to continue the guerrilla struggle for the liberation of the whole of pre-1948 Palestine. To a degree Arafat and the moderate wing were able to make a name for themselves in the international diplomatic community, particularly with the EEC countries.

But this strategy is obviously fragile, as diplomatic recognition is in the eyes of the beholder. It lasts as long as the exigencies of the web of imperialist interests allow it to last. When imperialism sees fit, it plays the Palestinian card; when other things are at stake, it drops it. Because imperialism is *not* the ally of the Palestinians; the workers and peasants of the Middle East are, and that is whom the PLO should appeal to.

Clearly, whatever criticisms we may have of the PLO's practice or strategy, we give it *unconditional* support in its struggle against Zionism. It is also important to remember that the PLO has never been a homogenous organisation. It spans many political positions and strategies. As yet, no current has emerged which could provide revolutionary socialist leadership needed to tackle the complex problems of the Middle East. But it is unlikely that the present crisis could pass without reviving the debate between the dominant Fatah wing and the current that has always rejected acceptance of a negotiated settlement for a mini-state. Although the different groupings within the PLO have recently been united and disciplined, the political differences remain. We can expect that important debates are going on, which may prove positive.

The final solution?

Whatever the final outcome, Israel does not emerge totally unscathed. It has done serious damage to an already tarnished reputation. It has effectively committed itself to prolonged military occupation in the south of Lebanon, yet another strain on the over-stretched, ailing economy. It has conducted this war without the consensus of the Jewish population who, for the first time in its short history, are organising against war in *war time*.

But above all, each partial Israeli victory, while creating a new refugee problem, does not destroy the Palestinian nation. Short of complete genocide no number of victorious battles can secure that for the Israelis. And this is increasingly apparent to the Israeli Jewish population, a large minority of whom now recognise that the 'problem' is not defence of Israel from warlike Arab states but the creation of a state for the Palestinians.

What next for the Palestinians?

We have reached the end of a period where the PLO constituted a large-scale fighting force with any independence of action from the Arab states. This is not a sudden degeneration, but the defeat of a political strategy — a defeat that became obvious as early as 1970. But even if the PLO is rendered ineffective, or transformed back into its pre-67 existence as a puppet organisation of this or that Arab regime, this does not solve the Palestinian 'problem'.

In many ways, the war in Lebanon has been fought, and won, by Israel on a false premise: that to solve the problems of the West Bank and Gaza Strip it is necessary to defeat the PLO in Beirut. In fact the centre of gravity of the Palestinian struggle will now shift to where it is much more of a threat to Zionism, to within the present borders of Israel where there now lives nearly half the Palestinian people and by far the largest single concentration.

The contradiction of Zionism is that it increasingly depends on this population which by the logic of Israel's permanent expansion has more and more become an Arab proletariat, a foundation-stone of the Zionist economy. The future of the Palestinian revolution and the PLO depends on the struggle of these people.

And what of the future for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese people now made refugees in Lebanon. The PLO's expulsion from West Beirut is a tragic blow for them. The majority of the Palestinian community remains there to face a possible future onslaught by the new fascist regime and occupation in part of the country by the Zionist army.

Finally, it is no coincidence that the PLO's withdrawal from Beirut was followed by the Reagan letter. The cynical proposals in the settlement for the future of the Palestinians, Reagan's facade of 'peace-keeper' while backing Israel's genocidal campaign throughout the summer should warn anyone of the hypocritical intentions of the US. The proposals for some form of Palestinian autonomy in the Occupied Territories in association with Jordan, a freeze on Israeli settlement-building and no Israeli annexations of the area, in return for Arab recognition of the state of Israel and guarantees for its security, is no solution for the self-determination of the Palestinians. Its main purpose is to secure the long term existence of Israel as imperialism's police force and to persuade the Arab states and the PLO that this deal is better than nothing from the ruins of Beirut, while at the same time appearing friendly to the Arab states.

The PLO may decide to opt for an autonomous mini-state. The Reagan plan was certainly greeted with enthusiasm by the Arab leaders at the Fez Summit. Their own proposals, although differing in detail, agree with the basic premise of a West Bank state.

Such a state will not give the Palestinians independence, will not be the basis for a just peace. Rather its aim is to disarm the potentially revolutionary struggle to liberate Palestine; the mini-state will be squashed between Israel and Jordan, dependent on Israel economically (as the West Bank is today), and will become Israel's 'bantustan' under the military eye of the Zionists.

We should remember that the national liberation struggle of the Palestinian refugees has been the revolutionary heart of the permanent revolution in the Arab East. But this must be part of an unfolding process in the region, not an end in itself — for what does it mean to speak solely in nationalist terms in a region where existing 'nations' were the creation of imperialism? The Palestinians must look to the workers and peasants in the rest of the Middle East for a united revolutionary struggle against not only Zionism and imperialism, but their reactionary Arab leaders.

ROS KAPLAN & PAM SINGER are members of the Socialist Challenge Middle East group, who collaborated in production of this article, written in the first week of September.

Answerback

RECORD OF THE LABOUR GLC

KEN LIVINGSTONE

Ken Livingstone and the Labour GLC have suffered an onslaught of vilification from the establishment media in the last fifteen months. There has also been some constructive criticism of the GLC's record from the left. Ken Livingstone replies to a recent article in *International*.

Tessa van Gelderen's article 'Reds at County Hall' in *International* Vol 7 No 3 argues that without a mass base within the trade unions then Labour GLCs and governments will not be in a position to resist the power of Capital in the struggle to implement their manifesto. She analyses, I think correctly, the weakness of the Left both in London and nationally in that it is based primarily in the constituency Labour parties and not in the trade unions. She also puts into perspective the manifesto on which the GLC was elected as a reformist document.

When the manifesto was drawn up and finally voted on by the Greater London Labour Party conference it was limited to a series of proposals the Party knew could be achieved. Because government had taken control of the capital programmes of councils (new building of houses, schools, buses etc) the manifesto promises were slanted towards revenue expenditure (wages, staffing, subsidies to fares and rents).

The conference accepted the logic that high rate spending by the GLC was in itself a mechanism for the redistribution of wealth. Of every £1 raised in rates one third comes from commercial ratepayers in the cities of London and Westminster, and another one third from industry and commerce in the rest of London. No Labour government has ever come close to funding a majority of its social programmes by taxing Capital rather than Labour, and it is this very favourable balance in London that meant that the average London Transport user still benefited massively from reduced fares although their rates were increased both by government penalties as well as the cost of subsidising fares.

It was our determination to continue with our programme which led to Heseltine's attempt to get legislation which would have given him control of our entire budget. It is because he was defeated in this attempt and because we are still increasing our spending in line with the manifesto that the government is preparing legislation for the abolition of the GLC. The Tories intend to make this a manifesto commitment at the next general election so that the GLC can be abolished before the end of its term in May 1985. The fact that the government has made so many attempts to block the GLC programme, and the press and judges have mounted such an onslaught suggests that they consider the GLC to have been more of a threat than many of our comrades on the Left believe.

we have made considerably more progress on the manifesto than we are given credit for

My main criticism of Tessa's article is not her conclusion, which is correct, but that the analysis is unduly negative. We have made considerably more progress on the manifesto than we are given credit for. We have restarted the housing programme building 1000 more than the Tories planned. We have campaigned for more resources from government although this campaign tended to be overtaken and swamped by the fares

Photo: GM COOKSON



campaign. The Direct Labour organisation has been saved and the threatened 1800 redundancies of building and housing staff has been averted by the creation of London Community Builders which has been found adequate work with a major expansion of modernisation and maintenance.

There were some areas of the manifesto, such as housing, where commitments were vague. It is therefore wrong to say that 'rents were to be frozen'. The commitment was to freeze rents for a year and then increase them in line with management and maintenance costs. This was done and rents and expenditure were brought into balance by a massive increase in expenditure on maintenance.

Tessa writes that 'virtually no progress has been made on the 35 hour week for manual staff and the Greater London Enterprise Board, intended to create jobs, remains on the drawing board.' Labour members keep pressing the manual unions to put in a claim for a 35 hour week but although there has been a reduction of one hour agreed nationally so far none of the manual unions wishes to break away from the national negotiating structure (on which the GLC has one vote) and do a Camden-style agreement.

The Greater London Enterprise Board has been established and the budget increased from under half a million pounds last year to over £40m this year. At the moment the GLC is involved in three major factories trying to keep the firms afloat. Other aspects of the GLC's work are going ahead: a ten percent increase in spending in real terms for each committee. There has been a tremendous response from gay, feminist and black groups to our anti-discrimination and grants policies. For the first time the labour movement in London is seen to have relevance to these groups that we have ignored for so long.

Part of our problem is that many activists assume that because the GLC gets so much publicity it must have major powers. The truth is that our powers are limited in many ways. We can only break the laws when it is a matter of refusing to comply with some government or court instruction. A positive decision to initiate some action that was illegal would be ig-

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nored by council officers who do not gain legal immunity because they are 'only following orders'.

Our weakness was highlighted with the Tube workers pay claim in June 1981 when we announced that we would underwrite any pay agreement but had no power to instruct the London Transport on any matter of day to day management. The London Transport Act gives operational control to the Executive and the GLC's powers are restricted to setting the budget. If we had operational control we would not only have agreed the pay claim but we would have instructed the London Transport Executive to remove all sexist advertising and to introduce women-only carriages in line with demands from the women's movement.

We have had a series of campaigns on housing, employment, nuclear disarmament and most importantly on fares. The GLC has spent nearly £2m in campaigning for our policies. Some 12 million copies of the *Londoner* newspaper have been distributed, and hundreds of thousands of leaflets, press advertising and dozens of public meetings have been organised. Other members and myself have spoken at hundreds of meetings on the fares campaign as well as at union, Labour Party and other public meetings.

Tessa urges us to openly support those trade unions which are in struggle. But we are doing this already. Labour members issue statements and join picket lines whether it is the NUR or ASLEF dispute, Wandsworth dustmen, Staffa workers, waiters in restaurants, Foyles staff, or disputes outside London. The Group has voted to donate £25,000 to the health workers' strike fund and has been represented at many picket lines.

Activists on the Left are unaware of much of this work as the press seldom report it and the pressure on time of activists means that they seldom get to these meetings themselves. But the effort expended has been enormous and not without its effects. Heseltine's attempt to get control of our budget failed in parliament after our campaign which was based on the Group's decision to refuse to obey the law if passed, and our

call for industrial action to support this stand.

Although our fares campaign failed to stop the 100 percent fares increase in March it forced the government to give us a legal dispensation which waived the second 50 percent fares increase in June. Our proposals to reduce fares by 25 percent next spring has caused the government to plan new legislation which will give the Transport Minister full control of fares and subsidy.

The GLC's termination of civil defence expenditure has exposed the whole sham of government war planning and forced the abandonment of Operation Hard Rock. Once again the government will be forced to use parliamentary time to get new regulations through and the whole issue will be kept in full public view.

the major task ahead for socialists is the struggle within the trade unions

The other key problem we face is within the nature of the Group and the issue of surcharge. The Group voted by 24 to 23 to refuse to comply with the Law Lords judgement and almost won that vote in the full GLC meeting due to Tory abstentions. To have come within three votes of such a major challenge to the power of the state would have provoked a massive crisis within the government about how to respond. Given the weakness of our narrow majority, our limited powers and the impossibility of winning a vote in Council which would risk surcharge we have achieved as much as we can by trying to build support within the trade unions and the wider community.

Tessa's analysis is correct. Our defeats reflect our failure to mobilise organised trade union support and a Labour government which could not count on such support would also suffer defeats and reverses. That is why the major task ahead for socialists is the struggle within the trade unions. To rest simply on the advances made in the constituency parties is to invite defeat.

KEN LIVINGSTONE is leader of the Labour GLC.

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NEW TRADE UNIONISM IN THE MAKING

HILARY WAINWRIGHT DAVE ELLIOTT

The Lucas workers' Plan for alternative socially useful production was widely popularised within the labour movement. In a new book to be published at the end of October* Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliott examine the Lucas experience and draw lessons for the development of the trade unions. We reprint below an abridged version of the final chapter of the book, *A new trade unionism in the making?*

* *The Lucas Plan: a new trade unionism in the making* by Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliott, Allison & Busby, £2.95, 28 October 1982.

The Combine Committee and the limits of trade unionism

The Combine Committee was in an ideal position for developing and fighting for a workers' plan. It had the benefit of a close connection with the shop-floor and office trade-union committee in each factory — a feature essential to the process of drawing up and fighting for popular plans, for without being based on the needs and attempts at control around which working-class people are organising, planning will just be the work of a new group of experts making judgements about other people's needs. Without the backing of the factory organisations of collective bargaining there is no hope of overcoming the tremendous resistance which, as we know from the Lucas experience, such plans will undoubtedly meet.

The drawing up of the ideal structures of democratic planning must take account of the power of the existing state and the private corporations. To a considerable extent the institutions of popular planning will be developed in the course of resisting the decisions emanating from these centres of unaccountable power. Democratically drawn up alternative proposals are ways of strengthening such resistance. For these reasons, the drawing up of positive proposals and plans based on social need cannot be separate from the defensive institutions of collective bargaining (as they might be when popular planning and self-management have been achieved).

However, there is a strong case for some additional level of organisation beyond but connected with existing trade-union organisations. This is especially true at a time when trade unions have been forced back to their most defensive positions. For example, delegates to the Lucas Combine Committee found that the day-to-day requirements of collective bargaining under the last year of the Labour government and the first years of Tory rule were of a very defensive kind. The confidence simply did not exist to put forward positive and radical policies of the kind they had developed in the Corporate Plan. However, the Combine believe that work should continue to develop the approach of the alternative Corporate Plan and to extend the network of organizations involved in similar initiatives, in preparation for more favourable conditions. Otherwise they and others would be unable to turn the opportunity of a radical Labour government, or at least an economic expansion, to their advantage and the cycle of disillusionment and demoralisation, leading to another Tory victory, would once more be set in motion. This work will involve a conscious allocation of time and trade union personnel to prepare discussions on issues of longer-term strategy: and to formulate the

basis for positive bargaining positions on questions such as technology, government funding and corporate investment plans, well in advance of the issues coming up in collective bargaining. This will involve the creation of some new structure, even if only extensions of existing trade-union organisations.

There are several arguments for this additional level of trade-union activity. First, the content of discussion and ideas in those organisations whose main function is collective bargaining is necessarily determined by the immediate tactical concerns of the negotiations at hand: on its own this is too narrow a framework to encourage ideas to develop about the future of the industry, the social needs which the industry could meet, and alternative products and technologies to press on management and government. Such a discussion needs stimulus and co-ordination outside of the procedures and agendas of collective bargaining. In the case of Lucas such a stimulus was provided by the Combine Committee when it sent out a questionnaire and thereby introduced a new dimension to the agendas of the factory trade-union committees. The discussions at factory level stimulated by the questionnaire were in general more open-ended, more conducive to innovation and experimentation than the routine discussions connected with day-to-day negotiations.

A second reason for some additional level of organisation concerns the fact that organisations whose main purpose is collective bargaining — including collective bargaining over proposals flowing from more broadly based workers' plans — need to *parallel* the power structures of the employers. By contrast the objective of developing alternative plans based on meeting

if workers' plans were simply focussed on one enterprise it would be harder to transcend the firm's economic boundaries, premises and priorities

the social needs of producers and users requires a form of association which *cuts across* different employers, and across the different but interdependent sectors of the economy. If workers' plans were produced only on an enterprise basis there would be a danger of including proposals that if implemented would simply put other workers out of work. There would also be a danger of implying that the producers alone had the right to determine what was socially needed. There would also be other, more strategic problems, concerning relations with the company, if workers' plans were simply focussed on one enterprise: it would be harder to transcend the firm's economic boundaries, premises and priorities. For this reason negotiations on 'planning agreements' with individual firms could degenerate into exercises in collaboration with management — as many trade unionists fear.

Clearly association with workers, and where necessary users, beyond the individual company and industry is needed. The Lucas stewards have tried to create such contacts with workers engaged on products related to those they proposed. In doing so they did not seek to replace or undermine more sectorally-based trade-union structures. Rather they sought to create associations of a very different kind. For example, arising out of their proposals in the medical field they, along with CAITS, called a workshop of workers and users connected with the health service. However, such contacts and discussion could not be sustained without political support, particularly as they directly concerned government expenditure.

Planning for social need: some examples

Although in the early 1980s the confidence among the majority

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of trade-union members has been insufficient for them to become involved in drawing up positive proposals for their industry or services, an increasing number of trade-union activists are responsive to the idea. Evidence for this is in the growing interest in the discussions and local initiatives stimulated by four trades councils — Coventry, Liverpool, Newcastle and North Tyneside — around the idea of popular planning for social need. These discussions followed the trades councils' inquiry into the industrial policies of the last Labour government. The inquiry arose out of an anger and disillusionment with the way that Labour's industrial policies, promised in 1973 as a new radical departure from old-style nationalization, were transformed to allay the fears of the City, the Treasury and the IMF. The trades councils concluded that these 'vested interests are too powerful to be overcome by politicians alone. We must create a movement in the workplaces and the localities around policies based on planning for social need, which can exert power for itself. Our inquiry concludes that it is only this grass-roots power which, with the support of a genuinely socialist government, can socialise and democratise production'.

Since the publication of the inquiry, several other trades councils, notably Sheffield, Burnley and Nottingham, have become directly involved in exchanging ideas and experiences that give more specific meaning to the idea of a movement in the workplaces and localities around planning for social need. Several of the combine committees involved in the Joint Forum have also joined these discussions. Together, the combine committees and trades councils have produced the declaration on 'Popular Planning for Social Need — an alternative to monetarism from shop stewards' committees and trades councils'. This declaration summarises the basis on which trades councils and combine committees, with the help of trade-union and community resource centres, have begun to investigate the strategies of the multi-national corporations, the failings of the public services and nationalised industries and the needs which alternative policies must show can be met.

there is a growing network of Local Energy Groups around the country concerned to find local job-creating alternatives to centralised energy provision

This concern with elaborating detailed alternative policies to be fought for through collective bargaining and extra-parliamentary campaigns is also apparent within the Left groupings of several unions. In the Post Office Engineering Union, for instance, the Broad Left has already made a thorough investigation of the telecommunications industry, an international level. Through workshops of activists across the telecommunications industry they too are developing policies to meet their members' needs. Moreover, by developing co-ordination between trade-union committees across competing multinationals, they are able to counter those arguments of managements which seek to identify workers' interests with the competitive success of the company.

The disarmament movement and the campaign against nuclear power have also stimulated and strengthened discussion among trade unionists for alternative plans. CND and END are beginning to work with trade unionists in the arms industry on plans for conversion. Activists in the anti-nuclear power movement have worked with members of many different unions affected by government energy policy, to develop a trade-union-based campaign for non-nuclear energy policies. This campaign has gained considerable support within the unions; at least ten major unions all oppose the nuclear programme. The campaign has also had a considerable popular impact creating a very strong lobby for the development of alternative energy sources and conservation. The new approach to energy policy that is gradually emerging — albeit against fierce

opposition — moves the emphasis away from a concern just with conventional energy supply technologies (for example, centralised electricity-producing power plants) to interest in local energy provisions (for example, solar energy and combined heat and power), and beyond that to a concern with the question of energy demand management, and energy conservation. Transport planning, waste recycling, urban planning, etc. — all very much the concern of local authorities — are increasingly been seen as relating directly to energy policy, which explains why public service unions like NUPE and NALGO are becoming much more interested in energy issues. This local government-level concern also offers more opportunity for involvement and initiatives by community groups, in relation, for instance, to local energy-conservation projects and community energy planning in general. There is a growing network of 'Local Energy Groups' around the country concerned to find local job-creating alternatives to centralised energy provision. Several Labour local authorities have also developed energy plans for their areas which emphasise local control and job creation. Given the existing alternative plans produced by power engineering workers, it seems that the basis for democratic planning linking users and producers is being created within the energy sector.

In these varied ways, networks are being created which feed into collective bargaining and campaigning but which have an independent momentum that enables them to see ahead of these day-to-day problems.

The shop stewards and trades council delegates involved in these networks are strongly motivated. They are not prepared to leave economic policy-making and implementing to Labour politicians. It is this strong commitment to investigation and policy-making as a necessary part of trade unionism which keeps the networks going; for they have little support from the national trade-union body concerned with economic policy, the TUC. Rather than encourage and provide resources for these attempts to develop policies based firmly on working people's needs and skills, the TUC has made their development more difficult. The four trades councils who produced the report on 'State Intervention in Industry' were at one point told that they could not meet with each other without permission from the TUC. Matters of government policy were not their concern, was the message. However, the TUC did not follow up the restriction beyond trying to discourage other trades councils from becoming involved. Nevertheless, the TUC has threatened this work in another way, by attempting to block the creation of two new trade-union research and resource centres in London and Birmingham — though the Birmingham centre has nevertheless gone ahead. As we have seen, such resource centres are a vital back-up to the policy discussions of trades councils, combine committees and others and the established structures are not meeting the needs of their members as far as positive policies are concerned. Trades councils, combine committees, resource centres and other local and workplace-based organisations, however, cannot themselves sustain and implement these policies whether or not they gain official trade-union support. They need political support, both locally and nationally.

Political support

When talking about political support we cannot treat the state as a single homogeneous block, rather we must distinguish between the elected assemblies — that is Parliament and, at a local level, councils — and the permanent apparatus of the civil service, the Army and the judiciary. Action by socialist representatives in the former could be used to undermine the power of the latter in favour of the new institutions of popular power. These extra-parliamentary institutions in the workplace and in the locality in many ways prefigure a new kind of political system, but they will need the support of a government elected within the present system to achieve the transition to the new system.

The importance of political support from within the elected

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Photo: JOHN STURROCK



Hilary Wainwright: 'a socialist government would co-ordinate the funding for the implementation of workers plans'

institutions of the present political system rests on two features of government in Britain — and parliamentary democracies in other modern capitalist societies. First, the government's role in the economy: the government controls either directly or indirectly much of the finance which at present enables capitalist industry to flourish but which could be used to support a move towards workers' self-management. Secondly, the elected government has a legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of people, over and above any particular economic institution or interest. And it can provide legitimacy for democratic organisations outside Parliament. A supportive government then is a potentially powerful ally for workers in industry with proposals for organising their workplace to meet social needs. This is why the initial support of ministers of the Department of Industry

a supportive government is a potentially powerful ally for workers in industry with proposals for organising their workplace to meet social needs

was so important in helping the Lucas Plan get off the ground. Without this support the Combine delegates would have found it very difficult to gain support for the Plan from their fellow stewards and trade union members. The reverse of this dependence of the Lucas workers' Plan on government support for its implementation is that the hostility which the Combine later faced from the Labour government when the Plan was ready nearly destroyed the Combine Committee, and with it the alternative Plan.

The Labour politicians who treated the stewards from Lucas Aerospace and elsewhere with such indifference had little or no political commitment to the socialist aspiration of workers' self-management and social ownership. But even a party leadership which enters government with such a commitment will be under extremely powerful pressures to thwart and divert the wishes of workers struggling for control over production. For, in spite of a government's control over considerable funds, its legislative powers and its control over the exchange rate and other aspects of foreign trade, it is nevertheless finally dependent on those who control the production of wealth. When this control is securely in the hands of the management of multi-national corporations, even a well-intentioned socialist government can on its own do little against their will. It

can only act against the major corporations and financial institutions if workers in those corporations, the real producers of wealth, have built up an internal challenge to management's control. What is needed, then, is an *alliance* between a socialist government and those workplace- and locality-based organisations which could create this counter power to the extra-parliamentary strength of capital. In the shorter run this applies to socialist-controlled local and county councils. In Sheffield, Greater London and the West Midlands, Left Labour councillors have taken the initiative to create such alliances. In doing so they are pushing against the grain of local government's corporate management in very unfavourable national political circumstances. It is too early to assess their success or otherwise.

The role of a socialist government

Comments on the possible contribution of government to such an alliance are bound to be speculative, for we are attempting to map out some of the political implications of popular planning at a time when the future of the Labour Party and the process by which a socialist government might be achieved are by no means clear. However, while over-deterministic prescriptions are of little relevance, the question of what types of political structures might be necessary cannot be avoided by rhetoric about 'decentralisation'. We need to begin to think in detail about new forms of political organisation. The possible role of a socialist government can be summarised under several categories. First it could play a *catalytic* role in bringing about direct association between the people, or the organisations representing them, connected with all spheres where existing market and planning mechanisms have failed to meet people's needs. The purpose of such direct associations would be to resolve conflicting needs, to arrive as far as possible at a common policy or several different but consistent policies and build the strength to implement these policies. For example in relation to the Lucas Plan the government ideally could have encouraged such direct contact between the different groups of workers and users who might have had an interest in, say the road-rail bus: local authority representatives and purchasers, bus workers and transport users' committees as users, and Lucas Aerospace, British Leyland and Dunlop workers as producers.

Given British industry's close integration into the international economy, such direct association would need to be organised on an international level: between, for instance,

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workers in tractor companies or agricultural machinery producers in Britain and the agricultural departments of radical governments in the Third World, so that machinery could be produced with a design and a price to meet the needs of those countries by workers who would otherwise be made redundant in Britain.

This catalytic role in the process of developing the democratic organisations which could draw up and negotiate over alternative plans should not be limited to a socialist government. Indeed, the achievement of such a socialist government could play a vital role in strengthening and co-ordinating the process. Much of this co-ordination and association would take place at a local and regional level, but there would be a need for Parliament, specifically concerned with deciding on the problems and conflicts arising from planning and self-management at a local and regional level that needed national and international resolution. Such an assembly would be based on representatives from workers' planning committees in the regions and within different economic sectors. The Polish movement, Solidarity, proposed an assembly along similar lines to be subordinate to their national parliament in terms of general economic principles, but to be responsible for co-ordinating a system of self-management and democratic planning.

The role of a socialist government would not only be to provide resources and encouragement for the direct association through which plans could be drawn up, it would also *delegate powers* and legitimacy to the workers' committee formed in this process, where they were representative and democratically formed. These powers would be to monitor the implementation

a socialist government would back workers bargaining over proposals based on these plans, with financial and other sanctions on the companies

of policies decided nationally, regionally, or sectorally. In some ways this is like a radical extension of the powers at present delegated to shop stewards in health and safety legislation. Trade-union representatives have the power, backed by legislation, to monitor the implementation of the Health and Safety at Work legislation. On a far wider scale the same could apply to industrial policy. We saw in the Lucas case how, even when agreement was reached in negotiations over a product proposed by the unions, that is the heat pump, management was able to inhibit progress or impose their own ideas. A civil service inspectorate could never adequately monitor such an agreement. It would require people with an intimate knowledge of the production process or the service involved. Workers' committees would need some power to carry out this monitoring, even when the company had been taken into some form of public ownership. This would be a step towards subjecting managers to election by workers and representatives of the local community.

A further role of a socialist government would be to *co-ordinate the funding* for the implementation of workers' plans. One of the first steps such a government would take towards socialisation of the means of production would be the imposition of exchange controls, the nationalisation of the banks and legislation for trade-union control over pension funds. In addition a socialist government would back workers bargaining over proposals based on these plans, with financial and other sanctions on the companies concerned. Where this met with determined resistance, a socialist government would need to be prepared to socialise the company and/or industry, under workers' control. In several industries, depending on their strategic position and the strength of workers' organisation, this socialisation would take place in the first months of the government. This socialisation would be very different from

the kind of nationalisation with which we are so depressingly familiar, because the workers would, in the process of extending collective bargaining, have developed a clear idea of how the resources of the company would be used and organised and would be prepared for self-management.

The joint worker/government plans might well propose breaking up the existing company structures. One principle of popular planning will be to identify the structures most appropriate to popular control, according to the kind of product or service concerned. The shape and structure of most major conglomerates — bringing together for instance newspapers and hotels and shipping lines under the same board — make nonsense for everyone concerned except the shareholder.

Finally, the government's role in supporting the new institutions of popular planning and self-management will be to set the overall framework of economic policy, including levels of taxation, exchange rates and the basis of international trading relations. Control of international trade would not necessarily or even primarily be import controls; rather the government's priority would be to identify trading arrangements with sympathetic governments which would be of mutual benefit.

Government measures of this sort would face considerable resistance from those with a vested interest in existing economic arrangements. But the extent and success of the resistance will depend on two conditions which can be influenced now, long before there is a real chance of such a government. First will be the political popularity of the government; in electoral terms, the strength of its parliamentary majority. Second will be the popularity and strength of the union committees, community groups and local authorities who could counter the resistance. Both these depend on a political party, no doubt emerging in part out of the Labour Party — though not in its present form — which bases itself on encouraging people to develop and fight for detailed proposals for the future of industry and the public services. So that for instance in the case of the car industry the party would not stand simply for nationalisation of the car industry; it would stand for proposals (for example) to get rid of planned obsolescence in car manufacture, to produce low-price, non-polluting city cars, to establish an extensive system for care and maintenance of long-lasting cars and to improve public transport. The emphasis would not be so much on nationalisation for its own sake but on the industrial and social changes which workers in the industry have suggested and, especially important, have prepared for and gained popular support for, before public ownership is carried through. In these circumstances public ownership is seen clearly as the means of eliminating particular vested interests blocking popular demands.

This is a reversal of the traditional Labour view of state intervention, in which legislation for public ownership was understood as the first step towards socialism. Aneurin Bevan expressed this traditional approach clearly when he stated that 'the conversion of industry to public ownership is only the first step towards socialism' and went on to say that the advance to full socialism depends on the extent to which workers in the nationalised sector 'are made aware of a changed relationship between themselves and management' [our emphasis]. The argument in this chapter would imply a very different relationship between ownership and workers' power. Put it this way: the extent to which public ownership is an advance towards full socialism depends on the extent to which workers *create* a changed relationship between themselves and management in the course of achieving public ownership.

The failure of the traditional Labourist formula was a pressure that led the Lucas stewards to initiate a new approach. In doing so they, along with others, have illustrated, not only a new trade unionism but also a new politics, a politics not only for people but also of and by the people — not to be confused with another 'new' politics, the politics of the SDP, which proclaims itself as a politics for people, and which is a new form of the old elitist approach, in flimsy populist disguise.

Interviews

A STAR IS TORN

Robyn Archer

Robyn Archer is at present performing in her successful one woman show *A Star is Torn* at Wyndham's Theatre in London's West End. She is well known in her native Australia and in London as a brilliant performer of feminist cabaret and a fine singer of Brecht's songs. In *A Star is Torn* Robyn Archer throws new light on the lives of some of the great popular female entertainers of this century by looking at the conflicting pressures of being both successful stars and having to conform to narrowly defined female roles. Shelley Charlesworth talked to her.

SC: You are known in this country as a feminist and a socialist performer and presumably you became radicalised in the sixties in Australia. How did this happen?

RA: It's a little hard to answer but I think it is always much easier for someone from a poor background to be much more attuned to the deprivations that are going on around them. I only got to University by sheer accident — I was so sick as a child that my parents couldn't

afford to have any more children after paying the doctor's bills. I would have been very different if I hadn't gone to University because I suppose that University did radicalise me. We were in the middle of the Vietnam war then and there were tens of thousands of Australian troops there. It wasn't only that we were in there and losing forces but that we were so much closer to Vietnam than America. It was then that my radicalisation became focussed and articulated. Feminism didn't come until a few years after that, in '70 and '71. I wasn't terribly active but I was involved as a singer — when I left University and I was invited by the Returned Soldiers and Sailors League to go and entertain the troops I was banned because the ASIO, which is the Australian equivalent of the CIA, had pictures of me on file singing at Vietnam moratoriums. And even before that when I started to sing folk music in '62 and '63 it was right at the heart of the American Black Rights Movement, so my first models were Joan Baez and Bob Dylan — it was an early association with music and big protest movements. And when you start to look at the reasons for these protest movements, if you haven't had a comfortable upbringing then it is quite easy to generalise out.

SC: So you were attracted to folk music because it was a music of protest in the early sixties?

RA: Yes, although my background was more that of showbusiness — my father was a singer and comedian so that was the natural background. But I am not too sure what it is that leads you into that first time when you think a song that says something about people having a hard time is better than a song which

says forget your troubles — here's true love and romance.

SC: You worked for a time as a singer in Sydney nightclubs after leaving University ...

RA: Yes, but I was never quite mainline entertainment. I tended to choose odd standards from way back and to whip out the eukelele. But I found that while I was starting to earn more money and get regular bookings — to break into the Sydney scene — that the more successful I became the less I liked it. Eventually a motor bike accident sealed it, I was on crutches for 4 months. I decided to give up singing and went back to Adelaide to do teacher training.

SC: It was after that that you became interested in Brecht. Where did that come from?

RA: I was drifting back into singing, teaching during the day — working an 80-hour week. Just as I was thinking 'I can't carry on like this' along came Brecht. The Opera Company (The State Opera of South Australia) were doing Brecht's *Seven Deadly Sins* to open The Space in the Adelaide Festival Centre, and a friend asked me if I'd like a crack at it. It was a great challenge for me and I saw for the first time singers trained in a formal way. I had never come across it before, I had never thought about training as a singer, I had thought it was intuitive, intuitive showbiz or intuitive folksinging!

SC: What about Brecht? Were you excited by that type of theatre?

RA: Extraordinarily — but that came later. I did the *Seven Deadly Sins* and toured it, then a year after I was offered a 3-month contract with the Adelaide Opera Company and that's when I decided to ditch teaching. I was offered a part in *The Threepenny Opera* and they then suggested I do a tour of the songs from it around factories. During rehearsals for *The Threepenny Opera* I met John Willett — he started to tell me about Hans Eisler — he gave me Brecht's poems. It was then that I thought, here is this perfect synthesis of what I regard as showbusiness in Brecht, and politics. And politics of an extraordinarily humane kind which is why I've stuck with it, I think. What I find about Brecht is that he doesn't give party line dogma but really looks at the shortcomings of everybody — he allows things to be seen as they are and then he allows the audience the choice by observing ordinary people in those situations. Why I think Brecht has failed on so many counts in English-speaking countries is because it's been taken as an intellectual medium and people have tended to neglect it as showbiz.

It was when I first went to the Berliner Ensemble and saw their production of *'Can't Pay, Won't Pay'* that — it was just amazing — they played it for laughs, it was broad farce. My meeting with Brecht was totally accidental but it allowed me for the first time in my life to combine the academic with showbiz.

SC: There are very few successful political performers around. Do you think this leads to problems of being seen as a figurehead — a sort of authority on feminist entertainment?



Interviews



RA: Yes, but that is partly because I can never quite understand people's fascination with entertainers — for instance for a magazine like yours to be interviewing me — this is something that I would like to study in more depth. But I quite often get rather embarrassed about it.

SC: Do you regard *A Star is Torn* as a feminist show?

RA: It is not a feminist show but on the other hand I can get onto the radio or TV and talk about the show and this leads to a discussion of feminism. It's a huge springboard because they always ask you. I see *A Star is Torn* as a nice night's entertainment springing from a feminist consciousness rather than a non-feminist consciousness. Similarly my reputation as an entertainer with politics means that many of the things I do spring out of a social and political consciousness. I am always aware of having it whereas many performers seem to be able to ignore it very easily.

SC: Has this led to any major problems for you as a performer?

RA: No, not yet. When I made the decision to come back into singing at the age of 26 I came into it knowing that I could give it up at any time and that I would never compromise on anything because it simply wasn't worth it. I had seen what a horrible business it was but it seemed to me worthwhile almost as a teacher to pursue it. Here I can spring a few more thoughts to a whole lot more people if I go outside of school — here is this perfect vehicle and I can use it.

SC: You don't feel you have to censor yourself or compromise your material?

RA: I haven't yet. For instance what I think

about *A Star is Torn* is that it does sow seeds of discontent. It is a look at a group of women who previously have just been looked on in a foolish and idolatrous way which just keeps the myths going — there's only been two things that this idolatry has said: either 'poor vulnerable darlings' or 'they were a group of luses who should have looked after themselves better'. For the first time in *A Star is Torn* we are saying 'yes they were fantastic' and 'yes they were no angels, any of them, but the forces that came to bear on them were enormous ...'

SC: And how would you describe these forces?

RA: Well, first and foremost I do think it is a very serious feminist issue. These women from an early age were told by their mothers, by managers, lovers, husbands and by more managers that they had to go out and be successful and they knew that to do that they would have to be very aggressive. Before this wave of feminism a woman was always taught to be passive — it's as simple as that. Now all of these women, like Garland and Monroe to some extent, inside, believed in that ideal, I am sure of it. So what you have is a situation in which they were singing all these songs about love and romance and everybody believed that they were singing about themselves. Whereas I think they were thinking inside that they were failing for not being the perfect wife and mother. Take Judy Garland: from twelve years old she was fed amphetamines to get up and go to work in the morning. Nobody said at the time: 'Judy you are going to be the biggest popular entertainer this century has ever seen, if you take these pills in the morning and get up then you don't have to worry about family life or anything,

you have got a different life to lead.' But no one said it and I think that is the central reason for their destruction. I defy anyone to put up with that kind of schizophrenia. And we are not just talking about any old entertainer in *A Star is Torn* — we are talking about the Monroes, the Garlands, the Piafs, who could not walk outside their doors without being mobbed — there haven't been too many of those women who were that adored. Marie Lloyd is a classic example. At the same time they are being failed time and time again by what was supposed to be the real love in their lives — their men. They were constantly ripped off by men who invariably became their managers, who took over financial matters — almost all of them had a husband or a lover who ran up immense debts. And all of them got into that situation where the only place they felt safe, loved and adored was on the stage. But when they came off it was just one bummer after another personally. That must be a funny thing to feel.

SC: You obviously feel completely different because you are living in a different time and you are aware of these pressures.

RA: That's the main thing. Also I am extremely sceptical about the business and I don't actually believe pop songs. I really think they are dangerous things in terms of human relationships. That is why political theatre is important to me. I can be a performer but whinge about the rest of entertainment at the same time. I think pop seduces and distracts people from the real issues.

Robyn Archer will be publishing a book about *A Star is Torn* with Virago in 1984. *Robyn Archer Sings Brecht* is available from EMI records.

Industrial Features

STRUGGLING FOR HEALTH

NORMAN LOCKHART

The dispute over the health workers' pay claim has now lasted more than five months. The unity and determination seen during that time is something new in the NHS. We decided to take a detailed look at how this has developed in one particular hospital. So we spoke to Norman Lockhart, a nurse at Glasgow Royal Infirmary who is a NUPE shop steward and secretary of the recently established Joint Shop Stewards Committee.

What was the situation in the Royal Infirmary before this dispute began?

The situation began to change with last year's pay claim. Nurses' consciousness of how they were being used by the government slowly began to change with the demonstrations and other protests. Two or three years ago they wouldn't have entertained any idea of industrial action. This year we were at least discussing what strike action meant before the dispute even started.

Even before last year's claim we'd also begun to get nurses organised in what we called the Nurses Action Group (NAG). The year before a few of us got together and called a protest demonstration which succeeded in getting out 600 people on a very wet day. There was no intention of going it alone. We saw NAG and the demonstration as a way of getting people involved *inside* the unions, of winning official support. NAG as such didn't last — I think it ended up as a campaign to improve conditions in the nursing homes — but what it did was to bring a number of people together and give them confidence in fighting for action through the unions. So when this year's dispute started we did at least have some experience to fall back on.

How did the unions prepare for the claim?

The most significant thing is that for the first time all the different groups have been fighting together at the same time. Nearly all the settlement dates — whether for nurses, clerical workers, professional and technical grades, ancillaries, or engineers — fell together on 1 April. And that gave people a new confidence in their strength and ability to act together.

Previously settlement dates for different groups ran from November through to April or even later. The fact that it changed was partly accidental — some dates were pushed back because of scabby settlements like giving a little bit extra for 15 months. Partly it was something that unions like NUPE were aiming for anyway.

Management and the health service bureaucracy also quite liked the idea because they thought it would make life simpler for them despite the effect of greater union strength. Previously the whole brunt of the fight for living standards in the NHS fell on

what settlement the ancillaries could achieve on their own. There wasn't any joint action before. The claims are still submitted separately through the separate Whitley Councils for each group.

Also this year, all the different staff sides met beforehand to agree a common claim — the central demand being for 12 per cent. The effect was the same as a single body putting in a claim for all healthworkers whatever category they came under, which again did a lot to give healthworkers a sense of common purpose.

In that sense the unions did prepare for the dispute. But they never thought about the forms of action that would be needed, or prepared any discussion about it. This proved to be really divisive. Some hospitals went into all-out action from the word go and then found themselves isolated and unable to carry on. In other places, such as the Royal, we've only been able to build up slowly to such a perspective. We didn't get the leadership we needed.

So how have things changed since the start of the dispute?

Our first problem was to break down the isolation between different departments in the hospital. We tried to tackle this through mass meetings. The first was on 14 April, the day the TUC called for one-hour workplace meetings. Ours was organised by the NUPE stewards, and mostly attended by nurses. There was also a scattering of tradesmen and technicians. The meeting was chaired by the GMWU convenor, but it was boycotted by the GMWU members under the influence of their full-timer.

Most of the ancillaries are in the GMWU, and the Royal is one of the main bases the union has in the health service in Glasgow. I think the full-timer feels that any body which brings the different unions together will undermine the GMWU's position.

Anyway, we got some names at that meeting and we decided to set up an action committee to lay the basis for establishing a proper joint shop stewards committee. We also sent a resolution from the meeting to the Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) — a coordinating body of union officials — of the Greater Glasgow Health Board (GGHB) asking them to set up a joint shop stewards committee.

The JTUC agreed to set up a joint meeting of the different unions in the hospital. There were stewards from NUPE and ASTMS, some NALGO representatives (since their stewards seemed to be totally inactive) plus tradesmen's stewards from UCATT and the AUEW. We decided then to have an interim election of officers — myself from NUPE as the secretary, and someone from ASTMS as the chairperson.

These were formalised at the next meeting, which was more representative because of more word-of-mouth contact. Most of the stewards were there and NALGO had replaced its old inactive stewards with two new ones. The GMWU was still boycotting the proceedings, but we decided that shouldn't stop us from going ahead and putting the whole thing on a formal basis with recognition by the JTUC.

Having the Joint Shop Stewards Commit-

tee (JSCC) has made a big difference in the dispute. It's really boosted the confidence of the individual stewards. Commitment has shot up as we've been able to start coordinating our members to take action for the claim. Recognition by the JTUC means recognition by the Greater Glasgow Health Board, so it's also meant we now get some facilities from management, despite the non-participation of the GMWU.

What difference does it make not having the GMWU there and is there any way you could put pressure on them to come in?

Well, it is a big problem because they're the largest single union in the Royal and they organise most of the key workers — the kitchen, portering, stores and domestic staff. They've taken some action during the dispute. They had an overtime ban for five weeks, and they pulled out six porters in rotation during the week of action. But they haven't supported the levy which is vital to maintaining a campaign of action which involves all staff in the hospital.

A lot of GMWU members have responded to the role of their union by coming to us saying they want to change unions. But aside from problems under the TUC Bridlington Agreement, that's not really a solution.

They're still a minority of the GMWU workforce, so it wouldn't solve the problem of getting united representation and action of all unionised workers in the hospital. We have to try to force them in as a union.

It's obviously been difficult in the Royal just to get coordination between some of the different unions involved. Has there been much coordination between the different hospitals in the Glasgow area?

Very little at the stewards level. The JTUC is seen as the body to handle it. Eventually the JTUC did call a stewards meeting at the beginning of August after resolutions from the Southern General and Royal Infirmary. But it was toothless and ineffective. There were about 180 stewards there out of perhaps 2,000 in the whole of the Glasgow NHS. The GMWU once more boycotted the proceedings (it held separate district meetings at the same time), and the meeting was absolutely powerless.

For instance, we had a resolution from the Royal stewards committee calling on the TUC to organise all-out action. But it was disallowed. There was just information plus a recommendation from the JTUC on the week of action. Still, it was better than nothing. Stewards from the different hospitals felt less isolated. But now we need a practical working conference.

It would have to be a conference to organise escalation of the dispute to indefinite strike action, as well as planning closer future coordination, especially in opposition to the cuts. But it's really difficult to get something like that off the ground because there's so little contact between the different stewards committees.

The JTUC keeps a very tight rein on developments. It would oppose any decision-making stewards body on the grounds that it would undermine its own position and powers. But of course, the whole GMWU business has shown that the JTUC doesn't exert any powers over the constituent unions

Industrial Features



Gartnavel Hospital contingent joins the demonstration on 15 August.

unless it suits it. In fact that's true of the coordinating bodies at all levels of the bureaucracy — the TUC, Scottish TUC, etc.

How about contact with and support from other workers outside the NHS?

We've generally had a good response at the rank-and-file level. For instance, we made a big collection at Cardowan colliery the day after their one-day strike in support of us in June. We've had big collections at the Wills tobacco plants, and a lot of support from the EIS (Scottish teachers union) at the College of Commerce: they've held collections for us, sent delegations to our picket lines, organised meetings, and so on.

We've held collections at as many factories as possible; the people on long-term strike at the hospital have spent a lot of time phoning round the shop stewards committees. Sometimes they've organised meetings for us; or they'll put round collection sheets themselves, or they've let us stand at the gates collecting with often one or two of the stewards alongside us.

What about the question of industrial action in support of the healthworkers? What role has the TUC played in developing the action?

The big problem has been that the TUC sanctions solidarity action by other workers in theory, but in practice it does nothing at all to organise it. Indeed, in some ways it positively discourages it. What are other workers to think when they see the TUC failing to support Sean Geraghty and the Fleet Street electricians?

So 22 September is a big step forward in this respect. But it still leaves unanswered the question of what happens next, especially in the NHS itself.

Initially the one-day actions were OK because they helped to build up confidence among health service workers who weren't sure that action of any kind was possible. But their continual repetition now means that many people are asking what they're achieving except the loss of another day's wages.

What's needed is all-out strike action in the health service with support from outside. The most popular understanding of what that means is an indefinite withdrawal of all services except accident and emergency cover.

There have in the past been threats of a total withdrawal of services by nurses in Australia, Canada, and Ireland. And they've had a dramatic effect on governments: midnight settlements and so on, so the threat has never had to be carried out.

But to withdraw accident and emergency cover without warning is not conceivable at the moment. You'd have to have an organised shutdown of the hospital. Of course some hospitals, such as the Gartnavel here, don't have accident and emergency and so they could be shut down more easily.

But the most important thing is that the call for indefinite action has to be a *national* one, otherwise it'll only mean further isolation for those hospitals involved.

Partial actions were important at the beginning — they allowed health workers to test their strength since they had little previous experience to go on. All-out action had to be argued then not as something immediate but as something to build up to. But today *national* action is vital. Anything else and you simply won't get out your support.

It's been estimated that indefinite action would involve 250,000 people out on strike. The point of all-out action would be to bring the dispute to a quick close. It's the position of NUPE conference, and it's what our shop stewards committee put in a resolution to the stewards conference called by the Glasgow JTUC in August, though they ruled it out of order.

There's an informal campaign by different stewards committees now to make it plain to the JTUC, STUC etc that they won't recommend any further escalation of the dispute unless it includes all-out national action. That's how serious it is now.

We don't know what the final outcome will be, but what lasting effects do you think the

dispute will have inside the hospital?

Well, first of all we now have a Joint Shop Stewards Committee — that's a big step forward in workplace organisation. We're finding that lots of small issues, some of them quite longstanding, are now being brought to the union — there's more confidence now that something can be done. That's important because we already see further battles looming ahead.

They're now planning to impose £6m worth of cuts in the Greater Glasgow Health Board area. That will mean loss of jobs, closures of wards, units, and even small hospitals, and so on. Also they plan to close every single creche for NHS staff, and we'll be launching a big campaign round that.

There's also the issue of private practice. A private hospital is being set up at Clarkston, and there's a growing awareness of the threat it represents to the NHS. It's basically an extension of the present illegal private practices. We all know about the existing thefts by consultants. Things like their habit of 'borrowing' sterilised trays for use in their private clinics and then bringing back the dirties for re-sterilisation at the expense of the NHS. That's something we all feel more confidence about taking up now as a result of working together during this dispute.

Finally, we're hoping to develop the CND campaign in the hospital. We want to educate people in the fact that the government deliberately chooses to spend money on nuclear weapons rather than on health. We'll probably get the Joint Shop Stewards Committee to sponsor a film show, and then try to get a workplace group set up. I think that's also important because it'll encourage people in all the different unions to take up the campaign within their own union structures and press for action in support of CND.

I see the dispute as having started a process whereby people are beginning to think more deeply about what is going on in society generally as a result of their experience in the health service — and thinking about what's needed to change it.

photo: NORMAN LOCKHART

British Features

THE MYTHS OF LABOURISM

JOHN ROSS

The tremendous boost in electoral popularity which the Tory Party registered during the Malvinas war came as a tremendous shock to major sections of the left. In three months its support rocketed from 30 per cent to 53 per cent in the opinion polls, confirmed by the results of local government elections and Parliamentary by-elections, and amid a wave of chauvinism not seen for many years. But, argues JOHN ROSS, this type of effect, like the dramatic fall in the Labour Party vote over the last 15 years, only comes as a shock because the British left has been living in a world of rhetoric and myths.

The view that the British labour movement is in some sense politically strong is extremely widespread on the British left. Its crudest version, put forward with little serious regard for facts is to be found in the continual quasi-mystical rhetoric about the 'twelve million strong labour movement' put forward by a group such as the Militant.

In more sophisticated versions political strength resides in the supposedly uniquely advanced British relation to Parliament and democracy. Thus for Tony Benn it is, 'democratic socialism ... a home grown British product which has been slowly fashioned over the centuries.'¹ For Michael Foot, summarising Aneurin Bevan, 'The Marxist theory of the state was inescapable, but the liberal criticism of it would re-emerge. Somehow a synthesis must be devised ... Britain and perhaps only Britain, could set the example.'²

This parliamentary, 'democratic', emphasis is replaced in other versions by an upholding of the alleged strength of the British tradition of working class 'common sense' and 'practicality' compared to 'abstract theorising'. A theoretical and polite version is EP Thompson's view that pragmatism, 'has served the British people a great deal better than most Marxists have been prepared to admit.'³ A crude version, expressing the outlook of the trade union bureaucracy and many others besides is Ben Tillet's famous attack on 'hairbrained chattering and magpies of Continental Revolutionists', and their unfavourable comparison to, 'the trade unionists of this country, a body of men well organised, who paid their money, and were socialists at their work every day and not merely on the platform, who did not shout for blood-red revolution, and when it came to the revolution, sneaked under the nearest bed.'⁴

The view that the British working class is politically extremely strong, however, has not only provided the basis of perspectives for the reformist left. It has also informed the assumptions, generally explicit but sometimes implicit, of the various individuals and small groups which have sought to 'transform the Labour Party' or 'build a revolutionary party' in Britain. The two principal sets of perspectives for such groups have both been broadly based on such an analysis; although there are many subvariants and combinations these can usefully be identified as 'syndicalism' and 'British entryism'.⁵

In the 'British entryism' version the political strength of the

working class is reflected in its supposed massive and undying attachment to the Labour Party which guaranteed it 45 to 50 per cent of the popular vote during the 1940s and 1950s. The formation of a Labour government, naturally with 'socialist policies' is therefore regarded as relatively unproblematic. The working class will be inspired to vote in even higher numbers for the 'nationalisation of the 250 monopolies', and the entire policy of the Labour Party can be changed, from right wing reformism to revolutionary Marxism or centrism, without the working class noticing that the political sheep of MacDonald/Attlee/Gaitskell/Wilson/Callaghan/Foot has transformed into a red-blooded socialist wolf. The same 49 per cent of voters that supported Attlee, or 48 per cent that supported Wilson, will continue to vote for Ken Livingstone or Ted Grant. On this view the working class is *labourist* first and foremost and reformist second.

From this overall view it flows that the priority is not mass campaigning to transform the existing consciousness of the working class but burrowing through the Labour Party machine to capture parts of it. Mass campaigns, such as CND, or earlier the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, may indeed even be considered dangerous as bringing 'petty-bourgeois influence' to bear on the supposedly unsullied ranks of the labour movement. The *Militant* group, with its unending propaganda and practical opposition to real campaigns, coupled with continual accommodation to British chauvinism, is a virtually pristine-pure example of such a current.

The syndicalist view is that somehow the working class will throw back the ruling class assaults launched on it through its 'industrial muscle' (souped up of course with revolutionary propaganda). While typically an ultra-left attitude is taken to the Labour Party tactically, tremendous political illusions in labourism are implicitly entertained: though the dominant politics of the working class, and even more its activist trade union layer, is clearly labourism, the 'syndicalist' view does not envisage any decisive political problems for the working class which need to be centrally confronted. Emphasis is instead placed on various organisational measures such as developing combine committees and small scale work to rebuild workplace organisation, in the belief that the working class struggle will primarily be rebuilt through solidarity with local disputes, etc. This type of approach is most clearly represented by Tony Cliff and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), but is also espoused in similar versions by other groupings.

Many other aspects of the traditional British left also flow from this view of the politically advanced character of the British labour movement: as a solution of the major political problems is guaranteed by the political strength of the movement attention should be switched away from these to detailed questions of organisation; as differences on the left arise within an advanced political tradition they are not seen as the type of discussions which inevitably arise in a revolutionary organisation but are instead regarded as the consequences of 'class betrayal'; because the particularly advanced British working class movement is singularly out of line with what are held up as virtues in other countries, international developments and organisation are to be downplayed. The typical British sect with its dogmatic crudities, its particular tactical fetishes, its tyrannical internal regime, its lack of interest in international questions or Marxist ideas, and its implicit or explicit view that the revolution in Britain is about two or three years away is a logical product of this view of the character of the British working class movement.⁶ The long and inglorious tradition which stretches from HM Hyndman and his 'Social Democratic Federation' of the 1880s down to Ted Grant and the Militant group is just the 'Marxist' complement of the right wing tradition dating back to Ramsay MacDonald.

British Features

Labour's decline

That there are serious political problems in the working class movement was brought home to many by the impact and aftermath of the Malvinas war. But in reality the 'Falkland's factor' was only the spectacular tip of a much more fundamental iceberg. An indicator of the underlying situation has been the rapid decline of the Labour Party vote since the late 1960s. This is something which, at last, is beginning to be incorporated into left wing thinking.⁷

While of course it is not the only important indicator of class consciousness, the percentage of the working class voting for an organisationally independent working class party is an important index of its political consciousness and strength. Table 1 shows how Labour's share of votes cast has fallen from a high of 49 per cent in 1951 to 37 per cent in the 1979 election. Opinion polls, confirmed by local government and by-election results, indicated that this had further fallen to around 30 per cent between May and July 1982. As a proportion of the electorate Labour's vote fell from 40 per cent in 1951 to 28 per cent in 1979.

Table 1

Year	% of votes cast	% of electorate
1951	48.8	40.3
1955	46.4	35.6
1959	43.8	34.5
1964	44.1	34.0
1966	47.9	36.4
1970	43.0	31.0
1974 (Feb)	37.1	29.3
1974 (Oct)	39.2	28.6
1979	36.9	28.0

Source: Percentage of votes cast: Hodgson, *Labour at the Crossroads*, Martin Robinson, Oxford, 1981. Percentage of the Electorate: Drucker (Ed), *Multi-Party Britain*, Macmillan, London, 1979.

There is of course no reason to believe that the 30 per cent bottom reached in the Malvinas war represents the actual level of Labour support. Some recovery has taken place and will continue from that depressed point. But there should be no mistaking the underlying pattern since the late 1960s. Labour's vote has fallen significantly as an almost unbroken trend. It is now down to the levels of 1931-35. As one recent review of international comparisons correctly observed: 'Electoral decline for the moderate left on this scale is unique to Britain. Among European countries since the war not even the faltering position of the Danish Social Democrats bears any resemblance to it... by the late 1970s there were only three European democracies — Belgium, Eire and Switzerland — with a smaller 'combined-left' vote (Social Democrat/Labour plus parties to the left) than the one in Britain.'⁸

Whereas in the other European countries trade unions may have lost members under the bourgeois assault, the vote for working class parties has held up fairly well. In some cases, notably France, Spain, and Greece, there have actually been spectacular breakthroughs by social democratic parties. In short, and contrary to the predominant myths of the left, the British labour movement showed itself not politically strong in face of the bourgeois assault from the late 1960s, but extremely weak in international terms. What is more this cannot be blamed on the 'Labour traitors' as the Labour and union bureaucrats are just as treacherous in other countries where the votes for working class parties have held up far better than in Britain.

Rethinking

Probably the best known example of the dawning of a better realisation of the real situation of the British working class movement was provided by the discussion around Eric Hobsbawm's lecture *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* 'Most of us,' he had written, 'have not paid as much attention as we ought to this crisis.' His own conclusion was that: 'the forward march of labour and the labour movement ... appears

to have come to a halt in this country about twenty-five to thirty years ago.'⁹

Unfortunately, the framework put forward by Hobsbawm himself provided no adequate answer to the problems set out.¹⁰ Nevertheless for the first time a major figure on the left had assembled a serious body of evidence, and attempted to explain the real trends of the working class movement in Britain, something, incidentally, singularly lacking in the majority of replies to Hobsbawm which instead engaged in the usual vague rhetoric without producing any serious factual material in their support.

What might seem surprising at first sight however is the degree to which the left, or at least the Marxist part of it, has been a prisoner of its own labourist illusions as the trends described unfolded. Indeed, despite its apparently radical break with traditional views, Hobsbawm's essay remained firmly within the labourist tradition. The very vivid image he put forward, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?' suggests a past period in which the labour movement demonstrated particular vigour and political strength. The difference is that while the conventional view asserts that we are still in the age of labourist strength, Hobsbawm tends to attribute this to a 'golden age' now behind us.

What is of some interest is that both these views, despite Hobsbawm's Marxist terminology, are in complete contrast to the analysis of the British labour movement put forward by 'classical Marxism' — that is the analysis initiated by Marx himself. This recognised that the British working class was in comparative international terms, and in relation to its own ruling class, not strong but on the contrary extremely politically weak — a condition of course not rooted in its genetic nature but in the historic weight of British imperialism and the great lag in working class consciousness this created. Trotsky for example, writing in 1924, explained this view clearly: 'The British working class is becoming conscious of itself as an independent class hostile to the bourgeoisie much more slowly than the working class of countries with less powerful bourgeoisies... the growth of the British bourgeoisie, the most advanced bourgeoisie in Europe, having taken place in exceptionally



Ramsay MacDonald, presided over the 1931 National Government

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Photo: SWANSEA SOCIALIST PRINTING GROUP

Miners dig their own coal in the 1926 General Strike

favourable conditions, has for a long time held back the development of the British proletariat.¹¹

Similarly Lenin, summarising the views of Marx and Engels, noted: 'Marx and Engels systematically traced this relation between opportunism in the labour movement and the imperialistic features of British capitalism for several decades. For example, on October 7, 1858, Engels wrote to Marx that: "The British working class is actually becoming more and more bourgeois so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat as well as a bourgeoisie. Of course, this is to a certain extent justifiable for a nation which is exploiting the whole world."'

'Almost a quarter of a century later, in a letter dated 11 August 1881, Engels speaks of: "the worst type of British trade unions, which allow themselves to be led by men who have been taught by capitalists, or are at least in their pay." And in a letter to Kautsky, dated 12 September 1882, Engels wrote: "You ask me what the English workers think of colonial policy? Exactly the same as they think about politics in general, the same as what the bourgeois think. There is no working class party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers merrily devour with them the fruits of the British colonial monopoly and of the British monopoly of the world market." Engels expressed similar ideas in his preface to the second edition of his *Condition of the Working Class in England* which appeared in 1892.¹²

This classical Marxist view of the historical political weakness of the working class movement in Britain is the extreme polar opposite of the dominant labourist/populist view which we have noted earlier. Far from believing that the British

working class movement was politically strong, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and the other writers of classical Marxism stressed the limited character of the political development of the British labour movement compared to other countries. They did, as we shall see, stress that this working class was extremely strong organisationally but they sharply distinguished that from *political* strength. Given the political implications which flow from this difference it is extremely relevant to indicate which of these two views is in line with the actual facts of the development of the British labour movement.

Prior to World War II

As a starting point, we can consider the period prior to World War II: is there any evidence of particular comparative political strength of the British working class movement in this period — whether it has since been 'halted' or not? The level of votes for the mass working class parties is naturally not in itself a decisive measure of working class political strength — they are usually votes for reformist parties votes, typically underestimate the strength of a working class and so on. Nevertheless, the proportion of the working class which votes for an independent working class party is one index, to be taken with others, of its degree of political consciousness. It is particularly relevant when making international comparisons because there is no reason to suppose that the French, German or Spanish working classes are more or less likely to express their political views through the ballot box than the British. The distortions created by bourgeois elections therefore apply equally in all similar political systems. The first point which stands out in international comparisons is the extremely late date of formation of the Labour Party compared to the mass working class parties in other European states. British society was qualitatively more proletarianised than any other in the world. However by the late 19th century it was the other European working classes which had created mass parties while the British remained essentially tied to the Liberals. By 1898 the German SPD received over 2 million votes and had 56 members of Parliament; the Belgian party in 1900 received 30 per cent of the vote. The first mass party of the British working class, the Labour Party, was not formed until 1900.

Even once formed electoral support for the Labour Party grew extremely slowly. In the last pre-World War I election, that of December 1910, Labour received 370,000 votes — 7 per cent of the total. In contrast the French SP received 1,100,000 in 1910 and the German SPD 4,250,000 in 1912. Furthermore in making these comparisons it must be remembered that the working class was a far larger percentage of the population in Britain than in other countries. The actual proportion of the *working class* voting Labour was therefore even more unfavourable in Britain than the gross figures for the total votes would indicate.

Even after World War I, which produced the great electoral breakthrough of Labour, this comparative situation remained. In the crucial election of 1918 Labour received 22 per cent compared to 46 per cent (for the SPD and USPD combined) in Germany in 1920, and 37 per cent in 1919 in Belgium. Even in Italy, where the working class was a tiny fraction of the population compared to Britain, the Socialist Party gained 25 per cent in 1919.

Labour's share of the vote did increase in the inter-war period, to 37 per cent, but in a situation where after 1926 the working class had suffered a crushing defeat. Furthermore Labour actually gained less from the break-up of the Liberal Party, the key feature of this period, than did the Conservatives. In short, compared to other major European countries a far lower proportion of the working class took even the elementary step of voting for an organisationally independent working class party in Britain.

The indicators of political consciousness and strength of the British working class on the electoral field are fully confirmed by other indices. The British working class after the rise of im-

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perialism engaged in no serious revolutionary struggle for power comparable to other major European working classes. Major sections, or all, of the French (1871, arguably 1943-45), German (1919), Italian (1919-20, 1943-45), Yugoslav (1941-45), Greek (1943-49), Spanish (1931, 1936-39), and Russian (1905, 1917) working classes passed through authentic revolutionary crises reaching the point of armed insurrection and civil war. The highest point of British working class struggle in this period, the 1926 General Strike, cannot seriously be compared in scope to any of these developments.

The Labour Party rejected even an official position in favour of socialism at its foundation in 1900, whereas the continental European parties were in general formed on a Marxist basis. The impact of the Russian revolution in France, Italy, Germany, and Czechoslovakia was sufficient to split the Social Democratic parties, leading to the formation of mass Communist Parties on a revolutionary basis. The French CP had 121,000 members and received 10 per cent of the vote in 1921. The German CP had 360,000 members at its height in 1921 and 12.6 per cent of the vote in 1924. In Italy the CP had 70,000 members in 1921. In contrast the British Communist Party had probably 3-5000 members at its formation and received 0.4 per cent of the vote in 1922.

In short all the indices show that, compared to the major working classes of Europe the British working class had no 'golden age' but was politically weak in the period prior to World War II. It is the classical Marxist analysis, not the myths of labourism which are confirmed.

Only in one field was the British working class indisputably extremely strong. This was in trade union organisation. Only the German unions, with 4.2 million workers organised in the socialist unions in 1925, compared to 4.4 in the TUC, could compare with the British unions in absolute size. Given the shop steward organisation which had first emerged in Britain during World War I, the British unions were, however, certainly stronger in real terms.

This organisational trade union strength of the British working class was well understood by the Marxist writers — indeed Trotsky referred to Britain as 'the classic country of trade unions'.¹³ They refused, however, to confuse this organisational strength and the trade union consciousness it involved, with political strength.

Up to World War II, then, the British working class movement had a clear character. It was, in comparative terms, politically weak and organisationally strong. It is only after World War II that the labourist myths can find even any apparent evidence for their view of the British working class as politically strong.

1945 and after

As regards the rise in the Labour Party vote between 1939 and 1945/51 this of course needs no particular explanation as it corresponded to general international trends created by World War II. Its rise from 38 per cent to 48 per cent was fully in line with other countries. In Belgium the workers' parties advanced from 36 per cent in 1939 to 44 per cent in 1946, in France from 38 per cent in 1936 to 45 per cent in 1945, in Holland from 25 per cent in 1937 to 39 per cent in 1946. Labour was slightly unusual in actually increasing its total and percentage vote between 1945 and 1951 but this is largely accounted for by the increase in the number of candidates it ran (the actual percentage vote per opposed Labour candidate fell from 50.4 in 1945 to 46.7 in 1950), and in the collapse of the Liberal Party vote (from 2,600,000 in 1950 to 731,000 in 1951). The rise in 1945 therefore presents no problems to explain on either a classical Marxist or a Labourist explanation. Both would have predicted it — although as we shall see important implications come out when the facts are examined in terms of social structure and not just crude totals. The real feature which must be explained is the fall in the Labour Party vote after 1951.

Before going on to examine in detail the reasons for this

decline we will first remove two erroneous explanations which are sometimes argued: increasing prosperity and the changing structure of the population. Both can only be even apparently defended by neglecting to examine Britain in either an international or a systematic historical context.

The explanation of the decline in Labour Party votes in terms of increasing prosperity is, of course, the crudest of all bourgeois explanations. It is simply the old theory of 'embourgeoisement' much favoured in the 1950s and 60s. It does, however, also sometimes poke up its head in left wing arguments. In a recent article in *International*, for example, Rich Palser wrote: 'Nor should we be misled by the decline in Labour's vote from 40.3 per cent of the electorate in 1951 to 28 per cent in 1979 ... Labour's electoral decline [is] to be explained ... in the alleviation and obscuring of the depth of the crisis of British capitalism during the post-war boom.'¹⁴

This view does not stand any serious examination. First, British post-war working class prosperity has been extremely limited compared to countries such as West Germany, Sweden, France, Holland, etc. Yet in these countries, no fall in votes for working class parties comparable in scope to that for the Labour Party has taken place.

Furthermore the explanation in terms of prosperity would lead to a pattern of change the exact reverse of that which has actually occurred. Labour's vote in fact held up fairly well during the real period of prosperity in the late 1950s and early 1960s — declining from 49 per cent in 1951 to 44 per cent in 1959 but then rising again to 48 per cent in 1966. The real collapse of the Labour Party vote came after the beginning of the economic crisis in the late 1960s. If 'prosperity' was the reason for the decline then one would have to assume that its high vote was explained by the poverty of the 1960s compared to the days of halcyon prosperity from the 1970s onwards, and the veritable Garden of Eden under Thatcher!

The other common explanation for the decline in the Labour Party vote is that of a 'changing social structure'. Hobsbawm for example is an explicit advocate of this view. Such an explanation of course has the merit that objective position in the social structure is a significant Marxist concept whereas prosperity is not. Furthermore such a view is apparently supported by the fact that truly dramatic changes have taken place in the social structure of Britain.

According to the figures cited by Hobsbawm, manual workers have declined as a proportion of the employed population from around 75 per cent in 1911 to only slightly over a half in 1976 (and even fewer today). Non-manual workers have increased to not far short of half the workforce. Furthermore one-third of the workforce is today in the state sector. The proportion of married women in work has increased from 13 per cent in 1931, to 20 per cent in 1951, to 50 per cent today. Simultaneously the number of 'employers and proprietors' has decreased from 7 per cent of the population to 3½ per cent since 1911, and the number of domestic servants from over 1½ million in 1911 to an insignificant number today.¹⁵ These are major changes which must be incorporated into any socialist analysis.

However, important as they are for other questions, they cannot account for the decline in the Labour vote. First, the proportion of the population which is working class, that is possessing solely its labour power to sell to live, actually increased in the employed population. Secondly, all studies indicate that it is precisely inside the working class, and not outside it, that the Labour party vote has declined.¹⁶ Thirdly, the transformations in British society have been paralleled in other countries and therefore cannot explain why it is specifically the Labour Party vote which has declined whereas that for working class parties in other major European countries has maintained its level or even increased.

Finally even Hobsbawm himself is forced to note that the decline in the Labour party vote did not at all occur as an even process. The number of people voting Labour fell primarily in

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two sharp drops of 1.5 million votes: the first from 1951-55, the second from 1966-74. Apart from this the shift in the Labour Party vote has either been fractional or actually in an upward direction (see Table 1). A third major fall in Labour votes may well have occurred after 1979, although this has yet to be established.

The two dramatic falls evidently do not correspond to shifts in the structure of the population, to 'prosperity', or even to factors such as unemployment (which started its real vast surge only later). They do however correspond to very sharp shifts in the political conjuncture.

1951-55 was the absolute height of the Cold-War bourgeois offensive — something which undoubtedly helped first the tremendous increase in the Conservative Party vote, up by nearly 4 million between 1945 and 1951, and then the dramatic fall in the Labour vote from 1951 to 1955. This mounting bourgeois political offensive first consolidated forces around its own chief party and then severely cut into the Labour vote. Similarly the sharp fall in the Labour Party vote after 1966 corresponds to the bourgeois withdrawal of support from the Labour government, which major sectors had advocated in 1964-66, and the start of the offensive which culminated in the Heath government.

In short the major falls in the Labour Party vote do not at all correspond to a view based on economic ('prosperity') or social ('changing structure of the population') elements. They are however entirely in line with the classical Marxist view of the political weakness of the British working class movement. The working class proved incapable of withstanding the two major post-war ruling class political assaults and Labour's vote fell accordingly. Whereas the working class of other European states withstood economic and social changes Labour's political weakness left it exposed.

Finally this view allows Labour's actual apparent strength in international comparisons from 1945-51 to be put much

more clearly in perspective. Taken purely in terms of the electoral total the votes look comparable or even slightly favourable for Labour — for example 40 per cent for the Socialist Party and Communist Party in Italy in 1946, 43 per cent for the SP and CP in France in the same year, and 48 per cent for the Labour Party in 1945.

Once the actual social structure of the countries is taken into account however the comparison in terms of working class votes becomes drastically unfavourable to Labour. For example in France in 1946, 37 per cent of the working population were in agriculture and fishing — the great bulk as peasants. In Italy in 1951 the proportion was 42 per cent — almost eight times the comparable British figure¹⁷.

In short, given the tremendously larger relative size of the working class within the population in Britain, it is clear that even at its peak, a far lower proportion of workers voted for the Labour Party in Britain than for parties of the working class in states such as France and Italy. The view that the working class movement in Britain even in 1945-51 was in comparative terms politically strong, is simply an illusion created by looking at gross electoral statistics abstracted from the real social structures of the countries.

Organisational strength

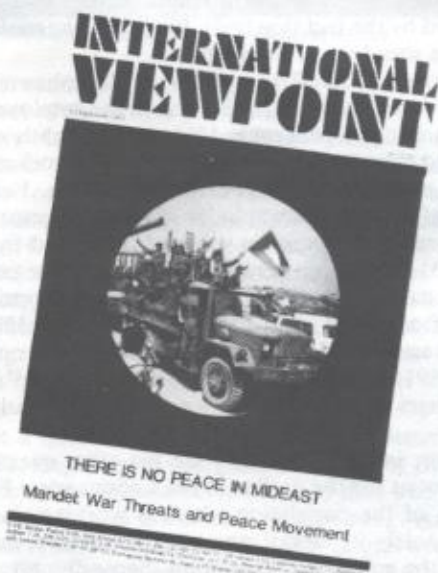
As we have seen the classical Marxist analysis of the British labour movement stressed not only the political weakness of the British working class historically created by the power of imperialism, but also its organisational trade union strength. How then does this second aspect stand up to the test of events?

Unlike the Labour Party vote the trade union membership of the working class did not decline after the late 1960s. On the contrary trade union membership sharply increased — rising from 10 million in 1968 to 13.5 million in 1979. Although a decline in absolute terms due to unemployment set in after this there was no relative decline and the percentage of the employed workforce in trade unions rose sharply throughout the decade and has since stabilised at the level established in the late 1970s. However, far from the growth of the trade unions leading to an automatic increase in support for Labour, the actual proportion of members of trade unions voting for the Labour Party fell drastically. According to the best estimates the percentage of trade union members voting Labour fell from 71 per cent in 1964, to 51 per cent in 1979, to, according to a poll commissioned by BBC television, around 43 per cent who would have voted Labour in an election in September 1982.¹⁸ It is not necessary to hold that the percentages are absolutely accurate to see the tremendous decline in the percentage of trade union members voting Labour. The contrast between organisational strength and political weakness could scarcely be more vividly illustrated.

The future

Up to now in this article we have consciously used only empirical material. We wanted to show that *only* a classical Marxist analysis of the characteristics of the British working class movement could account for the pattern of its development. Having established the point however we may proceed to use this analysis to fill in some details and draw some conclusions.

This is a question of some importance. The lack of an adequate theoretical framework has meant that the majority of the British left has been subject to the most extreme impressionism. From 1979-81, culminating in the Benn Deputy Leadership campaign, a general euphoria reigned regarding an allegedly irreversible surge forward by the left inside the Labour Party. One year later, when the right had clearly regained the offensive, despair and gloom held sway with Peter Kellner writing in the *New Statesman*, for example, that: 'the far left has had its day ... fundamentally it is now in retreat.'¹⁹ A series of books have been published, notably Dennis Kavanagh's *The Politics of the Labour Party* which purport to show the irreversible electoral decline of the Labour Party. These in general draw on the



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same materials, and methods of research, as those published during the 1950s which proved that Labour could never again win an election because of the disappearance of the industrial working class, and those produced after the Labour electoral victory of 1964 which proved that it would now in general win because of the dying out of old pre-1919 non-Labour voters!

Once however the underlying features of the workers' movement are grasped, then the entire development of the British Labour Party in the twentieth century, including recent developments, is easily comprehensible. We might put it paradoxically, that Labour's vote held up on its old basis, not *despite* prosperity, as the bourgeois sociologists think, but *because of* prosperity. The space for the rightist Labour politics, able to impose itself against a working class politically weakened by imperialism, was only possible because of the historical economic strength of the British ruling class. The other major European working classes, facing far weaker enemies and in far less developed imperialist states, developed a far higher political class struggle and consciousness than in Britain. It is precisely for this reason that Labour's vote began to fall drastically not in a period of prosperity but precisely when that prosperity began to collapse.

The old Labour Party vote was cast in conditions when Labour, through extreme reformism, still granted something to the working class. The collapse of the imperialist conditions which gave rise to that possibility led inevitably to an initial fall in Labour's vote — as always consciousness initially lags behind reality.

But if this is the short term effect, what of the long term one? Here the trends can be seen by going beyond the average figures to the unevenness they cover over. We will look at two processes — the rise of the left wing inside the Labour Party symbolised by Bennism and the increasing geographical unevenness of the Labour Party vote. As we will see the two are

not at all unconnected.

Labour's revival

The first thing to note is that the political geography of Britain is not at all random. The great bastion of Conservative power is the south of England outside London. Long before they became Labour strongholds Scotland, Wales, and the north of England were the great fortresses of the Liberals against the Tories. For example in the election of January 1910 the Liberals won 27 out of 34 seats in Wales and 59 out of 70 in Scotland.

These huge regional and national inequalities, which of course have their roots far earlier, have continued to show themselves throughout the twentieth century. Taking the elections in which the Labour and Tory parties came closest, the pattern shows up with great clarity. In 1929 the Conservatives only failed to win 53 out of 164 seats in southern England outside London, but could only win 51 out of 171 in northern England. In 1950 the Tories only lost 55 out of 199 southern England seats and only won 61 out of 169 in the north of England. In 1964 they only lost 49 out of 206 seats in southern England and won only 53 out of 167 in the north of England.²

As regards the most recent elections the situation was well summarised in a recent study: 'At the 1979 general election it (Labour) won 62 per cent of the seats in Scotland and 58.3 per cent of the English seats. In each of the three most distant English regions from London — the North, North West, and Yorks and Humberside — it won a higher percentage of seats than in Scotland, in the North region over 80 per cent ... If the party were dependent on the seats it can win in England, its chances of achieving power would be slim indeed for it has not won 50 per cent of the English seats since 1951 except for 1966.'³

Furthermore, while Labour's overall vote has declined it has actually strengthened its grip on those traditional bastions.



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This process was shown in its most extreme form in 1979 when Labour was severely defeated nationally but there was actually a swing in its favour in Scotland. In the words of Curtice and Stead surveying the 1979 election: 'We have witnessed at each election since 1959, stages in a long-term shift in the regional voting pattern ... The peripheral areas of Britain, with their higher unemployment, and the decline in the inner parts of the conurbations have become steadily more Labour.'²²

The Labour vote in these areas of course was always to a major degree, and increasingly is, of a different type to the class collaborationist vote which has declined with the demise of imperialist prosperity. These were the regions which never, even at the height of British capitalist success, benefited to the same degree from imperialist strength as did the south east of England.

Their political character is revealed not just in the proportion of votes for the Labour Party. Scotland and South Wales are also the traditional areas of support for the Communist Party — including when it was a revolutionary organisation. The most authentically revolutionary currents in the then British state prior to the Communist Party — James Connolly in Ireland and John MacLean in Scotland — also came from outside the English heartland. It has always been the south and south-east which have lagged. It is the consolidating grip of Labour on the Scottish, Welsh and north of England sections of the working class, not on the basis of imperialist prosperity but amid increasing economic oppression and misery, which offers the best omen for the future strength of the labour movement. For like it or not the north of England, Scotland, South Wales today show the picture of Britain tomorrow. Horrendous as it may seem, the days of Thatcherism will one day be regarded as good old days of prosperity compared to what is to come as Britain's imperialist decline continues. As this unfolds the labour movement's political grip will expand again to far wider layers of the country. But this time on a very different political basis to the old one of open class collaboration.

The significance of Bennism

The developments we have outlined above should not occasion any short term optimism as regards the majority trends in the political situation and the working class. On the contrary, for a whole period the decay of the old politics of Labourism will proceed far more rapidly than the building of an alternative which can fight back. Great defeats will be suffered even in addition to those already imposed and only in the course of a protracted period will these be overcome. The left wing of the British labour movement has its own 'long march' ahead of it. The wave of struggles of 1964-74, and the 'first round' of Bennism in 1979-81, are only the first shots in that prolonged struggle.

The majority of the labour movement and its entire traditional leadership faces to the past not the future. Any revival, any attempt to reconstitute the movement on a new basis will initially be the work of a minority. The minority in turn is not evenly distributed. On a scale of majorities in areas it is shown in Labour's consolidating grip, despite its overall decline, in its traditional fortresses. As majorities of particular layers of the working class it is shown inevitably first among the most advanced sections. The overwhelming votes of the miners for Scargill as president and Benn for the deputy leadership of the Labour party, when the trade union bureaucracy as a whole was swinging to the right and Healey won by a ballot in unions such as NUPE, is a reflection of a real situation. It is shown by the majority support among Labour activists for Benn while these are still a minority of the working class compared to the majority that support the old Labour line.

The forces who constitute the present basis for the reconstruction of the labour movement are clear to see; those who resisted the Malvinas war and its attendant carnival of chauvinism, those who resisted the TUC sell-out of ASLEF and are today supporting the health workers with deeds as well as

words, the new recruits who are rallying to the Labour Party, building oppositions in the unions and making CND one of the largest campaigns in British history. Although individual workers will go beyond this, the majority politics of this current in the next period will be of a Bennite character, for the base of the Benn current — as opposed to its leaders who compose a section of the labour bureaucracy — precisely represents those sections of the working class who seek a militant political solution to the present crisis through the mass organisations.

For the immediate future the supporters of the 'new politics' will remain a minority, but as Britain slides further into decline, and providing the organisational strength of the labour movement continues to be sustained, they will win further support in Labour's heartlands as the vicious effects of recession strike further and further home. For all its unavoidable ups and downs, Bennism is at the beginning of its development; what is dying is the rotten hulk of old Labour reformism: the tradition of MacDonald, Attlee, Gaitskill, Wilson, Callaghan and Foot. Once again the chance is there to build a movement in the tradition of Eleanor Marx, of Connolly, MacLean, Pankhurst, and the Communist Party in its revolutionary period. Alongside those who today follow Benn and Scargill, we must fight to win the working class to socialism for the whole of the above discussion underlines that this battle is not won but only embarked upon. Every kind of mass campaign, from industrial solidarity to nuclear disarmament, is a crucial element in this battle whose main field of contention, given their weight in society and their dominance of the Labour Party, will be the trade unions. The old Labourism has only a past; the 'old dogmas' of classical Marxism, however, are only just beginning their ascent inside the British working class.

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16. See for example Crewe, 'The Labour Party and the Electorate' in Kavanagh op cit p9-49.
17. Calculated from Mitchell, Statistical Appendix, in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe* Vol 6 (2).
18. *Panorama*, 6 September 1982.
19. *New Statesman* 10 September 1982.
20. Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill*, Fontana, London 1976 p200.
21. Sharpe, 'The Labour Party and the Geography of Inequality, a Puzzle', in Kavanagh op cit p139.
22. *Ibid* p139.

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SOCIALIST ECONOMIC POLICY

ALAN FREEMAN

The Alternative Economic Strategy has dominated labour thinking in recent years. Alan Freeman examines the latest version in the Report published by the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee.

The TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee has produced a remarkable document: a Bennite economic programme signed by Denis Healey, Tony Benn, Terry Duffy and Clive Jenkins. Holding aloft this rather battered sword, the TUC's Knights of Labour want to lead their faithful to the new Jerusalem at the next elections. Entitled 'Planning for Democracy: the Framework for Full Employment', it is cast as a report to the TUC and Labour Party congresses.

It hasn't excited a lot of attention. But its thinking permeates Labour's 1982 programme and the TUC's *Plan for Recovery*, and the idea is clearly to make it the basis of Labour's manifesto. Its role can be compared with that of the drafts that went into the policies arising from the 1973 conference: a first attempt at a leadership policy consensus around which the General Council, the National Executive and the Parliamentary Labour Party can rally our serried ranks. So it merits very careful attention.

This article calls for a forthright rejection of the report. It proposes instead a programme for joint action by the Labour Party and the unions at every level — political, parliamentary, industrial — based on measures which are either labour movement policy or have wide acceptance in the Labour Party and TUC. It argues for a different method of struggle from the Liaison Committee, with the emphasis on industrial action and mass campaigning to defeat the Tories, to secure a Labour government and to defeat any extraparlimentary resistance to such a government from the banks, multinationals and civil service.

Socialists cannot simply reject this report lightmindedly. It is quite easy to criticise in a discussion article, but it is another thing entirely to win the argument in trade union and Labour Party branches against a report endorsed by figures from Terry Duffy to Joan Maynard. The immediate charge such a course will bring is that of 'breaking the unity of the movement'. Yet the movement has already achieved very broad unity around, for example, unilateral disarmament, support for the health-workers, or withdrawal from the EEC. Will the report build on this unity or weaken it? This is one issue we want to discuss.

These are very practical and immediate questions. In our view it isn't helpful to reject the report for the traditional, and often sectarian reasons given on the far left. These can be summed up in one charge: the report won't introduce socialism.

This accusation is of course true: put at its crudest, the document is a plan to save capitalism from Margaret Thatcher — a goal shared by many but pursued by few. The Liaison Committee would inject £9bn into the economy, concentrated in the nationalised industries and public services; use a slightly expanded public sector to spearhead economic revival and restore jobs and social welfare; back this up with a long term plan to be overseen by a new, centralised Department of Economic and Industrial Planning to channel investment into the home industries; discuss this plan with absolutely everyone; and introduce a National Economic Assessment to control prices and 'influence' incomes.

All good Keynesian stuff despite the Bennite colouring, and nothing at all to do with introducing socialism. Nothing could

be further from Terry Duffy's mind. But this doesn't mean it should all be rejected. No socialist *rejected* the 1945 nationalisations although they were obviously intended to save capitalism from rapacious but bankrupt and incompetent rail and coal owners. Nor did anyone reject the health service, or universal education, and nor today would anyone except a few Spartans reject unilateral disarmament or withdrawal from the EEC, just because the aim is to save capitalism.

What does the report say?

We argue for these particular steps to be taken more thoroughly, under workers' control, without compensation, or by somebody else, or using different methods. Above all it has to be pointed out that they must be surpassed in a clash with the capitalist class as a whole. But when it comes to the question 'to be or not to be?' there are only two socialist criteria. The first is: will it advance workers' interests if it is done? And the second is: can it be done? Is it in fact practical?

On this field the report contains many individual proposals which in another context could take workers forward. Some of them are practical. Particularly important are the Bennite proposals seeking to erode management decision-making prerogatives. The report promises measures like a statutory right to information about company investment plans; a statutory right to consultation and 60 days' notice of any changes involving redundancies, and the establishment of Joint Union Committees involving workers from several plants within a combine and from several unions, in order to make use of these rights. Provided information is available to the whole workforce, provided the new committees are accountable to the workforce, and provided there is no reciprocal obligation on workers to accept management priorities, all these measures could help workers to fight redundancies.

Moreover, the report proposes statutory obligations on employers to discriminate positively in favour of women and blacks, and to offer training for youth — all of which are progressive demands that have been raised within the labour movement.

Finally, it would of course be excellent if the government spent £9bn on public services. It is also a small mercy that the report *aims* at full employment instead of figures such as 'no more than x million unemployed' which the leadership have been toying with. All these measures are reflections of demands for which rank and file workers have been fighting for years, often against the resistance of many people who have signed this report.

And perhaps it might seem churlish to reject a report that contains them, merely on the grounds that — for example — it hardly proposes any extension of public ownership, and makes no mention of bank nationalisation, or because it persists with the demand for import controls when the whole world is discussing the imminent prospect of a new trade war, or on the grounds that it is riddled with wonderful promises about Ministries to be created and Boards to be established, but says practically nothing about what we should do *now* about the four million unemployed.

The problem is this: most of the positive measures in the report are *already* labour movement policy on an individual basis, and those that are not could easily be made so. In this report, however, they appear as a *package* in a definite framework that tells us not only what the TUC wants, but how it proposes to get it.

This has important implications in the run-up to a General Election. No longer is there a vague 'Alternative Strategy' with as many different interpretations as authors. This is the alternative. This is the one the Labour Party leadership is going to campaign around, the one we will be asked to support. This is

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the end product, the result of all the debates and discussions of the last three years. To all the theorists of the AES — Geoff Hodgson, the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, Stuart Holland, and Tony Benn — we have to say: 'No more general discussions about an ideal AES. Here is the policy. Let us decide — for it or against it?' And to the labour movement we have to say the same thing.

The Chilean example

But the report as a whole can't be assessed without asking 'what is the context in which it is put forward?' There is no such thing as an abstractly right or wrong policy. In 1970 President Allende of Chile launched an outwardly very similar policy in different circumstances. Chilean working people achieved two important things as a result which are often forgotten but should not be denied. First, they secured a temporary but genuine shift of income and wealth in favour of working people. They won jobs, houses, food: and this was reflected in a growth of Allende's popular support in his first two years of office.

Second, workers greatly advanced their own organisation. Beginning from factory and neighbourhood committees they created networks of struggle organisations which not only went beyond what Allende set out to do — imposing workers' control, organising land seizures, and so on — but created a vehicle which could have prevented the coup and taken over the economy, had the government trusted them to do so. Indeed, the Economy Minister, Pedro Vuscovic, was sacked in 1972 for proposing just this.

The critical weakness of the Chilean government was thus not its economic policy alone — although this of course expressed all its other weaknesses. The problem was the government's failure to deal with the unaccountable power of the army, civil service, multinationals and bankers, so that it could not defend the gains made against the state.

the worst aspect of Allende's failure is that his followers now conclude it was wrong even to attempt reform

In short, the policy, despite its reformist nature, was a vital factor in radicalising working people and advancing their cause. Unlike Madam Allende, who confided in Tony Benn that there was no way the coup could have been prevented in Chile, we believe that it would have been possible even as late as July 1973 to consolidate everything that had been won and defend it against a coup, if a leadership had emerged which was willing to take the next logical step and make a revolution. Indeed the worst and most ironic aspect of Allende's failure is that his followers now conclude it was wrong even to attempt reform.

But the problem is — as Tony Benn has often told us — that Britain is *not* Chile. The context in which the TUC-Labour Party document is put forward is totally different. Yet a surprisingly wide spectrum of the Left approaches Britain as if it were Chile. The problems which everyone discusses surround the following question: what would happen if a left Labour government were elected and began to carry out its programme? Chris Mullin's recent book 'A Very British Coup' is an excellent example of this trend.

Such theorising ignores a fundamental difference between Britain and Chile, a direct consequence of the fact that Britain is an imperialist country, grown fat and lazy with the proceeds of foreign plunder, and that Chile is a dependent country. In Britain the ruling class is defended by an *immensely stronger Labour bureaucracy*, wedded to the defence of the capitalist order by its material interests and by its political dependence on imperialism. Against the widely held conventional wisdom in

Britain, it cannot be stressed often enough that the one obstacle the British labour movement has *never* surmounted is not the Tories but its own leadership. There has never been even a left Labour government, let alone a left Labour government that carried out its programme.

Nor has anything changed to make this more likely today. The TUC is more treacherous than ever. Not only is the PLP majority right wing, but the 'soft centre' is also decamping to the right; the Shadow Cabinet, after a three years' democracy struggle, does not even include Tony Benn, unlike in 1973. And the most practical problem we face is that of securing a Labour government at all. Therefore, the report can only be judged practical from one standpoint: will it help us change this relation of forces? Will it even get a Labour government?

The problem of winning a Labour government

Tony Benn says it will. His keynote speech at the TUC congress stated quite plainly that Labour can win if it unites around the policies agreed between the leaderships of the unions and the party, provided only that there is no witch-hunt.

Is this a plausible suggestion? We don't think so. There is, it will be argued, a precedent. This is Labour's 1973 policy, which incorporated much of the left's *Industrial Strategy*, was generally considered quite radical, and was however very similar to the new report or indeed, to its right. Labour won the election of 1974. It could be argued that it can win again, in the same way, but with an improvement: the threat of replacement now hangs over MPs or leaders who fail to carry out the policy, and the left has conducted a long battle over the issue of accountability. This will act as a sufficient sanction to stop any betrayal.

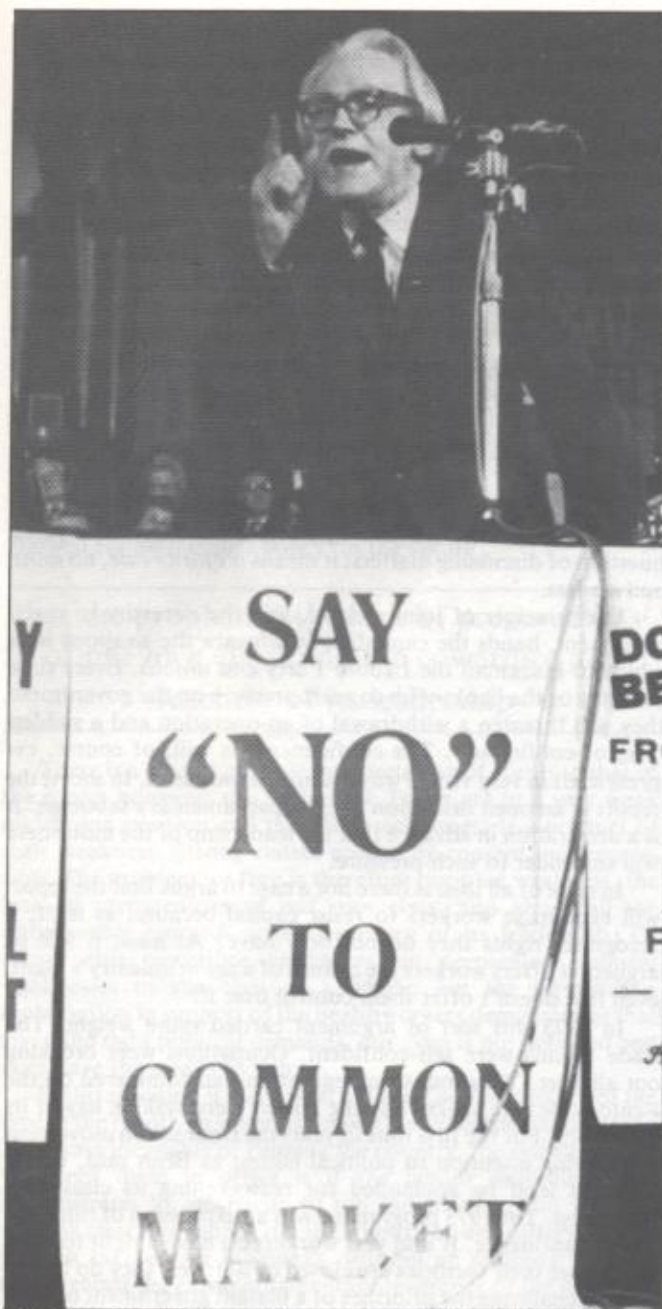
Somehow this idea doesn't ring very true. The point is this: what actually determined the result of the February and October 1974 elections? In February, Wilson did not even win a parliamentary majority. But he took office on a radical programme and, it must be said, initially carried a lot of it out. Rents and prices were frozen, lots of money was pumped into the economy, houses were built, wage rises were granted, and so on.

But why? A proper account of this election is impossible unless we remember that it took place during an extraordinary event: a miners' strike which forced the Tory government to resign. This was the first time any such thing had ever happened in Britain. It is so important that of the entire debate between myself and Tony Benn at the ICA, the one point which the *Times* chose to report was the fact that Tony Benn argued against a strike to bring down the present government. The *Times* at least understood that one of the crucial determinants of election outcomes is the extraparliamentary action going on at the time.

This is so for two reasons. First, the vote itself doesn't settle who makes the government. Only if one party wins an overall majority is it 'automatically' entitled to form a government — and then, only if its MPs all stay loyal. If these conditions are not met, a coalition may well be the result. In 1974 Heath was unable to form a coalition because everyone understood that it would not have the compliance of the unions. It would be unable to govern.

But the action also affected the vote itself. The media fosters a persistent myth: that strikes lose elections for Labour. This is as stupid as the idea that runs on the pound lose elections for capital. The fact is that any class loses elections when it is *disunited* and without clear perspectives. The miners' action won the election because it united the labour movement and some of the middle classes around support for basic rights which the miners were championing, and because it discredited the Tories and divided the ruling class over how to respond. In exactly the same way, the healthworkers — or any other group of striking workers — can help win the election for Labour *provided* they receive mass support and *provided* they do not have

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When the Labour left was defeated on the EEC, the CBI and Treasury put the boot in

a leadership which lines up against them. The most effective thing that the Labour Party and TUC can do to win the election is to throw their wholehearted support behind everyone and anyone who is fighting for their rights against the Tories.

Moreover this relates to what happens after the election. Wilson carried out Labour's promises in the first six months of office because the working class was mobilised and vigilant. If he had given in to pressure from the Treasury, the CBI or the IMF at that stage, the risk was that workers would have resorted to mass industrial action against cuts and wage restrictions and, moreover, would raise the demand for a Benn government, unleashing a full scale class confrontation. It was only when he had scored a political victory over Benn through the EEC referendum, and when he had disciplined the trade union leaders by threatening them with anarchy followed by a coup if they did not cool down their members, that the CBI and the Treasury were able to put the boot in.

The question then arises: why was Wilson nevertheless able to betray Labour's promises? Again, we want to differ from conventional Labour left wisdom. This holds that the Treasury, the IMF and Whitehall conspired to thwart Labour's

programme and that the Cabinet bowed to their pressure because of some mysterious lack of willpower. This is to say the least a bit naive. All these pressures of course existed, and the Cabinet did become the prisoner of extraparlimentary forces. But it was not exactly an unwilling prisoner. Harold Wilson used to write to firms threatened with nationalisation advising them to write back demanding not to be nationalised, so that he could then write to them assuring them it wouldn't happen.

The CBI and Treasury did not conspire to *unseat* the Labour government but to *subvert* it by turning Labour's own leadership against its supporters. It could do this because Labour's leadership was *perfectly willing* to be turned. And when it had created the conditions to launch its betrayal, it did so *in the name* of the 1973 programme. The Industry Act was not scrapped: it was rewritten. The Social Contract was not abandoned: it became the main device for attacking the working class.

The Labour left are right to say that Wilson's version of the Industry Bill (which, incidentally, was drafted by Michael Foot) was not true to the original intentions of the act. But the question which has to be asked is this: how was such a diversion of Labour's purpose *possible* without becoming immediately plain to everyone?

Joint control or workers' control?

The point is that the 1973 policies contained the seeds of their own defeat. The plainest way to demonstrate this is to ask what happened to planning agreements. Only two were ever concluded: one was with the National Coal Board. As Adam Sharples has said, it would be a bit much if the government couldn't conclude an agreement with one of its own companies. The other agreement was with Chryslers, who took the money and ran. Labour has never answered the question which this experience poses: what do you do if management don't agree? What do you do when they say, 'our priorities are more important than you social need'? The new report proposes all manner of procedures which oblige firms to discuss, to take representations from unions, to listen nicely: but the only sanctions to be taken against firms which don't agree at the end of this process is to withdraw government co-operation. In short, the government will take the grandiose step of refusing to co-operate with a firm which is no longer co-operating in any case. Wonderful.

every measure in the Report depends on the co-operation of business

But the whole report reeks of this bankrupt approach. Every single measure it proposes, with the exception of the statutory duty to provide information, depends on the co-operation of business: depends on reaching agreement around questions which everyone knows will produce disagreement. Nor, in the case of information provision, is anything said about the measures to be taken against a firm which refuses to comply.

The most important concession of all, however, is the concept which runs throughout the report: the notion of *joint control* of industry. What does this mean? That the unions, management and government will together seek to 'reach agreement' on company priorities, with a view to ensuring that social needs are taken into account. The real bankruptcy of this approach is revealed in all its starkness by the following passage on workers' consultation rights:

'Decisions affecting the operation of the enterprise as a whole and of individual parts of it — eg closure, nationalisation, merger or new investment — must be communicated to the workforce within a minimum notice period of 90 days. This right to consultation will also apply when a company is involved in discussions with the government leading towards an agreed development plan or with other sources of finance.'

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'No such decisions should be implemented until the trade union representatives of the workers affected by them have had a chance to respond within a set period of 60 days.

'If the workers affected propose alternative strategies to meet the circumstances underlying the decision, there will be an obligation on management to meet the workers and discuss these options within a set period, with a view to reaching agreement. As well as the general information rights set out above, more specific information relating directly to the areas of consultation must also be provided. Management will be under an obligation to state and explain their reasons for taking a particular approach; and workers must have the right of access to outside expert advice.'

Full stop.

Reading this, one is seized with the irrespressible feeling that a paragraph has dropped out. Surely, you think, the report must have *something* more to say. You draw up your alternative, you wait your sixty days, you discuss with management, and management say 'no'. *What happens next?*

In the real world, workers either give in or go on strike. The report has absolutely nothing to say about this. *It doesn't say whose side the government will be on.* The government will sit up there like Nero, fiddling away while the country falls apart beneath it. This is bizarre. In case the printers did actually lose a few words, can we supply our suggestion for the missing bit? It goes as follows:

'If failure to agree is registered, the workers will have a statutory right to take industrial action up to and including the occupation of the factory in defence of their right to work or, if they consider the objectives of Labour's programme as spelt out in its plan to be transgressed by the employer's proposals, in defence of the government's plans;

'The TUC, Labour Party and government will provide all necessary facilities to support such actions and, if the case put forward by the workers is found to be just and in the social interest, the government will nationalise the enterprise.'

The point is a very basic one. Who has the final say?

When workers clash with employers, when social need clashes with profit, who takes the final decision? The fundamental principle for which the labour movement must fight is that the *workers* should have the final say and that the government will support them. In short, they should have veto powers and the right to take action *back up* these powers. The same principle applies in relation to the 'right of represen-

tation' on boards of management. It is not democratic to propose, as the report does, a mere right to be represented by workers who constitute the overwhelming majority in a firm.

Why not fight for workers to have the right, if they so choose, to a clear (two thirds) majority on boards of management and to be allowed to hire and fire managers?

you can discuss and persuade all you like: but
who has the final say in industry?

The importance of such a stance is that it is the only way to convince industry that Labour is serious about its proposal to plan the economy. Planning is impossible unless you have some means of ensuring co-operation with the plan. You can discuss and persuade all you like, but what must be settled is: who has the final say? And who will enforce the decisions of the plan against those who refuse to co-operate? Democracy is not just a question of discussing matters: it means *majority rule*, no more and no less.

The principle of joint control, and the necessity to reach agreement, hands the capitalists *in advance* the weapons with which to blackmail the Labour Party and unions. Every time industry or the banks wish to exert pressure on the government they will threaten a withdrawal of co-operation and a sudden 'loss of confidence'. The confidence loss will, of course, express itself in very visible ways: a run on the banks. In short, the report is an open invitation to extraparliamentary sabotage. It is a declaration in advance that the leadership of the movement will surrender to such pressure.

In spite of all this, is there not a case to argue that the report will encourage workers to resist capital because, at least, it recognises rights they do not now have? At least, it will be argued, it offers workers the chance of a *say* in industry's plans, even if it doesn't offer them control over it.

In 1973 this sort of argument carried more weight. The trade unions were self-confident. Occupations were breaking out all over. Tory industrial legislation had foundered on the Pentonville Five strikes and the miners were making hay of its pay policy. For the first time in years the trade union movement was paying attention to political issues: as Benn said, Heath could at least be applauded for reawakening its class consciousness. The 1973 programme was an expression of this new-found confidence. It said yes, workers *do* have a right to a say in whether their factories are closed or not: yes, they do have a right to challenge the priorities of a blatant government of class privilege. The 1973 policies even awakened workers who had not thought of such issues, encouraging them to take action in defence of rights they had forgotten they possessed.

Learning the lessons of 1974

But things have moved on since 1973. The ruling class has reorganised itself around a daring assault on workers' rights by Thatcher. They are more desperate than before; more weak economically, more threatened by their rivals, more frightened than ever of reform. They have learned the lesson of 1974. They have taken steps, in the creation of the SDP, for fundamental changes in the election system which will be used, if need be, to block off the possibility of a purely electoral Labour victory. The SDP gives them a much more flexible instrument for coalition manoeuvres. Most important of all, they have adopted a fundamentally different approach to the trade union leaderships, capitalising on their political weaknesses.

There are two diametrically opposite conclusions which one can draw from this. First, one may take the appearance for reality and believe that the Tories are immensely strong, cannot be defeated, and that we should therefore retreat to the demands of 1973, dig our heels in and rest on very defensive positions for a while. This is, despite the verbiage, the *essential*

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drift of the report. It makes no advances on 1973 and a number of retreats. Less nationalisation, in particular a refusal to grasp the nettle by calling for the nationalisation of the banks; a retreat on the 1973 conference demand for a *majority* of workers on management boards, back to the position imposed by the CBI offensive in 1976, of mere *representation* on management boards; no sanctions against firms that won't conform to the plan; incomes policy under another guise, and so on. All the rest is in reality window dressing for a retreat into a compromise which Terry Duffy is quite happy to sign, because he knows damn well where it is heading.

Indeed that incomes policy question continues to be central. It is not just that wage controls cut working class living standards. It is also that they are designed to *break* the struggle of the working class. That is why their rejection continues to be central to any working class policy. The proof of this is contained in the reaction of the more sensible right wing leaders to the TUC decision to reject incomes policy: they quietly declared that it was okay because the Liaison Committee report still allowed for an incomes policy 'in the future'.

but the problem is the lack of preparedness of our *own* class, and the cowardice and treachery of its leadership

There is a second possible interpretation of events to that of the report however: this is that the Tories are in a very weak underlying position and that their viciousness is a product of their weakness. Strong classes govern by consent, not repression. The problem we face is therefore our *own* weakness, the lack of preparedness of our *own* class, and above all the unbelievable cowardice and treachery of its leadership. Of course this cowardice capitalises on deepseated political weaknesses of the class as a whole: but the tremendous mobilisation in support of the healthworkers demonstrates that given the right political demands, our class is not defeated and does have the means to win.

In this situation it is criminal to take a *political* stance of the type in the report, to water down one's *political* demands. If the Tories are incapable of running the country, the one thing that will keep them in office is if the labour movement also demonstrates its incapacity to run the country. But it is absolutely clear one cannot run the country on any different basis without taking over the banks, without an armoury of sanctions against the extraparlimentary resistance of the capitalist class, without being prepared to take over factories that are closing through flight of capital and to run them under workers' control; in short, without mobilising the working class by preparing them to take over administration of both the economy and the state.

What's the alternative?

In our view, there is an alternative to hand, which the labour movement has already tried and proven: that of mass, extra-parliamentary campaigning and action combining the forces of the Labour Party and the trade unions. The most damning feature of the new Report is that after ten years of discussion and experience, during which the importance of extra-parliamentary action has been at the forefront of the Left's advance, it receives scarcely a mention from the Liaison Committee. Instead of spelling out how the new Joint Union Committees could co-ordinate industrial action to *compel* recalcitrant employers to divulge information and change their plans, the Report discusses nothing but the most improbable conditions under which they might *ask* the employers to do things they have no intention of doing if they can possibly avoid it.

Will extra-parliamentary action alone secure lasting change? No, of course it has to be combined with government

action. The question is: which comes first? The Liaison Committee says first wait for an election (which we may very well not win); then hope the government will carry out our plan (which it probably won't); then wait for the employers' response so that we can invoke statutory rights (which the cabinet will probably not even grant.) The vain hope of the Left in the Liaison Committee is that when all these unlikely events have taken place, extra-parliamentary action is waiting in the background as a kind of reserve, last-ditch power.

Our approach is the direct opposite: extra-parliamentary action will defend our rights in the here and now, and create the best conditions for the election of a Labour government. If this succeeds, the extra-parliamentary action should *continue*, under a Labour government instead of being wound down, to defeat the extra-parliamentary resistance of Whitehall, the Treasury and the multinationals, and to force the cabinet to carry out the decisions of the labour movement. The Left in the Labour Party should be fighting for further policies whose goal is to neutralise and eventually destroy the resistance to change which is offered by these unaccountable institutions of capitalist rule, by preparing the working class to replace them with new and democratic institutions.

Let us take, as an illustration, just four of the most popular demands of the labour movement: unilateral disarmament, full employment, equal pay for women and a free and adequate health service. On every single one of these demands, there have been large extra-parliamentary actions. 250,000 took to the streets against Cruise missiles; hundreds of thousands took part in the People's March; equal pay struggles, often mingling with low pay struggles, are a constant fact of industrial life. Most important of all, the degree of unity and solidarity achieved around the healthworkers' dispute — as well as the degree of public support — shows that this kind of mass action can unite our movement *better* than 34-page manifestos.

If the Tory government is forced to concede to the healthworkers, the 'Iron Lady's' image will be somewhat dented to say the least. Tory unity will be the first casualty; the government's very existence would be threatened. This would only be the first breach in the wall: what will become of Tebbit's industrial legislation? Will the trade union left not take heart and try to repeat their success against privatisation? And why shouldn't industrial action be used to prevent Cruise missiles coming to our shores? The TUC could easily mobilise industrial support for equal pay if it chose to do so.

Suppose, then, that a Labour government came to office in the wake of this kind of movement. The first problem it could well confront is the attempted desertion of MPs to the SDP, or indeed the real possibility of arriving in parliament as the largest minority party. On what basis could it govern? On the basis, not simply of its parliamentary showing, but by claiming that it alone can retain the confidence of the women, healthworkers, anti-missile campaigners and unemployed workers who demand a future from it. It would therefore have to support and extend mass campaigning action in order to stay in office. If, as is most likely, the parliamentary leadership refuses to take this course, the left would have to do so, and *force* the right wing to implement Labour's promises under the threat that the country will become ungovernable if this is not done.

But the ruling class would not take such a situation lying down. The attempt to remove Cruise missiles would lead directly to an attempt by America to use international economic and diplomatic pressure to bring the government to heel, and Labour would rapidly be forced to decide whether to tolerate American bases and whether to remain a member of the Western Alliance and NATO. A break with NATO would be necessary to defend the decision to remove Cruise missiles; in the light of such a break Labour would have to review all defence commitments, and the best way to neutralise the military lobby would be a withdrawal from all overseas commitments, including Ireland.

On the economic front, Labour would clearly have to move

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rapidly to create new jobs by spending its promised £9bn and beginning to put its proposed plan into practice. It would have to legislate equal pay. But these two measures alone would make large holes in capitalist profitability. Labour would be threatened with a flight of capital, and the closure of factories — an open attempt at extra-parliamentary sabotage.

What should happen then? First, Labour has to command two vital instruments. It has to be able to nationalise firms which are not complying with social need; and it has to be able to mobilise workers in any firm threatened with closure to prevent that closure and, if necessary, take over the firm concerned. As a very minimum it would have to take over the banks and financial institutions.

How can Labour prepare the trade union movement for this kind of action? This is where the demand for workers' control becomes important. Capital's ultimate threat, which it uses most successfully to bring the union leaderships to heel, is what we might call the 'Samson threat'. It frightens the union leaders with the prospect that the whole economy will come down about its ears through loss of business confidence. How can we respond? Only if we are ultimately ready to take on the running of industry ourselves. However, we are not yet ready to do so. We do not have the expertise. We do not have the information. We do not have the cash.

A strategy for workers' control should aim to acquire these vital assets. First comes the demand for information. This is probably the single most important demand which emerges from the Liaison Committee Report. We do need to know about the various companies' investment options, trading partners, financial structure, and so on. But these secrets will not be yielded without struggle. Therefore, the Joint Union Committees proposed in the Report should by all means be created and fight, hand in hand with Labour legislators, for the right to in-

formation. But they must be prepared to struggle for it, by means of industrial action and by conducting their own research. There is scope here for widespread co-operation between Labour councils, Labour Parties, unions and even academics, in building up a real picture, at every level, of how British industry operates and how it could be made to serve social needs. A campaign to acquire this information, as a basis for real planning, could galvanise the labour movement.

However, having acquired this information, how can we begin to impose our own priorities? At this stage, while we are on the defensive, the most important realisable goal is that of a *right of veto*: the right to know what the employers plan to do and block it, if it is not in our interests. The development of alternatives flows naturally from this kind of action.

With Labour in office, a struggle for information and the right of veto could acquire a much more advanced dynamic: for Labour could not only legislate in favour of industrial action to secure these demands; it could go one stage farther. If the employers refuse to carry out a project proposed by the government and unions, if they refuse equal pay or refuse to provide jobs, the labour movement could then say: 'Right, you are not fit to run this industry in the interests of the public. We are going to put elected representatives of the workers in *overall charge*. We want the same rights the shareholders now have. We want a clear majority on the board of directors; we want the right to hire and fire managers; and we want to begin training up our own managers who will serve our interests.'

Needless to say, firms thus brought under workers' control could not function without financial resources and without insertion into a framework of national planning. The nationalisation of the banks, a basic national plan, and government commitment to nationalise firms thus brought under workers' control, are indispensable.

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CONSENSUS POLITICS

Andrew Gamble

As the waters of the South Atlantic continue to flow through Westminster the post-war social democratic consensus seems a long time ago.

Andrew Gamble looks at two new biographies and reflects on the nature of the consensus and the reasons for its passing.

Susan Crosland: **Tony Crosland**, Cape 1982, £10.95, and Nigel Fisher: **Harold Macmillan**, Weidenfeld 1982, £12.95.

Harold Macmillan and Antony Crosland were unusual British politicians because were intellectuals (although Macmillan did his best to disguise the fact after 1945), and both became important ideologists for their parties. Both also attempted to carry through some of their ideas into practice in government. In contrast to so many British politicians both had a conscious ideological view of the world which guided their political judgements and political activity. They belonged to different political generations, different political parties and drew inspiration from different political traditions. Yet the similarity of their conclusions about how a modern capitalist society should be organised is striking.

To understand the ideological underpinnings of the post-war consensus a perusal of Macmillan's *The Middle Way* (1938) and Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956) is indispensable. Both were at different times major figures in their parties and their ideas have had lasting political importance. Yet today the ideas and reputation of both men have suffered an eclipse. The post-war consensus in which both so passionately believed has been discredited and the demons of right and left which they thought they had locked away for ever are once more at large.

These two biographies are useful, if limited, studies of the two politicians. Of the two the Fisher book is less valuable. It is conventional in its judgements and adds very little to what is already known of Macmillan's career and his political views. Fisher is a Conservative MP, the biographer of Ian Macleod and very much within the Macmillan-Macleod-Heath tradition in the party. His biography does not probe very far into the interesting and unanswered questions about Macmillan's career but it provides a useful summary of it. Susan Crosland's biography of her late husband is altogether different. It is an extraordinarily vivid human portrait of Crosland as well as giving some fascinating details about the development of his ideas and the character of the Labour leadership. It is also worth reading in order to understand more about the origins and development of the Labour Right. It describes how far the original Gaitskellite group had fragmented by the time of Crosland's death in 1977, and will be an important point of reference for the understanding of Crosland's

own political standpoint and the way in which his views developed.

The post-war consensus has often been referred to as 'Butskellism' because of the apparent similarity between Gaitskell's and Butler's policies when they were Chancellors of the Exchequer in the 1950s. But this is one of the least important aspects of the consensus. To understand what it was really about, Macmillan and Crosland are far better guides than Butler and Gaitskell. The consensus established in the 1940s was more than simple 'policy coincidence'. It represented an agreement on the fundamental priorities of policy between the two major parties, an acceptance of the new balance of political forces and the limits which that set to the debate on policy. One of the most important and least discussed of these fundamentals was foreign policy. Crosland may have been on the brink of joining the Communist Party in 1939 and Macmillan was favourably impressed, like so many advocates of planning in the 1930s, by his visit to the Soviet Union. But the war and its aftermath transformed perceptions of communism and brought the great bulk of Western political leaders to accept the inclusion of their countries in a political and economic bloc dominated by the United States.

the consensus established in the 1940s was more than simply a 'policy coincidence'

The consensus on foreign policy was the basis on which arose the consensus on domestic policy between the leaders of the political parties. It was with this aspect of the consensus that Macmillan and Crosland are most associated. Macmillan in his premier-ship became preoccupied with foreign affairs while Crosland was appointed Foreign Secretary just before he died. But their writings are concerned overwhelmingly with the problem of managing the domestic economy. Mixed economy and managed economy are familiar euphemisms for the new economic order which emerged in the 1940s. For its advocates, like Macmillan and Crosland, it contained four main features: a) a productive sector which contained predominantly private owned companies but with a proportion of state owned firms — all of which however were subjected to market criteria and market sanctions; b) an extension of state regulation and surveillance of the economy to enable the state to assume 'strategic control' and so promote full employment and economic growth; c) an expansion of welfare and social programmes, to create more equal opportunities for all citizens and to provide a more flexible, more contented, and better trained labour force; d) the recognition of independent working class organisations and the need to involve their leadership in formulating and carrying out economic policy.

All these central features of British social democratic politics were anticipated and explicitly endorsed by Macmillan in his writings in the 1920s and 1930s. In a characteristic statement of his views he wrote: 'There are those great aims upon which Unionism must

concentrate — the modernisation of our economic methods, the humanisation of our industrial relations, and the expansion of our foreign and primarily of our imperial markets.' The 'Middle Way' for Macmillan meant a middle way between socialism and 'unrestrained individualism'. What was needed was to bring economic life under conscious direction and control to cope with what Macmillan saw as the two greatest scars of the capitalist system and the greatest threats to its political stability — unemployment and poverty. In another early statement he argued that laissez-faire led 'inevitably to socialism'. The only anti-socialist programme that has any chance of success is the organisation of a social and industrial structure which shall be neither capitalist nor socialist but democratic; where the wage earner shall be neither slave nor tyrant, but truly and in the widest sense

Macmillan was an isolated figure in the Conservative Party in the 1920s and 1930s

partner'. Such opinions put him close to social imperialists like Leo Amery, as well as to some currents of progressive Liberal opinion, notably Keynes. Keynes wrote to him in the 1930s: 'My main feeling is that you are not nearly bold enough with your proposals for developing the investment functions of the state.'

Yet Macmillan was an isolated figure in the Conservative Party in the 1920s and 1930s. He never held office and apart from a group of younger MPs he lacked supporters. He was constantly abused in the Conservative press as a semi Socialist — the *Daily Mail* openly rejoiced when he lost his seat at Stockton in 1929. If they had had the prescience to brand him 'wet' they would have done so. His concern for unemployment and his preference for much greater state coordination of the economy led him to sympathise strongly with Mosley when Mosley resigned over unemployment in 1930, and for a time he did contemplate joining Mosley's new party.

The war economy and the post-war reconstruction created a major shift in the balance of political forces and for Macmillan a major political opportunity. Since the Conservative Party was not obliged to accommodate itself to the enhanced electoral and industrial power of organised labour, Macmillan could effortlessly emerge as an architect of the New Conservatism, offering good reasons for accepting the reforms and changes the party had to accept if it was to survive as a mass political force. The Conservatives' Industrial Charter of 1947 he wrote: 'proved our determination to maintain full employment, to sustain and improve the social services and to continue the strategic control of the economy in the hands of the Government, while preserving, wherever possible, the tactical function of private enterprise.'

This was where Crosland came in. Crosland's political generation inherited the social democratic order which was established in the 1940s. In the 1950s, with Labour out of office, Crosland began to reflect on the ways in which British capitalism had been transformed and to redefine the goals and

Reviews

means of socialist activity. He gloried in the title 'revisionist'. What he wanted to revise were the traditional socialist doctrines of the British Labour Party, particularly Marxism. When he was only 22 he had declared: 'I am revising Marxism and will emerge as the modern Bernstein? The Marxism he wanted to reject was the British Marxism of the 1930s as represented in the writings of John Strachey and which had influenced prominent Labour Party intellectuals such as Harold Laski. He was consciously looking for an ideological basis for non-Marxists in the Labour Party other than straightforward pragmatism and opportunism. In the *Future of Socialism* he attempted to provide one.

First, he argued that the Marxist analysis was fatally flawed because the modern economy could no longer be described as capitalist. As a result of democratic pressures it had been transformed into an industrial society in which private ownership of the means of production was no longer important. This economy no longer had any inevitable tendency to collapse. On the contrary it could grow forever, due to the extension of state control and the new techniques of economic management at the state's disposal. For Crosland the managerial revolution combined with the achievement of full employment, the enlarged social welfare programmes, the nationalisation of key industries and the trade unions, had made the nature and distribution of economic power substantially different from what had existed in capitalist economies.

Underlying this account was Crosland's view of the pluralist nature of political power, hence the fundamental neutrality of the state and the technical and political possibilities of unlimited growth. In a well-known passage in the *Future of Socialism* he wrote: 'If socialists want bolder planning they must simply choose bolder Ministers'. It was central to his whole argument that if properly managed the capitalist economy could produce enough wealth to permit a steady expansion of social and welfare programmes without precipitating accelerating inflation.

Crosland argued that for socialists the fundamental goal was the creation of a classless, egalitarian society. The fault of many socialists for him was to mistake means for ends. Public ownership was only a means towards a classless society, which might or might not be appropriate depending on political circumstances. In the 1950s he decided it was not. By the 1970s he thought it might be again. The political programme he advanced was centred on how socialists could create a more egalitarian society in the post-capitalist industrial society which now existed and was still disfigured by gross inequalities. Crosland therefore became one of the leading advocates of a programme of modernisation in the 1960s. Modernisation involved better management of the economy to ensure faster growth and significant social reforms, particularly of the education system.

Crosland's ideas greatly influenced the New Britain programme on which Labour campaigned in the 1960s. More planning, more state involvement, more tripartism were seen as the means to remedy Britain's relative economic decline and provide the funds for the progressive social democratic policies Crosland wanted to see. The aspiration was widely shared, not least by Harold Macmillan who as Prime Minister after 1956 restrained the advocates of cautious deflationary

policies and eventually committed his government to the launching of a wide-ranging strategy of modernisation.

Yet by 1974 Crosland could write in *Socialism Now*: 'Extreme class inequalities remain, poverty is far from eliminated, the economy is in a state of semi-permanent crisis and inflation is rampant. All this undoubtedly belies the relative optimism of *The Future of Socialism*... Do these setbacks to our hopes demonstrate that the revisionist analysis of means and ends was wrong, and the Marxist analysis which it sought to rebut was right? He rejected his doubts. He argued that there was a crisis of British capitalism, but not a crisis of world capitalism. Growth had been interrupted by the oil crisis but would soon be resumed. Progress towards the kind of society he favoured had been hindered by policy mistakes — the failure to devalue in 1964 — and because British society 'slow-moving, rigid and class-ridden' had proved much harder to change than he had supposed.



Harold Macmillan

Macmillan and Crosland were both involved theoretically and practically so closely with the social democratic consensus and the modernisation strategy that it is hardly surprising that both have come under such fierce attack in the 1970s. The Macmillan era is seen by Thatcherites as an era of appeasement when the Conservative Party failed to roll back socialism, reduce the size of the state sector, or confront the power of the unions. The result was to unleash forces which produced the great inflation of the 1960s and 1970s. In the Labour Party Crosland's ideas have been challenged by the Labour Left but also increasingly by his former colleagues on the Labour Right. Crosland had been one of the strongest of Gaitskell's supporters and helped to organise the Campaign for Democratic Socialism which was intended to resist any leftwing takeover of the party. Crosland's views at this time were clearcut. The problem as he saw it was that the Left in the Labour Party was too big. In a letter to Gaitskell which Susan Crosland quotes, he analyses the 81 votes Wilson received when he stood against Gaitskell. They included he argued: '20 hard-boiled extreme Left... this is the crucial group which must be expelled'. Another group was '30 New Statesmen or ex-ILP... Many of these are intolerable and neurotic people who will always oppose us, but who nevertheless belong in the party and if we could get rid of group c (ie the extreme Left) would constitute a perfectly normal Left Wing.' Crosland was very anxious that the Right should not be sustained by trade union bloc votes alone, but should secure a permanent majority in the PLP and in the constituency parties.

Gaitskell's early death blighted Crosland's immediate prospects in the party, but Crosland was not an unqualified supporter of Gaitskell. He doubted whether he was a 'sufficiently radical' leader for a left-wing party. Crosland's egalitarian principles as well as his growing ambitions in the party led to increasing distance between himself and other prominent figures on the Labour Right, particularly Roy Jenkins. Crosland refused to vote for British entry to the EEC in 1971 and resisted overtures from Jenkins to form a Centre-Right alliance in the party to seize control of it and purge the Left. Within the Labour Government after 1974 Crosland emerged as a strong critic of cuts in welfare programmes and education and he fought hard in Cabinet against the terms of the IMF loan in 1976. He never abandoned Keynesianism or his belief in the desirability of high public spending. What he disliked most about many on the Labour Right was the uncritical way in which they embraced what he called the 'new illiterate and reactionary attitude to public expenditure'. He had earlier commented on the Jenkins faction in the party: 'Their idea of socialism is not mine. Roy has come actually to dislike socialism.' At the time of the IMF crisis he noted that there were some Cabinet Ministers, notably Prentice and Dell, who opposed the terms of the loan because they did not think them tough enough.

There is little doubt what Crosland would have thought of the Thatcher Government or of the SDP. Since he had worked out his own ideological position he resisted all attacks upon it whether from Right or Left. Not much is left of the edifice he constructed and the consensus on economic management and the institutional organisation of the economy of which he so much approved has gone. The experience of the last two Labour governments and the world recession has not convinced many socialists that he was right. But at least his egalitarian principles remained intact and he remained committed to the politics of Labour and to arguing his case within the labour movement. Under the hammer blows of Thatcherism Crosland would have instinctively moved Left rather than Right.

Macmillan also has not attempted to conceal his distaste for monetarism or his despair at the re-emergence of mass unemployment. In 1958 he said: 'Everyone in this hall tonight who is more than twenty five years of age has actually lived in a period when there were 2¼ million unemployed in this country.... As long as I live I can never forget the impoverishment and demoralisation which all this brought with it. I am determined, as far as it lies within human power, never to allow this shadow to fall again upon our country'. In 1982 there is little light left for this brand of Tory or Labour politics. It is a measure of the polarisation that has occurred and the seriousness of the crisis that the political positions of Macmillan and Crosland which once were so central and mainstream have now become so marginal. There is much to reflect on in these two books; not least the new character of Conservatism which Thatcherism expresses — the search for a new political programme and a new popular national majority. Macmillan's comments on his successors are brilliantly concise: 'Ted was a very good No.2 (pause). Not a leader (pause). Now you have a real leader (long pause). Whether she is leading you in the right direction...'

ANDREW GAMBLE is the author of *Britain in Decline*, Papermac 1981.

Reviews

MARCUSE'S MARXISM

Chris Bertram

Barry Katz: *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, Verso Editions, 1982, £4.50.

Some years have passed since Herbert Marcuse was seen as a cult figure by sections of the Left. This period which might have permitted a sympathetic reassessment of his views has been dominated by extremely hostile criticism. Unfortunately, Barry Katz has missed the opportunity of replying to 'analytical' and Althusserian attacks on Marcuse while maintaining a theoretical distance: instead he lapses into an uncritical repetition of Marcuse's own doctrines. This is not to say that the book is all bad; on the contrary, its biographical and historical sections are often excellent, although they do leave important questions unanswered.

The central theme of the book is Marcuse's use of aesthetic as a transcendental yardstick by which to judge contemporary culture. It may be that certain modes of life anticipate the values and culture of a communist society, and Marcuse was very alive to the significance of the advances made by the women's movement in the sphere of personal politics. Marcuse is always caught between an abstract counterposition of the ideal and the actual on the one hand, and a view which sees human liberation as the realisation of tendencies present in existing societies on the other. Katz records this dichotomy, but is so keen to defend Marcuse against the charge of 'Young Hegelianism' that he glosses over the difference between the two positions.

Marcuse's view that the working class in the imperialist countries was so dominated by bourgeois ideology that it could not formulate opposition now sounds rather hollow. Many of the institutions that Marcuse saw principally as instruments of social control, such as the Welfare State, were real gains made by the working class, which it was aware of the need to defend. The inability of the bourgeoisie to solve its problems by technological means would also seem to refute Marcuse's views. Katz, however, is content simply to record Marcuse's position.

The relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis is one that has never been satisfactorily clarified. Either attention is concentrated on therapy as a practice or it is fixed on Freud's metapsychology. Marcuse opts for the latter. The wholesale adoption of Freud's theory of history (in a pseudo-Marxist guise) leads Marcuse to see history as the alienation of humanity from its libidinal essence, which is to be restored in a communist society. All very Hegelian, and an opportunity for Katz to discuss the relationship between Marcuse and Marxism, an opportunity he lets slip.

The most impressive parts of the book are biographical. Katz gives us a fascinating picture of intellectual life in Weimar Germany. Marcuse's upbringing in a comfortable bourgeois home, his radicalisation by the First World War, his participation in the 1918 revolution, and his flight into exile with the ascendancy of the Nazi dictatorship all make interesting reading. Katz's contention that the

only choice available to Marxist intellectuals after the mid-1920's was between capitulation to Stalinism (Lukács) or retreat into academia (Marcuse) must be contested. Outside the Trotskyist movement, Karl Korsch provides an example of someone who sought to maintain both integrity and involvement during the same period.

LABOUR & IRELAND

Nick Hewlett

Geoffrey Bell, *Troublesome Business*, Pluto Press, 1982, £4.50.

Troublesome Business is a truly eye-opening book. For the first time we are able to trace the development of the Labour Party's words and actions concerning Ireland.

Many will be familiar with the policy and deeds of the Party, and particularly its leaders, since the troops went in in 1969. We remember that Labour sent them in 'to defend the Catholics'; that in 1977 the Labour government stayed in power because of a deal with the Unionists; that Labour's Don Concanon visited the dying Bobby Sands in 1981 to stress that the Party was behind the Tories as far as refusing the five demands of the hunger strikers was concerned.

In *Troublesome Business* Geoffrey Bell gives us a real insight into what went before. He describes how from the outset the question of Ireland in the Labour Party was 'troublesome'. At the first Labour Party conference forty of the fifty candidates supported some sort of Home Rule. But the extent of this rule was limited and the conception confused while Labour was still in opposition.

By the time they held some power, during the First World War coalition government, Labour MPs were prepared to sit in the Cabinet which executed James Connolly for defending the cause of Irish self-determination. The Irish question emerges clearly as the hot potato of Labour Party history. As far as the leadership is concerned the issue is best left alone and its own positions left half-formulated. From time to time either the Irish or the Labour Party rank and file force a decision.

In 1920 Labour Party conference gave un-

conditional support to Irish self-determination. Rather than challenge Lloyd George's negotiated partition treaty of the same year, however, Labour leaders voted for and praised it; JR Clynes described it as a 'triumph of national patriotism'. They clearly felt the issue could now be dropped.

Geoffrey Bell demonstrates how the rank and file of the Labour Party have been consistently ahead of the leadership on Ireland. Again in 1920 Labour's *Daily Herald* reported on a delegation to Ireland. A delegate writes: 'They have realised that the only alternative to coercion lies not in the timorous and ineffective proposals for "instalments of Home Rule" but in full and fearless application of the principle of self-determination.'

Implicitly then Bell points to the lack of democracy which has characterised the Labour Party since birth. He allows us to conclude that the question of Labour Party democracy is vitally linked to its ideological shortcomings. The lack of analytical passages in the book is at times frustrating. *Troublesome Business* is a description of Labour's neglect and betrayal of the Irish working class. This is clear. But it begs the question why it was there, and why is there still such neglect and betrayal?

But the book remains an important study for those seeking to understand better Labour's prevarications on Ireland. It is striking for instance how aspects of the forthcoming elections to an Irish Assembly in the North are reminiscent of the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974 under Ted Heath. What Bell shows us at one point is that these were similar to a set of proposals put forward by Harold Wilson shortly beforehand.

An understanding of history is the key to the present. The Labour Party's history on the Irish issue is no exception. *Troublesome Business* thus fills a yawning gap in Irish historical literature.

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