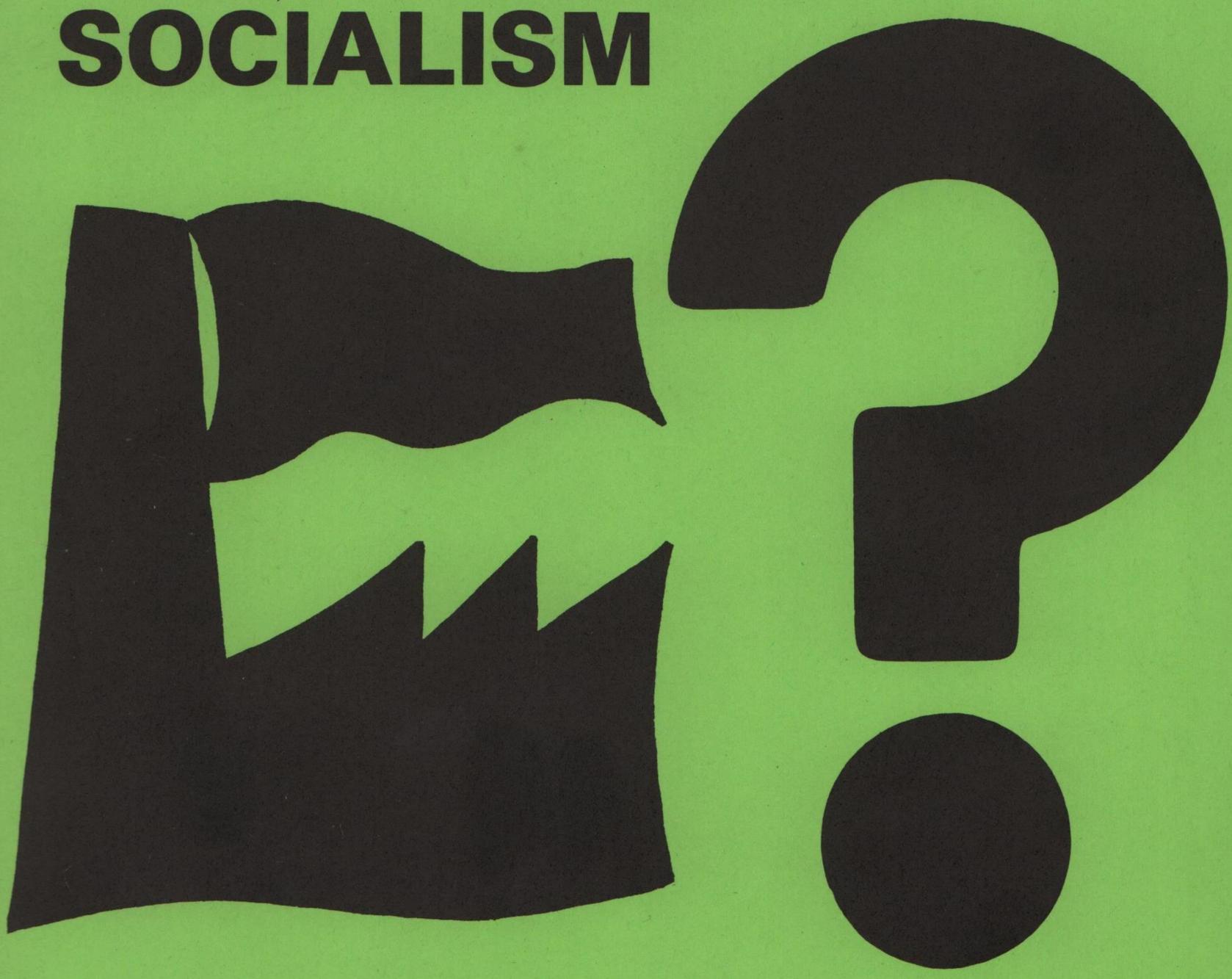


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# SOLIDARITY

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## THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM



40p

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Our apologies for the lateness of this issue. There are only a few of us producing Solidarity. And if one of us has a heavy month at work, the magazine is late.



SEND US CASH - WE'RE COMPLETELY BROKE !!



# EDITORIAL

## About ourselves

In a long article in this issue of Solidarity Andy Brown examines the problems faced by the Left in Britain. He argues that, despite appearances, Thatcherite policies have neither crushed popular opposition nor created a nation of passive spectators. However, the antagonism that ordinary people feel towards the government takes forms which lie outside the vision of the traditional Left. The outdated creed of paternalistic social welfare to which the majority of the Left still remain faithful has failed to attract any real popular support and is a sitting target for the propaganda of the New Right. Political debate remains a mere confrontation between 'soft' bureaucrats and 'hard' monetarists; individualisation, a-politicisation, and the diminishing of political perspectives have become normal; the angry nihilism of punk has been replaced by a passive, narcissistic culture.

What contribution can Solidarity make towards creating a way out of this situation? First, and most important, we must recognise that we are not political missionaries bearing some elite knowledge of pure revolutionary thought. New, critical currents within feminism, libertarian activists within the peace movement, and the more clear-thinking of the 'greens', are voicing much the same kind of ideas as us. The task facing us has already been identified: to go beyond the fragments into the creation of a new form of popular radicalism, and to generalise this abstract concept into demands and proposals which will directly express the real needs and frustrations felt by ordinary people.

In the 1970s, Solidarity's principal theoretical aim was to attempt some sort of synthesis of the best of marxist and anarchist theory. At times, this effort was reduced to a ritual of criticism for criticism's sake: "Tell us what you believe and we'll tell you why it's wrong"; yet something practical did come out of these discussions. Ideas about direct democracy and critiques of bureaucratic practices were widely discussed and have helped reshape the attitudes and structures of many radical groups. Similarly, the vast debate on the nature and organisation of daily life - the Personal and the Political - started within the libertarian left and has spread to virtually all areas of society.

Today we have a similar role. Taking account not only of marxist and anarchist theory, but also of the ideas of the feminist and ecologist movements, we must aim to contribute in an informed and

constructive way to a wider debate among all radical groups. The ultimate aim of this debate is the creation of new forms of popular struggle, which will effectively oppose state authoritarianism and social dehumanisation without falling into the bureaucratic and elitist structures of previous mass socialist movements. To contribute usefully we must avoid writing intricate accounts of vast but cloudy confrontations between political philosophies, and must place our proposals squarely in the context of present-day struggles. Clearly the best way to do this is through participation in these struggles: to re-phrase Marx, by attempting to change the world we will learn to understand it.

We are convinced that self-management - the deepest possible control by the largest possible number of people over all decisions affecting their lives - will be the basis for all future viable radical movements. But beyond this central commitment, we have relatively few fixed ideas. At the moment, we feel that the best way to progress is through open discussion, even through 'learning by mistakes'. For this reason we often publish material which presents new points in an interesting way even if we don't agree with its precise political direction. Accordingly, articles within Solidarity may present differing, even contradictory, views on the same subject.

S.G.





## CRISIS IN PRINT

# The story of Coastalpress

In early January, Coastalpress - a small periodical publishing company based in Central London - ceased trading after five months in existence. Its only journal, Motorcycling Weekly, was closed and the title sold to another company. Thirty-four staff members lost their jobs. Management claimed that the National Graphical Association was responsible; but an article in the Sunday Times hinted at managerial incompetence and lack of capital.

What made the demise of Coastalpress significant was that it was no ordinary publishing company. For the first three months of its life it had used new technology which allowed journalists to key their copy on to word processor screens connected to a computerised photo-typsetter, and it had been using this 'single keystroking' system with the tacit approval of the NGA's bureaucracy.

As such, Coastalpress was unique. Elsewhere, the NGA has refused to accept single keystroking in magazine- and book-publishing, except in the case of Latin American Newsletters, where what would have been the first single keystroking agreement signed by the NGA was broken by management while negotiations were still in progress, leading to a lock-out of NUJ and NGA members which is still continuing. The only British operations using single keystroking were - and remain - non-union houses.

The reasons for the NGA's intransigence in the face of single keystroking are well known. Single keystroking threatens NGA members' jobs, their control over the production process, and their craft-based high wages. Up to now, pressure from the NGA membership has prevented the NGA bureaucrats from deviating too much in practice from opposition to single

keystroking (although the NGA does have as its official policy acceptance of a negotiated three-phased introduction of the process). So why did the NGA officials change their tune for Coastalpress?

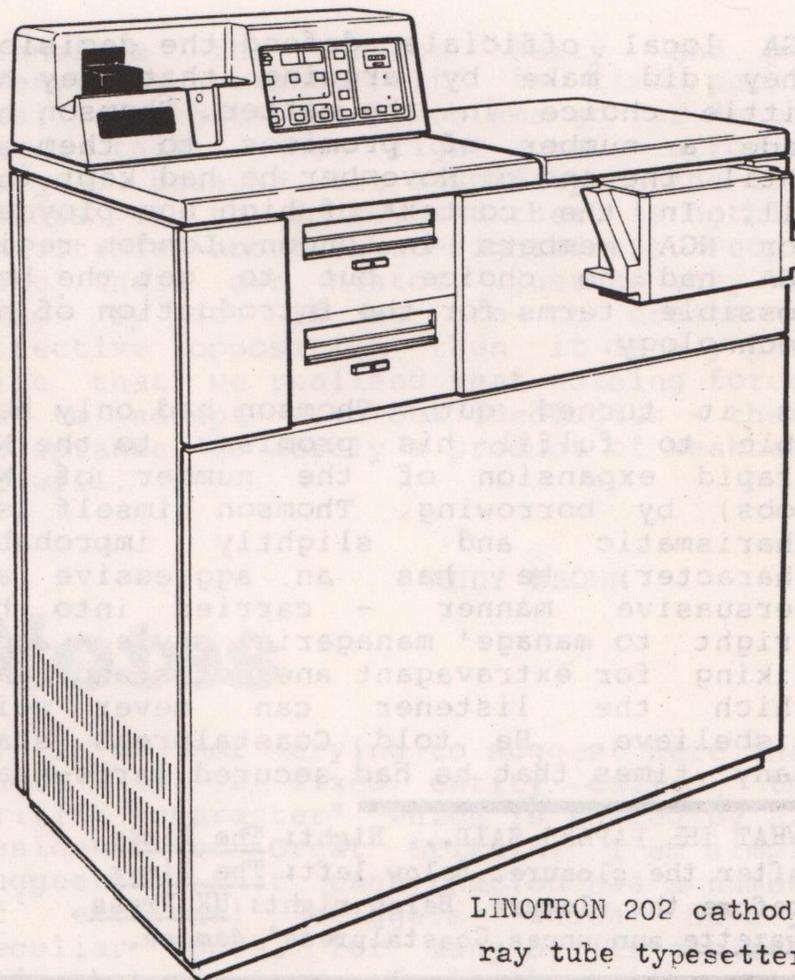
The answer to this question is complicated by the fact that they could claim they didn't. No formal agreement was ever signed between the NGA and the Coastalpress management, and indeed, on 20 December 1983, the NGA explicitly refused to sign such an agreement. Earlier, on 27 November 1983 (at the height of the picketing outside the Stockport Messenger works in Warrington) an NGA national officer, Chris Harding, had issued a blacking order on Motorcycling Weekly after an article appeared in the Times detailing Coastalpress's break-through with the NGA, and the blacking was only lifted when Coastalpress' managing director, Bill Thomson (an ex-journalist with experience on the Observer and News of the World), made a written promise to return to traditional methods of typesetting - in other words, double keystroking.

Nevertheless, until the blacking of Motorcycling Weekly, single keystroking had gone ahead, not only on that magazine but also on its predecessor Motorcycling (a monthly magazine) and two other titles, Radio News (a fortnightly paper for the radio industry) and New Video Viewer (a monthly magazine). Radio News was closed in mid-November and New Video Viewer in December, both on grounds of cost.

Until 1 November, journalists were keying all copy without help from NGA members. After that date, NGA staff were employed to set copy from freelances, advertising copy and contract typesetting work. The NGA's London region, if not its national council, was fully aware of what was going on, because John Geliet, an NGA London region official, had visited Coastalpress's premises on more than one occasion, first to look at the equipment and talk with management, and then to help organise an NGA chapel (i.e. a union branch).

During the single keystroking period, journalists found themselves regularly working a seven-day week. Often they worked overtime until midnight or later. Yet deadlines with printers were broken consistently. This was partly the result of under-staffing and the new technology's unreliability. But the most important factor was that the use of single keystroking made certain journalistic tasks - particularly sub-editing - far more laborious and time-consuming. Most journalists, moreover, with their slow two-fingered typing, proved to be inefficient typesetters. On a number of occasions temp. typists were brought in by management to speed up the process.

The upshot of all this was that, although single keystroking involved fewer workers being employed than in a traditional



LINOTRON 202 cathode ray tube typesetter

process, the total numbers of hours the workforce worked each week, was roughly the same as the number of hours worked with traditional methods. The difference was that workers doing those hours were worse organised and worse paid than the traditional workforce. Until the blacking by the NGA, the Coastalpress journalists had not even formed themselves into an NUJ chapel. When they did, it was for the most part to act as a counter to the influence of the NGA. A majority of Coastalpress journalists - composed mainly of those who had been taken on to produce Motorcycling Weekly - were unsympathetic to members of the NGA chapel, who they saw as overpaid (and technically unnecessary) potential threats to their own employment. Most of the Motorcycling Weekly journalists had previously had jobs on Motorcycle Weekly, a magazine originally owned by the giant IPC group, which had sold the title to East Midlands Allied Publishers (owner of the rival Motor Cycle News) and sacked the Motorcycle Weekly staff. The ex-Motorcycle Weekly journalists saw Motorcycling Weekly as their last chance to produce a rival to Motor Cycle News, and were fiercely committed to their paper. A minority of the Coastalpress journalists wanted to work towards a joint chapel with the NGA, an aspiration never tested, but one which most of the NGA chapel found unappealing.

The NGA chapel was itself split on the question of single keystroking. Most of the keyboard operators, including the Mother of Chapel - who also happened to be a Socialist Organiser supporter and an Islington Labour councillor - opposed it. The paste-up hands and a minority of the keyboard operators were simply grateful to have jobs after long spells on the dole. In the end, though, the NGA chapel did not have to make any decision. Full-time NGA officials decided on the line of action and informed the chapel afterwards, a state of affairs accepted quite happily by most of the NGA members in time-honoured fashion.

NGA local officials defend the decisions they did make by arguing that they had little choice in the matter. Thomson had made a number of promises to them and until the end of November he had kept them all. In the context of high unemployment for NGA members in London, London region NGA had no choice but to get the best possible terms for the introduction of new technology.

As it turned out, Thomson had only been able to fulfil his promises to the NGA (rapid expansion of the number of NGA jobs) by borrowing. Thomson himself is a charismatic and slightly improbable character; he has an aggressive and persuasive manner - carried into his 'right to manage' managerial style - and a liking for extravagant anecdotes and plans which the listener can never quite disbelieve. He told Coastalpress staff many times that he had secured large-scale

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID... Right: The Times after the closure. Below left: The Times before the closure. Below right: UK Press Gazette announces Coastalpress' demise.

## New paper's publication marks breakthrough in typesetting methods

By Mark Rosselli

Next Tuesday sees the first publication of a newspaper which may alter the whole way papers are run in Britain, and finally allow the widespread introduction of the latest computer technology that the industry desperately needs.

*Motorcycling Weekly* will be a tabloid newspaper costing 30p, with a print run of 70,000 copies. Its pedigree is old and honourable: the original *Motorcycling Weekly* was bought by Victorian enthusiasts in the late nineteenth century.

The reborn weekly uses the very latest in technology and represents something of a revolution in British printing labour relations. The breakthrough is that its journalists will be inputting their words directly on to computer discs; thereafter the printers will add typesetting instructions before the material is turned into type.

For years newspaper proprietors have tried to introduce direct input by journalists, by which reporters and sub-editors write copy on computer terminals and then use the same terminals to send the finished product directly into a typesetting computer.

For years the move has been totally opposed by the print unions, led by the National Graphical Association, because it would tend to eliminate the need for the traditional printer.

Those newspapers which have gone ahead with computer

technology have had to bow to NGA insistence and allow NGA members to continue setting the type. Journalists use their terminals to write their stories on paper; this is then typed back into the computer by NGA men on separate terminals.

This extra step in the process considerably reduces the advantages of speed and low cost which the technology offers.

Only one sizable newspaper has gone the whole hog and introduced direct inputting, but at the cost of alienating members of all unions. The *Nottingham Evening Post*, which defied the NGA five years ago, has since been blacked by the National Union of Journalists.

But *Motorcycling Weekly* has found a compromise unique in British newspapers. The 10 editorial staff type and edit all their own copy on Typecraft Systems Computers and store it on floppy discs.

The NGA inserts the disc and keys in the final typesetting instructions to the computer - the work of seconds.

*Motorcycling Weekly* is owned by Coastal Press, whose managing director is Mr Bill Thomson. He said: "I am well aware that I am running into experimental areas. We have a rather unusual arrangement to say the least."

The secret of Mr Thomson's success is that he has worked all along with the NGA rather than

against it, and also that his employees have plenty of work on Coastal Press's many other publishing and printing projects.

Mr Thomson said: "The union wish to protect their jobs, and there are no union jobs at stake. I am in fact creating NGA jobs and other union jobs. I am not out to use new technology to destroy jobs."

"I have combined new technology - which is all British - to give us the efficiency factors that I believe will make publishing more profitable. It does not matter whether you are talking about a small magazine or a very large newspaper."

The lead shown by *Motorcycling Weekly* has arrived in the nick of time. All the signs are that the newspaper industry in Britain is heading for a showdown.

In June the provincial newspaper industry launched a campaign called Project Breakthrough, aimed at creating the right climate for the negotiated introduction of direct inputting. Behind this, though, many provincial papers have been secretly training members of staff to do other jobs that would allow them to run the newspapers in the event of a strike.

The provincial ultimatum to the NGA was blunt: agree with the principle of introducing full computer technology by the end of 1984, or we publish newspapers without you at all.

## Print union blamed for closure of company

By Mark Rosselli

A newspaper that represented a breakthrough in the use of computer technology in the newspaper industry was closed last night. The former managing director blamed the National Graphical Association (NGA) for its demise.

*Motorcycling Weekly* was one of several titles published by Coastal Press, which ceased trading last night. The tabloid, which was aimed at motorcycling enthusiasts, had lasted only six weeks. Its first issue had been produced using direct entry, or single key stroking, by which journalists write copy and send it directly to the presses using computer terminals.

Newspaper proprietors have been trying unsuccessfully to introduce direct entry for years, as it is both faster and cheaper than other typesetting methods. But it has been vigorously opposed by the print unions, led by the NGA, who fear that new technology could largely eliminate the traditional printer.

National officials of the NGA intervened after the newspaper's first issue, overruling a working agreement on direct entry made between the union's London branch and Mr Bill

Thomson, managing director of Coastal Press.

Last night, Mr Thomson said: "We then had to return to double key stroking, and we found ourselves being forced into taking on additional NGA staff. I was presented with a situation where I had no alternative but to recruit more NGA staff, double the amount we actually needed to produce the journal."

*Motorcycling Weekly*, despite weekly sales of more than 35,000, suffered heavy financial losses. In six weeks it overran its target budget of £60,000 by more than £32,000.

Mr Thomson claimed that the costs of paying salaries and overtime to extra unnecessary NGA staff were largely to blame.

Announcing the closure, which has caused the loss of 34 jobs, Mr Thomson said that the breakdown of the original understanding with the NGA had resulted in the loss of several printing contracts, and had discouraged the company's financial backers.

Last night NGA officials could not be contacted for any comment.

## Single-key magazine dies after six weeks

THE NGA last week rejected the claim that it had forced the closure of a small London magazine publisher and the loss of 34 jobs by going back on an agreement to allow single-keystroke typesetting by journalists.

The firm, Coastal Press, ceased trading on Tuesday, and managing director Bill Thomson blamed the extra costs forced on him by NGA national officials overruling an agreement on direct inputting made with the union's London officials.

The deal had been made for a new magazine called *Motorcycling Weekly*, which has now closed after six weeks. It achieved sales of 35,000 a week, but overran its budget by more than 50 per cent.

Mr. Thompson said that the magazine had been forced to use double keystroking and had to recruit twice as many NGA staff as were required for single keying.

He also said that the failure of the agreement had discouraged the company's financial backers and led to the loss of several printing contracts.

In a statement issued from NGA headquarters in Bedford, national officer Chris Harding expressed surprise at Mr. Thomson's claims.

He said the NGA had honoured its agreement with Coastal Press and that all the NGA men employed there had been requested by Mr. Thomson when the business started.

His belief was that Coastal Press's financial backing had failed to materialise, and said that Mr. Thomson had said that the coup in Nigeria had caused the loss of three contracts.

He said the attempt to blame the NGA for the closure was "repudiated entirely."

Go-ahead for

funding for the company from a number of sources - including the Greater London Council and the NGA pension fund. He said that he had well-advanced plans for a London-only morning paper to be produced - with NGA approval - entirely by single keystroking. He also claimed that the Morning Star had approached him for typesetting estimates; that he was going to open a large printing works on the Isle of Dogs; that he had been to Vietnam as a freelance reporter and had been friendly with Charlie Richardson; that he had once produced a Dorset weekly newspaper single-handed after some leftist NUJ troublemaker had caused a strike; that he had been the owner of a helicopter company which had crashed; and much more besides.

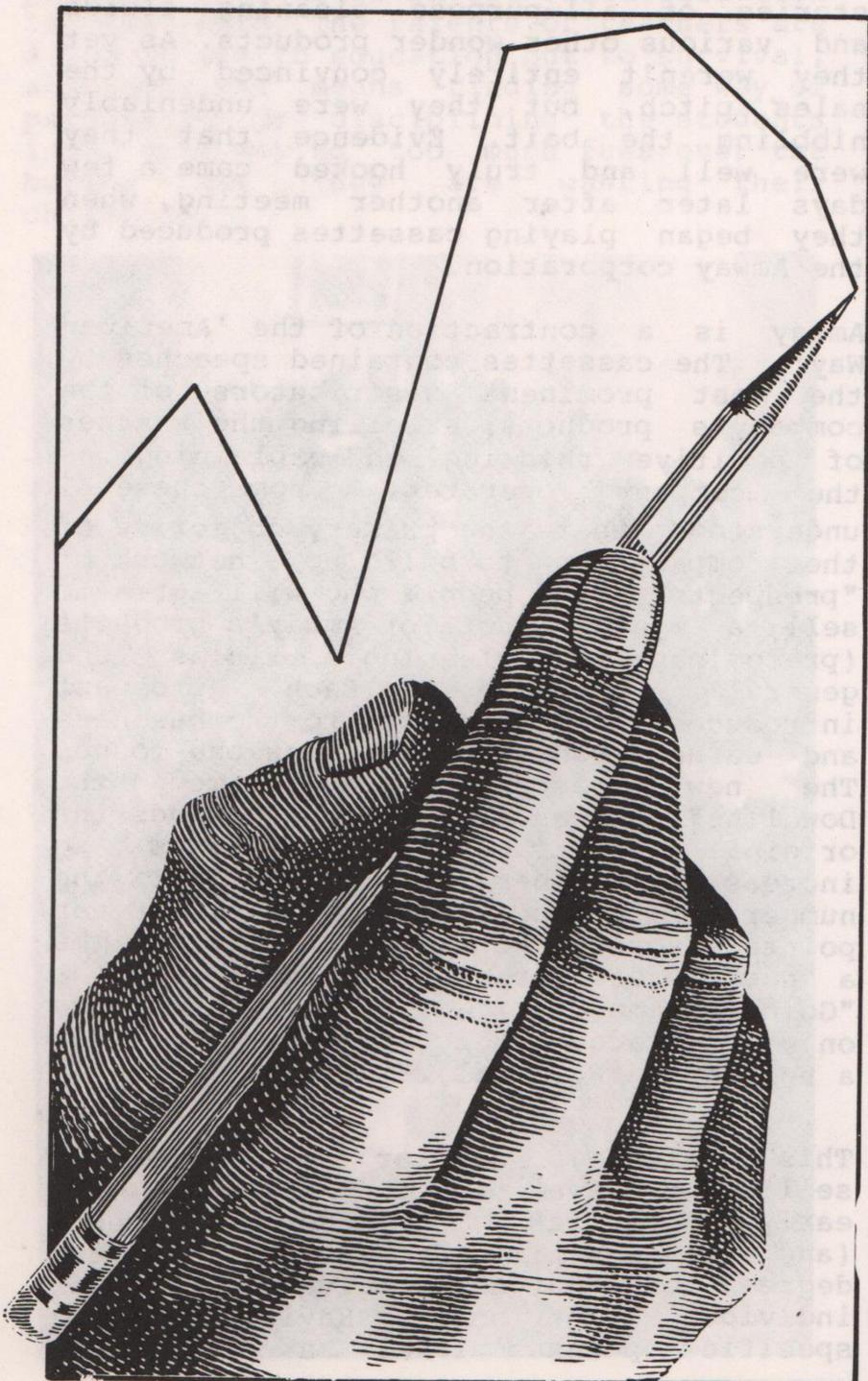
How much of this was true no one quite knows. What is certain is that the pay cheques Thomson gave his staff at the end of November bounced. He said that the problem had been caused by Leon Sakis, an Iraqi property dealer who had been a director of Coastalpress until November and then resigned. According to Thomson, Sakis had frozen the Coastalpress bank account before resigning and was refusing to co-operate. He assured staff that everything would rapidly sort itself out.

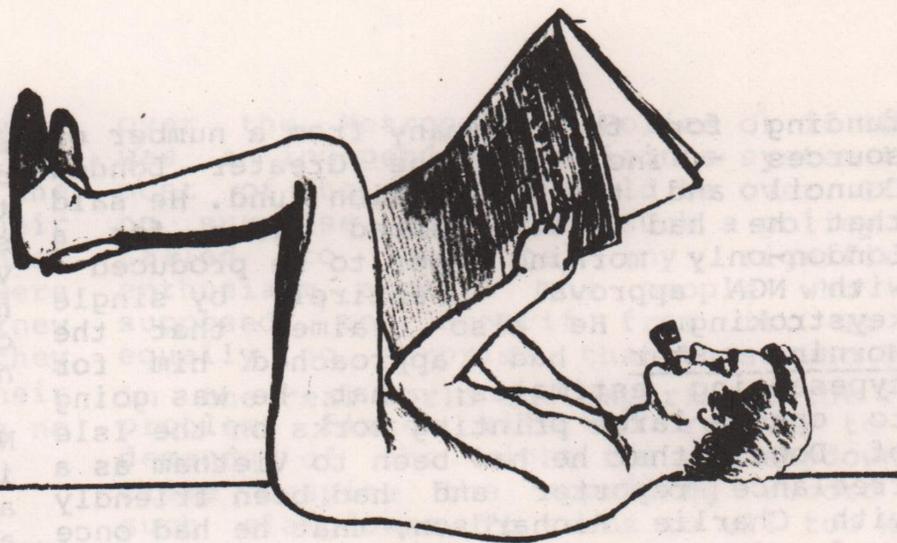
December's pay was promised - in cash and in full - for 21 December. Instead, staff were given a 'sub' on the last working day before Christmas. The rest was promised for the end of the month. The NGA chapel

said it would cease working if the money did not arrive then; and Thomson managed to find cash for the NGA members. NUJ staff from Motorcycling Weekly and New Video Viewer (the staff of the latter having been kept on despite the title's closure) received nothing. Neither did the non-union clerical workers.

Nevertheless, everyone continued working, in an increasingly tense and uncertain atmosphere, until 10 January, when Thomson announced that he would have to cease trading. In the last week or so before the closure Thomson began to behave in a rather unusual manner, accusing NUJ and NGA chapel officers of being 'anarchist wreckers' plotting to discredit him, and claiming that his financial plight had been caused by the NGA Mother of Chapel recruiting unnecessary staff from the NGA call book (the NGA register of unemployed members). The reality looks rather different: at a creditors' meeting held in March 1984 it was revealed that Coastalpress had, when it ceased trading, accumulated debts of over £180,000. The company's assets were estimated to realise only £5,000. It seems unlikely that Coastalpress's NGA wage bill could account for more than a tiny fraction of the company's debts.

The Coastalpress story is not one of heroic deeds in the class struggle. Nor is it completely typical of what is happening in the printing and publishing industry: most companies in the sector have rather more adequate capital, and are not yet quite so uncompromisingly committed to single keystroking. Nevertheless, Coastalpress was in other ways quite typical. Bill Thomson's 'right to manage' ideology is what managers are asserting throughout British industry. Poor relations between NGA and NUJ members at chapel level - regardless of the posturing of the union bureaucrats - are general in the print industry (for historical reasons too complex to detail here). Single keystroking is the central issue facing workers in print and publishing today: and the confused response to it at Coastalpress - a confusion which helped only management - is typical. Many workers in print (particularly journalists) are ill-informed about the likely impact of new technology, and become aware all too late of its class nature as a management tool for attacking workers' control over the production process, their workplace organisation, and their high wages. For other workers who do realise the implications of the new method, the alternative to accepting it - the dole - is a worse prospect. Of course, some print workers are prepared to make a stand, and we can no doubt expect some protracted struggles over the introduction of new technology, especially in Fleet Street. It is another question as to how successful these struggles are likely to be. With the NGA bureaucracy showing distinct signs of relaxing their oppositional stance to single keystroking, the flood of single keystroking which has been threatening to restructure the British printing industry at the expense of the workers (as it has restructured the industry in the USA and Europe) now seems imminent.





# THE AMWAY EXPERIENCE

The following account was sent to us by a reader. What is interesting in it is not the account of direct selling - that is probably the oldest form of commerce - but the techniques used by the sellers themselves for self-motivation. Once it was enough that you had to feed yourself and your family. The modern direct-seller has become a religious fanatic; but God has become Mammon.

The practice of 'direct selling' was imported into this country from the USA several years ago. In essence it embodies conventional capitalist principles, presented as a kind of panacea for material and spiritual deprivation. What follows is not any sort of profound critical analysis. It is merely a personal account based on my own experience of the effect which one particular organisation had on two friends of mine.

Until recently my personal knowledge of direct selling was of a distinctly peripheral nature. I remembered the weekly visits of the 'Avon lady' to my family doorstep, and there were also the numerous Tupperware parties from which my mother came back with a variety of translucent green containers. But that was all. My recent experience has shown that my perception was disturbingly naive and out of date.

It began casually enough. At the time I was living with Bet and Don, some married friends. Bet was out of work, bored and broke. To earn some extra cash she arranged a spot of moonlighting as a market researcher, and in the course of her questioning she was drawn into conversation with a local resident about her general predicament. This person suggested that Bet might benefit from attending a meeting at her house next week. She described the purpose of the

meeting as the provision of ideas on how to achieve greater financial security without the routine of a regular job or the need for a large capital outlay. Bet was understandably attracted by the invitation and agreed to attend with Don. They returned in high spirits, recounting stories of all-purpose cleaning fluids and various other wonder products. As yet they weren't entirely convinced by the sales' pitch, but they were undeniably nibbling the bait. Evidence that they were well and truly hooked came a few days later after another meeting, when they began playing cassettes produced by the Amway corporation.

Amway is a contraction of the 'American Way'. The cassettes contained speeches by the most prominent distributors of the company's products, extolling the virtues of positive thinking and explaining how the company operates. From these I understood that the primary objective of the company is to build up a network of "prospects" i.e. people who will agree to sell a monthly quota of Amway's products (predominantly cleaning fluids and general hardware). Each prospect introduces new prospects to the business and earns a bonus for each new one found. The new prospects are termed "the Downline" and as the Downline expands the original distributor accumulates an increasing number of points for the number of products sold. As his or her points increase so the distributor climbs a number of hierarchical rungs (known as "Going Diamond", "Going Ruby", and so on), and acquires lucrative prizes (e.g. a holiday in Portugal).

This system is similar to the pyramid selling outlawed in the UK since the early 'seventies. The major difference (and the legitimising feature) is the degree of autonomy given to each individual distributor. Having reached a specific points level a distributor

thereafter receives the products direct from Amway and not through the person who recruited him or her. This is known as "Going Direct" and is effectively the first rung of the ladder.

While there is no pyramid in the strict legal sense, there remains a distinctly hierarchical structure, characterised by the jewel-level description. A great song and dance is made in the monthly magazine Amagram when a distributor "goes diamond" or "double-diamond". It's almost like a presidential nomination. The whole edifice is bound together by the Amway Ideal: 'Think positive and you will achieve your goal in life'.

Conversion to this particular brand of 'born-again capitalism' is achieved by the relatively unsophisticated technique of the hard sell. Most Amway converts are introduced to the business at meetings arranged by existing distributors (like the one attended by Bet and Don). The initial invitation is couched in decidedly vague terms, usually a promise to reveal a way in which your life and lifestyle may be improved, with the means of salvation being placed fairly and squarely in your own hands. No mention is made of selling; indeed, it is actively discouraged. The idea, at this stage, is to titillate rather than inform. Having got the potential prospects to the meeting, the next step is to show 'The Plan'. The distributors begin by asking each person what they most want out of life. The reply is usually couched in strictly materialistic terms, such as 'a mansion in Surrey' or 'a Rolls-Royce'. They then ask how they rate their chances of achieving the objectives. Having induced the predictably pessimistic response the distributors then proceed to unveil the Amway 'dream' diagrammatically on a white board. There follows often lengthy informal discussion during which the distributors recount their own experience and attempt to illustrate how

Amway has 'revolutionised' their own existences, again in terms of material results.

An Amway convert is swamped with Amway information packs, which consist of various items of literature (including the Amway bible, a book entitled The Possible Dream, by the aptly-named Charles William Conn) and cassettes including recordings made at various American rallies in which the speakers recount how they changed from being downtrodden 'neggies' (i.e. negative-thinkers) into bright and prosperous 'clydes' (positive-thinkers). Distributors are encouraged to dress formally and display a forthright and businesslike manner. Great emphasis is placed upon patriotism, clean living, ambition and religious conviction. There is a notable disdain for intellectuals, radicals, drop-outs, and especially communists. Similar monthly rallies take place in Britain too. The presentation and charismatic speakers have all the polish generally associated with the staged political hype of American electoral primaries, but are even more reminiscent of evangelist or revivalist gospel meetings. There is much whooping, cheering and 'spontaneous' applause. The overall effect on this admittedly unsympathetic observer was faintly nauseating. I remember asking myself, while listening to one speaker, "Would you buy a used dogma from this man?".

In addition to the cassettes and the rallies, another recommended device for maintaining your momentum through moments of doubt is the plastering of photographs of your most coveted material goals and list of your objectives all over your house. We ended up with a massive picture of a 'dream house' in our hallway (mercifully ripped down by the cat) and a magazine photo of a Lotus Esprit which provided a novel distraction as I answered the call of nature. The piece de resistance was a series of quotes lifted



from recommended reading and emblazoned on the kitchen wall, gems like "Cream rises to the top" and "When the going gets tough the tough get going".

The part of direct selling which I found the most disturbing was the dehumanising effect which it has on its exponents. I have already mentioned the jargon. There is a distinct tendency to categorise people in terms of what use they can be to the distributor, and to see them as 'neggies' or as positive, rather like some Christians divides the sinners from the saved. Old friendships often disintegrate under the strains imposed by this new commercial discipline, and the zealous Amway convert can find that friends and relatives are intimidated by their new-found *raison d'etre*. But the 'creed' also injects an air of artificiality and manipulation into the newly-found friendships between distributors. Little consideration is given to the precariously commercial basis on which such 'friendships' are formed. Everything is fine until a prospect's sale begins to decline; thereafter he or she may become a kind of leper, for fear of failure becoming contagious. Furthermore, the collapse of a 'Downline' has a kind of domino effect; the distributor feels that he or she has failed and thereby disappointed the people 'up' from him or her. If he or she has given up a steady job to become a full-time distributor then he or she may be literally left 'high and dry'.

The continuing success of Amway and similar companies is not entirely surprising in the present economic climate. The prospect of replacing the unremunerative grind of an everyday job by financial security and the freedom to pursue your wildest dreams is clearly an appetising carrot. However, beneath this veneer of liberation is an equally repulsive form of bondage, the type commonly associated with slavish adherence to doctrinaire political or religious sects. A prospect remains tied to the 'possible dream'. But unlike the political or religious ideologies the ethos by which the prospect is motivated is the idea that increased material well-being increases self-awareness and self-esteem. There is little room for altruism or social conscience. Amway is not noted for its charitable works, and its founders are committed Republicans who have contributed generously to Reagan's re-election campaign. In that respect, as well as its 'house style', Amway has associated itself with the new right which seems to have achieved such a profound psychological hold over the West at the present time.

Amway is essentially a symptom of a general malaise. In itself it is relatively insignificant. To be fair, its products are of a high standard, and many of the distributors are perspicacious enough to see through the rhetoric and are genuinely only interested in supplementing their incomes. But the more impressionable are certainly affected. Don has told me on several occasions that he intends to give up his job (as a policeman) and devote himself to Amway full-time. It seems to me that he will be swapping one hard regime for another, perhaps the worse for being self-imposed.

CARLO MARX



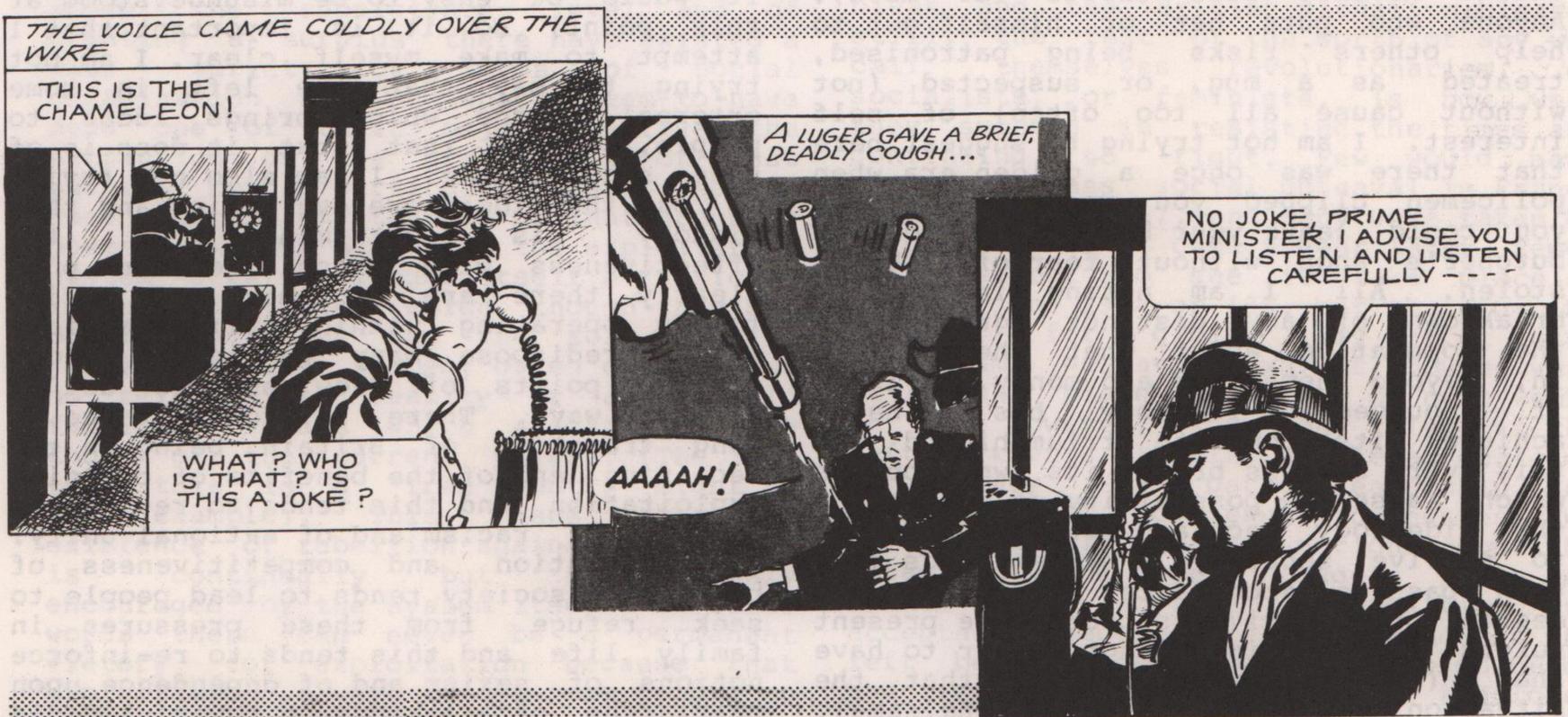
Recently a new libertarian magazine called Logo was published which, in the best tradition of obscure anarchist magazines, included an article attacking every other obscure magazine they could think of in a fairly humorous way. One comment in it was stupid since a careless reader could have taken it to indicate that Logo think Ronan Bennett should be locked up for terrorism when it should have been quite clear to them that Ronan is no 'terrorist' - whatever that word means. This led various people, notably those around Black Flag, to attempt to ban Logo's entire issue and to put out statements excommunicating Logo's editors from the anarchist movement. The Solidarity editorial group consider that this act of suppression demonstrated an appalling sensitivity to criticism completely out of keeping with anyone who calls themselves an anarchist, libertarian or genuine socialist. Wise up mugs! p.s. Contrary to Logo's suggestions we don't take leaflets to a riot and most of us don't have much faith in Cornelius Castoriadis anymore but we do wish Logo every success with their magazine. Our spies tell us there are still a few copies available in Collet's.

# MODERN SOCIALISM AND REVOLUTION

We have before us a strange state of affairs. Societies both East and West have hit a new pitch of moral and economic bankruptcy and yet there is no sign of an effective internal opposition in the heartland of either block. That is not to say that there is any shortage of people who are opposed to the regimes. I am simply asserting the lack of a real threat to their stability arising from concerted powerful opposition from within and claiming that this lack of opposition is not due to any noticeable improvement in these societies. Rather the reverse. In Britain, for instance, public confidence in such things as the likelihood of obtaining fair treatment from the police force or the law courts is demonstrably lower than it was ten years ago, for understandable reasons. It is still possible to meet people who will assert that our police are wonderful but it is much more common to meet those who have some tale of violence towards themselves or a member of their family. Confidence in the future prospects for the economy are equally poor. The existence of a three million strong dole queue has become a cliché but the evidence is that those who expect it to reduce are in a minority. Yet despite this lack of faith (and also because of it) resistance is at a low ebb. It is as if the new Conservatives have succeeded in creating an atmosphere which perfectly corresponds with their own beliefs. There is a kind of passivity in the air under which all human values seem to have been beaten down, so that those who resist the

mood of the times find themselves hard pressed to discover anyone with their intelligence intact who believes in anything other than the need to preserve their own personal monetary standard of living. Those who do retain potentially progressive beliefs can often only pose them negatively and thus succeed in converting an honest cause into nothing more than a sectional interest. They marshal their arguments effectively and well when they are arguing with those in their own circle, but their beliefs seem to melt away when they are asked to change their own behaviour to support others. (Sisters in the women's liberation movement will recognise this weakness in many male socialists, male socialists will recognise it in many women's liberationists, few will be prepared to recognise it in themselves).

Equally it is common to find those who cannot frame an argument so that it can be understood by anyone outside their own little subculture, and who are therefore only able to inter-relate with others who think exactly the same as them. Many (most definitely not all) women's liberationists cannot interrelate with those whose oppression is every bit as deep as theirs because the person is not being oppressed as a woman. Many (most definitely not all) black rights activists consider that because they have identified and fought their own oppression they need not recognise the oppression of others. You meet Gay



liberationists who vote Conservative because they want the streets free from 'black muggers' and you meet trade unionists who remain blissfully unaware that there is more to life than the Right (for Men) to Work. Far more often, though, you meet people who believe in nothing; who want only to get a good job and a nice house and settle down with a staggeringly good-looking partner who knows someone in the rock business. The standard British mind at the moment is a-political, a-moral, and has a deep admiration for anyone who knows how to make a fast fortune or who approximates to an over-blown image of some sexual stereotype (e.g. Frank Bruno, Paula Yates). The desperate pitch of this motivation is best illustrated by the despair it invokes in those who crack under the strain of its pointlessness and the extent to which people will go to find a 'home for their soul'. It may seem an apparant contradiction that in a time of moral bankruptcy there is a wave of enthusiasm for new beliefs but in fact the two go hand in hand. It is no co-incidence that the 30's and the 80's both produced mass enthusiasm for physical fitness. Nor is it a co-incidence that cult religions and crank health cures have a particular fascination for the generation of the late '60s as they grow older. It is as if some people are aware of how terribly empty their lives have become and are prepared to go to any lengths of irrationality (e.g. Jonestown, the Children of God) in order to find some beliefs which will no longer require them to cope with their own emptiness. Meanwhile the bulk of the population moves ever nearer to the ultimate statement of modern Western living: "I

believe in nothing, I trust no-one, I want only what I can put in my stomach, what I can use to achieve sexual pleasure, what I can use to build up my ego, and what I can use to bring me cash". Thought is replaced by a number of emotional triggers so that lines such as "Our lads in the Falklands" or "The need to defend our Isles" or "There's a woman I admire" can still excite support (though a good means of fiddling the Inland Revenue will excite far more). Anyone who puts her or himself out to help others risks being patronised, treated as a mug, or suspected (not without cause all too often) of self interest. I am not trying to suggest here that there was once a golden era when policemen clipped you round the ear and you could leave your bicycle outside the butcher's shop without fear of it being stolen. All I am noting is a deep breakdown of any distinct agreement in the population about what they believe in, beyond themselves and money. It is as if bourgeois ideology has finally achieved its complete triumph; and yet this very success brings its own problems which raise the possibility of destroying that ideology once and for all. In order to survive securely a system needs more than passive acceptance. It needs some degree of positive support. The present rulers of Britain do not appear to have that (and I would guess that the situation elsewhere is much the same).

They have instead a volatile, dissatisfied population which may believe in the promotion of its own personal economic self-interest but has no real commitment to the ideals and institutions of the ruling class. This means that people's ideas could move very rapidly in any one of a number of directions. Thus we had one year in which Mrs. Thatcher was polling only 30% support in the opinion polls and there were riots in the streets which genuinely scared her and her colleagues. Within 18 months we had her re-elected with what appeared to be a popular mandate. The truth of the matter is that few people have any faith in any of our leaders. It was easy enough for Thatcher to play the Churchill card over the Falklands. She has appealed to the macho element in the British character (1) by proving that she has balls, if you'll excuse the expression. She is now faced with the much more difficult task of delivering the economic goods to a population of sullen consumers who have made their sacrifices and given her every chance. Which way the bulk of the population will jump if she fails is not just a matter of chance. It is a direct function of how effectively the left puts its case, and it is also true that the attitudes that people will adopt if economic success is achieved are also not inevitably determined by economic circumstance but just as much the product of the effectiveness and apparent appropriateness of competing ideologies.



It would be easy to be misunderstood at this point, so it is important that I attempt to make myself clear. I am not trying to say that the left is some external force which brings ideas to people, merely that what it does is of some significance. I am also not trying to say that ideas are everything and that history is determined by the effectiveness with which ideas are put. Clearly there are economic and social forces operating within British society which predispose many people to adopt certain points of view and to act in certain ways. There is, for instance, a long tradition of Britain being on the receiving end of the benefits of colonial exploitation and this tends to re-inforce notions of racism and of national unity. The isolation and competitiveness of bourgeois society tends to lead people to seek refuge from these pressures in family life and this tends to re-inforce notions of sexism and of dependence upon patriarchs of all kinds. A powerful media

ften re-inforces and imposes notions of conformity and of consumerism and the education system tends to emphasise obedience and passivity. It would therefore be all too easy to come to the conclusion that we are powerless in the face of our oppression and can do nothing in the face of the immense power of the economic and social forces which are operating against us. What I am arguing is that this is simply not the case.



Whilst bourgeois bureaucratic society does have a way of reproducing itself it is never exactly the same from one generation to the next and it always contains within itself forces which lead to change. Usually these forces and pressures stem from the contradiction between the myths fostered by bourgeois society and the reality of people's lives. The system remain basically exploitative and it cannot avoid being so. This exploitation of itself drives people to rebel. Ever since human beings first managed to find a means of living above the subsistence level and of creating a surplus there have existed a wide variety of forms of social organisation all of which seem to have made one of their major objectives the extraction of the great bulk of that surplus by a particular class, sex or race and the maintenance of that group in power. At the same time the exploitative system creates around itself a fabric of ideas and values which, though they may originally have had the sole aim of justifying the system, often either bear no relation to reality or assert old fashioned values which are at odds with those of the current rulers. (The idea that this is a "free country" might be one example). This means that the existence of rebellion against the system is continually but unconsciously encouraged by the system itself. In other words there can never be a permanent victory for exploitation because that exploitation always forces some people to fight against it. It is hard to believe

in the merits of patriarchy from a battered wives' refuge, it is hard to believe in the benefits of defending British Sovereignty from a fox-hole in the Falklands and it is just as hard to believe that "hard work never hurt anybody" on the night shift at Fords. Again I must make myself clear here. It is not impossible, indeed it is very common, to find people who do manage to hold beliefs in their heads which directly contradict with the realities of their lives. We have all seen the newscasts of proud Falklands widows, and there are many battered wives who respect their husbands. What I am asserting is that, while there are definite circumstances which propel people to conform, there are also quite clear forces which propel them to refuse to accept the lifestyles which are being foisted upon them. If the left serves any useful purpose it is to strengthen that refusal, to help to give it voice, and to enable people to carry it forward with more confidence in their own ability to struggle and win. How effective we are in doing that depends on two things.

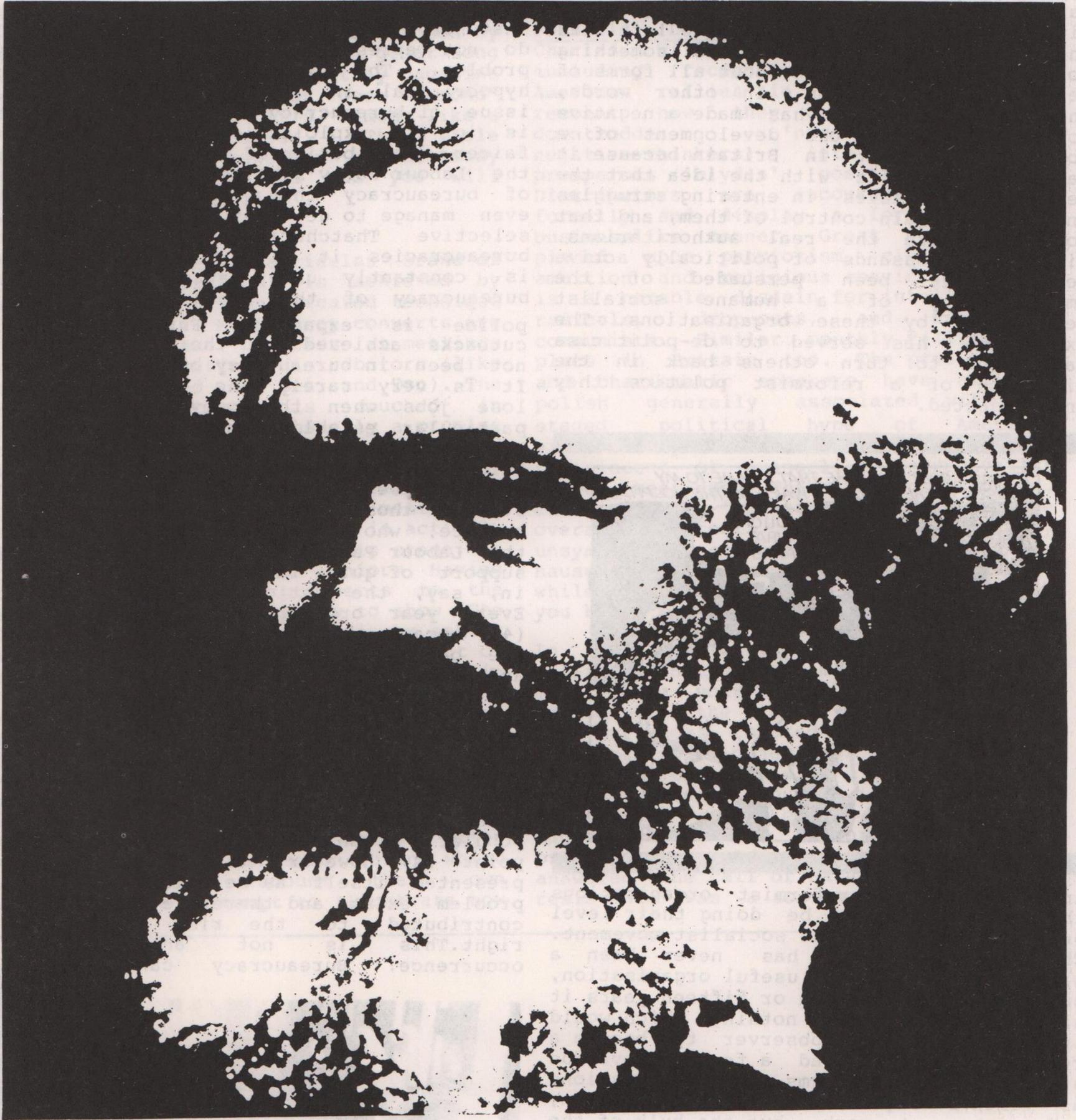
First, it is dependant on how society in general is moving (and in a society dominated by work and money this usually means how the economy is moving). There are changes in technology and in the world economy which make it easier to fight and win in certain eras or in certain places or in certain trades, and these forces cannot simply be forgotten or ignored. Thus a strike in the steel industry in England at a time of economic slump is unlikely to be a success, because the employers would be only too pleased to reduce the size of the steel stocks. However, the effectiveness of the left also depends upon our conscious ability to think, act and resist, so that there is no such thing as an era in which imaginative struggle is impossible; only times when it is more difficult than at others. An imaginative collective act of resistance carried through as virulently as possible can be successful even in the most depressed industry in the most depressed area. In other words, although the world situation at the moment looks bleak and the British situation bleaker still, the test of the worth of any who call themselves revolutionaries, or socialists, or feminists, is how well they succeed in resisting the times and continuing to fight. Few would have predicted mass social upheaval in France in the year 1967, and many were taken by surprise when it came a year later. Fewer still expect to see it take place in Britain in 1984 or '85, but there are no grounds for giving way to total pessimism. We have no way of knowing what will take place next year or next week. We do, however, know one thing: if the left presents itself as the advocate of bureaucracy of party leadership, of state control, of sexual joylessness, or of pathetically naive notions about the intentions of world leaders then we cannot be surprised if passivity and acceptance become more widespread. If the left becomes no more than the voice of the interest group of state and local government employees this will be even

more true. If, on the other hand, we become the advocates of and the people who put into practice the values of self-confidence, equal co-operation and personal initiative, then it is far more likely that we can participate in the struggles that surround us as useful equals, and we will have little with which to reproach ourselves if circumstances conspire to negate our efforts. Let me put it even more clearly. I do not believe that the left in the western world has failed because the objective state of the world economy is against us, or that any conceivable change in the state of the world economy would be enough to undo the damage. I think that we have failed because what has been said and done by the left over the past few years would be enough to turn anyone against it. It has failed because it has been seen (quite correctly) to serve the interests of a wholly different section of the population from that which it claims to serve. This is true for each of the main strands of the old socialism. The reformists, the revolutionary communists in power and the revolutionary communists

out of power all display a singularly unattractive set of characteristics. To illustrate this point with examples from the foreign Communist movements which have established themselves as the ruling power is not difficult. The role of the Party in Poland or in China may be very different from that of the Party in Russia, yet in all these cases the Party members as a general rule are quite clearly acting not out of a selfless devotion to the welfare of the masses, but rather in the interests of the maintenance and extension of the power of a new class. To anyone even casually familiar with the facts a government run by such people must seem a singularly unattractive proposition. The impact on the thinking of many people is simply "If this is socialism then give us capitalism", and while I don't support the logic of this I can hardly blame anyone for thinking it.

Matters would not be so bad if the critics of party dictatorship had shown themselves to be noticeably better, but that has simply not generally been the case. Take the trotskyist organisations for instance:





Karl Marx (d. 1883)

Your decomposed corpse is now  
beyond any hope of resurrection

thousands of people have been through their ranks over the last ten years and few have emerged with a good word to say for them. These groups have proved unreceptive to new ideas, undemocratic in practice, sexist, patronising and exploitative. Many people who entered the ranks of one or other 'party of the class' with a sincere commitment have left with the conviction that there is something sordid and manipulative about all forms of left-wing organisation. In other words, the trotskyist left has made a negative contribution to the development of a socialist movement in Britain because it has filled people with the idea that the left only believes in entering struggles in order to gain control of them, and that socialists are the real authoritarians. Literally thousands of politically active people have been persuaded of the impossibility of a humane socialist revolution by these organisations. The experience has served to de-politicise many and to turn others back in the direction of a reformist politics they once rejected.

IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT I CAME TO MY SENSES IN THE CASUALTY WARD OF THE HOSPITAL..



And yet these reformist organisations themselves seem to be doing their level best to discredit the socialist movement. The Labour Party has never been a particularly good or useful organisation, but over the last ten or fifteen years it has done little or nothing which would incline a neutral observer to become a recruit. We have had a few long overdue and inadequate reforms on such questions as women's rights, racial discrimination, and rights at work, but the bulk of the efforts of the Labour Party seem to lie in the direction of extending government control over more and more areas of society, and this too plays into the hands of the right. The impression given is that socialism means such things as nationalisation, government committees and wage control, and that the left wing simply believes in a more extensively unpleasant programme. The Labour Party has thus become the party of social workers, teachers and lower-rank civil servants (2), and it tries to solve each new problem either by strengthening state regulation or spending more money. As a result it has become quite clear to most people that when Thatcher talks about the need to remove bureaucracy she is addressing a real need, and she has gained

support by giving the impression that the right believes in freedom and self-organisation. Few on the left have understood that the tax-cutting movement which revitalised the modern right expresses genuine and quite correct fears about the expense and remoteness of government. The point is, however, that Thatcher, Reagan, and Proposition 13 (3) do not represent any kind of cure for this problem. The right is as cynical and hypocritical in its exploitation of the issue of bureaucracy as the reformist left is in its exploitation of desires for a fairer distribution of wealth. So great is the Labour Party's blind spot on the issue of bureaucracy that its leaders cannot even manage to get over to people just how selective Thatcherism is about which bureaucracies it hits. The health service is constantly under attack, while the bureaucracy of the armed forces and the police is expanded. Furthermore the cutbacks achieved by the new right have not been in bureaucracy but in services. It is very rarely the bureaucrats who lose jobs when the money available to a particular establishment is reduced. On the contrary, every cutback requires large quantities of administrative staff to organise and so it is the working staff, those who actually provide a service, who have to go. Despite this, the Labour Party cannot even count on the support of quite large numbers of workers in, say, the National Health Service. Every year ordinary nurses leave the NHS (4) because their efforts to help others are being frustrated by petty regulations and they are being asked to watch administrators waste millions whilst they exist on subsistence wages. Neither mainstream party is willing to recognise that the administration of this and other services has reached a point where it is difficult to see how the service could be maintained without a massive input of popular organisational initiative. The point is, however, that the left has presented itself as being unaware that a problem exists and therefore has directly contributed to the rise of the new right. This is not an accidental occurrence. Bureaucracy can only be



smashed by control of organisation being placed in the hands of those who use or work for the organisations and who know what the real problems are but this is precisely what the Labour Party most fears. It goes directly against the grain of patronising state socialism which is at the heart of almost the entire British left. If people controlled their own lives then there would be no need for politicians. Therefore the one type of reform which reformists can never allow is the type which takes control of an institution or process out of the hands of the carefully vetted officials and places it in the hands of those who are actually concerned about the fate of that institution or process. The consequences are serious.

Consider for instance the nature of education in this country. What is taught is not controlled by either teachers, parents or pupils. It is determined by a bizarre combination of institutional inertia, the interpreted needs of industry, and the current obsessions of bureaucrats in the education authority. As a result, education has become little more than discipline in many inner city schools, whilst there are large bodies of highly paid educational administrators and experts whose theories bear no relation to what goes on in the classroom. Ordinary teachers know that if they speak out against this state of affairs they will never get promoted, so protest is limited whilst dissatisfaction is the norm. The talents of teachers are devoted not to education but to survival, and survival means finding some way of persuading or disciplining the students into not making too much fuss over the boring way they are wasting their childhood.



The Labour Party cannot address itself to the weaknesses in educational provision in this country because it wants a centralised controlled solution and so it can only argue for more money to be spent or more years to be spent at school. The problem, however, is not to insist on more education of the current type - the problem is to change the nature of the education system so that it is in the control of those who wish to benefit from it. At the moment there are in this country two typical attitudes to education. One is to use it as a means of getting good qualifications and a good job. The other is to reject it and anyone associated with it. The latter attitude stems from generations of ordinary working class people who have been sent to school with high hopes only to find themselves subject to a stultifying irrelevant experience which teaches them little but demands from them obedience and a high toleration for tedium. If parents see schools as institutions which work against their children not for them, then why should those schools be defended? The fact that the local Labour councillor is probably a teacher is a poor explanation and we cannot be surprised if the left finds it difficult to mobilise people to fight in the struggle against educational cutbacks whilst the right finds it all too easy to switch resources away from such activities such as creches and nurseries which bring real benefits to people.

If we look at the law the situation is similar. The Labour Party talks about improving the law. What it almost always does is add to it. The result is yet more bureaucracy and ever increasing delays. This affects people very directly because it means that legal decisions are made so slowly and at such expense that it is often not worth the worry of proceeding with a case even if the decision goes in your favour. The Labour Party seeks solutions to this problem by adding yet more tiers to the bureaucracy and then seems surprised when the Conservatives meet little opposition when they streamline the system by abolishing rights. Few on the left are prepared to argue the seemingly obvious case that if we democratised the whole process of the law, justice would be quicker, fairer and more certain. The soft left have become the advocates of such ridiculously out of touch notions as 'community policing' whilst the right plays on people's fears to advocate more stringent measures which only serve to increase people's hatred of the police. Many people recognise that the real problems are, firstly that a lot of police cannot be trusted because they do not see themselves as part of the general public and, secondly that even when the police do want to help they cannot do so effectively because of the huge increase in paperwork which has taken place. This was particularly clear in the "Ripper" case when strong suspicions about Sutcliffe which were put forward by one member of the force simply got lost in the system and where the police themselves admitted that a major reason for their delay in catching Sutcliffe was the time wasted in working

their way through the volume of paperwork generated by the investigation. The police therefore failed to catch the Ripper for so long not because of their lack of will (as some in the feminist movement have suggested). They were desperate to catch him because they knew their reputation was suffering but they were unable to do so because their bureaucratic form of organisation is no longer efficient.



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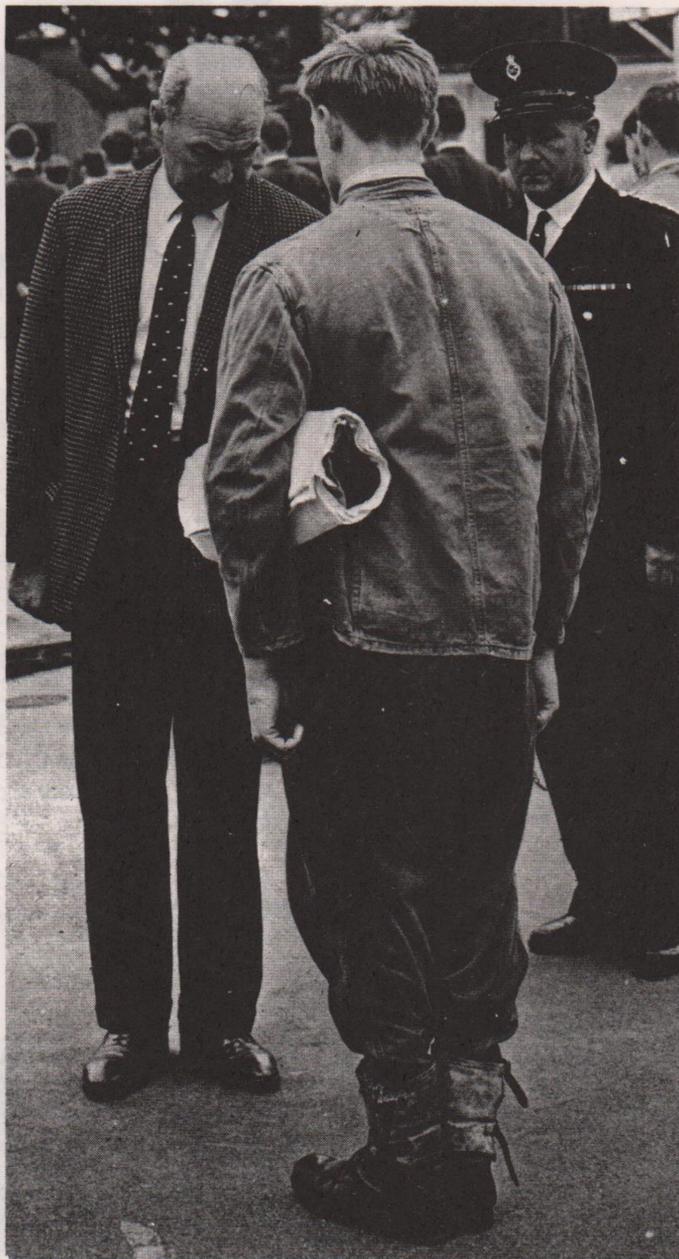
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In other words, the police have become so systematised and remote that they cannot as a rule catch criminals even when the public wants to help them do so. It would not have mattered one iota whether the police committee had been in the hands of Ken Livingstone or Leon Brittan. The problems of the police in this country stem from the very idea of having a standing force of people separate from the general public and outside of our direct control. This separation enables the police to see themselves as superior to the public and to believe that they have the right to act in any way that they perceive to be in the best interests of an ignorant public. Most police believe that if the poor duped public really understood what was being done on their behalf they would be overcome with gratitude. This makes any alterations to the law largely irrelevant since the police will find a way round the regulations or simply ignore them. In point of fact most members of the public do understand what is going on in the police force very well and it is only the Labour and Liberal politicians who are fooled. The police are becoming increasingly violent and lawless at the same time as they are becoming increasingly incapable of helping ordinary people who have been unfortunate enough to suffer from a crime and this process cannot be reversed by administrative reforms or corruption trials. It can only be reversed by introducing truly radical measures to bring the police under the control of those who suffer from crime or to put it in more traditional left-wing jargon under the control of a citizens' militia drawn directly from the people and immediately recallable by them. Instead of arguing for this type of measure the soft left seriously expects us to believe that if the GLC could only get control

over the Metropolitan Police or if there was an independent complaints system then most of the problems would be over. It is no surprise to me that such a policy has failed to generate any significant enthusiasm amongst the people who are supposed to benefit from it. It is equally no surprise that those who live in the real world and experience the real problems listen all too readily to the demands of the right for a clampdown on crime despite the appalling record of such clampdowns. It seems to all too many people that at least the right says it sees the need for a change and that must be better than some woolly notion that back in the days of Wilson things were alright.



Of course, I am not saying that we should all rush off and join the Conservative Party. But the fact is that many working class people have done so partly because the policies of the mass party of the "left" do not stem from the needs of the people who vote for them. The Labour Party does not exist to voice the desires of ordinary people but to promote the interests and prestige of a bureaucracy which is disliked by the mass of the population (including the majority of those who work for it). This puts the left in a fundamentally weak position which is worsened by the authoritarian reputation of the ultra left and the well founded suspicion that much of the left is still in favour of some modified version of the Russian system of government. This enables Thatcher and her like to appear as the champions of the poor. In a country beset by high taxes which are wasted on unnecessary items and

wages policies which are blatantly unfair it is all too easy for a Reagan or a Thatcher to evoke genuine support for tax cuts. (5) If the soft left can do no better than to propose a return to their old policies then it is small wonder that the right grows daily stronger whilst the left degenerates. It is necessary for the left to reformulate itself around a wholly different programme if we are to stand a chance of creating a socialist society, but that programme will not come out of the head of any guru. The seeds of it exist in the desires which ordinary people often voice. If we fail to help popularise the progressive aspirations which clearly exist then we mustn't be surprised if other people exploit the negative authoritarian notions which also exist. At the moment the right is growing stronger whilst one section of the left is comforting itself with the thought that our current difficulties are caused by the inexorable working out of the dialectics of history and another section is telling itself that a younger man will

transform the Labour Party and put everything right. It is time people realised that the problems go far deeper than this. The right grows stronger largely because the stupidity of the left allows it to do so, and there is nothing inevitable about short-sightedness. People make their own history just as they are made by it. If we are to create an effective opposition then it is way past time that we realised that nothing forces us to accept worn-out ideologies - their acceptance is merely a product of weakness of will.

ANDY BROWN

## Notes

1. I am not trying to suggest here that there is a fixed entity called "the British character" which is shared by all residents of Great Britain. I am simply suggesting that each nation has a number of emotional triggers which have a peculiar appeal for many of its citizens and that a form of 'backs to the wall' machismo is the usual British variant.

2. Not that it genuinely represents the interests of these people. Most of them find themselves working in difficult conditions at tedious and meaningless tasks. It is simply that the Labour Party tends to expand their job prospects and the Conservatives tend to contract them.

3. A tax-cutting proposal in California.

4. The figures for fully qualified nurses leaving the NHS within one year of qualifying is over 50% in many parts of the country.

5. It is worth pointing out here that at the end of the Second World War very few working class people paid income tax whereas nowadays most people in work do and many of them are subject to very high marginal rates of tax because of the 'poverty trap'.



# MORE ON SOCIALISM



A socialist society could only be created by the conscious voluntary actions of the overwhelming majority of human beings. (Whether or not this overwhelming majority should be characterised as the 'proletariat' is an important question, but one which need not concern us here). Socialism could not arrive by accident or through the operation of inexorable 'laws of history'; neither could it be imposed by a self-styled socialist minority claiming to act in the interests of the majority. A socialist society, in short, could only emerge with the generalisation of socialist consciousness.

But how could such a generalisation come about? The thrust of Andy Brown's essay 'On Socialism' is that socialist consciousness spreads as a result of socialists - 'real' socialists, that is (1) - persuading other people that a socialist society is both desirable and feasible. "We cannot expect to convince people that things can be organised along saner lines", he writes, "unless we can offer alternatives that will work".

Insofar as he is attacking the Marxist fundamentalists who attempt to convince the world that the impossible is workable, that the immediate abolition of the division of labour and of money would be the first tasks of the glorious and

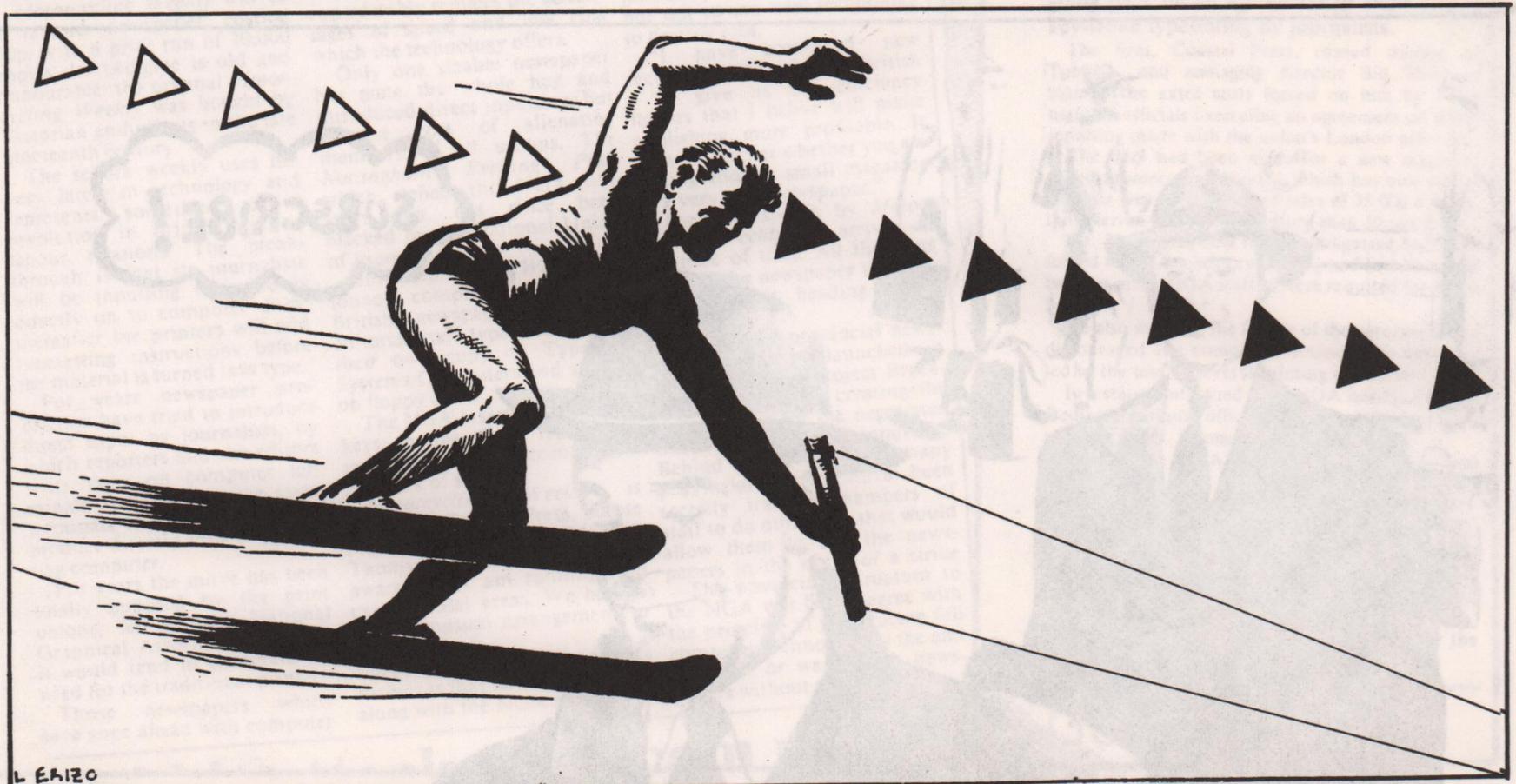
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In *Solidarity* #3 we published an article by Andy Brown ('On Socialism') on how a socialist society might come into being. The following commentary has been received from one of our readers.

inevitable forthcoming revolution, he is making a valid point (2). Nevertheless, his argument rests on three questionable assumptions: that the existing socialist minority has a crucial role to play in the generalisation of socialist consciousness; that it plays this role by slowly winning the hearts and minds of non-socialists; and that the best way to do this is by propagandising on the basis of outlining the form a socialist society might take.

To begin with the last of these assumptions, since its weaknesses seem most apparent, it seems very unlikely that attempts to convince the world of the desirability of a fully socialist society could lead very far in the direction of generalised socialist consciousness. Talk of workers' councils is not a lot of use to anyone confronting everyday life under modern capitalism. Any blueprint - however practically applicable - lacks immediate relevance to everyday problems and struggles. This is not to claim that the 'cookshops of the future' are not a worthwhile topic for debate, but rather to point out that at present such a debate is bound to be marginal. The construction of a socialist society is not on the political agenda today, in Britain at least, nor will this situation be changed by socialists simply presenting their models of feasible and desirable socialism (3).

So what can the socialist minority do? Traditionally the answer to this question has been "immerse themselves in struggle". A libertarian version of that





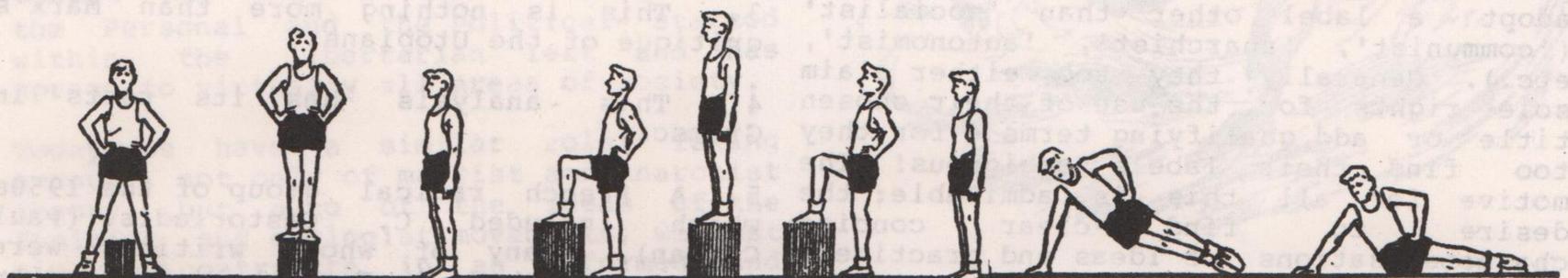
answer goes, "If we are to convince people of anything we have to start with people as they are. We have to attempt to show how socialism - an authentic socialism which defines itself against welfarist social-democracy and leninism - is implicit in the contestation of everyday life. We can only hope to do this by actively participating in, and putting our resources at the disposal of, that contestation, taking the utmost care never to usurp the autonomy of those we struggle alongside".

But is the generalisation of socialist consciousness a matter of socialists slowly convincing others - by whatever means - so that socialism becomes the 'common sense' of a majority of the population? Orthodoxy answers yes to this question. In the developed West, at least, so the argument runs, because the ruling class rules with a high degree of consent (or at least acquiescence) from the ruled, the sudden generalisation of socialist consciousness in the heat of insurrectionary struggle is out. However applicable such a model of the development of consciousness might be where the ruling class rules essentially by force, in the Western liberal democracies the long painful struggle for hearts and minds is what counts (4).

One crucial failing in this line of argument is that it ignores, at least implicitly, what has to be the starting point for any realistic discussion of socialist activity: the fact of the ghettoisation of socialism in the modern Western capitalist world.

This ghettoisation is only partly the result of the popular association of socialism with the regimes of the 'Communist' world, the nepotism and bureaucracy of social-democratic attempts to manage the capitalist state, or the manipulative practices of far left sects. Complaining that 'real' socialists have been wrongly tarred with the same brush solves little. Rather the problem is that of the transformation of political life over the past fifty years - specifically, the gradual disappearance of the liberal-democratic 'public sphere' in which 'real' socialists (as well as all the 'false prophets') were once able to intervene to win hearts and minds.

Here the most important development was the growth of economic and social intervention by the state, in an international context of the increasing predominance of multinational capital. This led to a severe limitation on the state's room for manoeuvre, through the subjection of politics to various economic-managerial imperatives; which in turn resulted in the reduction in importance of the liberal-democratic public sphere (except as an ideological legitimisation of the existing order). What had been matters for participatory public discussion became matters for 'rational' bureaucratic administration or corporatist carve-up, portrayed as being 'beyond politics' by the state. Such a trend of de-politicisation - reinforced by the privatisation of consumption in the 'consumer society', the fragmentation of the traditional working class community, the massification of communications, the isolation of the worker in the workplace by developments in capitalist technology and managerial methods, and so on - continues to this day. The methods used by the state in managing society and the economy may have changed in response to the changing demands of multinational capital; but for the state there is no alternative. The appearance of a revival of the public sphere with 'the breakdown of the postwar consensus' is just that; as Mitterand has found, international conditions militate against the possibility of alternative economic strategies.



This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the changing nature of the capitalist state (though some such project is a matter of urgency; the approach of Socialisme ou Barbarie (5), with its crucial underestimation of the power of multinational capital and consequent overestimation of the ability of the state to prevent economic crisis, needs to be replaced). It suffices to note that the destruction of the public sphere has left socialists isolated. Nobody comes to their public meetings; nobody reads their newspapers; nobody will talk politics with them at home or at work. Socialist groups exist mainly as social gatherings. Few survive long; disillusionment sets in and the group fragments.

And yet...the struggle goes on (to use



leftspeak) without the socialists. All around us people are engaged in absenteeism, fare dodging, shoplifting, squatting, sabotage, strikes and attempts (however easily co-opted and transitory) to create oppositional

cultures and define new interpersonal relationships. Occasionally this everyday contestation explodes suddenly and unpredictably to become something qualitatively different - the events of May 1968 in France, for example, or the riots in Britain in 1981. Whether or not it explodes, however, such contestation is what forces capital to act as it does - whether by introducing new technology and scientific management techniques at work, transferring certain sorts of production to low-wage areas of the world, directly assaulting workers' right to organise, increasing police powers, raising wages and providing welfare, or whatever.

This is not to romanticise or exaggerate the extent of everyday contestation, nor is it to underestimate the limits of its explosions. Rather it is to point to contestation as ever-present (though not necessarily ever-insurrectionary in nature) and as ever forcing the ruling class to respond. It is also to suggest that a generalisation of socialist consciousness, should it ever come about, is likely to be sudden; and it is likely to have its origins not in the attempts of socialists to win hearts and minds but in the experience of contestation.

The upshot of all this is that socialists can afford to relax a little. Of course, they can 'fight where they are' at work and at play, and they can debate and analyse the content of broader movements. But they can forget the evangelical zeal, the crazed immediatism, the neurotic quest for total theory, the obsession with organisation and the fear of marginalisation which currently afflict them. The revolution might happen tomorrow, it might never happen, in a sense it's happening around us all the time - what is important, however, is that the conscious socialist of today has no greater part to play in the revolution than anyone else.

L. ERIZO

## Notes

1. The ambiguity of the term 'socialist' has prompted some debate as to whether it is a label still worth using. Those who continue to use it either deny others' right to do so (since the others are not 'true' or 'real' socialists) or add qualifying terms ('revolutionary', 'libertarian', 'feminist', etc.) in attempts to make the specificity of their positions clear. Others have chosen to adopt a label other than 'socialist' ('communist', 'anarchist', 'autonomist', etc.). Generally they too either claim sole rights for the use of their chosen title or add qualifying terms - for they too find their labels ambiguous! The motive for all this is admirable: the desire to find clear concise characterisations of ideas and practices. The result, a tendency to squabble

idiotically over labels rather than interrogating the content of ideas and practices, is not. In this essay I take 'socialist' to be a term applicable to people who believe that a transitional stage between capitalism and communism, characterised by generalised self-management, is both feasible and desirable.

2. For a brilliant critique of fundamentalism, see Alec Nove, 'The Economics of Feasible Socialism'. Unfortunately Nove draws rather tepid conclusions from his analysis.

3. This is nothing more than Marx's critique of the Utopians.

4. This analysis has its roots in Gramsci.

5. A French radical group of the 1950s which included C. Castoriadis (Paul Cardan), many of whose writings were first published in English by Solidarity

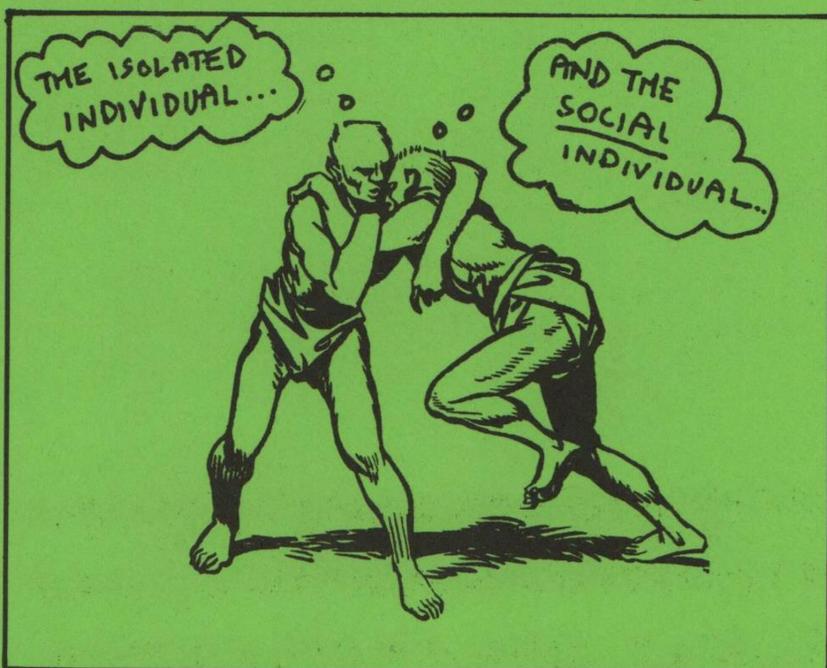
# BOOK REVIEWS

## No return to the seventies?

Every Move You Make by Alison Fell.  
(Virago 283 pages, £3.95p)

The publication of this novel has aroused a lot of attention. It has been widely reviewed, and most reviewers seem to have come to a similar conclusion: this book is interesting, but far from being a total success.

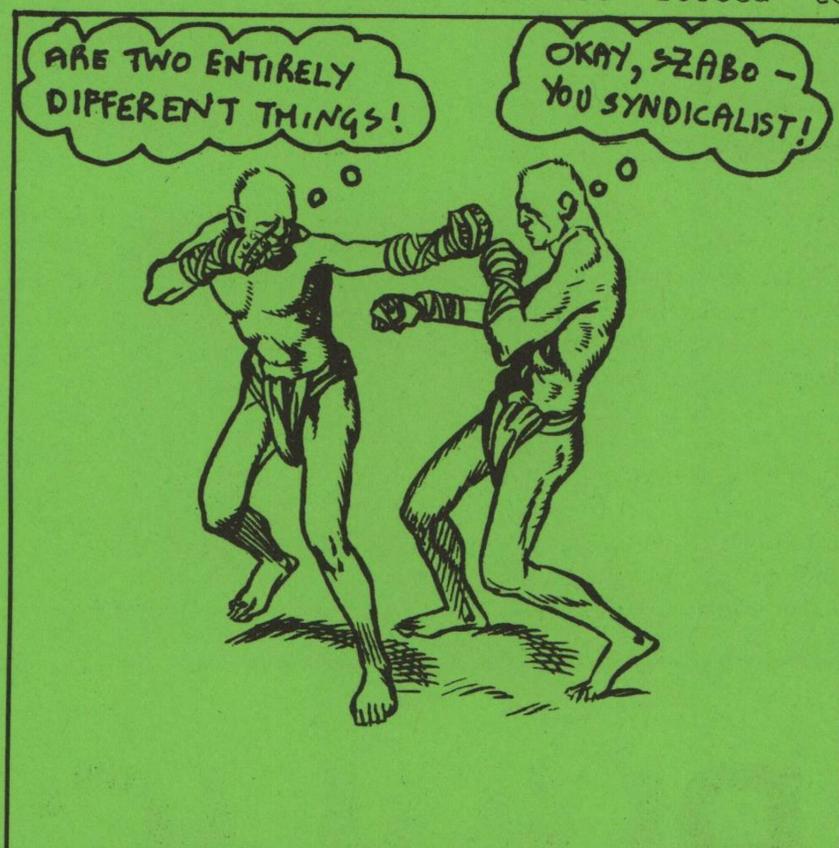
The reasons for this widespread interest are obvious. Whatever originally motivated Alison Fell to write this novel, it has been read as a commentary on the radical activist movements of the early 70's which culminated in the London based squatting campaign and in the miners' strike. But Fell's novel cannot really be read as a history of these years. She presents a series of semi-autobiographical sketches of life among the "urban nomads" of the early 70's and among political militants of the late 70's (belonging to the Anti-Nazi League and the Spare Rib collective). It's puzzling that this novel comes with a recommendation from Sheila Rowbotham that Fell "dares to hope". The dominant theme of this novel seems to be just the opposite: the old theme of Lost Illusions. Fell's heroine learns that her personal salvation will not come through her relationships with men, or through her participation in socialist or feminist movements. Losing illusions costs her a mental breakdown, but by the end of the book she has recovered her mental equilibrium and remains committed to working for radical social change.



By presenting the novel's narrative in a series of splintered fragments, Fell successfully evokes a strong sense of confusion and individual alienation. Often we seem to be looking at the world through a dope-smoker's hazy vision: is this 1974? Or 1978? Is she with Jed? Or Phil? Or Matt? The entry of Matt (the novel's principal male character) does nothing to dispel this haze. Matt seems curiously reminiscent of one of John

Fowles's muses: forever "passionate" and "unstable" (in the words of the back cover), in fact almost everything but a realistic picture of a male human being.

At its best, this novel works in a similar way to The Ploughman's Lunch: moments of daily life are presented out of their time, and we are forced to



reconsider them in a new critical light. Fell makes us acknowledge some hard truths that lie behind emotional relationships and political commitment. But the cumulative effect of this novel does not arouse the reader's curiosity. Characters start to appear as flies stuck in ice cubes of daily life, powerless to act for themselves and unable to break out of the moral imperatives which they have been given. Perhaps the most telling example of this weakness can be seen in the novel's heroine. We never really learn what has motivated her to become politically active, whether as a squatter, feminist or socialist.

One of the most important tasks facing all left-wing and radical groups is to re-evaluate the experience of the 60's and early 70's. Fell's novel does provide some valuable insights into both the emotional and political aspects of these movements, but ultimately it fails to point to any clear conclusion. Two lines from the novel seem a good epitaph for the radicals of the early 70's: "The most important thing was to act without delay. 'The details', he added with an embarrassed cough, 'can always be worked out later.'" It's time that we got round to working out the details.

# Brief reviews

Cornelius Castoriadis: Crossroads in the Labyrinth (Harvester 1984 £28.00)

This collection of Castoriadis essays - all from the post Socialisme ou Barbarie period and covering questions in psychoanalysis and philosophy of science as much as political concerns - is hideously expensive. But two of the essays are well worth reading. 'Technique' contains a brilliant critique of Marx's productivism, while 'Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: from Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to us' is a fascinating analysis and critique of Marx's philosophical assumptions. (To be fully reviewed).

Gyorgy Litvan and Janos Bak (eds); Selected Writings of Ervin Szabo (RKP 1982 £11.95)

Szabo was a Marxist intellectual in Hungary who is best known for having influenced Lukacs. His work is interesting in itself, however: Szabo's Marxism was flexible and libertarian, closer to revolutionary syndicalism than to Second International social democracy. He lived from 1877 to 1918.

Cynthia Cockburn: Brothers (Pluto 1983 £5.95)

Cockburn's socialist feminist analysis of the impact of photocomposition on NGA hot metal compositors is well done - but it won't be long

before the flood of single keystroking makes the changes she describes look very small indeed.

John Carvel: Citizen Ken (Chatto 1984 £2.95)

Adoring but interesting and honest biography of the Labour left's charismatic super-hack. Red Ken apparently once subscribed to Solidarity. He obviously doesn't take what he subscribes to very seriously.

Jean L Cohen: Class and civil society: the limits of Marxian critical theory (Martin Robertson 1984 £16.95)

Cohen is a regular contributor to Telos journal; her book is a critique of the various Marxist and neo-Marxist accounts of class which draws on work by Habermas, Touraine and Castoriadis (among others). (To be fully reviewed).

Alec Nove: The Economics of Feasible Socialism (Allen and Unwin 1983 £5.95)

A decisive attack on fundamentalist Marxist plans for a socialist economy, though with boringly social democratic conclusions. Give a copy to your friend in the SPGB...

# PUBLICATIONS

Czechoslovakia 1968 by Petr Cerny. A rigorous re-examination of the motives of the participants. Price £1.

Mutinies 1917-1920 by Dave Lamb. The forgotten moments of freedom which flowered in the shadow of total war. 50p.

Portugal: the Impossible Revolution? An eye-witness account by a deeply involved spectator. The recuperation of 'popular power' and the drift towards state capitalism. In Portugal the 'revolutionaries' were part of the problem, not part of the solution. 400 pages. £3

Women in the Spanish Revolution by Liz Willis. A history of women's involvement in the Spanish revolution which does not disguise the fact that this involvement was on both sides of the battle lines. 10p

The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control by Maurice Brinton. An impressive array of documentation is brought to bear on how the Bolshevik state related to the whole question of self-management in revolutionary Russia. £1.50.

A Fresh Look at Lenin by Andy Brown. An attempt to show how closely the theory of Bolshevism approximated to the later practice. The problem lay in what the Bolsheviks strived to achieve not in the class composition of post-revolutionary Russia. 60p.

Paris 68 by Maurice Brinton. The classic eye witness account. Soon to be reprinted jointly by Solidarity and Dark Star.

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