

SOLIDARITY

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Mobster Thermidor

The unpalatable recipe of Trotsky's 57th Variety



Brazil's return to democracy

Hopes of deliverance evaporate as reality sets in

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Cover picture: The unacceptable face of socialism. Gerry Healy, the 73 year old 'founder leader' of the Workers' Revolutionary Party, recently expelled. Press Association photograph.

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Publishing history. The present Solidarity Journal is the latest in a line of magazines produced by the Solidarity Group and stretching back to the early sixties. Solidarity for Workers Power, first in this sequence, was founded in 1960 and ran to 89 issues. This was succeeded by the nationally produced Solidarity for Social Revolution which ran to 16 issues and was in turn succeeded by the current journal. Our publishing history is complicated further by the existence in the sixties and early seventies of six or seven regional Solidarity magazines, among them those produced by the Scottish, South Wales, and North Western Solidarity groups; and by the publication of the shortlived, nationally produced, Solidarity for Self Management.

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AS WE SEE IT

POLITICAL SECTS 1



57th Variety act

Few people have noted the spectacular split in the Workers' Revolutionary Party as more than a diverting entertainment. We invited two ex-members of the WRP's forerunner, the Socialist Labour League, to comment on the show. Below, ROBIN BLICK casts an experienced eye backstage, while KEN WELLER adds an afterword, starting on page six. Both find circumstances which ought to give all leninists urgent cause to rethink their ideas of revolutionary organisation.

MANY READERS of Solidarity will have followed the evolution of the crisis in the Workers' Revolutionary Party, and each will have their own view on both its causes and possible outcomes. I am doing nothing more than adding my own

insights with the possible advantages that a ten-year membership (1961-71) and subsequent involvement in another split (the Oxford-based opposition of Cowley shop steward Alan Thornett in 1974) might provide.

It is a truism to say that the WRP was a leninist organisation like no other in Britain, or for that matter anywhere else at present. Certainly the disclosures about the Gerry-built internal regime are redolent more of a religious cult than a secular political movement; and this, together with the alleged sexual depravity of its leader G Healy, sets it apart in many respects from the other groups which make up the family of trotskyism. The unquenched (and entirely justified) venom and glee which erupted among scores of former WRP inmates at the news of Healy's disgrace is certainly unique in recent British politics and perhaps can only really be compared to the revulsion against Stalin unleashed by Kruschev's 'secret speech' of 1956.

Year Zero

Even so, can the rest of the 'revolutionary left' distance itself from Healyism quite so neatly? After all, as Trotsky put it, "The party in the last analysis is always right, because the party is the sole historical instrument given to the proletariat for the solution of its basic problems". Let us ask the question, what would Healyism in power look like? Of course, with or without its fallen leader the WRP will never assume state power, but if it ever had, under its former regime, Britain would surely have had its own 'year zero' and witnessed its own 'killing fields'. Within the limits imposed by the constraints of a liberal society, the WRP gave us more than a glimpse of what can, in other circumstances, times and cultures, burst forth as Gulag or Auschwitz. Reports in Newsline, the party's paper (now renamed Workers' Press), allege that for years Healy plundered the movement's supporters to the point of penury, physically attacked members, sexually exploited or abused young women, and sold opponents of Arab despotisms into torture and execution, without any objection from those around him.

Each abomination found its justification in a familiar argument: the end justifies the means. If the leader is tired, worn down with the cares of leadership and grappling with the destiny of humanity, is it not natural, even necessary, that the younger female 'cadre' should be placed at his disposal to ease these burdens and thereby enable the party to lead the human race out of barbarism? What is a rape placed on the scales of history and weighed against the menace of impending military dictatorship and nuclear catastrophe? And if the leader's performance is enhanced by some of the good things of life - say a £15,000 BMW - is it not right that party members should sacrifice their own little luxuries to make it possible? Finally, if the continued financing of the party - the only hope of humanity, remember - hinges on securing and sustaining finance from regimes that habitually torture and massacre their opponents, then shouldn't the party go along with and even publically endorse such regimes' every act of depravity? It may even, as part of the fulfilment of the tasks of history, offer its services - at a price - to bring yet more victims within their grasp. All this has been alleged against Healy by his former comrades.

Once the absolute abstraction of 'the revolutionary leadership' is accepted as the only answer to the problems of the human race, then it becomes all too easy for otherwise quite decent and well-motivated people to cheerfully contemplate, and even participate in, the degradation or extermination of any part of it.

This, the morality of the Jacobin, passed, through Lenin more than anyone else, into the main current of contemporary marxism, whether stalinist, trotskyist or other. It is not unique to Healy, his faction, or the WRP as a whole. Readers would be hard put to it to find any revolutionary or radical grouping which subscribes to a

conception of morality and ethical conduct that repudiates in toto the leninist subordination of human beings to the requirements of party regimes and the social systems they create and rule over. There has been much talk, both in their press and at their meetings, of what the anti-Healy faction call 'communist morality'. However, talk is all it is. The writer has yet to have explained to him what precisely, in any given situation, this 'communist morality' would permit or forbid. Its current advocates voted with only one dissension for the WRP Central Committee resolution approving the execution in March 1979 of more than twenty opponents of the Baath

regime in Iraq; one of the victims, Talib Suwailh, had only five months earlier brought 'fraternal greetings' to a conference of the WRP's front organisation the All Trades Union Alliance. Where was the vaunted 'communist morality' then? Free men and women, meeting not in Baghdad but in London, found they could not oppose such a vile motion. For twenty years, according to the foremost proponent of this 'communist morality', Cliff Slaughter (Newsline, 20.11.85), Healy had been busy converting the WRP into a "private brothel" - hardly an activity which, in view of Healy's position, would have escaped the notice of someone as observant as Slaughter. Yet again,



Press conference diplomacy: As controversy over the expulsion of party founder Gerry Healy grew, General Secretary Michael Banda (right, above) and Newsline deputy editor John Spencer faced the press at their Clapham headquarters on November 1. Three days later Central Committee members Vanessa and Corin Redgrave briefed journalists with their side of the story in a London hotel (see picture on page three).

'communist morality' failed to guide the actions of those who could and should have put a stop to what has been called Healy's "byzantine debauchery".

In fact, the reason is quite simple. Ideologically based and orientated morality cannot function in such situations precisely because it is subordinated to a supposedly 'higher' end - in this instance, the triumph of communism. 'Fascist morality', 'christian morality', 'islamic morality': each has proved itself capable of the most terrible crimes against humanity because of a similar opposing of ends and means. Slaughter should be asked - as I hope to when given the chance - what does 'communist morality' lead us to conclude about the repression of the Kronstadt garrison by the Bolsheviks in 1921? Were not vile means subordinated to lofty goals then, as he accuses Healy of doing now? Did the 'communist morality' of Lenin and Trotsky - and it is to

their example that we are invited to turn for inspiration in such matters - prevent them from framing and murdering their political opponents, outlawing, contrary to earlier pledges, all opposition groups, first outside and then within their own party, and unleashing on the Soviet people the first totalitarian political police in history, the Cheka?

I hope, but doubt, that in the course of the WRP's much advertised public quest for the roots of its present crisis, the search for the historic roots of Healyism will transcend the barriers of sacred texts and even more sacred leaders. Healy may be a monster. But what he is, where he came from, should give us all food for thought. Both factions of the WRP, in their various ways, are still telling us that morality is subordinate to politics, that 'the moral is political'. Surely it is time the matter was put the other way round. The political is moral.

POLITICAL SECTS 2

The party's over

Solidarity member KEN WELLER reviews the new WRP chorus line and finds it parading the same feet of clay.

WE ARE NOT PURITANS - indeed this writer is strongly critical of the neo-puritanism infesting the radical milieu. We couldn't give a monkey what consenting adults get up to, even those with whom we strongly disagree. Nevertheless, what has happened in the WRP seems to have far transcended anything acceptable to revolutionaries, with Healy turning himself into a kind of 'mobster thermidor'. Moreover, even the critique of the Healy regime by the WRP majority is infused with an attitude which shows that they haven't come to terms with what was wrong. It tells us that they haven't rejected the

organisational forms which created Healy and allowed him to thrive. For example, Newsline (30.10.85) contains an interview with the general secretary of the WRP, Mike Banda, and quotes him as saying:

"This group [the Healyites] lack the most elementary concept of revolutionary morality. They willingly defend the corrupt sexual practices of a 'leader' who thinks nothing of abusing his authority to degrade women and girl comrades and destroy their self-respect".

But what sort of authority is it which can be used or abused in such

a manner? What sort of organisation is it which allows such 'abuses' to go on for well over twenty years? What we are seeing is a familiar feature of leninism, an attempt to unload onto an individual 'errors' which go far deeper.

The crisis within the WRP, which would be a hoot if it were not for the fact that real people got hurt, raises at least a couple of points of interest to libertarians.

Religious and political sects, of which the WRP was a prime example, are more a symptom of the deep malaise of society than a pointer to any solutions. This is an area to which we have devoted some attention. Recently, in issue 6/7 of the current series of Solidarity (Spring 1985), we published a long article by Bob Potter, 'The Last Days of this Wicked System of Things', which dealt with the purely religious variety; but the parallels with their political brethren were clear. In Solidarity for Social Revolution 7 (March-April 1979), we printed a whole supplement, 'Suicide for Socialism' by Maurice Brinton, which dealt with the political-religious cult of Jim Jones and the People's Temple and the mass suicide of over nine hundred of his followers at Jonestown, Guyana. In describing such groups, Brinton commented:

"In such organisations the Leader may become more and more authoritarian and paranoid. If he has achieved institutional power he may kill, torture or excommunicate (Stalin, Torquemada) increasing numbers of his co-thinkers. Or he may order them "shot like partridges". If he is a 'leftist' authoritarian devoid - as yet - of the state power he is seeking, he will merely expel large numbers of his deviant followers. Deviance - above all - cannot be tolerated. Such men would rather live in a world peopled with heretics and renegades and keep the total allegiance of those who remain. One even wonders whether (unlike most of their supporters) they

still believe in what they preach - or whether the maintenance of their power has not become their prime concern. Jim Jones' rantings about defectors and 'traitors' is not unique. It is encountered in a whole stratum of the political left. Many 'radical' leaderships boast of how they have coped with previous deviations. But however 'unreal' the world they live in, the core of followers will remain loyal. The Leader is still the shield. Even in Jonestown anything seemed better than the other reality: the painful alternative of deprivation, material, emotional or intellectual".

At a WRP aggregate meeting on 18 October 1985 (as reported in Newsline, 20.11.85), Cliff Slaughter said of the pro-Healy faction:

"Here again is a cynical ideology with strong parallels in the extreme right, in fascism. There is a monopoly of information and monopoly of power and discipline. The leader knows no rules of right and wrong: only what he wants is important".

Authoritarian sects

It is remarkable how many features such sects, whether religious, political, or both, have in common: a belief that they are the elect, and that consequently normal rules of decency do not apply to them; paranoia about supposed enemies; hyper-activity; physical or social isolation of members from outside influences; the acceptance of an infallible leader who frequently has a droit de seigneur over women in the group (we would like to squash here and now the counter-revolutionary rumour that Gerry Healy and the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, both on the run from their respective cults, had a secret meeting in Bermuda with a view to swapping organisations). Such cults also share a vision of the imminent final crisis; and have none too choosy methods of fund-raising.

While we reject leninism in all its varieties, it would be a mistake - if only it were that easy - to claim that all such groups conform to the behavioural norms of the WRP. Yet can it be denied that large chunks of the leninist inheritance provide rich pickings for nascent Stalins, Joneses, Hoxhas, Pol Pots or Healys?

Libertarian organisation

Our own views about politics and organisation were most succinctly expressed in our Open Letter to the International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers' Party) in September 1968:

"It is remarkable how few socialists seem to recognise the connection between the structure of their organisation and the type of 'socialist' society it might help bring about.

"If the revolutionary organisation is seen as the means and socialist society as the end, one might expect people with an elementary understanding of dialectics to recognise the relation between the two. Means and ends are mutually dependent. They constantly influence each other. The means are, in fact, a partial implementation of the end, whereas the end becomes modified by the means adopted.

"One could almost say 'tell me your views concerning the structure and function of the revolutionary organisation and I'll tell you what the society you will help create will be like'. Or conversely, 'give me your definition of socialism and I'll tell you what your views on the revolutionary organisation are likely to be'.

"We see socialism as a society based on self-management in every branch of social life. Its basis would be workers' management of production exercised through Workers' Councils. Accordingly we conceive of the revolutionary organisation as one which

incorporates self-management in its structure and abolishes within its own ranks the separation between the functions of decision-making and execution. The revolutionary organisation should propagate these principles in every area of social life".

One of the hallmarks of such a revolutionary organisation ought to be a willingness to discuss ideas in an open way. It is in this spirit that we publish Robin Blick's article which raises a number of important questions with which we do not concur in every detail. In particular we do not agree with his comment that "Readers would be hard put to it to find any revolutionary or radical grouping that subscribes to a conception of morality and ethical conduct that repudiates in toto the leninist subordination of human beings to the requirements of party regimes and the social systems they rule over". In our view there have been a number of libertarian tendencies, with not all of whom we would agree, who do not share or practice the authoritarian visions of leninism, or for that matter social democracy, and it is possible to create revolutionary groupings which avoid the subordination Robin describes. Nevertheless, the idea, explicit or implicit, of the primacy of the party elite is a serious danger which needs to be constantly guarded against.

Finally, the WRP ratfight has exposed yet another feature of corruption (one not restricted to them alone). Details are coming out about relations with a number of the 'leninoid' Tammany Halls in local government, where in return for jobs, grants for front organisations and contracts, the WRP gave political support and cheap printing to support the political careers of particular individuals. It is becoming increasingly clear how the poor, old and homeless are deprived to pay for flats and BMWs for the 'revolutionary leadership'.

BRAZIL

Liberal illusions begin to shatter

In Rio de Janeiro homeless families squat beside prestige business centres (picture below) symbolising the massive disparity between Brazil's prosperous urban bourgeoisie and its rural poor, the legacy of 21 years of military rule. NEIL TERRY reports from Sao Paulo on the pressures confronting the new elected government. Not the least of these is widespread expectation of swift change.

THE RETURN to civilian government in Brazil was certainly a victory for civilian society and - as the military finally departed for the barracks to the clamour of a nation-wide mass movement that at its high points threw up rallies of over a million people - was undoubtedly felt as one. Six months into the 'Nova Republica' it is interesting to wonder whose is the victory, and where the power now lies.

Twenty-one years of military rule, ranging from bloody dictatorship to, by the end, a tired authoritarianism without authority, transformed Brazil. What had begun as an attempt to remove the populist left and the 'communists' from power ended as a massive project to 'modernise' Brazil and build the basis for it to emerge as a leading power of the capitalist West in the twenty-first century, if not before.

The economy has grown fast, particularly industry. Exports are now dominated by manufactured and processed goods. Most of the population now lives in towns and cities. But the fundamental social problems of twenty-one years ago



Jenny Matthews/Format

Brazil's military beat a controlled retreat

THE MILITARY REGIMES which took control of most of Latin America in the late sixties and seventies have for the most part disappeared. Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru and Bolivia are now back in civilian hands, leaving the generals in Chile and Paraguay looking rather isolated.

But the manner of the military retreat varied a lot. In Argentina they scuttled themselves with the fiasco of the Falklands campaign. In Brazil the military executed a planned withdrawal - though even they must have been surprised by the mass movement which finally pushed them out and the degree of hostility against them which developed at all levels of civilian society.

In Argentina the military regime lasted less than seven years, in Brazil twenty-one. Here they were preparing the ground for their exit from power at least six years ago. In 1979 they implemented their own, limited amnesty. In this way they made certain that the torturers will not be brought to justice. The corruption which flourished under their rule will also, for the most part, go unpunished.

Most important of all, they have retained a great deal of influence. While they were making an orderly retreat from power, most of the civilian right joined the anti-military movement, and have now emerged with important positions in the new government.

These two factors are an important key to understanding what now appears to be the progressive bourgeoisie's failure to grasp power in the post-military period.

are as bad or worse than ever: widespread poverty and ill-health, appalling housing, poor education, a grossly unequal distribution of income, high unemployment, a grossly unjust system of land tenure, and a foreign debt which, at \$105 billion, is second only to the USA's.

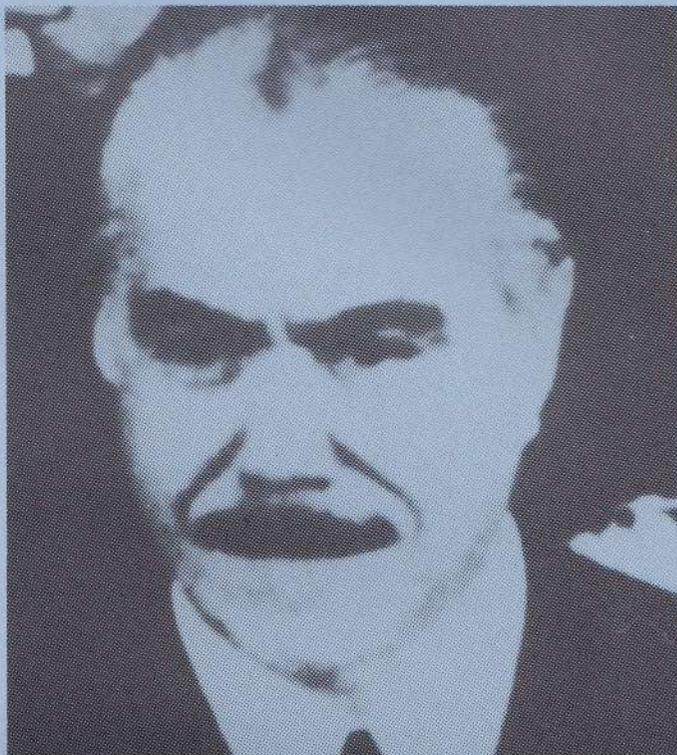
Is the Brazilian bourgeoisie capable of tackling these problems? The country is not about to 'go socialist', but if capitalism is to secure its future here, a viable project for at least alleviating poverty, redistributing wealth, providing a means of living for the rural poor, and so on, would have to be implemented. The country is now ripe for reform. The anti-military movement ended up - unfairly and unrealistically - blaming all the country's ills on the soldiers. Their departure from the offices of power was seen as the prelude to opening the doors to a new period of social justice. The word on everyone's lips these days



General Joao Baptista Figueirdo, Brazil's last military president. Weak, corrupt and extravagant, he needed a second jet to fly home family purchases from trips abroad.

is 'democracy', and since democracy means 'the will of the majority', it also implies reform. In some important ways the new government has shown itself disposed to tackle the problems. It has refused to renew its agreement with the International Monetary Fund along the submissive lines accepted by its predecessor. It by no means proposes to renege on its debt repayment, but its claim that the debt will not be paid by sacrificing the Brazilian people is an important new posture in North/South relations. It has also announced a cheap food programme designed to ease the absolute poverty to which a large part of the population is subjected.

But the contradictions within the government - a coalition of 'progressive' and conservative forces which arose to defeat the military's attempt to put its own civilian candidate in the presidency - are becoming increasingly obvious. The conservative forces are grouped around the President, Jose Sarney, who by a quirk of fate took office when president-elect Tancredo Neves - representing the progressive side of the coalition - was taken ill and died before being inaugurated. Sarney's hand can be seen in two important issues: first, the proposed land reform law, which has been watered down to the point where it will hardly affect the huge land holdings which form the crux of the problem; and second, over the question of the constituent assembly which will decide the form of the new constitution. The government proposes to base the assembly on the current Congress, itself elected in the final years of military rule and biased firmly towards the right, rather than to hold specific elections to decide membership of the assembly. All in all, the right is showing a strength far beyond what seemed possible when the mass anti-military movement was at its peak last year. It scored a notable advance in November when its



Jose Sarney, Brazil's first elected president in 21 years. The premature death of president-elect Tancredo Neves let in one of Figueirido's former 'Mr. Fixits'.

candidate, a virulently anti-communist demagogue called Janio Quadros, won the election for mayor of Sao Paulo, one of the most powerful political posts in Brazil. Nor should it be forgotten that the military, though no longer formally in power, remain a highly influential force for conservatism.

After the first six months of civilian rule, the prospects for a reformist capitalism, capable of at least alleviating the country's worst social problems, have dimmed considerably. In the absence of a creditable socialist alternative, the hope - and illusions - created as the military were pushed out of power are now being broken. All of which is of particular significance to the organised labour movement and the left. With the exception of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party) which has remained independent, they have largely thrown their weight behind the progressive bourgeoisie. A great deal of soul-searching could now be in prospect.

NICARAGUA

Higher productivity, tighter organisation and more discipline

In practice marxism-leninism often acts more as a theory of how to establish an industrial structure in a peasant economy than as a critique of capitalism. This certainly seems to be the case in Nicaragua. Here GORAN LIDEN, recently returned from Nicaragua, examines the policies of the Sandinistas as revealed by statements from their central trade union organisation. On the evidence, he suggests there seem to be more appeals for harder work and the raising of productivity than ideals of workers' liberation.

HOW DO THE SANDINISTAS regard the role of the working class in the rebuilding of Nicaragua? This article demonstrates that the Central Sandinista Trade Union (the CST) places responsibility for raising production on the workers without, in any way, questioning the capitalist nature of the production process. To achieve this goal many different methods are used, all of which have the effect of concentrating the workers' attention on production and on wage levels. The CST's policy rests on a pronounced class collaboration and the absence of class antagonisms in production.

At the end of January 1985 the fourth Trade Union Congress, 'Leonel Rugama', was held in Managua. The questions it had to consider were the organisation of defence against the contras (which absorbs forty per cent of the state's budget), how to raise productivity without losing quality, and how the real wages of the workers should be defended against the high rate of

inflation (forty per cent per annum) and speculation in goods. According to the congress resolution:

"Production constitutes the rearguard to the war front. We need to put all the nation's resources to the disposal of the war, which demands from us workers a discipline, a spirit of self-sacrifice, and a fighting spirit even greater than we showed during the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship.

"In particular we may summarise our pledges to our people as follows: 1. To fight against imperialism and shatter the counter-revolutionary bands. 2. To begin the extermination of the factors that cause speculation and unproductive work. 3. To raise production and productivity.

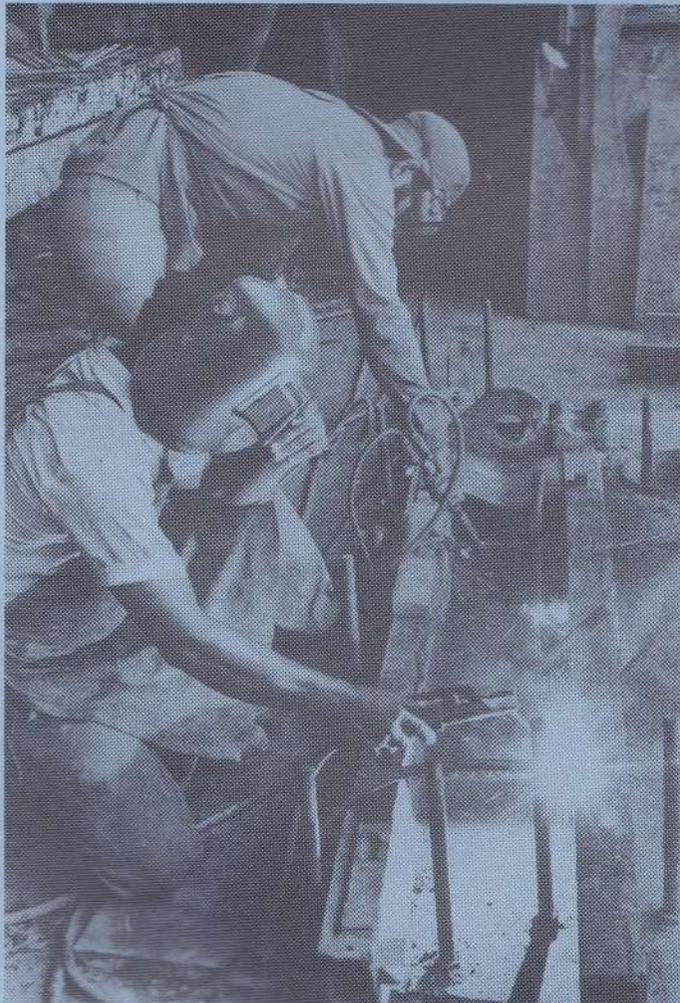
"We give the Patriotic Military Service definite support... and will train substitutes for those

who have been mobilised, so that production will not suffer, and together with management we will combat all attempts to avoid this patriotic duty... We give special attention to the task of explaining and diffusing the Law on the Patriotic Military Service to the youth and their families...

"A war economy, like the one we now live in, demands a strict rationing of human and material resources, and especially an iron discipline, raised patriotic consciousness and an extra effort from every worker. The most important link, and the first to be strengthened, is production - an unshakable and decisive support for the defence of our

country - which because of the war is subjected to a rigorous policy of savings and efficiency".

To realise this policy, the union put forward eleven objectives. These can be divided into four groups. The first and most important concerned the workers' responsibility for production and stressed the need for raised productivity per worker with the help of incentive wages and co-operation between trade union branches and factory managers in order to achieve production targets. The CST wants the trade unions, centrally and locally, to take upon themselves responsibility for ensuring that there will be enough people for harvesting



Blockaded industry: Left, welders fabricating 'home-made' spares in the workshops of the El Liman gold mine. Right, machine minding in one of Nicaragua's cotton factories. One of the worst effects of the economic blockade is that the vital flow of spares for imported industrial equipment has dried up.

coffee, cotton and sugar, and also for drawing more women into production in order to cover for the scarcity of workers. It believes that productivity should be raised by linking wages to production, by conducting a countryside work study assessment of different job contents and work norms, and lastly by continuing the policy of 'emulation' as an important mechanism to improve work discipline and work efficiency, and consequently the saving, austerity and rationalisation of resources".

The next group of objectives concerned the technical side of production. One objective is to make proper use of the inventiveness of workers in order to reduce dependence on foreign technology. The trade union also argued that technical equipment should be taken better care of and personnel given better training in its use, service and repair.

Third, the union turned its attention to the way that trade union branches are linked through production and distribution, and argued that they must develop collaboration and control in the economic activity of which they are a part. The aim is to obtain a smoothly functioning distribution system.

Labour heroes

Finally the CST made a series of exhortations to the state to control bureaucracy energetically and deal with lack of plans and under-utilisation of resources, and linked them with an appeal to the mass media to inform people about the political economy of the revolution by honouring productive work, labour heroes and inventors, and overfulfilled production targets.

On the important question of real wage rises the congress stated that "The foundation for 1985's wage policy is that the wage will be linked to production, along with a fight against hoarders and

speculators to control the process... This pre-supposes that we workers obtain effective distribution through secure channels in order to stop that anarchistic distribution which renders possible the black market and mismanagement".

For the state to be better able to concentrate support on the workers, the CST demands that state subsidies on basic goods be abolished and these tax revenues instead be used to raise the workers' wages.

Soldiers of work

Many of the suggestions made by the CST were acted on, and shortly after the congress El Nuevo Diario began to publish a series of reports under the title 'Soldiers of Work', while the government abolished the subsidies on basic goods and raised wages in connection with a radical turnabout in economic policy at the beginning of February. It was decided that wages should be raised gradually, but not in step with the rate of inflation - no index-linking of wage rises and inflation was agreed, since this was considered to add to inflation. In other words, the measures of the new economic policy were motivated by the simple desire to stimulate production.

Very similar aims emerged from an interview El Nuevo Diario conducted with Jose Ortez, the Esteli regional secretary of the CST, on 30.1.1985. Ortez said that the CST would like to harmonise the workers' interests with those of the 'useful' industrial bourgeoisie, so as to concentrate on the struggle against the 'taxing' commercial bourgeoisie. He repeated many of the themes from the trade union congress. According to Ortez,

"The workers must understand that management is not their enemy, and they may not look upon it as an opponent. Instead, it is only a correct relationship

between management and the local trade union branch that may lead to good production plans".

"To raise productivity to acceptable levels it is necessary to launch a propaganda campaign aimed at the workers".

"Both management, and the relations between it and the local trade union branch, ought to be improved, while both workers and the local trade union branch leaders ought to be more watchful over management, in order to help get the production plans carried through".

"Lavishness, unpunctuality, slowness, as well as bureaucratic manners, are habits from the past which the workers today have to abandon. It is not the wage which will solve workers' economic problems, but instead effective control by the state and workers' revolutionary vigilance against speculation, etc. We must teach the worker what productivity means for him, for his family, for society, and for the revolution".

Emulation Days

These attempts to establish workplace passivity can perhaps be most clearly seen in the policy of emulation which was described in a pamphlet put out in 1984 by the CST under the title How to Organise the Sandinista Emulation. Sandinista emulation is, according to this brochure, "the worker's conscious attempts to achieve and surpass the attitude of the best towards work and the current highest levels of productivity and production".

On 'Emulation Days' the Nicaraguan worker must, according to the pamphlet, strive against the following parlous circumstances: lack of work discipline; lack of production quality control routines; bad union-management coordination; ignorance of, or non-participation in the preparation of, production targets; and local

union branch or management paternalism.

As in earlier revolutions in underdeveloped countries, production is an exceedingly critical link. Both in Russia 1917-18 and in Portugal 1975, the workers submitted proposals as to how production could be maintained and raised. In both these countries proposals emanating from the workers in their factories competed with proposals from centralised organisations such as trade unions, parties or the state. In Nicaragua, solutions based upon rule from the top seem to reign supreme.

The FSLN is, therefore, another example of how traditional left organisations, at least in crisis situations, choose to look upon society's production from a productivist viewpoint. In other words, they are solely interested in how to achieve increased production in a way that is remarkably similar to the attitude of 'our own' private capitalists.

A productivist viewpoint denies or forgets that production most of all produces class relations between people (workers and management) and also subordinates workers to objects. These relations between people and between people and objects flow out of production proper and dominate the whole of society.

From the view point of the FSLN, class collaboration between bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, middle classes, workers, small peasants, and the developing state, must not be disturbed. Therefore, all class struggles of an independent nature have to be suppressed. That is why the FSLN-CST wants workers, unions and management to discuss production plans together. The assembly meetings and common efforts are intended to show the workers that they and management have common interests, exactly as expressed by Jose Ortez in his interview. It will, however, be very difficult

for the FSLN in the future if it needs to rely upon the working class struggle, after first having tried to strangle it.

The immediate reasons for needing to raise production and productivity just now are of course the economic blockade by the USA and the contras' attacks. And there are surely few workers who would like to help the contras, even indirectly. However, just as in the Spanish Revolution, this raises the very delicate question of whether it is possible to win the civil war without first consolidating the revolution, or, on the other hand, if a victory in the civil war is needed in order to consolidate the

revolution. The idea behind the FSLN's policy is to consolidate the national revolution by calling off the class struggle and preserving capitalist production methods.

In short, the FSLN wants a compromise with the bourgeoisie because it lacks confidence both in its own ability to organise production centrally via the state, and in the ability of ordinary people to manage themselves. As a result the FSLN is concentrating on keeping the working class down in order to help the bourgeoisie and the state. This policy seriously undermines the prospects for the future socialist development of Nicaraguan society.

WORKING COLLECTIVELY

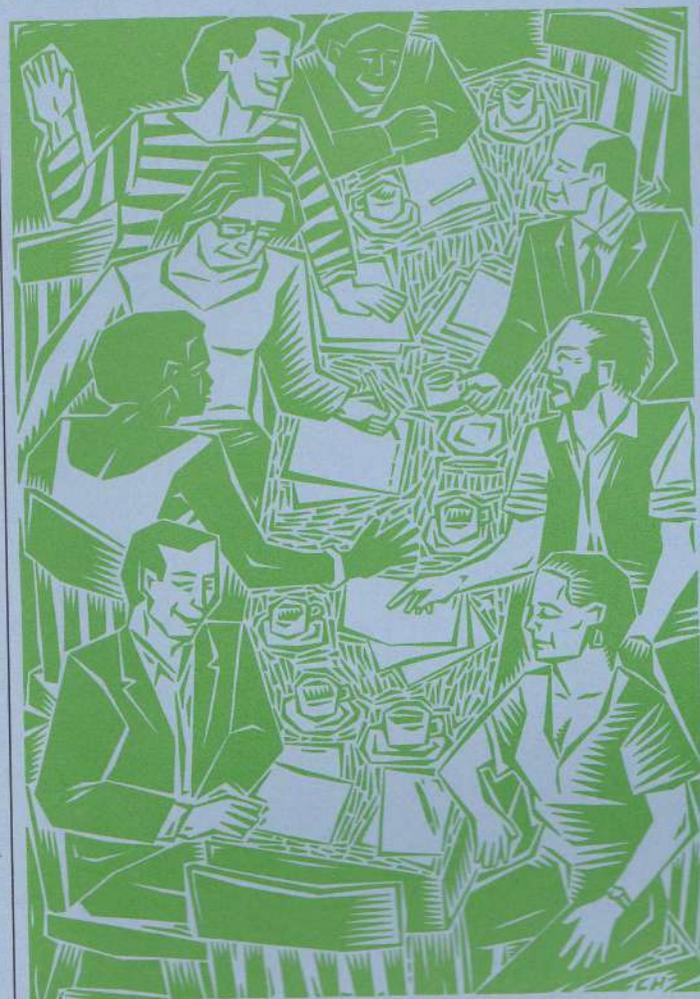
Organisation or spontaneity?

If it is true that a little experience is worth a lot of theory, then eighteen months in a miners' support group should teach a great deal about organising. On the basis of just such experience MICK LARKIN offers his thoughts on self-organisation and some of its difficulties.

THE FIRST MEETING of County Durham Miners' Support Group after the strike began was quite an event. Faced with the question 'How do we organise from now on?', an assembly of about a hundred people, mostly ordinary workers, unanimously decided to adopt the classic anarchist structure, a sovereign assembly which mandates a co-ordinating body without executive powers. Obviously, I was overjoyed; but sadly, there's been a lot of backsliding since then.

It does seem that the ideas we are trying to promote (such as participation and grass-roots control) are becoming popular, even

taken for granted, but once they are put into practice it seems to bring out all sorts of contradictions which people aren't willing to deal with. For example, the question of delegates being subject to the mandate of the assembly seems simple enough; but in practice this comes down to someone having to say "Excuse me, Mary, I think that's out of line with what we decided last week/last month - see it says in the minutes for March 23rd...", etc. It seems to me that this is out of keeping with the working-class traits we so rightly admire such as spontaneity and 'earthiness'; in other words, it all seems a bit cerebral.



Anyway, even if we could persuade people to adopt this approach to organisation, do we really want to live in a world where people are always referring to motions carried, alterations to paragraph three line six, and so on?

Now there are no doubt reasons people can come up with as to why this is not really a problem, but in my experience, to say that we can trust in spontaneous self-organisation doesn't take into account that well-known phenomenon, the tyranny of structurelessness. One example of this, which I've run up against a lot, goes like this. Imagine that someone suggests a new way of dealing with a situation (and obviously we're going to need plenty of them). What often happens is that this suggestion throws people a bit and there's a silence. The people who are content with the status quo, and who are usually therefore quite articulate within it and respected by many people,

don't bother to take up the suggestion and discuss it. Instead, they suggest a more familiar alternative, volunteer to carry it out, and then change the subject on the assumption that the lack of dissent means that this is what people want. It often is, but only because that's what they're familiar with. The original suggestion is lost almost without anyone noticing, unless the person who raised it in the first place stops the meeting, which requires a certain amount of confidence, and asks to go back to it. Obviously this seems pedantic; 'spontaneity' has thus worked in favour of the articulate elite and the anarchist gets labelled 'bureaucratic'.

'Relying on people's spontaneous common sense' can thus result in a debased form of volunteerism where it's understood that certain people usually write the leaflets, the assembly's final approval becomes a formal 'rubber stamp', and the majority sink into passivity. To an outside observer, the action may seem to be a grass-roots decision; but I for one have now become very suspicious when I hear that a certain group has spontaneously developed an anarchist-type organisation. If you scratch the surface you may find a leading militant behind it all.

Utopias and realities

All this seems quite a dilemma to me. We tend to think of a self-managed society as the kind of place where cleaners can argue the toss about developments in the third world, where the milkman has a say in town planning, and people generally think for themselves and get involved. But could it be that this would all become ridiculously pedantic and boring? Have we been developing our utopias while ignoring the realities of human psychology, such as the fact that people have a limited attention span, find it difficult to be open in large groups, don't want to be making choices all day, and have better

things to do than decide what the graphic on a leaflet is to look like? If we try to promote a simplistic conception of the 'sovereign assembly', where, for example, all one hundred people try to write a leaflet, this will quickly be seen as impractical and rejected. So instead, we have to develop a more subtle approach which relates to what people are really like. Rather than just identifying a problem and leaving it at that (something I find a bit annoying when I read other people's articles), I'm going to try to suggest some ways this might be achieved.

Possible solutions

I think it basically comes down to looking at things differently. It's a well-known fact that we abstract the infinite variations in the world around us and filter them through a particular, limited interpretation. This is inevitable, but sometimes it leads us to set up unnecessary dilemmas.

For example, there are three basic ways to write a leaflet. The worst is to leave it to the experts. The most impractical is for a whole group to try to do it at the same time. The most usual (in groups where anarchist forms of organisation have developed) is to mandate someone to draw up a draft, then submit it to the group for possible alterations. This last is not bad so far as it goes, but it's very susceptible to degeneration if, for example, the usual people always get asked to do the draft. Many people are not confident enough to voice their opinions in a large meeting - the draft is often just read out and people are expected to make comments upon it off the cuff.

A big step forward in terms of participation would be achieved if it were realised that the involvement of the group is vital in the initial creative stage of the process if everyone is to feel it is 'their leaflet'. This is much

easier to achieve if we realise that projects get formulated through different levels of detail. Although one hundred people cannot write one leaflet, they can sketch out the basic concepts they want included, then give it to delegates to draw up. If this kind of outlook were accepted, we would not get the situation which often now occurs, where people try to get into the detail of a leaflet en masse, realise it's not on, and leave it to a few people to draft; by which stage much boring time has been wasted and people are starting to get pissed off with the idea of participation.

Obviously people should be expected to share their skills and positions rotated to help people build up their confidence. Various people, especially feminists, have done a lot of work on breaking down meetings into smaller groups, so we need to consider what aspects of this are worth taking on. Finally, we should try to promote the idea that a large number of copies are made of any draft leaflets, etc., and distributed before the meeting, so that people have a chance to formulate clearly what they want changed.

So that's a start, maybe. No very earth-shattering concepts there, I'll agree, but I don't think that's really what we're in need of. What is required is a practical reworking of the structures that exist inside and outside, so that they are as efficient as possible for the new purposes we want to put them to.

This concept of anarchism may seem pedantic, and I'd be only too pleased if someone could persuade me that such rigour is all unnecessary, but experience suggests that there is a real need to develop effective forms of organisation which counter all kinds of elitism. Otherwise, 'spontaneity' becomes the tyranny of structurelessness and participation is about the most boring thing you can imagine.

TROTSKYISM

Not quite right, Mr. Stalin

Denver Walker

"Quite Right, Mr. Trotsky!"

Harney & Jones £1.00

THIS IS A VERY AMUSING and quite useful book on the origins and development of trotskyism in Britain from the 1930s to the present. Although I cannot comment on the accuracy of specific details the author's political line - that of the New Communist Party (a group which broke from the CPGB after 1968 when they felt it had become insufficiently Stalinist) - is explicit, so it is fairly easy for readers to formulate their own opinions of trotskyism.

There are three sections: origins; groups in Britain; and theory. Of these, I found the second most interesting, covering all the splits, re-groupings, changes of name and arguments over theory and practice of a myriad of groups over fifty years. The author describes the groups as the fifty-seven varieties, a title probably borrowed from the old Solidarity cartoon which added 'all unfit for human consumption'.

However, the book fails in seeming to attribute the failings of trotskyism as a theory to the character of Trotsky as a person. Section One portrays him as a maverick, disagreeing with whatever happened to be the majority position at any time in order to promote his own leadership or ego. This may perhaps be accurate, but is surely not enough to explain his partnership with Lenin (they must have had something in common!) or the appeal of his theories at the

time and since. Nor is it very good marxism to lay so much emphasis on personality, separate from the 'historical circumstances'.

In fact, Section One and other parts of the book are too short to do justice to the complexities of the situations described. For example, the Bolshevnik/Menshevik split is accounted for almost entirely in terms of 'the Mensheviks were opposed to discipline' (which would make one think "good for them" were it simply not true). Trotsky's views on trade unions (the need for the militarisation of labour and for unions to stick to issues concerned with production) are criticised - and Lenin is quoted in this context. But it is stretching credulity to claim without supporting evidence that the unions were able to protect "the material and spiritual interest of the masses of the toilers by ways and means that this (Soviet) apparatus cannot employ", as Lenin claimed.

The question of Trotsky's character did, however, raise a thought in my mind about his appeal: he seems not to have bothered to try to pretend that he had not changed his line. Lenin, on the other hand, gives the impression (or his followers do) that he was the embodiment of the objective truth. Perhaps trotskyists (or the more libertarian of them) believe he was less authoritarian, when he was merely less consistent?

The author would not, of course, agree with this implied criticism of Lenin, nor with our view that the rigidity of marxism-leninism and its obsession with 'objective truth' about history led to the re-writing of history (a habit of many of its adherents, not just Stalin, nor just Trotsky!)

Section Three deals with trotskyist

RADICAL EDUCATION

Catching them young the second time around

'Lib Ed' Number One, Spring 1986
(New series). 50 pence

quotes Lenin to the effect that Trotsky represented "liberal views with a marxist coating". I wonder if most marxism now isn't merely a revolutionary-sounding coating on otherwise liberal views - witness the author's own position that revolutionaries should ally themselves with the Soviet Union internationally and the Labour Party at home, or that in CND the issue should clearly be cruise missiles rather than quitting NATO.

I also wonder how long the 'liberal' views of any marxists - least of all the NCP - would last if they came to power here? After all, the author brushes aside without further explanation the horrors of the Stalinist period with the extraordinarily anodyne description: "the period of distortions of socialist legality that lasted from 1935 to 1953". And he claims that Stalin was clearly the best man the CPSU had to take over from Lenin!

The book does, however, make some interesting points and the author's criticisms, first that trotskyists idealise the working class, and second believe the revolution to be always around the corner (and have done for fifty years!), are, ironically, ones that we have frequently made ourselves. We might agree with the statement that they "divide and divert the labour and peace movements", but have a different explanation and a different reaction: the manipulation and authoritarianism of trotskyism (and orthodox Communism) is divisive and demoralising. It is not the criticisms which trotskyists make of the labour and peace movements which are at fault so much as their inconsistency and opportunism - summed up by the author with a quote from Tariq Ali in 1972: "The Labour Party? A corpse...a thoroughly bourgeois prop of capitalism".

IAN PIRIE

AT LEAST since the time of William Godwin, libertarians have recognised that, after the family, schools are the main means of accustoming people to the ideas of hierarchy and obedience to authority; and they have, therefore, been prominent in the provision of alternative forms of education: from Ferrer in Spain in the early part of this century, A S Neill from the twenties, through to the 'free schools' of the sixties. The magazine Libertarian Education was started twenty-five years ago to support these alternatives, and continued until (by then called Lib Ed) it collapsed four years ago. The old magazine's quality had no doubt suffered from the general disappearance of libertarian alternatives which has affected the whole movement over the last ten years; so I was looking forward with interest to its rebirth. Unfortunately, I'm disappointed by what has appeared. It could just as easily been called 'Liberal Education'. Although there are interesting pieces e.g. about Countesthorpe College, Leics, and 'special needs' teaching, the general tone is soft, even trendy, left, with a vague support for the NUT. Perhaps there is no agreement among the Lib Ed group about where they stand politically? I'd like to see libertarian socialist analysis of schooling and how we can alter it in line with our ideas; I hope Lib Ed provides this in the future. Lib Ed is available for a £2 annual subscription from the Cottage, The Green, Leire, Leicestershire.

S K FRENCH

SOLIDARNOSC

Two churches

From CAJO BRENDEL, Holland:

I think a comment is needed on John Cobbett's critical remarks which were published in Solidarity 9 under the title 'Simplified Struggles'. Cobbett seems to discover an obvious contradiction between two different descriptions given by Henri Simon of the Polish Catholic Church, but he overlooks the complexity of real social and spiritual life. The "incoherence" Cobbett speaks about - the Church as an "independent mass organisation" in one respect, as an "institution of the Polish state" on the other hand - doesn't exist. The first definition is as good as the other - both statements are correct, the Polish Church represents both things at the same time.

What Cobbett is characterising as inconsistency is nothing but a paradox, of the same kind, for instance, as the statement that the modern working class is a class inside bourgeois society which finds itself outside bourgeois society. Catholicism in Poland is a force which cannot be neglected, because that country has maintained rural conditions of pre-capitalist methods of production to a large degree and consequently has a peasantry with an ideology which belongs to such a state of affairs. This ideology is the Catholic faith. Just because it is widespread (wider than anywhere else in Eastern Europe), the Catholic Church is a mass organisation, independent in so far as its ideology has nothing to do with the ideology of the bolshevist Polish state.

However, because of these two

facts, its mass membership and its relative independence, it could become, and really is, an instrument of mediation between the state and the people. The first is just the precondition of the other. When John Cobbett says that Simon doesn't provide a clear analysis of the rise and subsequent defeat of Solidarnosc, he is, I fear, the victim of misunderstanding. The clear tendency of Simon's book - "well illustrated", as Cobbett has to admit - is that Solidarnosc, unable to keep the workers under tight control, and also unable to manipulate them in a way its bureaucracy considered useful, found it impossible to operate as a mere trade union and was therefore slipping more and more towards becoming a political body, increasingly influenced by KOR members as its advisers, and inevitably couldn't maintain its position any longer. Its defeat was caused by this.

True, this analysis is quite opposite to Cobbett's view that Solidarnosc could likely be described as of 'councilist' character. But this doesn't mean that it should be "unclear". Moreover, if Cobbett is using terms like 'councilist' and 'anarcho-syndicalist', he is pointing to different conceptions of society. Otherwise he is comparing things which cannot be compared. May I remind him that councilism was developed as a theoretical reflection on the practice of the (German) working class and that it was never more, but also never less?

The Polish workers had the same practice. However, whether one defines councilism one way or another, it is obviously opposed to the pure trade unionist and mediatory role which Solidarnosc claimed for itself. This is masked by the way John Cobbett puts things forward. If there's any question of

simplication, it is there, and not in Simon's book, which we (i.e. the Dutch group Act and Thought) published in a Dutch translation just because of its clarity.

Friendly yours

EDITORIAL POLICY

More socialism, please!

From ROBIN COX, Haslemere:

I think Solidarity is an excellent journal though I do have one major criticism of it; rarely if ever does it define socialism. I cannot remember when I last came across the idea in your journal that socialism involves the abolition of exchange relationships and the institution of voluntary labour and free access to wealth. As socialists, though we may differ over the way to achieve socialism, we should be constantly pushing a clear vision (not a blueprint) of a socialist society to the fore, and trying to show how we can begin at once to tackle existing social problems in a practical way within the framework that such a society offers. We cannot simply take it for granted that readers will understand what is meant by socialism. I'm afraid the overall impression I have of Solidarity - and I'm not alone in thinking this - is of a journal that has some very perceptive things to say about certain aspects of capitalism but which has nothing solid to put in its place. It's as though it existed in a sort of limbo of disembodied criticism.

I have thought in the past that the Socialist Standard suffered from the same defect though to a lesser degree, but happily this is changing, and being in the SPGB myself, I shall certainly want to

see the party move still more in this direction. I just don't think we should, or indeed can afford to, adopt the attitude that a clear statement of what a socialist society will be like is a bit too much for our fellow workers to swallow, and that it would be far better that we try to attract their sympathy solely by attacking capitalism and its hierarchical relationships. Socialism is urgent. If we relinquish the sense of urgency about the idea of a world without bosses and labour, we condemn it to be a distant utopia to the detriment of the socialist movement itself.

Regards

POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Burning experience

From S K FRENCH, London:

I was particularly interested by the letter in the last Solidarity from Rose Knight. I was one of the more vociferous opponents of the views she was then putting forward (see Solidarity Journal 1), and I came to much the same conclusions as she has now done about what lay behind the ostensible terms of the dispute and the passions it aroused.

I agree with her that we are not limited to learning from our own experiences, but can also learn from those of others. If it were not so then we would indeed all be wasting our time writing anything. But I would distinguish between intellectual and emotional understanding. She asks whether we need to put our hands in the fire to learn that we can be burned, and of course the answer is "No". We do, however, need at least to have felt a hot surface to understand

what being burned might be like.

To illustrate this in my own life, I became a socialist while I was a student. I had an intellectual sympathy with 'the workers'. But I had no emotional understanding of what it meant to be a worker. It was not until I spent seven months working alternate fortnights of day and night shifts in a car factory - with no prospect of it coming to an end - that I began to appreciate why working people could go on strike (at least at that time) over petty issues, and what it meant to be no more than a 'hired hand' whose own ideas about production were not wanted. The company ran a bonus scheme for suggestions about improvements in production which were adopted by the company. I made various suggestions about minor improvements in design but was told that this was not within my province: it was a design question. In other words, of course, the company wanted workers to suggest ways of increasing their own exploitation, but not to suggest improvements in the vehicles (even if they also meant small savings in materials, etc.).

I mention this not only to show how naive I was at that time, but also to show why I have never forgotten how I came to dread the 'dead time' I spent at the factory. That is something which has stayed with me over many years, and makes socialism, for me, not merely an intellectual belief but an essential part of how I feel.

I think that every intellectual socialist should spend a period of time 'on the shop floor'; if they did I hope they'd find it a lot more difficult to produce those convoluted theories justifying repression of real workers in the name of the 'proletariat' or glamorisations of 'the working class' that so many of them do!

Regards

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