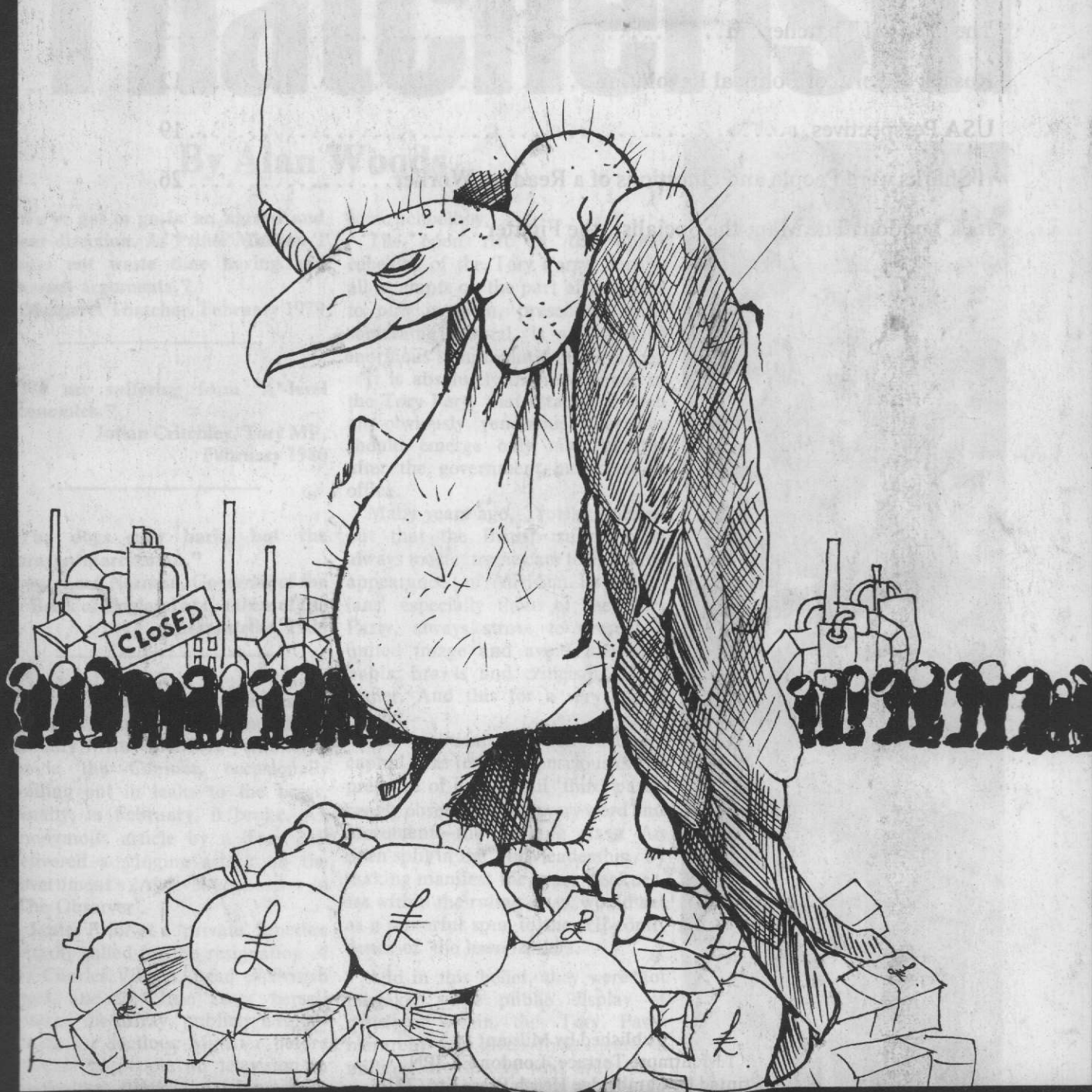


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The crisis of Thatcherism

By Alan Woods

"We've got to go in an agreed and clear direction. As Prime Minister I could not waste time having any internal arguments."

Margaret Thatcher, February 1979

"We are suffering from 'A'-level economics."

Julian Critchley, Tory MP, February 1980

"The dogs may bark, but the caravan marches on."

Lord Norman, Governor of the Bank of England at the time of the general strike, 1926

The Thatcher government is in crisis. Throughout the month of January, the conflict simmered inside the Cabinet, occasionally spilling out in leaks to the press. Finally, in February, it broke. An anonymous article by a Tory MP delivered a stinging attack on the government's 'A' level economics in 'The Observer'.

James Prior at a 'private' function initially called for the resignation of Sir Charles Villiers, head of British Steel, and the 'Iron Lady' herself entered the affray, publicly admonishing her factious Minister before millions of people on television in much the same language as a headmistress upbraiding a trouble-

some schoolboy.

The open rift in the upper echelons of the Tory Party, despite all attempts on the part of the press to play it down, presenting it as something normal, is an event of enormous symptomatic importance.

It is absolutely unprecedented in the Tory Party that attacks of such an obviously venomous character should emerge only nine months after the government has been in office.

Many years ago, Trotsky pointed out that the British ruling class always took extreme care to avoid the appearance of division. Its politicians, especially those of the Tory Party, always strove to present a united image and avoid unseemly public brawls and criticism of the leader. And this for a very sound reason.

The political representatives of capital were for ever conscious of the presence of a powerful 'third party' keenly observing their every word and movement—the working class. An open split in the Tory leadership, by making manifest the inner weaknesses within the ruling class, would act as a powerful spur to the self-confidence of 'the lower orders.'

And in this belief, they were not mistaken. The public display of divisions within the Tory Party hierarchy has given fresh heart to millions of workers who draw their own conclusions from the disarray in the camp of 'their betters.' Like a



heavy stone dropped on the smooth surface of a pond, the row in the leadership sends ripples speeding in all directions.

Commenting on the state of mind of Tory backbenchers after the revolt in the House of Commons, Hugh Stevenson wrote in 'The Times' (19 February): "If as current forecasts quite credibly have it, earnings are rising by 20% a year, output is stagnant or contracting, and unemployment next year is going over the two million mark, Mrs Thatcher will be a one-term Prime Minister. The troops clearly sense these things and are restive."

The discontent of 'the troops' is not difficult to understand. Many Tory MPs find themselves beleaguered by middle-class Tory voters affected by the cuts, the raising of the minimum lending rate to 17%, the introduction of charges for school transport and rate increases.

Even the normally docile Tory Women's Advisory Committee, in an uncharacteristic act of Bolshevik defiance, has called for an increase in child benefits this year, while Lord Thorneycroft, the Party chairman appeals desperately to the back benches to "hold steady" and attempts to rally support for the local government elections with the slogan "Keep Britain out of the red."

But the prestige of the Tory leadership has plummeted to an all-time low. In the corridors of Westminster, senior Ministers and civil servants grumble about the abrasive manner of 'Atilla the Hen' and the 'mad monk's' clumsy handling of the steel strike. A glimpse into the way Cabinet meetings is run is afforded by the following extract from Fred Emery in 'The Times' (23 February):

"The fact is—astonishing though it seems—there has been no formal Cabinet decision about what to do in the steel strike. That is what non-intervention means. The full Cabinet looks on, hears reports, while what responsibility there is is left to ministers in Cabinet committees."

All this serves to demonstrate the degree to which the political representatives of the ruling class have 'lost their touch.' The senile

decay of British capitalism is faithfully reflected in the leadership of the Tory Party, once the most far-sighted strategists of capital, now "in second childhood and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

The calculated gamble of the steel strike proved to be a costly mistake. The steelworkers were not at all the 'soft option' that Sir Keith and his cronies had imagined.

The magnificent counter-offensive of the steelworkers, in their first national official strike since 1926, had the government and its BSC stooges reeling under a rain of body-blows inflicted by the mass flying pickets which threatened to paralyse industry and bring the government to its knees.

The ruling class looked on, horrified, at the consequences of the actions of its representatives. A clear note of panic crept into the leader writers of such sober-minded organs of big business as 'The Sunday Times':

"A moderate union has been transformed into a group of determined militants," sobbed the editorial of February 24, "Innocent manufacturing companies (!) face imminent bankruptcy. Any settlement will be much higher than what was negotiable two months ago."



At this moment of writing, the final outcome of the steel strike is undecided. But one thing is absolutely clear. With proper leadership and adequate backing from the TUC general council, the heroic struggle of the steelworkers would have rapidly ended in a complete success, forcing the government to back down, not only on the wages issue

but on the all-important question of closures.

The pressure from below led to the call for a general strike in Wales, which was only headed off by the activities of the general council of the TUC. The South Wales miners, finding themselves isolated and in an exposed position, decided for the time being to beat a tactical retreat.

But there can be no doubt that when the issue of pit closures is posed in a more concrete way, the South Wales miners will be at the forefront of the struggle once again, but with a difference. This time the heat will be on the national leadership to organise effective national action.

In the same way, the opposition of Len Murray and Co. to the strike action in Wales will place them under increasing pressure to take national action against the government. The impressive demonstration of 140,000 on March 9, despite the almost total lack of preparation by the leadership is just a small warning of what Thatcher can expect in the coming months.

This was the biggest demonstration since the monster demonstration against the Heath government's Industrial Relations Bill. And now the TUC has been obliged to call a national day of action in May, with Len Murray indirectly calling for strike action. A one-day general strike, combined with meetings and demonstrations all over the country would shake the government to its roots and give the workers an idea of the colossal power which they hold in their hands. It would be a decisive stage in the development of the workers' movement in Britain, opening up an entirely new situation fraught with dangerous and unforeseen consequences for the ruling class.

The policies of Thatcherism are increasingly costly and dangerous to the ruling class. The insane attempt of this mindless middle-class upstart to push through a short bill to outlaw secondary picketing during the steel strike was defeated by Cabinet opposition. But it revealed once more the extent to which the ruling camarilla are removed from reality.

They are like the Bourbons before

the French Revolution. They learn nothing and forget nothing. The whole experience of the Heath government and the ill-fated Industrial Relations Act is a book sealed with seven seals to Thatcher and 'the mad monk.'

Yet this showed clearly that the decisive factor in industrial relations



Tory Party have grasped this fact, as shown by the comments of Richard Needham, Tory MP for Chippenham, on the present government's intended policies on industrial relations:

"If all these proposals were enforced, not only would there be no strikes, not only would the law be back to 1850 rather than 1906, but one of the fundamental democratic rights of the British people, the right to withdraw one's labour, would have been rendered virtually unusable. **The law would be flouted on a massive scale and its enforceability would become even more impossible.**" (Our emphasis—AW)

Left: James Prior, Tory "wet"
Right: Thatcher and her "mad monk" Joseph

It is, of course, the latter consideration, and not any sentimental regard for the 'democratic rights of the British people' which most concerns this spokesman of the less lunatic brand of Toryism.

Given the present balance of forces, with over twelve million organised workers in trade unions, 300,000 shop stewards and six million members and affiliated members of the Labour Party, any attempt to take away the democratic rights conquered by the working class through generations of struggle would provoke massive resistance and lead to an open clash of the forces of organised labour with the capitalist state.

It is this prospect which makes the blood run cold in the veins of the strategists of capital. In the course of struggle, their friends within the ranks of the labour movement, the so-called 'moderates' and right-wingers would either be compelled to lead or be pushed to one side and replaced by new and more representative sections of the class.

The workers would draw revolutionary conclusions from their experiences and the whole delicate equilibrium between the classes, carefully established and nurtured by the far-sighted representatives of capital

in the past, would be destroyed.

It is a prospect which fills the more intelligent members of the ruling



is not what laws are on the statute book, but the **correlation of class forces.**

The steel strike itself corroborates this fact. After the mass picketing of Hadfields, the private steel company, a senior police officer told 'The Sunday Times':

"There was never any question of making mass arrests...if we locked up 500 or 1,000, none of us had much doubt that there would be 5,000 there the next day and probably 10,000 the day after that. With mass arrests the scene would have turned very ugly."

"A delegation of Chief Constables in a discussion with Whitelaw during the strike stated that "They are not prepared to treat pickets in the same way as, for instance, student demonstrators outside the American embassy. 'we have to live with these people once the strike is over,' said one Sheffield officer."

The more thinking elements in the

class with fear and dismay.

Prior and his allies in the Cabinet represent that wing of the Tory Party who have not completely lost sight of the elementary facts of life.

Their objectives are ultimately identical with those of Thatcher, Joseph, Biffen and Howe. But they want to tread more cautiously, testing the ground to try to avoid provoking an untimely explosion.

Realising their weakness, they understand that one false step could bring the whole edifice thundering down around their ears.

As Prior expresses it: "This is about the last time Britain is going to have an opportunity of placing reasonably civilised changes in industrial relations on the statute book."

There is the same fateful echo about these words as the well-known phrase of Louis XIV: "After me—the flood."

Mr James Prior is justifiably anxious not to burn his bridges with the trade union leaders. He is, we are assured, a 'reasonable' man. Len Murray, who stands at the head of an army of twelve million organised workers, is also a reasonable man, who spends a great deal of time trying to engage in a discourse with the deaf.

"The government," he complains with bitterness, "spends half its time accusing us of irresponsibility and the other half denying us any responsibility."

All the reasonableness in the world does not prevent Len Murray having the door of Number 10 slammed in his face. The government is not interested in the TUC's pleas for "co-operation instead of confrontation."

Len Murray and his colleagues tend to attribute all this to Mrs Thatcher's "dogmatism" or Sir Keith Joseph's "inflexibility." In reality, it is the terrible crisis of British capitalism which compels the ruling class towards confrontation with the unions in a desperate attempt to make the workers and their families pay for the decades of waste, mismanagement and misrule by which they have transformed the former workshop of the world into a vast industrial wasteland.

Why did the Tories behave the way they did towards the steelmen? Let them speak for themselves:

"They (the government) need a victory in this dispute, not from any sense of vanity and bravado—even though they may be tempted to indulge in such sentiments, but **because it is necessary to the logic of their policy.**" (our emphasis)

Thus the editorial of March 10, of that semi-official organ of the ruling class, 'The Times'. And with brutal frankness it goes on:

"Ever since the miners' strike of

1974 there has been an assumption that no government could afford to get into a major conflict with a leading union. If the outcome of the steel strike can change that assumption, it will be all to the good because it will have to change if the discipline that is the essence of the government's policy is to work."

In order to 'solve' the crisis of British capitalism, living standards must be cut to the bone and all the social and economic gains painfully won by organised labour over the last 150 years will have to be destroyed. The one great obstacle standing in the way of the ruling class is the labour movement.

That is why, despite all the risks and dangers, the capitalists will strive time and again to eliminate this obstacle in their path, by one means or another.

'Reason becomes unreason'

That is why the old policies of 'consensus' have completely broken down and all attempts to restore them to life are doomed to failure in advance.

The lunacy of Thatcher and Co. is not just their personal madness but the madness of a social system which has outlived its usefulness, become entangled in a web of contradictions and has no way out except by tearing itself to pieces and in the process rending the very foundations of industry, science, technique and culture upon which modern civilisation is based.

"Reason becomes unreason." The mask of smiling reasonableness, tolerance and humanity has fallen away to reveal the ferocious and bestial nature of capitalism fighting to preserve its power and privileges in a period of economic downswing.

Harold MacMillan, the last Tory leader with any pretence to political stature, could write in his autobiography that: "If capitalism had been conducted all along as if the theory of private enterprise were a matter of principle," and all intervention of the state resisted, "we

should have had civil war long ago."

These words were quoted approvingly by Tory "moderate" Ian Gilmour in his Cambridge lecture when he warned the government that "there is a limit to how much change the public can accept and understand, especially if it is forced through at too fast a pace."

However, Gilmour's appeal to the MacMillan tradition leaves one vital factor out of account: the terrible decay of British capitalism over the past 25 years.

The policy of "consensus" and "Butskellism" was predicated on a long period of economic upswing and a steady increase in living standards.

Now, the world crisis has fully revealed the extent of the decay of British capitalism. The most recent economic surveys present an unbelievably bleak landscape.

Two years of severe recession with 2.3 million unemployed and an annual inflation rate of 20% this year.

A drop in total output of 2% (2½% if North Sea oil is excluded). More alarming still, engineering production is expected to fall by 6%, ferrous metals by 16% and shipbuilding by 10%.

The relentless erosion of Britain's industrial base is shown by the figures released as part of the ill-starred "Buy British" campaign: 79% of pocket calculators sold in Britain are now imported, 71% of typewriters, 78% of hairdryers, 70% of cutlery, 99% of dishwashers, 68% of freezers, 72% of leather handbags, 74% of sports equipment, 96% of portable radios, 56% of cars and 66% of music centres.

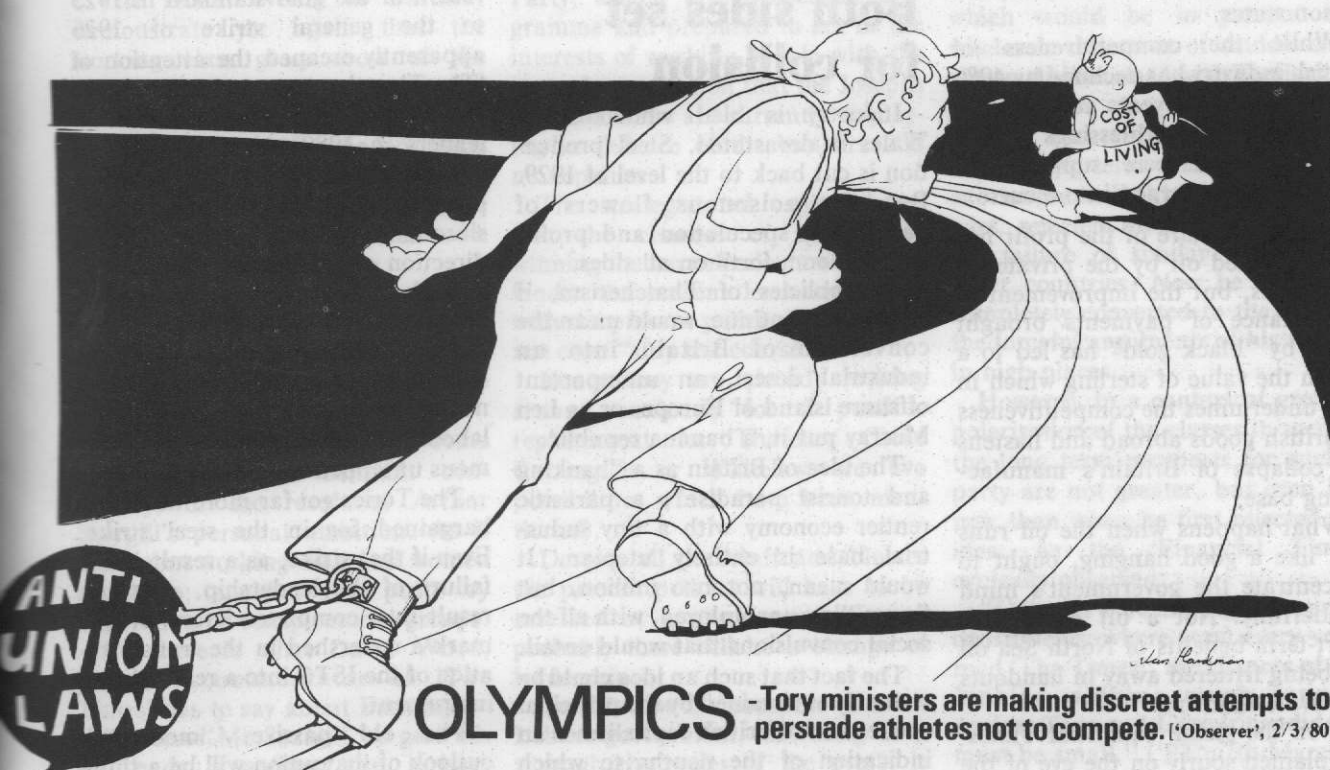
The long-term trends are still worse as the following figures for imports show:

	1970	1979
Agricultural machinery	22%	44%
Machine tools	28%	48%
Construction equipment	40%	71%
Mechanical engineering	19%	32%
Textiles	14%	33%

In a context of shrinking markets and falling demand on a world scale, the savage deflationary policies pursued by Thatcher, Joseph and Howe will only serve to undermine Britain's industrial base completely.



The British steelworkers have received magnificent support from their European, American and Japanese brothers and sisters



The process of de-industrialisation is proceeding apace. In the ten months to October 1979, 27,000 jobs were lost in mechanical engineering. In January there were 24 bankruptcies in the engineering sector—three times the normal rate—and there could be as many as 300 in 1980, according to 'The Financial Times'.

In their madness, the "theoreticians" of Thatcherism talk of a "new capitalism" emerging miraculously from the ruins as a result of the wonders of the free market economy.

Denis Howell, Secretary of State for Energy, predicts "the end of the Morrisonian inheritance of the nationalised industries, a more widespread ownership of capital, a more varied pattern of financing the diffusion of economic units." ('Financial Times', March 7th)

This "new capitalism" would mean, not a return to 1880, but to 1780! This, in a world where the concentration of capital has reached a point where the economy of the entire so-called "free world" is now dominated by no more than 200 giant monopolies and where the financial power of Exxon and General Motors greatly exceeds the budgets of many medium-sized nation states.

While the competitiveness of British industry has declined by 40% in the past three years according to the OECD, the blessings which North Sea oil were supposed to represent have turned into a curse.

The lion's share of the profit has been creamed off by the private oil companies, but the improvement in the balance of payments brought about by "black gold" has led to a rise in the value of sterling which in turn undermines the competitiveness of British goods abroad and hastens the collapse of Britain's manufacturing base.

What happens when the oil runs out, like a good hanging, ought to concentrate the government's mind wonderfully. Not a bit of it! The short-term benefits of North Sea oil are being frittered away in handouts to private industry.

Even the stolid 'Financial Times' complained sourly on the eve of the budget that Sir Geoffrey Howe

sounded "like an indulgent uncle contemplating the distribution of some hastily chosen presents for the children."

Theoretically, the government cuts and hand outs to the capitalists should lead to an increase in investment. In practice, investment will continue to fall in 1980 and 1981, particularly in the productive sector.

In their short-sighted greed for quick and easy profits, the British capitalists have forgotten that industry is the real source of Britain's wealth. Britain is an industrial nation, or it is nothing.

Yet, the 17% minimum lending rate, which further exacerbates the problems of industry, has meant soaring profits for the most parasitic and non-productive section of the capitalist class, as shown by the staggering increase in bank profits.

Lloyds alone increased their profit on business in the UK by 90% last year. At the same time, the bonfire of exchange control led to the outflow of £2 billion in the last quarter of 1979.

Both sides set for collision

Industry is bled white. South Wales is devastated. Steel production is cut back to the level of 1929. But the poisonous flowers of parasitism, speculation and profiteering bloom forth on all sides.

The policies of Thatcherism, if allowed to continue, would mean the conversion of Britain into an industrial desert, an unimportant offshore island of Europe, or as Len Murray put it, a banana republic.

The idea of Britain as a "banking and tourist paradise", a parasitic rentier economy with a tiny industrial base is entirely utopian. It would mean, not two million, but five million unemployed, with all the social convulsions that would entail.

The fact that such an idea could be seriously entertained by the principal spokesmen of British capitalism is an indication of the depths to which they have shrunk.

As MacMillan correctly explained in by-gone days, the application of "capitalism in the raw" would lead to civil war: an open confrontation between the classes.

Yet despite all warnings, Thatcher and Co. are relentlessly pursuing a policy which is a finished recipe for class war, egged on by the hysterical editorials of "respectable" journals like 'The Times' and 'The Sunday Times' which cynically commented in its editorial of February 24th:

"When cuts are made in public spending there is no escape from the indignation and sometimes suffering they cause in one client group (!) or another."

The well-heeled leader-writers of 'The Sunday Times' counsel the "Iron Maiden" to ignore the protests of "client groups" such as the homeless, the old, the sick and the unemployed and get on with the job of savage cuts.

A letter writer to 'The Times' quoted with approval the phrase of Montague Norman, who was Governor of the Bank of England in the 1920s: "The dogs may bark, but the caravan marches on."

The fact that Lord Norman's caravan lurched straight from the return of the gold standard in 1925 to the general strike of 1926 apparently escaped the attention of 'The Times' correspondent.

For their part, the trade union leaders in 1980 no more desire a general strike than their counterparts in 1926. But the logic of the situation is pushing both sides in the direction of a collision.

And given the enormously increased power of the trade union movement as compared to 1926, the outcome of a general strike would not at all be the same thing. The labour movement today has enormous untapped reserves of strength.

The Tories got far more than they bargained for in the steel strike. Even if that strike, as a result of the failure of the leadership, does not result in a complete victory, it will mark a watershed in the transformation of the ISTC into a real fighting instrument.

The old passive, "moderate" outlook of that union will be a thing of the past. And a new series of

battles awaits the Tories on the industrial horizon: the railwaymen, postmen, local government workers, civil servants and the water-workers, who have already turned down two offers of 13% and 17% and are currently discussing an offer of 21.4%.

Even in British Leyland, where the government were congratulating themselves on their success in the Robinson affair, there are ominous stirrings on the wages front.

Wherever they look, the Tories can see nothing ahead but trouble and strife in the coming months. No wonder the millionaire press is filled with predictions of gloom and doom.

What alarms the strategists of capital more than anything else is the change which has taken place within the labour movement in recent years. Gone are the days when the trade unions and the Labour Party were securely under the control of the trusted agents of the capitalist class.

The growing radicalisation of society has made itself felt in the trade unions and in the Labour Party where the right wing is now an increasingly beleaguered minority, out of step with the real aspirations of the rank-and-file.

The recent events at Barnsley demonstrate yet again that the working class grass roots of the Labour Party are no longer prepared to act as the stepping stones for unrepresentative MPs who look upon the Party, not as a vehicle to defend working-class interests and change society, but to advance their own personal careers.

For the hired hacks of the millionaire press, of course, there can be no question of this being the result of ordinary Labour workers thinking for themselves.

No. It must be the result of some plot, some sinister 'Militant' conspiracy, or the result of Arthur Scargill's personal ambition. As if intelligent working men and women could be moulded like putty by individuals or conspiratorial groups!

Yet here is what David Wood, political commentator of 'The Times' has to say about Barnsley:

"At least Mr Scargill, to gain his own ends, if nothing else, is busy organising the revival of the constituency Labour Party, a task Mr

Mason and his moderate friends allowed to go by default." ('The Times', 3rd March)

These case-hardened hypocrites have been howling for months about the alleged utilisation by the left of "small, unrepresentative meetings."

Yet now that the mineworkers of Barnsley have decided, quite rightly, to move into the Labour Party to assert their rights, it is all part of a left-wing "conspiracy"—to build the Labour Party!

Thatcher Removed?

The fact is that these gentlemen have no objection at all to "small unrepresentative meetings" so long as they continue to elect the kind of middle-class careerists who can be trusted, when in office, to toe the line laid down by big business, ignoring the interests of the people who got them elected and the decisions democratically adopted by Labour Party Conference.

What they are terrified of is the prospect of a real mass Labour Party, armed with a socialist programme and prepared to act in the interests of working people with the same determination that the Josephs and Thatchers are currently displaying in defence of the bankers and monopolists.

The strategists of capital know that the chances of the Tories winning the next election are remote. Under the present leadership, and with the present policies, they might not even "stay the course".

Hence they are already looking around anxiously for a possible replacement for Thatcher (Lord Carrington or Whitelaw are two possibilities which have been mentioned).

Despite all the bluff and bluster the present policies will have to be reversed at a given moment, and probably there will be a change of leadership.

Terrified at the prospect of a left Labour government, the ruling class through the pages of the press, is attempting to drum up support for a Centre Party.

If, as seems likely, the right wing do not succeed in reversing the decision on the re-selection of MPs at the next Labour Party conference, then those ladies and gentlemen who have joined the Labour Party as the result of a slight misunderstanding, will begin to organise a split in earnest.

Roy Jenkins, that great man of moderate principles, is due to receive his cards any day from the European Commission and is anxious to avoid swelling the ranks of the unemployed this side of the Channel by becoming the first leader of the new Social Democratic Party.

His friends in the City will ensure that he suffers no great loss of earnings on account of his principles, and according to the 'Observer' there are at least a dozen members of the Parliamentary Labour Party who would not flinch at making personal sacrifices of a similar kind. (The figure is, beyond doubt, greatly underestimated.)

Prodded on by his wealthy backers, that other great man of principles, David Steel, might well contemplate a fusion with the ex-Labour "moderates" to form a new party of the Centre, the aim of which would be to prevent the wholesale desertion of middle-class voters, disillusioned with Toryism, to Labour.

Alas! The venture is a risky one, and its long-term chances of success are not great. Jenkins himself, in the past, rejected the idea after seeing the failure of similar attempts in other countries. Now he has been completely converted to the idea by the forceful arguments of his friends in high places.

However, in a context of growing polarisation of the classes in society, the long term prospects for such a party are not greater, but even less now than when he first rejected the idea. As the 'Financial Times' cynically observed:

"Unless it were in a highly unusual constituency where (say) every voter read 'The Times', the chances of Mr Jenkins winning much support against Tory and Labour candidates must be small." ('FT', 7th March)

Nevertheless, in the short run, a Centre Party brought about by the



No matter what the outcome of the steel strike is, the steel unions will never be the same again

fusion of the Liberals and right-wing Labour renegades, inflated by a massive infusion of funds from big business and backed by a noisy campaign waged by all the considerable resources of Fleet Street, might well succeed in establishing itself, winning twenty or more seats.

But in the medium and long term, as shown by the experiences of other countries, such a hybrid formation would not be able to sustain itself.

It would collapse under the enormous pressure to the left and right.

The ruling class strategists have carefully studied all the options and reached frankly pessimistic conclusions. Their crisis of confidence is reflected in the panic with which they observe the evolution of the Labour Party, and in particular the growth

of influence of the Marxist ideas of the 'Militant'.

The hysterical campaign waged in the pages of the Tory press against alleged Trotskyist "infiltration" of the Labour Party is an indication of their fear of the future.

The ideas of the right wing of the Labour Party are completely bankrupt. They belong to another epoch which has already definitely receded into the past.

Their historical role has been played out and all their attempts to hang on by their fingernails to their privileged positions in the Party by means of organisational manoeuvres, slanders and witch-hunts will not enable them to turn back the clock.

They will end up where they rightly belong, in the ranks of Labour's enemies, with their old pals

Reg Prentice, George Brown, Dick Taverne, Woodrow Wyatt and all the other renegades who used the Labour Party for their own ends and then stabbed it in the back when it suited them.

The right wing, organised as a party within a party in the misnamed Campaign for a Labour Victory, tries to pretend that socialist policies would frighten away Labour voters.

Yet it was their policies which led to the defeat of Labour at the last election and made possible the victory of the monstrously anti-working class Thatcher government.

Contrary to all the fairy-stories of the right wing, broadcast to the ends of the world by their friends and allies in the Tory press, the policies of the last Labour government, of

reformism without reforms, has no appeal whatever, either to the working class or to the middle class, or to anyone in particular.

On the contrary. The memory of what was done by previous Labour governments, run by these "moderate" ladies and gentlemen, is an enormously harmful burden which the Labour Party has borne for too long.

Indeed, if there is one nagging doubt which lurks unspoken in the minds of the workers as they battle against the Thatcher government it is not at all fear of the 'Militant' or radical socialist policies, but the danger that all their efforts and sacrifices might be thwarted "if we put in another lot like the ones we had last time."

The right wing is practically a spent force. But what of the left? Undoubtedly, the rejection of the policies of watered-down Toryism will mark a great step forward.

But the policies defended by the Tribune majority of the NEC, are confused and incoherent and offer no real solution for the working class.

To propose, as an alternative to monetarism, a return to the discredited policies of Keynesianism and increased state expenditure, is to understand nothing of the workings of the capitalist system.

Such a policy would merely result in a further explosion of inflation which ultimately would lead to a still deeper recession than before.

As far as import controls are concerned, even the capitalists have no objection in principle to these,

and will probably be compelled to introduce them at a certain stage.

But in the modern world, it is impossible for an industrially developed country like Britain to impose import controls without provoking retaliation from its rivals.

The short-term benefits would rapidly be cancelled out and a trade war between the main capitalist countries would threaten to bring about the collapse of the whole shaky structure of world commerce built up since the second world war.

In that case, there really would be the danger of a deep slump like that of 1929. That is why, for the moment, the main developed capitalist countries have avoided resorting to import controls on a large scale, at least in an open fashion.

In the recent period, the discussion in the Labour Party has centred mainly on the question of re-selection, the control of the Manifesto and the election of a Party leader.

These questions are important. But far sooner than we think, the Labour Party will be faced with the problem of power and the need to work out a real socialist alternative to both the nightmare policies of Thatcherism and the kind of diluted Thatcherism carried out by the last Labour government.

Only the supporters of 'Militant', Labour's Marxist voice, have consistently defended a socialist programme based on the nationalisation, under democratic workers' control and management, of the banks, insurance companies and the

200 monopolies with minimum compensation on the basis of proven need, and a socialist plan of production which would mobilise all the resources of society to solve the problems of unemployment, housing, education and health, introduce the 35-hour week and an £80 minimum wage as the first steps in the socialist transformation of society.

This is the only programme which offers a way out of the blind alley of capitalism and hope for the future generations.

Armed with a socialist programme and mobilised behind the banner of Labour, there is no force on earth capable of barring the path of the working class.



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Russia: Rerorm or Political Revolution?

Roy Medvedev's book, "On Socialist Democracy", was first published in Britain in 1975. It is an analysis of the situation which Russia finds itself in 60 years after the Russian Revolution.

Although most of the material which Medvedev draws on is from the 1960s and early 1970s it is still an essential book for understanding the crisis which presently besets the Stalinist regime in Russia. The author is somebody who is participating in the struggle in Russia itself. He is therefore able to draw on sources which are not easily available to critics of Stalinsim in the West.

Medvedev produces an abundance of material which demonstrates the colossal achievements of the planned

**Review article of Roy Medvedev's
'On Socialist Democracy'
published by McMillan
By Peter Taaffe**

economy in Russia since 1917. He points out that overall industrial production increased by 230% during the 1960s, the production of consumer goods doubled while the production of the means of production increased approximately two and a half times. Capital investment in industry more than doubled, the productivity of labour in industry rose during the decade by 66%, and the basic capital available by two and

a half times.

During the 1960s Russia's overall industrial production reached 75% of the level of production in the United States. There was also an appreciable rise in the average wages of most categories of workers and there was also a corresponding growth in the fields of education and science.

Thus while there were 4.6 million students in the USSR in 1970, with

257,000 graduating in engineering, in America there were only 50,000 graduates in this field in the same year. Yet the author also shows that in comparison to the 1950s Russia's growth rate in all fields slowed down.

In the 1951-60 period, the growth in industrial production was more than 10% and the average for the decade was about 12% per year. But during the '60s only in 1967 did industrial production increase by 10% and the average yearly growth rate for the decade was about 12%.

But during the '60s only in 1967 did industrial production increase by 10% and the average yearly growth rate for the decade dropped to 8.5%. In the 1970s there has been an even more catastrophic drop in the rate of growth of the Russian economy. In 1979 it is estimated that the economy grew by 3.6%.

This is an indication of the crisis of the regime. In the past Stalinism played a relatively progressive role in developing industry, science and technique and a modern economy. In a sense it fulfilled the tasks which capitalism in the West played, and which the weak Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of undertaking in developing the means of production.

But as Trotsky pointed out this was at two or three times the cost under capitalism. Capitalism at least has the check of the market. The completely arbitrary methods of the uncontrolled Stalinist bureaucracy has meant that there have been enormous overheads in the development of Russia under Stalinism.

But Stalinism has now become an absolute fetter on the further development of Russian society. It is no longer a backward society with a predominately rural population; it is a highly developed industrial society. The further development of Russia is incompatible with a one party totalitarian regime and the stranglehold of a monstrous bureaucratic elite.

This is the conclusion to be drawn from the wealth of data furnished by Medvedev in this book. He shows that not only in comparison with the past but also in relation to the capitalist world Russia and all the other deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe are falling further

and further behind even the crisis-ridden capitalist West. Thus Japan's growth rate, even though it has slowed down in the past period, still exceeds that of Russia. Moreover, Medvedev shows that: "Electric power and production of electricity in the USA is still more than twice that of the USSR. The United States produces within its own borders almost one and a half times as much oil and three times as much natural gas as the Soviet Union. At the end of the '60s, the Soviet Union manufactured a quarter of the number of trucks produced in the United States and Japan. We produce far fewer passenger cars than countries like Italy, France, Japan and West Germany. The United States manufactures almost 20 times as many as we.

Sickness and Despair

"We make half as many radios as the United States and one quarter as many as Japan. As to refrigerators we are about on the level of the US in 1950. In the production of synthetic resins and plastics we remain behind almost all the European countries including Italy; the US produces 6 times as much as we do. In 1970 Japan manufactured 5 times and the US 10 times as much synthetic fibre as we did" (Page 5-6).

The total extent of the railway network in the US despite a much smaller land area involved is $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as great as in Russia. Russia lags even further behind in the new fields of production such as electronic computers, fully automated machine tools etc. At the same time the US productivity of labour is approximately 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as high as in Russian industry and in the major capitalist countries of Europe and Japan it is one and a half times to 2 times as high.

But as Medvedev remarks, it was Lenin who pointed out that socialism would be able to guarantee a very much higher productivity of labour than under capitalism.

The figures furnished by Medvedev are sufficient to show that Russia

is not "socialist" despite Medvedev's constant use of the term in describing present day Russian society.

It is a transitional regime between capitalism and socialism. The existence of a greedy stratum of ruling officials bars the way to the development of Russia towards socialism. Their dead hand which pervades the whole of Russian society has resulted in the complete snarling up of production and the appearance of all the sicknesses common to the capitalist West.

The author gives some well documented facts and figures about the extent of alcoholism and even the appearance of drugs amongst sections of the youth in the past period. The sickness and the despair which particularly afflicts the so-called intelligentsia is graphically described by Medvedev. Such is the hatred of one group, describing itself as "the Westerners", of the insufferable atmosphere created by Stalinism, that they openly identify with the capitalist West.

Another calls itself "The Februaryists"; they are in favour of the February as against the October revolution! On the other hand, extreme jingoistic and nationalistic (great Russian chauvinists) have also appeared amongst the intelligentsia. This goes together with the revival of religious cults in one form or another, amongst sections of the intelligentsia.

However none of these groupings in which could be included those who support the ideas of Solzenitsyn and Sakharov are completely representative of the opposition to the regime amongst the intelligentsia. In particular, they have nothing in common with the attitude of the majority of the proletariat in their opposition to the Stalinist regime.

As Trotsky once pointed out: "The wind blows the tops of the trees first". The opposition of the intelligentsia is in itself a reflection of the enormous discontent which is festering within the working class and the peasantry in Russia. Because the regime is alleged to rest on the ideas of Marxism the hatred and opposition of some sections of the intelligentsia is also transferred to



Brezhnev and Nixon in "happier times"

Marxism itself.

However, the author shows that the commanding stratum in Russian society has nothing in common with Marxism. He points out that there are "No genuinely popular leaders" amongst the ruling elite. The grey mediocrity of this Stalinist elite is shown: "Within the top ranks of the party today there are practically no politicians worthy of the name, no ideologists or theoreticians or even public speakers capable of talking on television for half an hour without reading from semi-prepared texts: instead we find only a multitude of cloistered bureaucrats."

The growing opposition of the working class will not reject Marxism. On the contrary it will seek in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, not to mention Trotsky, ammunition to be used against the bureaucracy. Indeed this is shown clearly by Medvedev's book. His

arguments against the regime are peppered with quite annihilating quotes from the works of Lenin.

Bureaucracy's lush life style

He also shows that Lenin's writings against the bureaucracy are a crushing condemnation of the present regime in Russia. Medvedev writes: "As far as office workers and civil servants are concerned the Paris Commune established the principle that: 'The salaries of all State officials from the highest to the lowest should be brought into line with ordinary levels of wages paid to workers'" (page 221).

"This was in order to combat careerism and to avoid the emergence of socialist bureaucrats iso-

lated from the people" (ibid). He then goes on to show, that because of the isolation of the Russian revolution and the necessity to encourage skilled engineers and administrators to serve the regime it was necessary for the Bolsheviks to make a retreat and to introduce differentials for these groups.

However, "The first Soviet wage scale established a ratio of 1:2.1 between the lowest and highest earnings. At the beginning of 1919 the gap between the two extremes was narrowed even more and became 1:1.75, but even after the introduction of the New Economic Policy Lenin made sure that the ratio between the lowest and the highest salaries did not exceed a fixed limit—during his lifetime the differential apparently was never greater than 1:5". (It was in fact 1:4—PT).

Moreover, "Such high salaries were paid only to specialists who were not members of the party, if a



Sakharov—persecution of dissidents shows the instability of the regime

party member found himself obtaining a very high income he became subject to a ceiling and any money above that figure had to be given to the party finance department for its mutual aid fund. This was the origin of the 'party maximum', that is a limit to the salary a party member was allowed to receive" (page 223).

But Stalin as a representative par excellence of the millions of officials of the army, the police, the party and the state machine, gradually abolished the limitations imposed by the Bolsheviks and Lenin.

Inequality was proclaimed as the greatest virtue. The party maximum was abolished and "Senior officials earned not 2 to 5 times but rather 10 to 20 times as much as factory and office workers" (page 224). Moreover the system of secret rewards called "Packets" was gradually introduced. The heirs of Stalin—Brezhnev, Kosygin etc—live in sumptuous surroundings in comparison to the average Russian worker.

The difference between the workers, the management and bureaucracy in general is greater than even exists in capitalist factories in the West. As Medvedev points out "In a small research institute concerned with the problems of training manual and professional workers where I was employed for 10 years the difference between the lowest salary for a research assistant, 60 to 70 rubles a month, and that of the most highly paid section head was in the order of 1:13. In the larger institutes of the academy of sciences the ratio between the salary of a laboratory assistant or a junior research worker with no degree and that of a top academic in charge of a department is 1 to 15 or 1 to 20.

"In the soviet ministries and the important military establishments the ratio between the highest and the lowest rates of pay is also 1 to 20 or even 1 to 30, but if one takes into consideration the many services available to officials at public expense (food coupons, medical

treatment, holidays, personal transport etc) the total value translated into monetary terms would make the ratio of 1 to 50 or sometimes even 1 to 100" (page 224-5). In a masterly understatement Medvedev comments, "Obviously this is quite excessive for a socialist country."

The author also indicates the tremendous resentment and even hatred which is piled up in the ranks of the working class at the lifestyles and sumptuous living of this usurping elite. He also gives evidence that the most conscious elements are returning to the first heroic period of the revolution and the works of Lenin.

"Several letters written by old Bolsheviks and sent to the 23rd and 24th party congresses contained rather more concrete proposals. They called for a return to the principle of a party maximum or at least to a maximum differential of 1 to 5 between the lowest and the highest rates of pay" (ibid).

Justification for these demands as the author shows is to be found in the literature about the Bolsheviks which freely circulates in Russia itself. The Russian masses cannot help but compare the lifestyle of the ruling elite with that of Lenin: "Memoirs about Lenin recall how on the day of the victorious uprising in Petrograd he simply went by tram to rest in the apartment of one of his comrades. When he visited the Kremlin barber, Lenin insisted on waiting his turn and sat quietly reading the newspaper.

"He often drove to the countryside without a bodyguard and on one occasion was attacked by a gang of thieves who made off with his car. When Lenin moved into the Kremlin he occupied a small room which had belonged to one of the former servants. In "State and Revolution" he expressed the view that the leaders of the new state should not have their expenses paid out of public funds" (page 226).

Medvedev as a representative of the so-called 'liberal' trend within the so-called Communist Party itself, opposes 'extreme demands' to cut down inequality, but nevertheless argues for a lowering of the differentials between the bureau-

cracy and the working class.

However, there are great weaknesses in the analysis of Medvedev, particularly in his attempts to explain the historical roots of Stalinism itself.

He gives no real Marxist explanation of the reasons why this privileged caste has arisen in Russia. Nor is a clear programme outlined by the author to remove from power this greedy and obsolete caste.

On the one side, he hints that the development and growth of the bureaucracy resulted from the cultural backwardness of Russia, and the isolation of the revolution to a predominately backward and peasant country.

Some features of the analysis of Trotsky and the Left Opposition of the causes and the growth of Stalinism is shown in the following: "The pre-revolutionary autocracy in Russia was essentially bureaucratic, even officials who possessed the highest personal qualities were almost transformed into bureaucrats under the Tsarist regime. Before the October revolution, the organisation of soviets was extremely democratic but after the victory of soviet power bureaucracy re-emerged and soon began to penetrate every pore of the new soviet and party organisation.

"It was clear that even after a socialist revolution a considerable amount of authoritarian administration was unavoidable, given the size of the country and its economic and cultural backwardness. The population was predominately peasant and petit-bourgeois whose inadequate educational level deprived the Bolsheviks of potential support, but the bureaucratic mentality was not confined to bourgeois specialists or former Tsarist officials employed by the new state in lower and middle levels of administration. Even former revolutionary leaders finding themselves in power were most of the time forced to resort to authoritarian methods: they simply gave orders often in a high handed and bureaucratic way."

Medvedev is undoubtedly correct when he suggests that the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian revolution was inevitable given the isolation of the revolution. The Russian Revolution was seen by

Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks as the prologue of the international revolution. None of the leaders of the revolution ever faintly imagined that it would be possible to construct socialism in one country, particularly a backward country, such as Russia.

The beginning of socialism, according to the great teachers of Marxism would mean a level of production, and culture, higher than the highest level reached by capitalism. In other words, it would have to be higher than even in capitalist America today. Only on this basis would it be possible to dismantle the state, money, classes and all the other vestiges of class society.

This, in turn would have been possible only on the basis of a world socialist federation. The leaders of the Russian revolution hoped that the October revolution would have provided the spark which would have initiated revolutionary explosions throughout Europe. This in turn could have led to the establishment of a Socialist Federation of Europe, as a springboard towards a Socialist Federation of the globe.

Because of the betrayal of the social-democratic leaders in western Europe, in Germany and Italy in particular—the revolutionary wave which followed the Russian revolution was defeated, and the Russian revolution was isolated for a whole historical epoch. Given this isolation the growth of a bureaucratic caste was inevitable. The rise and development of Stalin was a personification of the gradual development of this caste and its usurpation of power from the working class.

Will bureaucracy reform itself?

However, despite the above remarks, Medvedev, in another part of the book in commenting on "ethical socialism", shows that he doesn't really grasp the reasons and the causes for the growth of Stalinism. He writes: "Disregard for the ethical side of socialism has led to a number of distortions that for a long time were not exceptional but rather the norm of life in our society. Failure to

respect the interests of the individual disguised by fine words about the interests of the collective, a peculiar kind of party egotism that illegitimately identifies the interests of the party elite with those of the interests of the party as a whole (and then the interests of the party with those of the whole people and the interest of the soviet people with the interest of the whole of mankind), total indifference to certain elementary standards of justice, the restriction of people's spiritual freedom, the notion of people only as cogs in some kind of complicated social machine. All such perversions of socialism have done our movement and our country enormous political and moral damage" (page 75).

But the role of the Russian bureaucracy is determined not by its morals or lack of them but by its social role in society. Indeed, its morals, or lack of them, its ignorance, hooliganism and social parasitism is in fact a product of its role in Russian society. Yet because of Medvedev's own political position he is incapable of fully grasping the role of the bureaucracy, or of elaborating a programme and course of action which can eliminate this monstrous incubus on Russian society.

He is in fact a representative of the "Liberal trend" within the bureaucracy itself. He calls himself a "party democrat" and puts forward the utopian hope that the bureaucracy will reform itself out of existence, liquidate itself as a privileged group in society. At best his arguments are an attempt to convince the bureaucracy that it must carry through reforms from the top, in order to prevent colossal upheavals in Russian society in the next period.

The weakness of his position is indicated by the following: "It must be said straight away that at the moment it is evidently the weakest trend, both within and outside the party....The party democrats are at the moment almost completely unrepresented in the highest organs of the party" (page 57). In other words, the reforming trend within the bureaucracy has very little support in Russia at the present time.

Brezhnev and Co. have decided that the way to meet the mounting resistance of practically the whole of the population, to the bureaucracy's arbitrary rule, is by screwing down the lid even tighter. Medvedev compares his struggle against bureaucracy to the one that was conducted by Lenin just before his death. But this is to completely misunderstand the enormous change in the character and social role of the bureaucracy, that has taken place in Russian society in the last 50 years.

Between 1917 and 1923, Russia was a relatively healthy workers' state with bureaucratic distortions. Because of the cultural poverty of the Russian masses the Bolsheviks were forced to rule with the aid of the old Tsarist civil servants. In the Red Army also the great majority of the officers initially were drawn from the ranks of the Tsarist army. In the words of Lenin the state which the Bolsheviks were forced to rely on was the "same old Tsarist State machine with a thin veneer of socialism."

The Bolsheviks looked towards the victory of the international revolution to come to the assistance of a backward and beleaguered Russia with technical, educational and other aid. A Socialist Federation of Europe would undoubtedly have laid the basis for a rapid development of industry and culture in Russia. The raising of the cultural level of the masses would have allowed the flowering of the soviets and the full involvement of the Russian working class in the democratic management and control of society. However events turned out differently.

The further isolation of the Russian revolution, which was a consequence of the defeats of the revolutions in the West, which in turn were promoted by the false policies of Stalin, resulted in the gradual elbowing aside of the masses in Russia, from any control or say in the organisation of society, or of the state machine. The bureaucratic caste, with Stalin at its head, completely usurped power. It came to oppose and look with mortal dread on the prospect of revolution in the capitalist countries.

A successful socialist revolution in any of the advanced capitalist



Leon Trotsky in his days in control of the Red Army: his later analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the USSR remains valid

countries threatened not just the capitalists but the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia itself. This was clearly demonstrated by the Spanish revolution which Stalin responded to by conducting the infamous 'purge' trials as a one-sided civil war against the last remnants of the Bolshevik party.

Yet the author writes: "Reform must also be gradual because of the peculiar nature of bureaucracy. As Lenin often pointed out, there is no way to 'lance the bureaucratic boil, to wipe bureaucracy from the face of the earth'—the only possibility is cure. 'Surgery in this case', wrote Lenin, 'is absurd, it cannot work. There can only be a slow healing process—other alternatives are fraudulent or naive,' (page 314).

But it is Medvedev who shows incredible naivety. A chasm, a river of blood, separates the regime of Lenin and Trotsky from the present Stalinist regime in Russia.

To compare the state of Lenin and Trotsky to the present Russian state is like comparing a pimple, which can be eradicated through a "cure" (i.e. reform of the state) with a

monstrous boil which needs to be "lanced" from the body (through political revolution). Medvedev goes to great lengths to distance himself from what he calls the 'ultra left'.

Thus he condemns Grigorenko, the famous Red Army General who is now imprisoned in a Stalinist jail, for including in the programme of his group a call for the complete liquidation of the KGB, and all secret service and oppressive apparatus. He justifies this on the grounds that it's necessary for every state to retain some security apparatus!

Yet a few pages later he points out that these organs of the state are almost solely directed against internal opponents of the regime. He declaims against any 'illegal' methods of struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy! "As for ways and means of political struggle they must be absolutely legal and constitutional, there are certain extreme groups that believe in the use of illegal methods including for example the organisation of underground printing presses" (page 314).

Yet he himself points out that the regime prohibits almost all voluntary associations including innocent "groups of cactus growers". But it is clear from this book, that Medvedev opposes not just the methods of some underground groups, which he doesn't name, but also their whole approach.

He is honest enough to quote the comments of one of his opponents who level the charge of 'utopianism' against Medvedev: "You believe that the leadership would support a certain degree of democratisation, but this would amount to the leadership liquidating itself and the whole of political history confirms the unreality of such an expectation. No government withdraws of its own free will. Your ideas are harmful because they create illusions about the ease with which your proposed programme of reforms might be realised. You suggest that because of a change in social and political conditions, fresh forces will become part of the 'apparatus' and transform its bureaucratic style. But this only encourages the false idea of an automatic and spontaneous process—in reality these fresh forces will

undoubtedly encounter fierce resistance" (page 313).

This critic is more correct than Medvedev on the attitude and outlook of the bureaucracy. If possible the bureaucracy may loosen the screws a little. They may attempt reforms at the top, sometimes in order to prevent revolution from below.

This is what Krushchev did in the aftermath of Stalin's death. But even then this provoked the East German uprising in 1953 and in 1956 the Hungarian and Polish revolutions. 10 years ago in 1968, the bureaucracy could not afford even concessions of this character in relation to Czechoslovakia because of the changed situation, not only in Eastern Europe, but in Russia itself.

So rotted is the Stalinist regime, so isolated from the majority of the population is the uppermost strata of the bureaucracy, that even the smallest concessions threaten to ignite an explosion that will result in the toppling of Brezhnev, Kosygin and their clique. The bureaucracy is fully aware of this. It is for this reason that they're unlikely to heed the 'good advice' of Medvedev.

The bureaucracy will do anything for the workers except get off their backs! Medvedev shows in this book an honest distaste for the rule of the bureaucracy.

But in the final analysis his fears of an enormous upheaval of "disorder and anarchy" in Russia overcomes his opposition to the bureaucracy.

His real feelings are betrayed in the following remarks: "Overhasty reform can also cause problems with the socialist bloc (as the experience of Czechoslovakia has shown)!" (Page 314).

When he writes like this Medvedev appears as an unashamed if benevolent adviser of the bureaucracy.

One could say that the whole book is in effect an appeal to the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia to carry through the democratisation of Russian society. He draws an analogy between the struggle for bourgeois democracy with the struggle for democratisation in Russia at the present time.

It is true that the bourgeoisie has been enabled to switch from bonapartism (military police rule) to bourgeois democracy. This was from its point of view a different and cheaper form of class rule, than a dictatorial regime or military police dictatorship. The bourgeoisie is a class with roots in society through its ownership of the means of production.

Workers' democracy

As supervisors, as the "trustees" of the means of production in the words of Marx, the bourgeoisie was necessary for the development of capitalism. But the bureaucracy is an excrescence. It is a totally unnecessary and privileged caste that is clogging up and hampering the further development of Russian society. Once democracy, to be precise, workers' democracy, is established, the greedy, privileged, and inefficient rule of the bureaucracy would immediately be eliminated. It is for this reason that the bureaucracy will put up a more ferocious resistance than even the capitalists in an attempt to retain its rule in society.

The wave of repression directed at dissidents both in Eastern Europe and Russia is a graphic reflection of the social crisis of the Stalinist regimes.

Medvedev is correct when he writes: "There is now a very widespread feeling that the way we live and work has become untenable, and this applies not just to the intelligentsia but also to much of the working class, white collar workers, and perhaps some of the peasantry" (page 314). Although not visible at this moment there is an enormous subterranean opposition which is gathering in the ranks of the proletariat, particularly amongst the youth.

The main actor in Medvedev's scenario for the future is not the working class. Nevertheless this will be the decisive force which will shape the future of Russian society. He does give some figures to indicate the colossal developments and growth of

the proletariat in Russia. From a minority of the population, about 10% at the time of the revolution, the proletariat is now the overwhelming majority of Russian society.

He shows that the numbers of the working class has increased by 2 to 3 million every year since the end of the second world war. Once this mighty force moves into action, it will be the beginning of the end of the Stalinist regime. In the process of the struggle against the Stalinist dictatorship, this proletariat will rediscover all the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky in establishing a healthy workers' state.

It will end the arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy, and establish all those features which marked out the first period of the Russian revolution as the most democratic in the history of the world. As with the Hungarian revolution the working class will rediscover and establish soviets, will demand the election of all officials and the right of recall, with no official receiving more than the average wage of a skilled worker.

It will also demand the abolition of a standing army, and its replacement with an armed militia, an armed people.

In opposition to a permanent bureaucracy it will establish a situation in the words of Lenin, "where everyone is a bureaucrat, nobody is a bureaucrat". Once this programme becomes a reality it will mean not just the end of Stalinism in the East, but the beginning of the end of capitalism in the West.

Although it has many deficiencies, nevertheless, Medvedev's book is a valuable contribution to understanding developments in Russia at the present time. It provides the necessary raw material in order to arm the advanced workers in the West, with an understanding of developments in Russia and the enormously favourable prospects that exist throughout the Stalinist States for a movement to overthrow the bureaucracy and usher in a period of workers' democracy. ●

U.S.A. PERSPECTIVES

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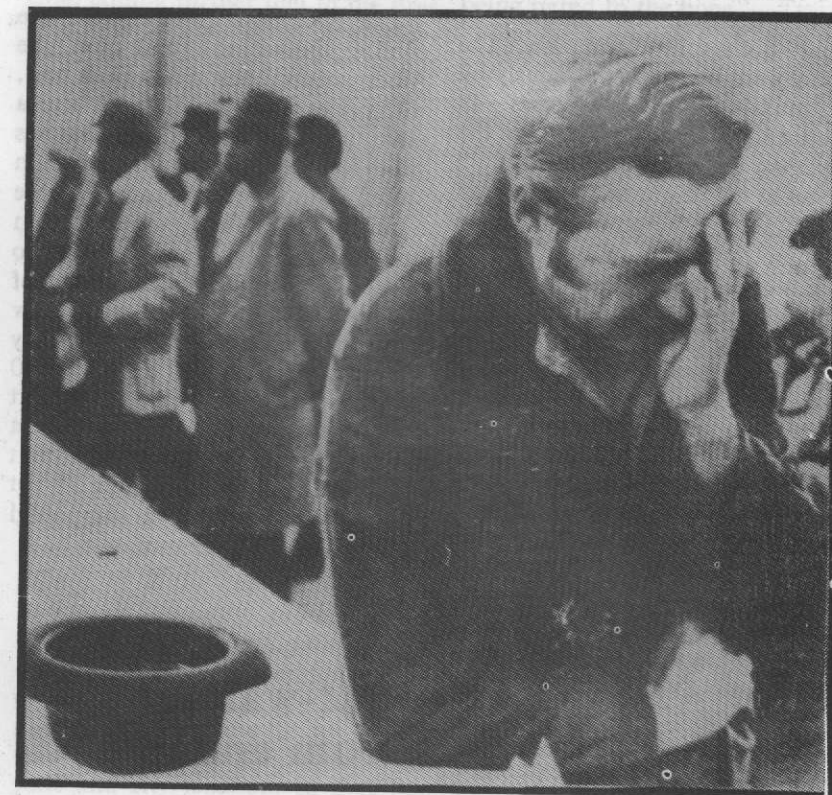
By
John Pickard

In the mid-term Congressional elections in November 1978, the last major national elections, two thirds of the registered voters didn't even bother to take part. That in itself is an indictment of the American political system, a clear expression of the widespread contempt shown to Congress. But the puny and uninspiring character of the Presidency is not only the fault of Jimmy Carter. If mediocrity is now the by-word for the White House it is because mediocrity has invaded the whole political machine of the American ruling class.

The "Imperialist Presidents" of the past, the statesmen like Kennedy, Eisenhower, and Johnson, presided over the strongest nation the planet had seen, both in economic and military terms. But at the same time the White House and the Pentagon, by their vast and costly military adventures overseas—especially in Vietnam—were ultimately responsible for the weakening of the American economy and the consequent loss of strategic and military power.

The Watergate hearings and the forced resignation of Nixon were more than a personal indictment against him; they were part of a process by which the strategists of capital used Congress to break the back of the "Emperors". A whole arsenal of obstructions and regulations were placed by Congress in the way of the Presidency so that Congress would no longer be a rubber stamp for future adventures like those in Vietnam and Cambodia. The legislative arm asserted its authority over the executive arm of government.

Moreover, the diffusion of authority downwards from the Presidents to the Congressional committees has also been paralleled by enormous blows to the confidence and morale



of the ruling class. The failure of the Vietnam war, the Watergate affair, the 1975 recession, the energy crisis, Iran, etc etc—all these have left the once-mighty American ruling class reeling, gasping for a strategy and a policy for the future.

It is ironic that they are now bemoaning the lack of a great leader for the nation. The same political pundits who ridiculed Carter are now trying to build him up as a statesman; Watergate and the Vietnam war must be consigned to the past; the 'emperors' are forgiven. History repeats itself, the first time as a tragedy, the second time as a farce! But try as they might, the American ruling class will not conjure up the statesmen of the past, when they lack confidence in their own system and their own future.

How can they trust another 'emperor' when they cannot trust themselves? There is no longer a 'consensus' as there was in the 1950s and 1960s about the best course in

international and domestic questions. The Presidency is in a crisis because the American ruling class is in a crisis.

After the 'British Century' of the 1800s the post war period in America seemed to point to what was referred to as the 'American Century'. The USA emerged enormously strengthened after the second world war, the only real victor among the capitalist powers. By 1944, with 80 per cent of the capitalists' world gold in its vaults, the USA was able to impose the Bretton Woods agreement on the rest of the capitalist world. The dollar became the world's main reserve currency and it was on this basis that America was able to produce massive quantities of currency that was not backed by gold or productive capacity in the USA—so-called 'fictitious capital'.

In the decades after Bretton Woods the world was flooded with billions of dollars of this fictitious money, enabling the USA to buy up

and invest in many industries in Europe and to finance deficits in the balance of payments from around 1950 onwards. Each successive deficit increased the amount of 'paper' dollars in circulation. The deficits were boosted enormously by the massive military costs as American Imperialism acted as the policeman for world capitalism.

Even at the height of the post-war boom, the real value of the dollar was dissolving away in the flood of paper money. By the 1960s it became clear that the real value of the dollar notes floating around the world was less than the amount set at Bretton Woods i.e. \$35 to the ounce of gold. Greater competition from Japan and Europe created a deficit on trade from 1971 onwards, further swelling the outflow of dollars to the world.

Pressure on the dollar forced the first devaluation in 1971 and it has continued to slide ever since. In 1971 \$53.3 billion of dollar currency was held abroad against a holding of \$10.5 billion of gold in US vaults. Today the dollar holding abroad amounts to over \$250 billion. Little wonder that, once the dam cracked, it broke altogether: once it was freed from the artificial price of \$35, the price of an ounce of gold soared. Putting it another way, against gold, the dollar has lost more than 95 per cent of its 1970 value!

The value of the dollar is likely to decline even further against gold and other currencies, given the fact that there seems to be no end in the immediate future to the massive balance of payments deficits, especially in relation to oil.

The fires of inflation at home have been fuelled by the Keynesian policies of successive governments. From 1945 to 1954 there were five years when the government's own budget was in deficit and five years when it was in surplus. From 1955 to 1964 there were seven years of deficits and three years of surplus. From 1965 to 1974 there were nine deficit years and only one year of surplus. The total deficit run up over the last 20 years was \$400 billion and despite efforts to cut it down, this year's budget deficit alone was over \$30 billion. Those years of plenty, when there were unprecedented

increases in living standards, were all piling up massive contradictions which are now surfacing with explosive consequences.

The 'Keynesian chickens' are coming home to roost for the American capitalist class. Even now, with prices rising at 15-20 per cent a year, the American working class has yet to feel the full lash of the inflation stored up in the past decades. As the sober-minded Times pointed out in an editorial: "We have reason to expect that the purchasing power of the dollar in 1990 will be well below its purchasing power today. We may suspect that it may fall by at least 50 per cent, which would represent compound inflation at just over a seven per cent rate. We may fear that it will now fall by more than 75 per cent, which would be a compound inflation at a 15 per cent rate."

Post-war boom ended

These factors explain the frantic attempts—although largely unsuccessful—to reduce the external trade deficit, and especially the oil deficit. At the same time, it explains the enormous pressure behind Carter and other representatives of the ruling class to introduce savage 'monetarist' policies, to cut public expenditure and to decrease the government's own budget deficit. All Carter's pre-election promises of welfare improvements and tax cuts for workers evaporated and came to nothing in the face of the financial constraints of the capitalist system.

The end of the post-war boom signposted particularly by the 1975 recession and the demise of the dollar, has dealt a shattering blow to the morale and confidence of the ruling class. In their blindness, the capitalists were super-optimistic even as recently as the early 1970s. Thus the influential 'Fortune' magazine glowed in July 1974: "By comparison with the past 18 months, the next 18 will be almost sunny....Industrial production will rise at an annual rate of a bit under 4 per cent over the

coming 18 months....the world doesn't seem to be moving into a severe recession....unemployment will tend to increase to just below 6 per cent....".

Within 5 months the US Treasury Secretary admitted that they were in the worst recession since World War II and the official unemployment rate was moving towards 9 per cent!

Now the rose-tinted forecasts of the halcyon days have been replaced by forecasts of doom and gloom. The blows that have affected the economy have debilitated the wider political thinking of the strategists of American capitalism. There is no longer any clear strategy or perspective in domestic or foreign policy issues. An article in the 'Washington Post' last year summed up the mood of the ruling class. It was entitled: "The intellectuals agree, there are no answers anymore." It goes on: "Prominent thinkers agree on only one point: there is little or no agreement on issues of major consequence. The consensus that marked the first 25 post World War II years has been shattered. At home there has been a mainstream academic view, a belief that Keynesian economic policies could repeat indefinitely the hat-tricks of more or less steady growth in goods and services, high employment and generally stable prices. An intractable and worsening inflation has fractured this....the thinkers are in similar difficulties on foreign policy."

The Professor of Urban Values of New York University was reported as resigning, saying, "I don't have anything to say anymore. I don't think anybody does. When a problem becomes too difficult, you lose interest." Another luminary from Harvard commenting on domestic policies said, "Nobody has any answers he is confident of. If he does, he's a fool."

The paralysis of the intelligentsia is an indication of the profound crisis that faces American society: in its widest economic and social sense, the USA faces tremendous upheavals and changes in the 1980s. The great days of the '50s and '60s are over. These changes will bring unparalleled movement in the conditions

and the consciousness of the mass of American workers. Unlike the worthy professor, the worker cannot simply choose to 'lose interest'.

What is the position that faces the working class? How will the American trade unions respond to the crisis in the coming months and years? For a generation after the war a layer of American workers enjoyed unexampled prosperity, far greater than that achieved even by the middle classes in Europe.

There seemed to be an endless supply of televisions, motor cars, and all the other tokens of affluence, as well as an endless supply of dollars to buy them. American goods, American films and American values seemed to be the last word in modernity. These years saw the further bureaucratisation of the trade unions, especially the CIO which before the war had conducted militant campaigns, recruiting workers on an industrial basis by the millions.

The CIO merged with the craft-conscious AFL and the new AFL-CIO became a bastion of 'anti-communism', supporting all the reactionary policies of the governments. On the political plane, the workers felt no compulsion to create their own party of labour and the system of the two capitalist parties—the Democrats being slightly more 'liberal' than the Republicans—was shored up. The cold war and the example of totalitarianism in Russia, China and Eastern Europe served to further re-inforce the backwardness of wide strata of the American workers.

But the last decade has marked the end of the "Golden Age". Average annual growth in productivity in industry from 1964 to 1973 was 1.8 per cent, but by the mid '70s, 1974-78, it had fallen to 0.1 per cent. The recession of 1975 saw levels of unemployment at post-war record levels—adding the hidden unemployed to the official figure would have shown well over 10 million jobless. In that year actual production fell by only half a percentage point but it was enough to signal the end of the boom.

The 'recovery' from the 1975 recession showed, on paper, production increases of 6 to 8 per cent a

year, but this 'mini-boom' was in no way based upon investment in new capital, but on government financing, adding further fuel to the fires of inflation. The levels of employment and the levels of investment have only marginally recovered from the 1975 period and now, even as inflation is on the increase, the country faces a new recession in 1980, even worse than the last. The era of 'stagflation' has arrived.

9 million poor

It has been the working class that has borne the brunt of the economic crisis over the last decade. The Wall Street Journal pointed out that, "Since 1972 the real income of a typical US family of four has declined by 8 per cent, although its dollar income has increased by 66 per cent." (15th Nov. 1979) It also pointed out that these figures do not take into account the increases in state and city taxation, so that the real decline in living standards will be considerably more.

The inflation rate at the moment is given as 13 per cent but in reality it is much higher. The official Consumer Price Index does not take into account the fact that poorer families spend a far greater share of their income on the faster rising items like food, housing, energy, and so on. Even by the government's own modest standards for 'minimum requirements', poverty now engulfs more than five million families. It has been estimated that one third of all the tinned dog and cat food bought in the shops is in fact used for human consumption because of the prohibitive cost of meat.

More than seven million workers are unemployed in America today. But this figure also hides the extent to which the unemployment affects large numbers of families. It was admitted, for example that while the average level for unemployment in 1973 was 4.9 per cent, the total proportion of the workforce who had experienced unemployment for one or more spells in that year was 14.2 per cent! All the major US cities are

now staggering under the weight of accumulated debt interest and so their social and welfare services are being pared to the bone.

The bald statistics of homelessness, unemployment and poverty disguise the intensity of these problems in certain areas. Whole areas of inner cities now consist of acres and acres of derelict or semi-derelict slums. Unemployment in the inner cities and among black youth is staggering.

Neither are the American workers cushioned to any great extent by social welfare. Only about half of the unemployed receive any state benefits and that does not take into account the many hidden unemployed and underemployed. When it comes to health charges, the American workers can be seen to be completely vulnerable to the sharks and the parasites of the private system.

In 1976 when living standards were a little higher than today, nearly 45 million Americans were without even basic hospitalisation insurance and when it came to major medical expenses, 80 million were not insured. It costs the average family, even with insurance cover, about \$2,800 for the delivery of a healthy child. In the last few years the government has been forced into introducing government health schemes, but these are a farce as far as most workers are concerned.

The government Health, Education and Welfare Department sets a 'poverty line' for a family with two children at an income of \$9,600 a year but in some states such a family would have to earn less than \$4,800 a year to qualify for free health care under 'Medicare'! Thus, 9 million living below the official poverty line are not eligible! For the overwhelming majority of Americans, any serious illness or accident means a certain drop in living standards or even bankruptcy.

Quite clearly, the position of American workers today is far removed from the apparent harmony and security of former years. On the basis of capitalism they face only further savage attacks upon their living standards as the economic problems are foisted onto their

backs. The promises of a dynamic and thrusting capitalism have vanished. As one Congressman admitted, "The US is a rickety-rackety ramshackle economy. America's health, food, steel, car, electronics and energy industries are all in trouble and tighter money policies are not going to help."

The problems facing the motor industry are in many respects typical of those facing the whole of American industry. One job in every six in manufacturing depends on the motor industry, particularly those in steel, glass, rubber, and so on. At the present time all of the main car manufacturers are facing serious problems, as a result of higher petrol costs and foreign competition. Last year the 'Big 3' car companies (General Motors, Ford and Chrysler) laid off about 46,000 workers and this year will certainly be worse. The car manufacturers are planning one of the lowest first quarter production schedules for years—23 per cent down on the same time last year (30 per cent down for the 'Big 3', and 50 per cent for Ford alone) but even these production figures are still well above the anticipated sales levels. The ruling class are in a vicious circle because as they cut into living standards in an attempt to shore up profits, they also decrease the market by reducing the purchasing power of the workers.

Even these reduced production schedules will probably turn out to be over-optimistic as the months wear on. The problems faced by the Chrysler Corporation which has been forced to go to the government for a \$1,500 million handout are only the beginning of problems for that particular company and for the motor industry as a whole. The steel industry is also facing a recession and the US Steel Corporation, for example, has recently decided to close down 10 entire plants and parts of others, with the loss of 13,000 jobs. The company has further threatened to close other plants unless the workers accept a 3-year wages freeze. Under these conditions the American workers will inevitably move in the direction of militant action and socialist ideas.

In the past in times of economic

crisis there was always at least the hope of a new life in the West and mid-West. This safety valve is now missing; the workers have nowhere else to go.

The first to feel the icy winds of the post war slow-down were the black workers. The 24 million blacks and the 20 million Spanish Americans have long been on the bottom rungs of the social ladder. At no time in the last 20 years has unemployment among blacks and Spanish-speaking Americans been below 6 per cent. Today, in the inner city areas unemployment among the youth of these minority groups hovers at or above the 50 per cent mark.

The opposition of black workers in particular threw up various militant organisations like the 'Black Panthers' in the late 1960s, but these organisations were always condemned to obscurity as long as they failed to find any way to the organised working class. Today, however, black workers are moving into action in their hundreds of thousands, but now as trade unionists along with their white and Chicano brothers and sisters. Just as the years of prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s caused a decline in union membership and activity, so the shocks and turbulence of the 1970s have thrown the American trade unions once again onto the industrial battlefield.

Miners Strike

In the last few years almost every section of workers has been involved in struggle: steelworkers, rubber workers, lorry drivers, local authority workers and so on. But perhaps the most significant of the strikes of the period was the miners' strike that ran for more than three months from December 1977.

The strike showed the tremendous pressure of the rank and file miners on the leadership and the ingenuity and determination of the miners on strike. Flying pickets were organised and managed to close down all of the union mines and half of the non-union mines—75 per cent of all

total production.

The President of the Miners, Arnold Miller, who had been elected himself on a reformist programme, struck a deal with the coal owners after the strike had started but he was inundated with telegrams and delegations demanding "No Sell Out!" In the middle of the strike the miners voted two to one against the offer.

Even the pressure of the government failed to force the miners back to work. You would think that having invoked the Taft-Hartley Act three times in the past against the miners and having been ignored three times, that the White House wouldn't have bothered this time. But bother they did and the miners duly ignored the order to go back to work.

To be more exact, the miners didn't ignore the order, they scoffed at it! Despite a vicious campaign by the press and the coal owners trying to break the solidarity of the strike, other workers and trade unionists rallied round, seeing the miners' strike, quite correctly, as a test case for all the trade unions.

As soon as the Taft-Hartley Act was invoked, in fact, other trade unions threatened a 24 hour strike in protest. The International Longshore Workers (dockers) levied their membership to support the miners. Trucks and truck convoys from all over the North and Mid-West took food and essential supplies to the miners in their isolated communities.

After 110 days the strike was settled for wage rises of 40 per cent over three years, but with the miners' leaders having compromised on some very important issues like health and insurance benefits. Many miners were angry at the settlement, feeling that their leaders gave away at the negotiating table what the miners had won on the picket line. Despite the hardship endured by the miners and their families (the average miner having lost \$6,000) the vote to accept the third offer was only 57 per cent. In disgust many UMW members have since left the union, drifting away to non-union mines where safety is poorer but wages may be higher.



Miners and their wives demonstrating in Charleston, West Virginia

The UMW membership was claimed at 280,000 in May of 1978, but the rolls only showed 160,000 last December. Today, the total share of coal produced in organised mines is only 52 per cent compared with 82 per cent in 1951. Nevertheless, the experiences and lessons of the strike will not be lost on the miners that took part, not to mention the millions of other trade unionists who supported them. Whatever the effect of the final settlement, however much the miners themselves were disappointed with the end result, it was clear that the ruling class were deeply shocked at the show of trade union power not seen since the 1930s.

The glaring impotency of the Taft-Hartley Act to send the miners back to work (like the ill-fated Industrial Relations Act in Britain in 1971-72) and even the level of the

settlement were seen as twin defeats by the representatives of American capitalism. Robert Strauss, the government's 'inflation adviser' at the time, blurted out, "That agreement cannot be followed in other industries. Is that clear? It would be an outrage for that contract to be taken as a pattern!"

The impact of the strike was to give backbone to the trade union movement. Arnold Miller seemed like a militant compared to Presidents before him who had connections with gangsterism, but even he came under pressure during and after the strike. The repercussions are still being felt in the union two years later. At the recent conference of the UMW, the first since the strike, many rank and file delegates slammed the union bureaucracy for wasting union funds and for not organising mass recruitment drives

in the non-union mines.

The delegate from Bluefield, West Virginia was reported to argue that the union leaders "drink up union dues", and he objected to "high-priced officers in air-conditioned offices". Another delegate declared that the expenses of the union's international leadership "are double what they ought to be". Delegates also demanded unionisation drives: a delegate from Marissa, Illinois was reported to say that "thousands of tons of scab coal is being imported from the West to the East" and a delegate from Wyoming complained that "90 per cent of the coal in that state is scab."

For the miners and the coal owners, 1978 was only round one. The contract drawn up and agreed then runs out in early 1981 and the coal operators at least are already

preparing for battle. Even if the UMW are numerically weaker now than they were three years ago, the experiences of that strike will be an invaluable asset.

The memory of 1978: the solidarity, the flying pickets, the role of the National Guard and the police etc—all these are imbued in the minds of those who took part, including those who may have temporarily left the ranks of the union. The militancy and the strength of the miners will be renewed in the next few years along with renewed demands for rank and file control over the union leadership.

There have been significant reform movements in other unions too in the last few years. In 1975 and 1976 the leadership of the United Steelworkers of America was rocked by a campaign for rank and file representation led by Ed Sadlowski. That movement failed to assert itself at a national level but remains an important force, in so far as it affected at least many state leaderships, especially in Cleveland, but there cannot be any doubt that the fights that loom against redundancies and wages freeze will throw up other movements to bring that union back into the hands of its own membership.

Similarly, there have been moves to democratise the Teamsters Union, associated in the past with organised crime, by reformist groups like "Teamsters for Union Democracy". There are many examples in Britain of trade unions that have come under similar pressure from the rank and file during the last decade. Some of the most militant unions at the moment were little more than company unions only a decade or so ago. In the same way the mass membership of the American trade unions will move to transform the leadership and the constitution of their own trade unions, as a result of the class struggles now opening up.

In contrast to what has happened in most of the other capitalist countries, the proportion of American workers in trade unions has declined since the war, from 36 per cent to below 25 per cent. In the "Sunbelt" of the Southern states,

state governments have passed so-called "right to work" laws banning closed shops. Many of the big corporations have set up factories in these states (the worst three, for example, have between 8 and 11 per cent organisation) at the expense of the more organised Northern states. But this numerical weakness on the part of the trade unions will not be more than a temporary handicap in the future. When the American workers were recovering from the depression, the newly-formed Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) organised massive recruitment drives that brought millions of fresh workers into the trade union for the first time.

Between 1933 and 1937 the numbers of trade union members rose from less than 3 million to over 7 million, chiefly as a result of CIO activity. The looming economic crisis in the US today will find a class still strong and confident, despite the low levels of organisation, and once again the union activity and membership drives will bring in millions of fresh workers. It is significant that where union membership is already going ahead it is among white collar workers—like their counterparts in Britain, they are realising that their positions are no longer 'privileged' and that they must throw in their lot with the rest of the trade union movement if they are to fight back.

The spectacular and explosive character of American capitalism, with all its aggressive and abrasive qualities, has bestowed itself to the American workers in the form of trade union traditions. The mass strike movements of the past, the campaigns of the 'Wobblies' (International Workers of the World) and the CIO were nothing if not explosive. These are the traditions that will reassert themselves again in the next decade.

Nor will it be possible for these titanic events to occur without them exerting a profound influence on the political outlook of the working class. The American labour movement has also a rich political tradition, including on many occasions attempts to set up political parties to represent workers.

Debs, for example, as the Socialist Party's candidate for the presidency in 1912 got one million votes. But for two generations it has seemed that this part of history has been buried beneath mountains of accumulated ideological rubbish from the years of relative affluence and stability. The prejudices and political habits of the Cold War period and the post-war boom are like weights bearing down on the minds of many workers, but they are not immovable weights.

The class struggles cannot but increase in temperature in the future and this will raise fresh political ideas and aspirations in the minds of millions of workers, especially among the youth. The 'Vietnam' generation will be in the forefront of the class struggle.

It is a remarkable fact that despite the "anti-communist" theme of all the official news and government propaganda (including the trade union leaders) the workers are so intensely distrustful of big business that, according to a New York Times opinion poll, 23 per cent of the population are in favour of the nationalisation of the oil companies! Among workers with incomes below \$10,000 the figure was 31 per cent and among blacks as high as 42 per cent. And this is without any mass campaign of propaganda and education by the trade unions or a Labour Party!

A Labour Party

At the moment these political aspirations have no real outlet but already there are at least tentative moves towards the establishment of a Labour Party based upon the trade unions. For the last few years the Democrats—supposedly the more liberal of the two pro-capitalist parties—have controlled all the levers of power, that is the Presidency, both Houses of Congress as well as numerous state governments. Carter abandoned all the promises of reforms and social welfare that swept him to office and along with them he abandoned the hopes of millions of

poor, blacks and trade unionists.

These years have shattered the illusions that many workers had in the Democratic Party as a pro-worker party. At the present time it is only the most "left" wing of the Democrats who retain any credibility among workers, that is, the wing around Senator Edward Kennedy. In Detroit at the end of 1978 a conference took place with representatives from 30 trade unions and over 70 assorted reformist and community organisations.

Marxist ideas

Many of those present, including the leader of the carworkers' union, Douglas Fraser, were openly talking about the formation of a Labour Party. In the end, the meeting formed the 'Progressive Alliance' which seems to have become only a pressure group inside the Democratic Party—certainly Fraser has for the moment abandoned all thoughts of a Labour Party and has come out with an endorsement of Kennedy's election campaign.

But the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party will not hold on forever to the support it now has. If he reaches the White House, Kennedy will come under the same pressures as did Carter four years before him. Kennedy the liberal will be utterly incapable and unwilling to tackle the vested interests of big business and he will be forced to press the burden of the country's economic problems onto the working class. The establishment of a 'party for the representation of Labour', based on the trade unions, will only be a matter of time under these conditions.

A Labour Party would act as a mighty pole of attraction to blacks, Spanish-Americans and young workers especially. For years there has been a shift in membership and activity from the two main parties to activity in so-called single issue groups, based on stopping pollution, nuclear energy, civil rights, and so on. This is a further indication of the decline in support for the traditional

parties. A Labour Party would become a focus for all those isolated reformist groups, but it would be above all else the political arm of the trade union movement, generalising upon the struggles and needs of workers in many cities, industries and cultural backgrounds.

The goals and aspirations of the workers, stifled or only half-expressed in the past will be brought to the fore in the party programme. Demands for a National Health Service will find a wide echo, as well as urgent reforms in housing, job creation, trade union rights, and so on. Whilst it will have taken the British Labour Party over 80 years to arrive at the programme of changing society, there is no reason on earth to suppose that an American Labour party will take anything like as long.

On the contrary, the explosive character of the coming social events will push a Labour Party rapidly to the left in the USA. Workers will base their political ideas on concrete reality, not on abstractions and there cannot be any lasting reforms on the basis of capitalism. The American workers will quickly begin to demand fundamental and revolutionary changes in society.

Marxist ideas will quickly grow in the trade unions and in a Labour Party in the future. With its basis in trade union branches and Labour Councils (Trades Councils) as well as in the Labour Party itself, a Marxist tendency would soon gain the ear of the advanced workers moving into the political arena, and through them would influence the wider labour movement.

From trade union branches to city-wide influence and from the city to the state and national level, the ideas of Marxism will find an echo. The programme of Marxism is based upon the real needs of the workers themselves:

- ★ National Minimum Wage of \$1,500 a month.
- ★ No redundancies. Share out the work on full pay. Reduce the working week to 35 and then to 32 hours.
- ★ Adequate living wage for those unemployed.
- ★ For a decent living wage for all retired workers.

- ★ For a public health service free at the point of use.
- ★ For the cancellation of all city and state interest charges.
- ★ For a crash programme of municipal housing.
- ★ Interest-free loans and cheap credits to small farmers.
- ★ Public ownership of big business, finance and the establishment of a democratic plan of production.
- ★ For workers' control and management of industry.

By the end of the century the physiognomy of the whole world will have changed, if anything at all can be judged from economic, social and political trends. Tens and hundreds of millions of workers will be catapulted onto the political stage for the first time. On a world scale, the 1980s will be an epoch of social instability and revolution. The United States of America will be no exception. Social upheaval and revolutions devour old political parties and create new ones, sometimes several times over and the American landscape of today will not be able to withstand the political earthquakes of the future.

The capitalist class will reduce and even ultimately destroy its own productive capacity rather than lose forever its power and position. In the long run, the American ruling class would even resort to totalitarianism in order to stop the onward march of the trade unions, and that would mean disaster for the whole of mankind. An American military police dictatorship in the 1990s would spell nuclear holocaust. But before such a bloody reaction ever became possible, the workers would have many opportunities to show their revolutionary mettle.

A socialist United States of America would be a beacon to the whole of humanity. Inheriting from capitalism the most up to date scientific and technological skills would put a workers' government in a position to conquer all the ills of mankind, not only in America, but internationally. The American ruling class is incapable of developing science and technique any further. The American workers will show them the way.

If sharks were people

'If sharks were people', the land-lady's little daughter asked Mr. Keuner, 'would they be nicer to the little fishes?' 'But of course', said he. 'If sharks were people they would have big boxes built in the sea for little fishes to live in. Inside these habitations they would deposit all manner of nourishment—plant as well as animal matter. They would see to it that the boxes always had fresh water, and generally take all kinds of sanitary precautions. If, for instance, a little fish damaged one of its fins, it would be bandaged immediately, so that the sharks would not be deprived of it by a premature demise.

In order that the little fishes should not feel depressed, great water festivals would be held from time to time, for happy little fishes taste better than miserable ones. In the schools the little fishes would learn how to swim into the sharks' jaws. They would need geography, for example, so that when the big sharks were lazing about somewhere, they could find them.

The main thing, of course, would be the moral education of the little fishes. They would be instructed that the Greatest and Finest thing for a little fish was to sacrifice itself joyfully, and that they must all believe in the sharks, especially when they promised a great future. The little fishes would be told that this future could only be assured if they learned obedience. Above all, they would have to be on their guard against all base, materialistic, egotistic and Marxist tendencies, reporting at once to the sharks if any of their number manifested such tendencies.

If sharks were people they would naturally wage war among themselves to conquer foreign fish-boxes and little foreign fishes. They would let their little fishes do the fighting for them. They would teach the foreign fishes that there was a vast difference between themselves and the little fishes of other sharks. Little fishes, they would proclaim, are well known to be dumb, but they are silent in quite different languages, and therefore cannot possibly under-

stand each other. Each little fish who killed a few enemy fishes in battle—little foreign fishes, dumb in a different language—would have a little sea-weed medal pinned on his chest, and be awarded the title of 'Hero'.

If sharks were people they would naturally have art. There would be exhibitions of beautiful pictures of sharks' teeth in glorious colours. The theatres on the sea bed would show heroic little fishes swimming rapturously into the sharks' jaws and would just stream forward with melodious strains of music thrilling in their ears, and blissful thoughts lulling their senses.

Why, there would even be a Religion if sharks were people. This

would teach that little fishes only really start to live inside the bellies of sharks. Moreover, if sharks ever became people, not all the little fishes would be equal as they are now. Some of them would be given positions, set above others. Certain of the more important ones would even be permitted to gobble up little ones. This would certainly please the sharks, who would thus more often have larger morsels for themselves. The more important 'official' little fishes would be responsible for keeping order among the rest: they would become teachers, officers, fish-box constructors and the like. In short, the sea would only start being civilised if sharks were people.

Questions of a reading worker

Who was it built seven-gated Thebes?
In the books there are kings' names.
Was it the kings who lugged the great stone blocks?
And oft-destroyed Babylon,
Who built it up again so many times?
In which of the houses
Of gold-glittering Lima did the labourers live?
On the evening the Great Wall of China was finished,
Where did the bricklayers go? Great Rome
Is full of triumphal arches. Who put them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Did fabulous Byzantium
Only have palaces for people to live in?
Even in legendary Atlantis
On that night when the sea swallowed it up
The drowning men were bawling for their slaves.
The young Alexander conquered India.
All on his own?
Caesar smote the Gauls.
Didn't he even have a cook with him?
Philip of Spain wept when his Armada
Was sunk. Did no-one else weep?
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years' War. Who
Won apart from him?
On every page a battle.
Who cooked the victory feast?
Every ten years a great man.
Who footed the bill?

So many reports.
So many questions.

**Both pieces
on this page
by Bertholt Brecht**

Jack London: The Man The Socialist The Fighter



We publish below a brief autobiographical sketch by Jack London, author of "The Iron Heel", "Martin Eden", and countless classic short stories and novels. But very few of the millions who read "White Fang" or "Call of the Wild" while at school know anything about Jack London, the lifelong socialist and revolutionary.

Here in a few words, told by himself, is the story of how Jack London derived socialist conclusions from his experience of life. Starting work in a canning factory at the age of 15, he worked in a laundry, as a sailor and shifting coal in a power station, searched for gold in Alaska and fought as a prize-fighter, before becoming convinced of the need, felt by so many workers, to achieve something better out of life.

But London, the rebel and fierce individualist realized that the only way to raise himself above the conditions of life under capitalism was through the emancipation of the whole working class.

In 1896, he joined the Socialist Party and for twenty years fought and worked tirelessly for the cause of the working class. As a popular writer, he earned large sums of money, which he donated to the funds of the party, to strikes and soup kitchens and wrote regularly for socialist newspapers.

This side of Jack London's literary work is generally unknown but for him it was the most important thing in his life.

Running like a red thread through all his writings is a feeling of burning

indignation at the martyrdom of the workers, their wives and children under the dictatorship of capital, which in works such as "The Apostate" reach new heights of effectiveness both as works of literature and as political and social comment.

Jack London was not a theoretician but an instinctive socialist whose knowledge came from life itself, not from book-learning. As such, his interpretation of socialism is not always free from criticism.

But as a creative artist, his startling imagination and penetrating insight into social life enabled him to write such classics as "The Iron Heel" which first appeared in 1907, but which provides an uncannily accurate anticipation of the rise of fascism more than two decades before the development of the Nazi movement in Germany.

London's life had a tragic ending. Increasingly disillusioned by the reformist degeneration of the Socialist Party leadership, his health undermined, he left the party, explaining his resignation in typically uncompromising terms:

"I am resigning from the Socialist Party because of its lack of fire and fight, and its loss of emphasis on the class struggle. I was originally a member of the old, revolutionary,

up-on-its-hind-legs, fighting Socialist Labour Party.... Since the whole trend of socialism in the United States of recent years has been one of peaceableness and compromise, I find that my mind refuses further sanction of my remaining a party member."

At forty years of age, a broken, unhappy man, Jack London saw no longer any reason to live. On the night of November 21st 1916, a few months after leaving the Socialist Party, he took an overdose of drugs and died 24 hours later.

By a tragic irony of history, a few months later, Tsarism was overthrown by revolution in Russia. Almost exactly one year after his death, the workers of Russia finally came to power in the October Revolution, something Jack London had waited a lifetime to see.

He never lived to see it. But behind him, he left a priceless heritage of Socialist literature to inspire the youth of future generations with the revolutionary optimism which had been the mainspring of his life's work, summed up in the final phrase of his own account of his life:

"The stairway of time is ever echoing with the wooden shoe going up, and the polished boot descending."

What Life Means To Me

I was born in the working class. Early I discovered enthusiasm, ambition and ideals; and to satisfy these became the problem of my child-life. My environment was crude and rough and raw, I had no outlook, but an uplook rather. My place in society was at the bottom. Here life offered nothing but sordidness and wretchedness, both of the flesh and the spirit; for here flesh and spirit were alike starved and tormented.

Above me towered the colossal edifice of society, and to my mind the only way out was up. Into this edifice I early resolved to climb. Up above, men wore black clothes and boiled shirts, and women dressed in beautiful gowns. Also, there were good things to eat, and there was plenty to eat. This much for the flesh. Then there were the things of the spirit. Up above me, I knew, were unselfishness of the spirit, clean and noble thinking, keen intellectual living. I knew all this because I read "Seaside Library" novels in which, with the exception of the villains and adventuresses, all men and women thought beautiful thoughts, spoke a beautiful tongue, and performed glorious deeds. In short, as I accepted the rising of the sun, I accepted that up above me was all that was fine and noble and gracious, all that gave decency and dignity to life, all that made life worth living and that remunerated

one for his travail and misery.

But it is not particularly easy for one to climb up out of the working class—especially if he is handicapped by the possession of ideals and illusions. I lived on a ranch in California, and was hard put to find the ladder whereby to climb. I early inquired the rate of interest on invested money, and worried my child's brain into an understanding of the virtues and excellences of that remarkable invention of man, compound interest. Further, I ascertained the current rates of wages for workers of all ages, and the cost of living. From all this data I concluded that if I began immediately and worked and saved until I was fifty years of age, I could then stop working and enter into participation in a fair portion of the delights and goodnesses that would then be open to me higher up in society. Of course, I resolutely determined not to marry while I quite forgot to consider at all that great rock of disaster in the working class world—sickness.

But the life that was in me demanded more than a meagre existence of scraping and scrimping. Also, at ten years of age, I became a newsboy on the streets of a city, and found myself with a changed uplook. All about me were still the same sordidness and wretchedness, and up above me was still the same paradise waiting to be gained; but the ladder whereby to climb was a different one. It was now the ladder of business. Why save my earnings and invest in government bonds, when by buying two newspapers for five cents, with a turn of the wrist I could sell them for ten cents and double my capital? The business ladder was the ladder for me, and I had a vision of myself becoming a bald-headed and successful merchant prince.

Alas for visions! When I was sixteen I had already earned the title of "prince". But this title was given me by a gang of cut-throats and thieves by whom I was called "The Prince of the Oyster Pirates." And at that time I had climbed the first rung of the business ladder. I was a capitalist. I owned a boat and a complete oyster-pirating outfit. I had

a crew of one man. As captain and owner I took two-thirds of the spoils, and gave the crew one-third, though the crew worked just as hard as I did and risked just as much in his life and liberty.

This one rung was the height I climbed up the business ladder. One night I went on a raid amongst the Chinese fishermen. Ropes and nets were worth dollars and cents. It was robbery, I grant, but it was precisely the spirit of capitalism. The capitalist takes away the possessions of his fellow-creatures by means of a rebate, or of a betrayal of trust, or by the purchase of senators and supreme-court judges. I was merely crude. That was the only difference. I used a gun.

But my crew that night was one of those inefficients against whom the capitalist is wont to fulminate, because, forsooth, such inefficients increase expenses and reduce dividends. My crew did both. What of his carelessness he set fire to the big mainsail and totally destroyed it. There weren't any dividends that night, and the Chinese fishermen were richer by the nets and ropes we did not get. I was bankrupt, unable just then to pay sixty-five dollars for a new mainsail. I left my boat at anchor and went off on a bay-pirate boat on a raid up the Sacramento River. While away on this trip, another gang of bay pirates raided my boat. They stole everything, even the anchors, and later on, when I recovered the drifting hulk, I sold it for twenty dollars. I had slipped back the one rung I had climbed, and never again did I attempt the business ladder.

From then on I was mercilessly exploited by other capitalists. I had the muscle, and they made money out of it while I made but a very indifferent living out of it. I was a sailor before the mast, a longshoreman, a roustabout; I worked in canneries, and factories, and laundries; I mowed lawns, and cleaned carpets, and washed windows. And I never got the full product of my toil. I looked at the daughter of the cannery owner in her carriage, and knew that it was my muscle, in part, that helped drag along that carriage

on its rubber tyres. I looked at the son of the factory owner, going to college, and knew that it was my muscle that helped, in part, to pay for the wine and good fellowship he enjoyed.

But I did not resent this. It was all in the game. They were the strong. Very well, I was strong. I would carve my way to a place amongst them and make money out of the muscles of other men. I was not afraid of work. I loved hard work, I would pitch in and work harder than ever and eventually become a pillar of society.

And just then, as luck would have it, I found an employer that was of the same mind. I was willing to work, and he was more than willing that I should work. I thought I was learning a trade. In reality, I had displaced two men. I thought he was making an electrician out of me; as a matter of fact, he was making fifty dollars per month out of me. The two men I had displaced had received forty dollars each per month; I was doing the work of both for thirty dollars per month.

This employer worked me nearly to death. A man may love oysters but too many oysters will disincite him towards that particular diet. And so with me. Too much work sickened me. I did not wish ever to see work again. I fled from door to door, wandering over the United States and sweating bloody sweats in slums and prisons.

I had been born in the working class, and I was now, at the age of eighteen, beneath the point at which I had started. I was down in the cellar of society, down in the subterranean depths of misery about which it is neither nice nor proper to speak. I was in the pit, the abyss, the human cesspool, the shambles and the charnel-house of our civilisation. This is the part of the edifice of society that society chooses to ignore. Lack of space compels me here to ignore it, and I shall say only that the things I there saw gave me a terrible scare.

I was scared into thinking. I saw the naked simplicities of the complicated civilisation in which I lived. Life was a matter of food and shelter. In order to get food and shelter men sold things. The

merchant sold shoes, the politician sold his manhood, and the representative of the people, with exceptions of course, sold his trust, while nearly all sold their honour. Women, too, whether on the street or in the holy bond of wedlock, were prone to sell their flesh. All things were commodities, all people bought and sold. The one commodity that labour had to sell was muscle. The honour of labour had no price in the market-place. Labour had muscle, and muscle alone, to sell.

But there was a difference, a vital difference. Shoes and trust and honour had a way of renewing themselves. They were imperishable stocks. Muscle, on the other hand, did not renew. As the shoe merchant sold shoes, he continued to replenish his stock. But there was no way of replenishing the labourer's stock of muscle. The more he sold of his muscle, the less of it remained to him. It was his one commodity, and each day his stock of it diminished. In the end, if he did not die before, he sold out and put up his shutters. He was a muscle bankrupt, and nothing remained to him but to go down into the cellar of society and perish miserably.

I learned, further, that brain was likewise a commodity. It, too, was different from muscle. A brain seller was only at his prime when he was fifty or sixty years old, and his wares were fetching higher prices than ever. But a labourer was worked out or broken down at forty-five or fifty. I had been in the cellar of society, and I did not like the place as a habitation. The pipes and drains were unsanitary, and the air was bad to breathe. If I could not live on the parlour door of society, I could, at any rate, have a try at the attic. It was true, the diet there was slim but the air at least was pure. So I resolved to sell no more muscle, and to become a vendor of brains.

Then began a frantic pursuit of knowledge. I returned to California and opened the books. While thus equipping myself to become a brain merchant, it was inevitable that I should delve into sociology. There I found, in a certain class of books, scientifically formulated, the simple sociological concepts I had already worked out for myself. Other and

greater minds, before I was born, had worked out all that I had thought and a vast deal more. I discovered that I was a socialist.

The socialists were revolutionists, inasmuch as they struggled to overthrow the society of the present, and out of the material to build the society of the future. I, too, was a socialist and a revolutionist. I joined the groups of working class and intellectual revolutionists, and for the first time came into intellectual living. Here I found keen-flashing intellects and brilliant wits; for here I met strong and alert-brained, withal horny-handed, members of the working class; unfrocked preachers too wide in their Christianity for any congregation of Mammon-worshippers; professors broken on the wheel of university subservience to the ruling class and flung out because they were quick with knowledge which they strove to apply to the affairs of mankind.

Here I found, also, warm faith in the human, glowing idealism, sweetness of unselfishness, renunciation, and martyrdom—all the splendid stinging things of the spirit. Here life was clean, noble, and alive. Here life rehabilitated itself, became wonderful and glorious; and I was glad to be alive. I was in touch with great souls who exalted flesh and spirit over dollars and cents, and to whom the thin wail of the starved slum child meant more than all the pomp and circumstance of commercial expansion and world empire. All about me were nobleness of purpose and heroism of effort, and my days and night were sunshine and starshine, all fire and dew, with before my eyes, ever burning and blazing, the Holy Grail, Christ's own Grail, the warm human, long-suffering and maltreated, but to be rescued and saved at the last.

And I, poor foolish I, deemed all this to be a mere foretaste of the delights of living I should find higher above me in society. I had lost many illusions since the day I read "Seaside Library" novels on the California ranch. I was destined to lose many of the illusions I still retained.

As a brain merchant I was a success. Society opened its portals to me. I entered right in on the parlour

floor, and my disillusionment proceeded rapidly. I sat down to dinner with the masters of society, and with the wives and daughters of the masters of society. The women were gowned beautifully, I admit; but to my naive surprise I discovered that they were of the same clay as all the rest of the women I had know down below in the cellar. "The colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady were sisters under their skins"—and gowns.

It was not this, however, so much as their materialism that shocked me. It is true, these beautifully gowned, beautiful women prattled sweet little ideals and dear little moralities; but in spite of their prattle the dominant key of the life they lived was materialistic. And they were so sentimentally selfish! They assisted in all kinds of sweet little charities, and informed one of the fact, while all the time the food they ate and the beautiful clothes they wore were bought out of dividends stained with the blood of child labour, and sweated labour, and of prostitution itself. When I mentioned such facts, expecting in my innocence that these sisters of Judy O'Grady would at once strip off their blood-dyed silks and jewels, they became excited and angry, and read me preachments about the lack of thrift, the drink, and the innate depravity that caused all the misery in society's cellar. When I mentioned that I couldn't quite see that it was the lack of thrift, the intemperance, and the depravity of a half-starved child of six that made it work twelve hours every night in a Southern cotton mill, these sisters of Judy O'Grady attacked my private life and called me an "agitator"—as though that, forsooth, settled the argument.

Nor did I fare better with the masters themselves. I had expected to find men who were clean, noble, and alive, whose ideals were clean, noble and alive. I went about amongst the men who sat in the high places—the preachers, the politicians, the businessmen, the professors and the editors. I ate meat with them, drank wine with them, autotomiled with them, and studied them. It is true, I found many that were clean and noble; but with rare exceptions, they were not alive. I do

verily believe I could count the exceptions on the fingers of my two hands. Where they were not alive with rottenness, quick and unclean life, there were merely the unburied dead—clean and noble, like well-preserved mummies, but not alive. In this connection I may especially mention the professors I met, the men who live up to that decadent university ideal, "the passionless pursuit of passionless intelligence."

I met men who invoked the name of the Prince of Peace in their diatribes against war, and who put rifles in the hands of Pinkertons with which to shoot down strikers in their own factories. I met men incoherent with indignation at the brutality of prize-fighting, and who, at the same time, were parties to the adulteration of food that killed each year more babies than even red-handed Herod had killed.

I talked in hotels and clubs and homes and Pullmans, and steamer-chairs with captains of industry and marvelled at how little travelled they were in the realm of intellect. On the other hand, I discovered that their intellect, in the business sense, was abnormally developed. Also, I discovered that their morality, where business was concerned, was nil.

This delicate, aristocratic-featured gentleman, was a dummy director and a tool of corporations that secretly robbed widows and orphans. This gentleman, who collected fine editions and was an especial patron of literature, paid blackmail to a heavy-jowled, black-browed boss of a municipal machine. This editor, who published patent medicine advertisements and did not dare print the truth in his paper about said patent medicines for fear of losing the advertising, called me a scoundrelly demagogue because I told him that his political economy was antiquated and that his biology was contemporaneous with Pliny.

This senator was the tool and the slave, the little puppet of a gross, uneducated machine boss; so was this governor and that supreme court judge; and all three rode on railroad passes. This man, talking soberly and earnestly about the beauties of idealism and the goodness of God, had just betrayed his comrades in a

business deal. This man, a pillar of the church and heavy contributor to foreign missions, worked his shop girls ten hours a day on a starvation wage and thereby directly encouraged prostitution. This man, who endowed chairs in universities, perjured himself in courts of law over a matter of dollars and cents. And this railroad magnate broke his word as a gentleman and a Christian when he granted a secret rebate to one of two captains of industry locked together in a struggle to the death.

It was the same everywhere, crime and betrayal, betrayal and crime—men who were alive, but who were neither clean nor noble, men who were clean and noble, but who were not alive. Then there was a great, hopeless mass, neither noble nor alive, but merely clean. It did not sin positively nor deliberately; but it did sin passively and ignorantly by acquiescing in the current immorality and profiting by it. Had it been noble and alive it would not have been ignorant, and it would have refused to share in the profits of betrayal and crime.

I discovered that I did not like to live on the parlour floor of society. Intellectually I was bored. Morally and spiritually I was sickened. I remembered my intellectuals and idealists, my unfrocked preachers, broken professors, and clean-minded, class-conscious working men. I remembered my days and nights of sunshine and starshine, where life was all a wild sweet wonder, a spiritual paradise of unselfish adventure and ethical romance. And I saw before me, ever blazing and burning, the Holy Grail.

So I went back to the working class, in which I had been born and where I belonged. The imposing edifice of society above my head holds no delights for me. It is the foundation of the edifice that interests me. There I am content to labour, crowbar in hand, shoulder to shoulder with intellectuals, idealists, and class-conscious working men, getting a solid pry now and again and setting the whole edifice rocking. Some day, when we get a few more hands and crowbars to work, we'll topple it over, along with all its rotten life and unburied dead,

its monstrous selfishness and sodden materialism. Then we'll cleanse the cellar and build a new habitation for mankind, in which there will be no parlour floor, in which all the rooms will be bright and airy, and where the air that is breathed will be clean, noble, and alive.

Such is my outlook. I look forward to a time when man shall progress upon something worthier and higher than his stomach, when there will be a finer incentive to impel men to action than the incentive of today, which is the incentive of the stomach. I retain my belief in the nobility and excellence of the human. I believe that spiritual sweetness and unselfishness will conquer the gross gluttony of today. And last of all, my faith is in the working class. As some Frenchman has said, "The stairway of time is ever echoing with the wooden shoe going up, the polished boot descending."

Newton, Iowa
November 1905

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