

# the Leveller

The New  
Radical  
Examiner

Issue Number  
One

November

1976

Price 35p

## THE RISE OF THE ULTRA-RIGHT

Trevor Griffiths Interviewed on Bill Brand  
The Syrian Intervention in Lebanon  
Hull Prison : The 'Inside' Story.  
How The N.H.S. Treats Women  
The Right To Work March Examined  
Wages For Housework Debated  
Who Paid Out Mercenary Money  
What Happened At Ford  
Plus Letters and National AgitProp





# Inside The

This issue has been produced collectively by the Leveller Working Committee, and published by the Leveller Magazine Ltd (Registration as a Co-Operative Friendly Society in hand)

Issue Number One. November 1976

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Cover design : Julian Stapleton

Typesetting : *Race Today* (01 737 2268)

Printed By : Feb Edge Litho. The Oval, London E 2.

Distributed by Publications Distribution (A co-operative project). 435, Caledonian Road. London N 7. Tel.01 609 3969

## Branded a marxist

Marxist playwright, Trevor Griffiths, the darling of the radical chic at the National Theatre, reached a massive audience with his series for Thames TV, *Bill Brand*. Apart from its topicality, the series raised questions about how far drama for a mass audience can be used to affect politics, and what forms and structures the political dramatist can use to make his or her points.

Trevor Griffiths discusses the series and the problems facing political dramatists with NIGEL THOMAS.  
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## Waging the housework struggle



The Wages for Housework group has been at the centre of many contentious arguments in the women's movement. RUTH HALL explains why she believes women should be paid for housework. MARY DAVIS argues against the campaign position. LYN GAMBLE examines how the campaign originated and ZOE FAIRBARN provides some of the economic information on women's work within the home. SEE PAGES 7-10

## Cooking the books

How Britain's most ruthless employers used the TUC to save themselves a cool £74m on their wage bill and laughed all the way to the bank. SEE PAGE 6

## Money for guns

A lot of money was sloshing about when mercenary recruiters were trying to find 'dogs of war' for Angola. FRANK BRANSTON traces the murky path of where it came from and who didn't get it. SEE PAGES 28-29



## The right to organise

The IS-run Right to Work Campaign has assumed the leadership of the industrial fight against unemployment, the cuts and the Labour Government. How and Why ? SEE PAGE 5

## Hull - Shout it from the rooftop

The papers didn't tell us why it happened We piece the story together from the prisoners' letters. SEE PAGE 26

## Laying it on the line

Ned Ludd lives on in Halewood and Dagenham : walk-outs, occupations, machine smashing. IAN WALKER explains why they are fed up with being treated as casual labour. SEE PAGE 27

## Our bodies

WOMEN'S HEALTH  
Three writers look at different aspects of the struggle by women to control their own bodies. KAREN MARGOLIS was told by the doctors that she wasn't really ill. The truth turned out to be very different. DOROTHY JONES reviews the excellent Women's Health Handbook which explains about self-examination. And ELANA EHRLICH attacks the new Pluto Press book on abortion. SEE PAGE 23

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# Leveller

## British Fascists

The apparent growth of support for the neo-fascists is frightening. Especially since they seem to be duplicating the quasi-electoral strategy take-off perfected by the National Socialists in Germany.

In a group of articles on the threat of fascism in Britain, we look at how they set about winning electoral support in the Rotherham by-election, one of those which really upset the Labour Party - especially since most of the fascist vote seems to come from Labour voters.

We also give a view of the convoluted, nasty, usually Nazi but always fascist background of the present leadership of the extreme right-wing organisations and two assessments of the seriousness of their challenge for state power.

And we look at how the Asian community has responded to their activities, and present a round-up of the development and standing of anti-fascist activity throughout the country.

SEE PAGES 16 - 22

## Agitprop

A national Agitprop page which tells you what's going on and where. If you want details of your meeting, demonstration or publication brought to the left's attention send details to us at 155a, Drummond St. NW1. SEE PAGES 31&32



## Eye-opener

Lefties for Goldsmith ? TIM GOPSILL explains why he is giving critical support to Jimmy Goldsmith in his battles with *Private Eye*. SEE PAGE 11

## Syrian war



What in the name of Allah are the Syrians doing in Lebanon ? As their tanks roll against the Palestinians once again, MIKE PREST explains how what was once presumed to be the most progressive country in the Middle East is trying to re-shape the balance of political forces. PAGES 28-29



Richard Mellkenny

## WHO BOMBED BRUM?

SIX Irishmen were given multiple life sentences last August at Lancaster Crown Court for the Birmingham city centre pub bombs murders on November 21 1974.

The men - all with families, and all from Northern Ireland - are John Walker, William Power, Gerard Hunter, Paddy Joe Hill, Hugh Callaghan and Richard Mellkenny.

They have now exhausted all legal recourse in Britain, with the refusal of leave for them to appeal, and all that is left them is the long, expensive, and often ineffective, European Human Rights court at Strasbourg.

On the surface, it should be a closed chapter. And yet, there is a strong case for re-examining many features of their trial, and for arguing the innocence of at least five of them.

Why should people still concern themselves with the fate of the six Northern Irishmen - did they not receive a fair trial at Lancaster? Did not the Director of Public Prosecutions even bring charges against the Winson Green prison warders accused of assaulting them?

Anyway what is so important about them; and why should their case be reconsidered, let alone reopened?

The six are indeed very ordinary Irishmen typical of the thousands who have been coming to Britain over the decades to find work. They were among the numerous Irishmen leaving Britain the night of 21 November 1974 to attend the funeral of a widely-known Birmingham

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# BIRMINGHAM

Continued from previous page

ham Irishman James McDaid whose own bomb killed him at a Coventry telephone exchange. But they never got home – police picked them up, boarding the boat.

They were cruelly unfortunate in that it was them selected by the Birmingham police, under desperate public and political pressure, to carry the rap for the bombings, and now they have no-one, except their loyal wives to speak for them.

## WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE?

The Provisional IRA know who is responsible for those bombs – bombs which had wide-ranging consequences beyond the grief of those bereaved that night, with amongst other things, the introduction of the 'temporary' Prevention of Terrorism Act, and the breaking up of Provisional Sinn.Fein as an effective political body in Britain.

Realising what a horrible debacle the whole affair was, the Provisionals immediately ordered an internal inquiry with a public pledge given that week by David O'Connell, Sinn Fein's vice-president; that his movement 'would not flinch' from accepting full responsibility and offering an explanation once their investigations were complete.

Since then however, the provisionals have maintained an awkward silence, and Mr. O'Connell's pledge has not been honoured. The Sinn Fein organiser in Birmingham at the time – George Lynch, who was on the first list of Irishmen excluded from Britain under the new legislation – will not comment even privately on the business, except to express surprise at scarcely knowing the six convicted men, and doubting their responsibility.

The Provisionals almost certainly know by now those six were not responsible, but they will not speak out because they too want that episode forgotten and behind them. Only the Provisionals can now say whether the bombings were done by men acting on their own initiative or under orders, who may have gone for a dreadfully 'overkill' bombing or who may have hopelessly bungled the whole operation with inept warning phone calls.

## THREE MISSING IRISHMEN

The British Home Office know at least three names of people long since returned to Ireland, names which were sent in a remarkable letter to the then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, by John Walker, after the trial.

In this letter, he gave the three men's Birmingham addresses, even identifying the pubs they usually drank in, and these names are in the possession of the *Leveller*. Denying his own involvement, Mr Walker also dramatically pointed the finger at Michael Murray, one of three Irishmen at the same Lancaster trial though accused only of an explosives conspiracy, who was given a nine-year sentence.

According to Mr Walker, Mr Murray, who was active in the IRA's 1956–62 campaign, told him in a prison yard he was 'deeply sorry' to see the six 'carrying the rap', and he admitted he had made the futile warning calls. "It all went badly wrong that night," he was supposed to have said.

Mr Walker repeated these allegations during the Lancaster trial. Adding he was now a 'dead man' whose life was not worth 'a plumped nickel'. Mr Murray kept silent throughout the whole trial, declining to even make an unsworn



William Power

Hugh Callaghan

statement, and was complimented at the end by the judge for having 'a true soldier's bearing.'

It is not however in the interests of the Home Office nor indeed the British Government to upset the status quo, and they too have remained silent.

Within the Birmingham police force there are Special Branch officers who know only too well they did not get the right people and who can still recall the manner in which they extracted damning statements from four of the six, statements which were to form the bulk of the prosecution case at Lancaster

## A MOST PECULIAR MAN

Amongst the many disturbing features of that Lancaster trial is the role played by a Thomas Watt, an admitted police informer and a member of the National Front.

Mr. Watt was a significant prosecution witness giving damning evidence against two of his former workmates, Mr Walker and Richard McKenny; he was also the man who gave shelter in Birmingham to Kenneth Littlejohn, who at that time had made his way out of Dublin's Mountjoy prison, and was by an astounding co-incidence, in Birmingham the night of the bombings.

No action was subsequently taken by police against Mr Watt for harbouring Littlejohn when there was a warrant out for his detention. Littlejohn, the British agent who engineered a Dublin bank robbery to discredit the Official IRA and who was then ditched by his ringmasters in the Ministry of Defence, by all accounts could have been arrested at any time, particularly as Mr Watt was a police informer.

The police chose not to move until well after the bombings, and Littlejohn was re-arrested at Watt's house; it was said this 'breakthrough' came from a "tip-off." From whom, Mr. Watt? Thomas Watt, with his fanatical political convictions, was, it could be argued, deliberately placed in the same factory as Walker and McKenny to keep an eye on them, and other Irishmen, and he indeed said in court that he regularly passed on tips, particularly about Mr Walker to Birmingham police.

Mr Walker was subsequently presented by the Lancaster prosecutions as the brains behind the operation, and yet, if Mr Watt was a useful police informer it must be asked why Mr Walker was not then trailed much earlier, and crucially why was he not closely observed the tense night of the bombings?

Much is extremely suspicious about Mr. Watt's involvement in the affair. The Birmingham police, in their wisdom, did not pursue any of these issues after the trial, and he soon slunk back into the recesses of that grim Midlands city.

## HELPING WITH POLICE INQUIRIES

The bulk of the Lancaster case against the Irishmen hinged round the statements said to have been made by them at Morecambe and Birmingham police stations. In their defence, the four men in question went through a consistent pattern of detailing each line of those statements, and saying whether they actually did say such words to the Special Branch interrogators, and then whether it was true or not.

Roughly one third of each statement, according to the men was genuine, with the rest forced from them by individual brutality and by only too credible threats to their wives and families a milder version of the sensory deprivation techniques condemned last August by the European Human Rights Commission as constituting 'torture.'

This form of legal defence was perhaps just too familiar in Irish cases, and went beyond what the average British person is prepared to accept. Do you believe the tales of grubby-looking Irishmen, or do you believe the polite and upright testimony of police officers, those people who form the line of defence against all that aims at destroying the system you support?

Together with the atmosphere still prevailing from the Birmingham bombings themselves, the truth of the matter did not enter into it, and the six Irishmen did not stand a chance.

## BEHIND PRISON WALLS

On top of all that, there were the righteous shrieks of horror at the attacks evidently received by the men their day on remand in Winson Green prison the 25 November 1974. At the Lancaster trial, it was clear that the men had been assaulted, but it could not be admitted that the police were responsible as this would undermine the prosecution case.

When it became clear that the undoubted attacks on the men would prove a crucial part of the trial, the two journalists responsible for revealing the story about the Winson Green assaults suddenly in a cold sweat feared they had been 'duped.'

That was not the case however; the evident truth of the matter was that the men were attacked twice, by warders and by police, though in different ways, the main difference being subtlety, and the issue of their treatment at police hands was well clouded at Lancaster.

As for the prosecution of the fourteen prison warders from Winson Green on assault charges last July, its half-hearted nature was well-revealed by the refusal to request a transfer of the trial away from Birmingham.

Given this refusal, the acquittals were inevitable and should be interpreted as realising that no Birmingham jury wanted to ruin the profes-

sional careers of men who only did what they themselves would have welcomed the opportunity to do in the immediate wake of the pub bombings.

**WAITING AND HOPING**

Outside a soon-to-be-published pamphlet by Dr Denis Faul from Dungannon in Northern Ireland, which features detailed statements from each of the men since their convictions on their movements the night of the bombings, there is little else for the six men. No-one is interested anymore, and unless a documented and full account, almost an impossible objective when all the opposing forces are considered, of what really did happen that night, can materialise, then those six men must spend the rest of their lives in gaol.

They are different from other Irish victims of miscarriages of justice in British courts, such as Noel Jenkinson, serving life for the 1972 Alder-shot car bomb, when he was nowhere near the place that day, and Judith Ward, jailed for the M62 coach bomb, when she could only have played, if any, a minimal part in planting it.

The six men recognised the Lancaster court fully, if recognise is the word for men seemingly dazed after a bad nightmare they were forced to live through; they did not make any Republican protestations from the dock as they were led away in handcuffs after conviction, their heads shaking in numbness; and they appear on no lists of Irish prisoners tended to by the various prisoners' action groups.

In their various prisons now, the six men, unusually for Category 'A' top security inmates, received regular open visits from their wives and children; they do not mix with the other republican prisoners who are all organised under the O/C in each jail; and they constantly send out pitiful letters free from any political ideology and not evoking the memories of any Irish patriots, but which instead just cling to the life-sustaining belief that something somewhere must happen sometime to end it all.

David Martin



John Walker



# Organising around the unemployed

**ON November 26 last more than 20,000 Right to Work demonstrators marched on Parliament. Inside the Palace of Westminster police, Members and functionaries were in a cold sweat; only 600 officers to defend the Mother of Parliaments from the biggest manifestation of working class resistance it had seen this century.**

**Unemployment had then just topped the unheard-of-million. I remember thinking: "Next year, when it's a million and a half, these people will have a hundred thousand on the streets." At last there was a united front to stir the hearts and minds of the left into action.**

In March the National Assembly on Unemployment, 3,000 delegates from a broad range of left, set a programme of action culminating in demonstrations against the social contract at the Special TUC Congress. And on May 26 250,000 workers took some kind of industrial action on the National Day of Action the Assembly had planned.

Since then? The united front has come apart at the seams, as the Communist Party have drawn back from a confrontation with union leadership, and the groups to the left fallen to sectarian squabbling over the assumption of the leadership by IS.

However much they may dislike it said, the Right to Work Campaign, at National level, is IS-run, a weapon in their struggle to build Britain's first revolutionary rank and file party. It must also be said that IS is perfectly justified, indeed, obliged to do this. The question is: what what has happened to the others?

For at rank and file level comrades from all groups and none are working together in anti-racist committees, community action, industrial struggles and a thousand other campaigns, yes, including Rank and File and Right to Work themselves. On the London to Brighton march, fewer than half the brave 568 were IS members - at least at the start. Yet the total discipline on the march made it a propaganda unit for IS, one they capitalised on handsomely.

The Campaign has judged the march a huge success. For one thing, according to one of its four full-time organisers Tommy Douras, they recruited 150 people into IS. More importantly, they reaped an "unfavourable" press that has identified them exclusively in the eyes of the working class as leading the fight against collaborationist TUC bosses and the social contract - a fight that is going to expand with the growing voices in the union ranks for a return of bargaining power from the Cabinet

Room to the shop floor.

Arm-in-arm with this rank and file strength, IS see themselves as getting into a position to relaunch as a revolutionary party (the Socialist Worker Party, floated in the paper last month). "We can now intervene at a higher level," says Douras. They may recall that the Socialist Labour League thought they had made it four years ago, and for what it's worth, it has come as something of a shock to old Trot hands who have long regarded IS as the most libertarian group to see them moving left with all the endearing traits of the SLL in the halcyon days of Gerry Healy: tight discipline, a low level of democracy, expulsion, threats, and the odd stray stray boot and fist.

On the Brighton march a group from the Women Women's Right to Work Campaign, largely but not entirely IMG, and a gay workers' group, who who were registered for the march, were refused permission to carry their banners. All political banners were banned from the march, the Right to Work Council had decided beforehand, but the women and gays turned up with them. Tommy Douras says this was deliberate provocation: they knew well in advance they wouldn't be allowed to carry them. There were scuffles in Brixton over these banners. IMG members were stopped from handing out leaflets, and three were thrown off the march. (Others left of their own accord, about 20 stayed).

The point was made by Campaign secretary John Deason at a mass meeting that the ban on political party banners on the march extended to IS itself. But John was being a little ingenuous, especially since Socialist Worker was being sold at the roadside in Brighton.

The brief discussion of this question, was the only time politics came up in mass meetings at all. Certainly there was no discussion or expansion of the programme the march was supposed to be demanding.

In justifying this lack of democracy, and the exclusion of other political groups, Right to Work leaders distinguish between a march and a demonstration. "On a demonstration anyone can tag along", says Jimmy McCallum, IS executive member and their prospective candidate in Walsall North, "but a march has to be a disciplined force that has to be organised to get from A to B. We didn't want any old rabble joining on behind." Tommy Douras adds: "It also cost money. We would have liked to have had a bigger march of course but it would have been beyond our resources." Nonetheless he rejects the argument that numbers is all: to IS who you have on the march is more important

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# Out Of The Frying Pan..

**HOW BRITAIN'S MOST RUTHLESS EMPLOYERS USED THE TUC  
TO SAVE THEMSELVES A COOL £74m.**

**THE EMPLOYERS IN BRITAIN'S hotel and catering industry have been laughing fit to burst for the last couple of months. And this month, when the 390,000 workers covered by the Licenced Residential Wages Council pick up their £2.50 wage rise, a piece of astute manoeuvring will be the toast of the boardrooms.**

For by a clever combination of blustering, delaying tactics and a close reading of the Social Contract, the hotel and catering companies have managed to save themselves an extra £74m on the annual wages bill. And that is in an industry which already pays such meagre wages that last year the Low Pay Unit estimated that a quarter of a million workers were living below the poverty line.

The build-up to the employers' coup starts last October. At that time the hotel and catering workers picked up an extra £9.17 in their pay packets after an all-time record settlement at the Wages Council. The settlement had been agreed the previous May when the industry had been stung not just by the report from the Low Pay Unit, but also by a report from its own Economic Development Council.

Working from New Earnings Survey data and reports from the Economic Development Office, the EDC had pointed out that 113,000 full-time adult men, and 250,000 full-time adult women were below NEDO low earnings criteria.

These, the EDC pointed out, were the lowest rates for all the industrial orders in the New Earnings Survey. If the Low Pay Unit could be

argued off as a bunch of leftie agitators, the industry's own EDC could hardly be ignored. So the Wage Council decision was made in May 1975, to come into effect in the October. In the summer, the TUC met and agreed to the £6 limit on wage rises for 75/76. But agreements which had already been made were to be exempt. The employers then argued that the £6 limit should be applied to their wage agreement, but the Department of Employment said the £9.17 for October could stand.

Not that it was a straight £9.17. Deductions for board and lodging were bumped up from £1.70 a week to £3.50 so for many workers the real rise was more like £7.37.

On May 13 this year, the Wages Council met again at St James Square to discuss the new agreements for 1976/7. On the union side were eleven representatives led by GMWU National Officer Bobby Smith. On the management side another eleven representatives led by James Davison – a senior manager from Grand Metropolitan but this time wearing the hat of the employers' union, the British Hotels, Restaurants and Caterers' Association. In addition to these 22 were three independents, led by Professor John Wood a lawyer from Sheffield University.

The unions' line was to argue for £6 – the full sum as agreed by the TUC for the year 75-76. They pointed out that the industry's other two Wages Councils had already agreed to the £6.00 that some of the bigger companies with reasonable union organisation had also agreed to £6, and that since the agreement was being made in May there should be no doubt about it.

But the employers had a much stronger card up

their sleeve than moral or economic arguments. The TUC was already talking to the Chancellor about a £4 limit.

The Department of Employment was quick to seize on this. It sent out a confidential circular letter to the chairperson of all 44 Wages Councils – including Professor Wood – asking them to hold off all settlements if they could until August 1.

So when the Wages Council met on May 13, Smith put forward the union side of the case for £6 to be met by total silence from Davison. The meeting broke up after just thirty minutes. The employers wanted more time to consider their case, and, Davison later said, "the meeting was adjourned until early June and it is simply a question of arranging the next meeting. I am trying to find suitable dates."

The Union side was furious, with Smith calling for the disbandment of the Wages Council and demanding a meeting with the Department of Employment. What he wanted was an agreement before his own union's conference starting on June 6 – and certainly an agreement before the Special Congress of the TUC which would ratify the £4 policy.

To Davison's problem of "finding a suitable date," the unions offered any day between June 1 and 4. Meantime Smith, and John Stevens from the T&GWU, met Harold Walker, the Minister of State for Employment, at the end of May to press the claim for an early settlement. Knowing that the TUC would ratify the £4 with no exemptions, Walker prevaricated and said he would seek clarification from his Department.

The Wages Council still did not meet. Smith threatened to resign, called for the abolition of the Council and told his own union conference on June 8 that the "best many hotel workers can look forward to is retirement because in real terms the old age pension is better than the statutory minimum rate in the hotel industry."

On June 16, the TUC did meet and, sure enough, it was £4 with no exemptions.

On Monday August 9, the Wages Council sat down to make their new agreement. It was quite simple – 5% across the board. For the vast majority of workers, that was an additional £2.50. But even then it wasn't over. Living-in workers will be paying an extra 1½p per working hour for the privilege – bringing their total contribution up to £7.60 a week. Other workers will pay another ½p an hour for meals, bringing their contribution up to £3.70 a week.

The EDC reported recently that the average British worker spends just over 80p a week on meals at work. In the very industry whose business is food, the workers will now be paying £3.70 a week – although the biggest companies like Trust Houses Forte only allow their chefs £2 a week to cater for the workers.

As a result of the TUC's £4 limit, the Department of Employment's confidential letter and the employers' delaying tactics, the employers have saved themselves a total of £70m a year on the wage bill – that is the difference between £6 a week the workers were entitled to and the £2.50 they actually got, multiplied by the 390,000 people it applied to. In addition the employers have won another £4m a year on the extra contributions to meals and board and lodgings. A grand total of £74m a year.

The GMWU called at its conference for a major recruiting drive in the industry and talked of putting thousands of pounds into it. But although unionisation is growing in the industry, there are still only 12,500 people in the GMWU out of a potential of more than half a million. And the GMWU's fine recruiting plans appear to have disappeared in a welter of inter-office politics and financial confusion at Head Office.

Larry O'Brien

## Right to work

*Continued from previous page*

than how many, and various groups have, according to McCallum, been banned from the Right to Work campaign for using meetings to push their own line.

But the lack of political discussion on the march leads to a more serious question. Right to Work's slogans call simply for jobs – without a programme for revolution. The call to "occupy, nationalise, fight for the right to work" refers to the use of these weapons to fight redundancies and closures, and other demands, for work-sharing with no overtime, 35-hour week, and so on, are the kind of minimal demands that could typify a united front.

Tommy Douras points out that "nationalise" means "under workers' control," of course, and that revolutionary demands could not be put, yet, because a good half of Rank and File/Right to Work members are not revolutionaries. "In any case," he adds, "even the demands we are making could not be met under capitalism."

He also explains that more democracy will be possible within Right to Work. There have been criticisms that its council is not elected: it consists of representatives of affiliated TU bodies. But after the November conference it should be possible to have an elected council, he says.

So what happened to the united front? The CP dropped out suddenly, between May 26, and June 16, when the Assembly sponsors from the

Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, simply did not show up for the lobby of the Special Congress. CP industrial organiser Bert Ramelson says: "There was no point. The issue was cut and dried anyway, after the change in line of the AUEW." He adds: "We can't work with people demanding nationalisation under workers' control," and that the Party could not support the tactic of attacking the trade union leadership.

Tommy Douras says that the fact that IS have been allowed to take the initiative on unemployment "comments more on the left in Britain than it does on us. We decided to stand aside. Other groups decided to move to the right, entering the Labour Party and so on, because of the lack of class activity. That's why there's no united front. It is a split over tactics."

Comparisons with the success of united fronts over other issues – obviously CND and Vietnam – are misleading. The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign was student-based, and consciousness was high in '68. So it was in the fight against the Industrial Relations Act. "Until two years ago struggles had to be united fronts," says Douras disparagingly. With unemployment doubling in under two years the rank and file should be stirring again. IS reckons they are.

Tim Gopsill.

# THE GREAT WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK DEBATE

## How It All Began -

NOT having a history is like being a bastard — it makes you feel rejected, insecure, not good enough. Women know all about that — we have been written out of the history books often enough.

The notion of paid housework is probably as old as woman herself, and there is written evidence of it as far back as 1867. But as a campaign organised round an idea, it belongs exclusively to the 1970's.

Cartoons began to appear in *Shrew* adding up the rate for the job and demanding a wage of £139.47½p a week for housewives. That was the climate in 1971.

March 1972 and a mysteriously anonymous pamphlet appeared at the national conference of the Women's Liberation Movement in Manchester, signed "SD." It was selling like hot cakes. Everyone wanted to know who "SD" was, and Selma James owned up. Deitch was her maiden name and she had used it so any feedback would be unbiased.

"Women, the Unions and Work" drew a record 300 people into the hall at Manchester when the workshop reconvened in the lunchbreak. Leonora Lloyd from the left argued that women must go to the factory to organise revolutionary activity. Another woman replied "you can't tell my mother that. She's been working in a factory for 20 years, and she wants to go home."

The debate was a hot potato and everyone wanted a copy of the paper. Wages for Housework was only one of six demands, but it galvanised the most response.

Meanwhile in Italy, Lotta Femminista, a revolutionary non-separatist group, had arrived at a similar strategy: if their basic relation to capital as women was as wageless houseworkers then they wanted a wage as a lever against the work. *Women And The Subversion Of The Communist* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James had been completed in 1971, but not published until 1972, when it came out with Selma James' *A Woman's Place* under the umbrella title *The Power Of Women And The Subversion of the Community*

Under the impact of the debate the various left groups in the women's movement, all usually quite distinct in their identities, now united to attack the threat of an autonomous feminist movement. IS, IMG, the CP, and the Maoists concerted their energies to stave off WFH: some of the arguments are put in Wally Secombe's *The Housewife And Her Labour Under Capitalism* in the *New Left Review* of February 1974, Carol Lopate's *Women And Pay For Housework* in *Liberation* June 1974, and Caroline Freeman's *Women And Socialism, Conference Paper 3*.

The next women's conference at Acton, London, in November 1972, was a stormy and unhappy affair during which the microphone was forcibly taken from Selma James. Although the left opposed WFH, it found support among members of the claimants' unions and from unsupported mothers.

During that conference several international

THE WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK CAMPAIGN is one of the most contentious and hotly-debated throughout the international women's movement. In this four-page feature, *The Leveller* invited an activist from the campaign to explain their point of view, and an opponent to say why she disagreed. Both sides were then invited to reply to the arguments of the other.

To assist readers to follow the debate, *Lyn Gamble* provides an introduction to the campaign, and *Zoe Fairbairn* has dug out the basic information on the value of women's work within the home. Additional work by *Wendy McFadden*.



meetings were held to discuss WFH, which are written up in a paper by Priscilla Allen and Sylvine Schmitt called *In Defence Of Feminism: A London Conference Report*. Also a paper was given on the threat to family allowances, and this campaign was now defined as part of Wages for Housework. Under the family allowance banner together they showed their strength at the women's day march in 1973.

But the opposition and criticism from the left still had to be faced. A meeting was called, and that was the birth of the Power Of Women Collective.

The group got to work publishing a leaflet for May Day 1973 entitled *To All Women*. In the meantime Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa were touring North America where it was clear the same issues were uniting women. America already had a movement; the Power of Women Collective decided to consolidate the one forming here. It clearly had grass roots appeal.

They began to publish: titles rolled off the presses, especially Suzie Fleming and Jeremy Mulford's *Falling Wall Press* in Bristol.

In 1974 and 1975 there were international meetings in New York, Montreal, London and Toronto. Autonomous lesbian groups sprang up and they held conferences too, adopting the name "Wages Due Lesbians." "Wages due" as a slogan comes from a 1940's pottery money box in the form of a rolling pin which bears the inscription "If women were paid for all they do. There'd be a lot of wages due."

A WFH women's centre opened in London. A book was published *All Work And No Pay* edited by Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming. They developed Punch and Judy shows; street speeches; songs; stickers and T-shirts, tea-towels and pot holders — all stamped with

## - And Grew

"Wages for Housework." National and local newspapers could not help but notice and gave them coverage.

This year WFH took over the BBC's Open Door slot to present their case. The programme was transmitted and repeated in February and brought in over 20 letters a day for weeks afterwards.

Also this year the first black women's WFH group opened up in New York.

Wages for Housework actively sought publicity, rejecting the traditional women's liberation view that 'the media fucks you over, have nothing to do with it.' It has paid off. They now have international recognition and an image which they control.

In terms of publicity it is not as big as the Equal Pay movement, which was taken up in Parliament; nor the Battered Wives, who got a lot of attention from television. Both are seen by WFH as part of the same struggle. WFH has a staggering amount of grass roots appeal.

When women first hear the idea, a smile often creeps over their faces, and they go "Yeah, why not." And it is still growing.

## The Campaign Position

FOR or against, the feminist debate first circled, then settled on the wage. Everywhere economists and sociologists are making the first reckonings of the value of housework to capital. We women for generations have been calculating what housework has cost us in time, energy, sexual and social possibilities and low wages on the second job. Now we are translating these calculations into the "universal equivalent" — money.

In China women are demanding work points for housework. In Russia the birth rate declines and the number of unsupported mothers demanding state payment skyrockets. In Nigeria in the forties women deprived of land and the independence of its income struck to demand wages for housework they would now be forced to do for free. In the US in the sixties Welfare mothers demanding wages from the state built a mass movement.

*Continued over page*



In Britain women have obstinately turned the "charity" of Social Security into a massive daily confrontation with the state for more money with less control.

Everywhere women are putting in their wage claim and refusing to live in the shadow and under the power of a man's wage, and refusing also the alternative of a second job. The spearhead is the money we have already won: where we have some, we are using it as a lever of power to get more.

To demand money for working is not exactly an oddity in societies dominated by waged labour. Even housework in some forms is waged. Except during slavery, we always got wages for housework in someone else's kitchen. And when governments and industry socialised and industrialised housework in hospitals, schools, canteens, nurseries, laundries, the rag trade, we women made up the bulk of their labour force.

We wouldn't have dreamt of entering these factories for free! If we'd had the money for our first job, we might not have entered them at all. As more of us demand wages for housework, our power to demand equal pay and paid time off in every second job is increased manifold. Every SS mother is one less competitor with other women on the waged labour market — is a power for the partially waged woman.

And that demand for a wage makes housework visible as work. Within the family housework "appeared to be a personal service outside of capital," something that came natural to women. The emotional and sexual work of girlfriend, wife and mother was unseen, like the rest of housework, unless it was not done. Only then was it paid a wage — to foster mothers, prostitute women or therapists. *And only then, when it was waged, was it counted as work.*

The feminist movement which burst out in the late sixties finally established that what was personal was also political, social and economic. And the Wages For Housework Campaign uncovered housework as a crucial area of the capitalist division of labour for which we women are trained from birth. We produce and reproduce the basic ingredient of all industry and all profit, the basic capitalist commodity, labour power.

Every area of that production has been a point of struggle against it. The fight for nurseries and the fight for immigrant women for their children to join them in this country have both been the fight against the State's control of the relationship of mother to child. The fight for student "grants" — a word, like welfare, to mystify the wage — for married women has been the fight against dependence on men which institutionalises us as housewives.

The struggle of pensioners has been led by women who, unlike men, never retire. The fight for women's centre, rape crisis centres, centres for women refusing to be battered, women's studies and paid creches has been the fight for space free of housework, for a base from which to struggle further.

On a much more massive level than most people imagine, lesbian women are refusing the many kinds of housework involved in sexual relations

with those through whom capital supervises and enforces our work, and refusing the discipline which dictates that our deep ties with other women should never be allowed to find sexual expression.

Each of these struggles has been isolated from every other. Each appears to need a strategy of its own. But at the heart of each is the struggle for power: for money or for social services directly and completely under our own control — for wages.

And whenever we have only demanded the service without the control, we have been saddled with further control over us. The most glaring example of that has been the battle for control of our fertility.

For years Women's Liberation in North America rallied round the cry "Free abortion on demand." Abortion was supposed to be "the right to choose." But it was the right only to choose not to have children. At the same time, women, mainly black women, fought forced sterilisation. When abortion was legalised — never free — it became the right of the state, not women, to choose.

The same division has surfaced in Britain, as the "leaders" of the abortion campaign have vehemently insisted that abortion is a separate issue from money. The strategy of Welfare and Social Security mothers has been the opposite — to fight for the money which alone guarantees our power to have children and our power not to.

But refusal to have the children that capital demands of us is a struggle with a long history. In the metropolitan countries from about 1870, women began lowering the birth rate. By 1945 the British State introduced Family Allowance. That is, they paid some women some wages to encourage us to produce more babies. We didn't, but we took the money.

At this moment we are fighting to keep and increase it. The petition which the London Wages For Housework Committee launched May 1st has been the pivot of our protest as women against the erosion of Family Allowance; it also protests the State's use of our flexible working day at home to bridge every gap opened by cuts in wages and social services. We are refusing to be the shock absorbers for their crisis.

It is a disgrace that the Wages for Housework Campaign is alone in publicly insisting that Family Allowance and Wages for Housework come from the state and not from men.

The petition is one way the campaign has moved to reintegrate our battles from the fragmentation our isolation has imposed on them. Because it names and attacks all our work and lays claim to all our wages, the campaign is a reference point for the many fights women are making. Each confrontation loses its sporadic character and connects organisationally with others.

Those who assume that only those with wages work and only those who "work" together can struggle together can't believe what full-time housewives, actresses, telephoneists, prostitutes, bank clerks and cannery workers are together able to achieve.

But last October in Iceland the general strike of women ended the discussion. As one Icelandic placard had it, "When women stop, everything stops," and everything stopped in Iceland.

This year another unwaged sector has surprised those who, in writing off unwaged women as protagonists, also wrote off the Third World, where even most men are unwaged. In Soweto, school girls told their fathers: "Don't go to work today, we'll be demonstrating." Unwaged school workers finally lit the South African tinder box.

Closer to home, in fact at home, 14 & 15 year-old girls and boys last month made Carnival in Notting Hill their pay day — with what

they took home in food and champagne, the local co-op's wage bill was higher than ever before.

The mothers who reproduced them as labour power did a good job — but not for capital. It seems that the "revolutionaries" who define those of us who are wageless out of the struggle for wages will have to defend their position from the other side of the barricades.

*Ruth Hall*

*London Wages For Housework Committee Committee.*

## The Argument Against

**TO DEVOTE** space (let alone time and energy) in penning a refutation of the demand for wages for housework, is no testimony whatsoever to the logic or coherence of such a demand. Rather, like all glib catch phrases, it might have a superficial attraction initially, but that doesn't mean that it has anything positive or practical to offer those unfortunate enough to be duped.

Most women would agree that housework is stultifying drudgery, but this has to be viewed in the overall context of the oppression and exploitation of women. In so doing the question has to be asked of any demand made by or for women, "will it retard or advance their liberation from this oppression?" Without doubt if the demand itself is based on incorrect theoretical premises then it will naturally follow that the practical activity to which it leads will also be misguided, since there is (despite appearances) a relationship between theory and practice.

It is on these two counts that the demand for wages for housework stands condemned

1. because it is incorrect theoretically
2. because, as a consequence of this, it is neither viable nor desirable in practice and would thus serve to retard the struggle for the liberation of women.

In arguing that the demand for wages for housework is wrong theoretically, I make no apology for so doing from the standpoint of Marxist-Leninist theory, since it is only through this that we are able to correctly understand the inner workings of capitalist economy, and more specifically in this context, to understand the real meanings of such terms as "wages" and "work." These terms have a precise scientific definition which is largely obscured by their everyday usage, and if not understood give rise to moralistic or utopian outpourings.

So then, what is a wage? A wage is the monetary expression of the value of labour-power under capitalism and as such is only paid to those who sell their labour power by entering into capitalist relations of production. This raises the question; "what is labour-power," isn't it the same as "work"? No it isn't the same. Everybody works. To make a dress, repair a fuse, put up a shelf etc is "work" in the sense that it involves the expending of energy in making something.

Labour power has a more precise meaning. It is that capacity to work which constitutes the sole possession of the class in a capitalist society which depends on those who own the means of production (the factories, the mines etc), for a livelihood. Being the sole commodity owned by this class, their capacity to work (or labour)





is sold by them to those for whom it is indispensable, ie the capitalist. (To own the means of production without human labour power to set it in motion and render it capable of producing profits, would be quite useless). Only those who sell their labour power in this way are paid a wage.

A housewife undoubtedly works (harder than most people imagine who haven't tried it), but, accepting the above definition, she doesn't sell her labour power because she doesn't enter capitalist production relations. Rather she works privately in the home. But, it could be argued, don't other people work privately and yet get money for it - eg. a cleaner who does similar work to the housewife? Here the similarities in the type of work obscure the real differences between the two cases.

Although it might appear that the individual cleaner who clears up the mess in some posh house in Camden or Islington is working privately, for herself, in reality she isn't. As soon as she decides to sell her labour power, (which she does the moment she knocks on the door), she enters into capitalist relations of production and her reward is a wage.

Even so, it could be further argued by the persistent, that there are some individuals who genuinely do work for themselves, without employing or being employed by others, and yet make money. This is true - owners of one-man businesses, tailors, shopkeepers etc. fit into this category. But the money these people earn is not a wage because they themselves (unlike those who sell their labour power), fully appropriate the fruits of their own labour. They don't sell their labour power, but rather the product of their labour. (Historically, of course this is a dying category of people since the technical development of the forces of production make it less and less possible for individual small producers to compete - ultimately they themselves are forced onto the labour market).

Now the housewife neither sells her labour power nor the product of her labour, (although she did once under the system of simple commodity production which pre-dated industrial capitalism). Thus, whether we like it or not, it is impossible for her to "earn a living" in the monetary sense.

In the same way it would be impossible for a man who dug his own garden for his own use to be paid a wage, even though he could earn wages by doing the identical job for somebody else. In the former case he is not "freely" selling his labour power on the market, which is the essential condition for capitalist production relations, and in consequence the wages system.

Thus the only way a housewife can obtain money for her work is through her husband's pay packet or by claiming allowances from the state. But neither of these are wages, nor can they ever be and no amount of wishful thinking will make them so. Without fully discussing the place of housework within the capitalist economy as a whole, I think it is clear thus far that that as a concept, wages for housework is an emotional rather than a scientific one and as such can only commend itself to those who in some strange way are attracted to the unreal.

But even if the concept wasn't wrong would it be desirable anyway? (Assuming such an eventuality to be possible). For any woman genuinely desiring her liberation, the answer must be emphatically NO. As Engels correctly observed in his *Origin Of The Family* the entry of women into social production is the precondition for their emancipation. This is not to have any illusions about capitalist production, only to understand, as any woman who has

been isolated within her home will recognise, that one's chances of playing a fuller part in and ultimately helping to change society can be realised much more adequately in the arena in which the truly decisive battles are to be fought - the point of production.

This is not to belittle other struggles - merely to place them in context. It would be difficult to think of any demand which more runs counter to this analysis than that of wages for housework. Its almost as though its advocates, despite their revolutionary rhetoric, had colluded together to devise a formula which would serve most effectively to reinforce traditional female stereotyping by keeping us locked away, isolated, and cut off from class struggle forever in our "proper" place - the home.

This, it must be appreciated, solves no problems for women, and merely accentuates their existing ones. It's no good trying to mask it by going on about the dignity of domestic labour and how dreadful factory work is in compari-

**WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK is based, as we tried to show, first, on the massive struggles of women all over the world; second, on the power these struggles have exercised to put capital into crisis and, as in Iceland, to stop it from functioning at all: it can't do without us, not even for a day.**

We work for *capital*. If not, then we work only for men, which means men are the enemy. We don't believe that. Does Mary Davis?

Nor do we believe that men alone are the working class. Yet what class are we if we only "enter capitalist relations" when we go out to work? What class are we if we are "cut off from class struggle forever" when we work full-time only at home?

We are dependent on men for money which gives them power over us. Mary seems to be insisting that we must also be dependent on men for our liberation. But at critical moments men have usually known that they are dependent on us to win what Mary Davis calls the "truly decisive battles."

As far back as 1912 in Alexandria, Louisiana, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, a union of over 30,000, organised for blacks and whites to meet together, which was against the law. Covington Hall, one of the organisers, described it this way.

"There were no women in the convention, and in the men wanted their wives to have the right of membership. A motion to this effect was offered from the floor, and seconded. It was thoroughly discussed, and finally agreed that a housewife, whether wife, mother, sister or daughter, would be allowed membership, her dues to be \$1 a year (men's dues were \$5) As the call for the vote was made, Secretary Smith interrupted to ask, "Does this mean that house women will have a full and equal vote with men on all matters pertaining to the

son. Instead what we must demand from the state is the increased provision of social facilities, (more nurseries etc) to liberate women from the crushing burdens of housework and thus enable them to play as full a part as they want in demanding their rights in the society which exists outside their own four walls.

Mary Davis

*Over The Page : The Economics of the argument .*

## The Replies

union?" "Yes!" was the unanimous answer. "Even to the calling on and the calling off of strikes?" asked Smith. "Yes," they said. A man's wife has as much right as he to vote on strikes, for when a strike is on, the man can go hunting or fishing, and not have to hear hungry children whimpering for something to eat, while the woman has to stay home and take it all. "Besides, but for the housework of their wives, many men could not hold their jobs. Yes, our intention is that she shall have full voting rights with us, even to the calling on and off of strikes."

The secretary responded, "Suits me. I asked the question only to know how to guide myself in such cases."

A lot of people can find out how to guide themselves from this.

When slaves demanded wages they were told they were "misguided" as Mary says we are, that they had been "duped" as Mary says we are, that they "in some strange way" were "attracted to the unreal" as Mary says we and all the millions of women who are demanding wages are. And all in the name of "scientific theory." It was "scientifically proven" that slaves were inferior to wage labourers, and too "emotional," as Mary says we are! "Science" didn't settle the question of slavery. The unwaged slaves did. In the process they also settled what was scientific.

We find it a little late in the day for this old racist rhetoric to be used against women. Capital has our money. We want it. We have the power to get it. We are organising for it internationally. That is *our* science.

It will be interesting to see if Mary is going to help the State to keep it from us - for our own good. *For Mary Davis and for the whole of the left, that is the only theoretical and practical question about wages for Housework that remains.*

Ruth Hall

MARY DAVIS saw a copy of the Wages for Housework campaign's statement before it went to the printer. She told *The Leveller*: "The nub of the case is presented in my original article. Since WFH refuse to engage in specific points, then debate is very difficult.

"You have to have something to reply to. It is difficult for me to reply to them because they don't present a reasoned case but argue purely on a rhetorical and emotional level."



**ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.**

Housewives are officially classified as "not economically active" although this was not always the case. In the 1851 census, wives of farmers and of small businessmen were assumed to be part of the working population. In the 1891 census, women reported as assisting in household duties were reckoned to be "in domestic service" and counted as occupied. Today, full-time wives and mothers are not included in employment statistics at all.

**HOW MUCH MONEY HOUSEWIVES GET**

Woman's Own Magazine and the National Consumer Council surveyed 4,000 of the magazines readers in July 1975, and analysis of a sample of the replies showed that:

- Husbands pass less than half their pay rises on to wives for housekeeping.
- Husbands pass less than half their pay rises on to wives for housekeeping.
- One in five mothers had no increase in a year of 25% inflation.
- One in three of the poorest wives had had no increase (i.e. wives on £10 a week or less.) (Woman's Own 20/9/75.)

**COST OF DAY-CARE**

*Low Cost Day Provision for the Under-5s.*

Papers from a conference organised by the DES and the DHSS at Sunningdale Park, 9-10 January 1976, quoted the following approximate costs for different kinds of day care.

Local authority day care: Capital cost - £3,000 per place. Annual cost £700. Private: Not known.

Private: Not known.

Employers: £800 per year.

Child minders: £100 - £520 per year.

Local authority sponsorship with private child-minder: £215-£335.

Playgroup (5 sessions a week): £135.

*Cost Of Putting Child Into Care.*

The *Sunday Times* (21/9/76) quoted £2,681 as the cost of keeping four children in care for six months while their mother was in prison - i.e. about £100 per child per month. (But a more exact figure is probably available - from DHSS, NSPCC etc.)

*Cost Of Caring For The Elderly*

*Guardian* 28/1/76: "Relatives and neighbours of old people living alone in Kent are to be paid up to £35 a week to take care of them in their own homes and flats. The alternative would be to move the frail old folk into more expensive residential homes run by the county council. The scheme will cost £50,000 a year. . . "In an ideal world (says the Director of Social Services) relatives and friends would care for those who are too feeble to help themselves. But we now know that you cannot get people to look after others in the community without paying them. No-one works for nothing these days."

Cost of private residential accommodation for the elderly in one county - Sussex - ranges from £17 - £90.

**TIME SPENT ON HOUSEWORK**

a) The National Council of Women reported in 1974 to the Council of Europe's Consultative Assembly on the Economic and Social Value of the work of the Mother in the Home, that the time spent running the home by different members of the family and at different stages in the family's development, was as follows:

**AVERAGE HOURS WORKED PER WEEK BY:**

Family Phase	Mother	Husband	Family	Paid Help	Total
Youngest child under 5	87	18	-	1	106
" " 5-11	60	10	1	3	74
" " 11-18	69	12	4	4	89
" " 18 plus	56	11	4.5	8	79.5

(this was based on questionnaires compiled in homes throughout the country, collated with similar studies in other countries. See *Women Speaking*, January - March 1975.)

b) Ann Oakley's survey of 40 London housewives in 1971 concluded that an average of 77 hours a week was worked, varying with the number of children as follows:

**WEEKLY HOURS SPENT IN HOUSEWORK**

No. of children	40-9	50-9	60-9	70-9	80-9	90-9	100 plus	Total
one	1	2	5	5	1	1	1	16
two	0	1	1	5	4	0	1	12
three or more	0	0	0	2	8	2	0	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>40</b>

(See Ann Oakley: *The Sociology Of Housework*, Martin Robertson 1974).

**WHAT IS HOUSEWORK WORTH?**

There is no simple answer to this question; a number of approaches have been tried. One can estimate the cost of paying a commercial rate for the work done; one can look at what payments are made to people who are employed to do work usually done by housewives; one can count the cost to the welfare state of housewives' failure to do this work.

a) The National Council of Women Survey, quoted above, estimates that if women were paid 50p per hour, overtime, and double time for Sundays, the total cost would be about £3,448 pa per average family of four. The over-

all cost of £22,000 million would represent one-third of GNP (1973 figures.)

b) The Legal and General Insurance Company, promoting life insurance for wives, estimates that £71 per week would be a realistic cost of replacing the labour of a mother of young children, including the employment of nanny, housekeeper and cleaning lady. (See *The Guardian* 25/6/75.) And as the *Daily Express* pointed out, writing on a similar theme on April 1 1974, "You couldn't expect a housekeeper to work like a wife does. She would expect regular evenings off, and probably a daily to help with the housework."

AGE OF CHILD	S. B. PAYMENT (Nov 75)	FOSTERING ALLOWANCE
0 - 4	£3.10 (0 - 5)	£ 9.84
5 - 10	£3.75	£11.40
11 - 14	£4.60 (11-12)	
	£5.60 (13-15)	£12.96
15 - 17	£6.70 (16-17)	£14.52
	£8.70 (18 plus)	

PLUS special allowances

Mia Kellmer Pringle, director of the National Children's Bureau, said in November 1975 that mothers at home should be paid a salary equivalent to two thirds of what a teacher gets, and that this would save money in the long run because of the high costs caused by the casualties of poor mothering.

The NCB has been unable to supply the exact basis for this claim, but the fact remains that

the state is far readier with money for the casualties of broken families than for support of the families in the first place.

This is most cruelly seen in comparing Supplementary Benefit levels paid to one parent families to care for their own children, with allowances paid to foster parents to care for the children of parents who couldn't cope.

An interesting sidelight on the problem of paying for housework is thrown by the situation of au pair girls. According to a Home Office guide, "au pair is an arrangement under which a girl who is not less than 17 comes to the UK primarily to learn English. . . she receives her keep, entertainment and pocket money and is expected to help with the housework. . . the relationship between the girl and her hostess is a personal one. . . the arrangement should not be confused with regular domestic employment for which, except for EEC nationals, a permit from the Department of Employment is required."

So what is the au pair girl, then? Working or not? Paid or not? It is interesting to note that special immigration concessions for au pairs are not available for boys: "We don't think

boys would accept au pair arrangements," explain a Home Office spokesman. One could hardly blame the boys if they didn't; an article in the *Sunday Times* 15/2/76 indicated the kind of money au pair get; £7 a week for 6 hours a day seemed normal. Compared with an industrial wage, it is, of course, ludicrous; but compared with the normal payment for housework - nothing - it is generous in the extreme.

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For history of the debate as to whether mothers should have an income in their own right or be dependent on their husbands, See Vol 2 of the *Finer Report* ("Report of the Committee on One-Parent Families") Appendix 5, "History of the Obligation to Maintain."

THE CURSE of the cowardly Gnome operates only retrospectively, when someone who has sued *Private Eye* drops dead or is stricken by sickness or accident. This is the occasion of much mirth in the magazine — you can hear them choking on their cream buns — and presumably among the curious colony of political cripples that comprises its readership.

From time to time this readership (worth 100,000 words of anybody's Ph.D thesis in sociology, consisting as it does of the guilt-ridden in Fleet Street, the disgruntled in the City, and the mindless in the Kings Road who know what *Private Eye* is about — themselves — plus the insecure who imagine it's worthwhile *getting* to know) are carefully exhorted to dip into their pockets to save their parish magazine from extinction.

The red line on the latest restoration fund thermometer outside the parish church in Greek Street has now swollen over the £26,000 calibration. This is very successful fund-raising, which will doubtless prove as profitable to Lord Gnome and his lawyers, the notorious Sue, Grabbit and Runne, alias Bindman and Partners of Grays Inn Road, London WC1, as earlier appeals, and one can see why.

Unlike, say, poor Zelda Curtis in the *Morning Star*, Gnome (alias Richard Ingrams) can point to a specific bogeyman, in James Goldsmith, and because he is a power in the City and mingles, whatever he might say, with the more odious parasites on society, the faithful can be deluded into thinking they are taking part in some assault on the ruling class.

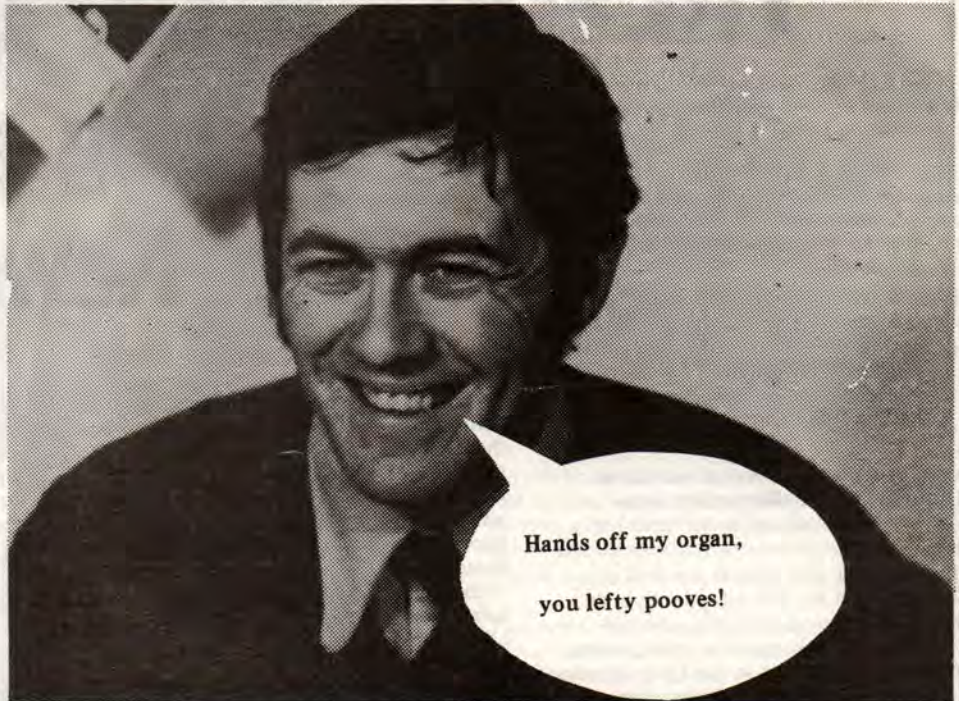
Nothing could be further from the truth. People who imagine that *Private Eye* is a radical, let alone a political voice have their vision limited to the world it presents. No, it is the voice of the clique in the sixth form common room that likes to thumb noses at the prefects behind their backs, without challenging their authority. It is sexist, racist, elitist, vehemently anti-socialist. And its standards of journalism are shocking.

There has long been a justification of *Private Eye* known as the "pantomime horse": this concedes that the front end is pretty gruesome, the asinine grin fairly representing its infantile humour, distasteful gossip and irritating in-group reference. But at the back, doing the pushing, is the serious investigative journalism that lifts the lid off the corruption in society like it's lifted nowhere else, and this, together with the scoops that journalists are said to bring in pocketfuls, stories they cannot get into the straight papers, is the true purpose and nature of the beast — the best-informed radical journal there is.

supporters of the theory use as referees people like Richard West, the socialist writer who specialised on Vietnam and the multi-nationals; Martin Walker, *The Guardian's* one-time ace investigator and *enfant terrible*; Michael Gilard, Granada TV researcher who writes the apparently authoritative City Slicker column; Martin Tomkinson, he who donned the Mantle of Foot when he took over the back pages on IS colleague Paul Foot's departure to *Socialist Worker*. These men work for or with *Private Eye*.

The theory must now be discredited. The two ends of the pantomime horse have swapped places. The "serious" material has become either very right-wing, or trivialised by obsession with personalities, or just downright incomprehensible. Only people directly concerned with the City can understand Slicker; only Fleet Street journalists can be interested in Street of Shame; only Birmingham builders can

# WE DEFY THE CURSE



## OF LORD GNOME

follow the long-running serial "Ross and Crookery," which is set to rival "Crossroads" in triviality and boredom.

The only reason for reading the *Eye* now is for the funnies; for Auberon Waugh and Claud Cockburn, who wield irony with more dexterity than anyone in print (Bernard Levin please drop dead): for the cartoons, Dave Spart, and the take-offs of the national press. These are often side-splitting — but *Private Eye* has never attacked the real social evils of Fleet Street: the racism, the sexism and the lies in its political and economic coverage.

In fact it is perpetuating them. Industry News, by Blackleg, consists of attacks on trade unionism that often, like the last issue's incoherent tirade at the NUJ's fight for a closed shop, exceed what even the *Daily Telegraph* would dare to print. This was an interesting piece: for those who didn't see it, and who care, it attempted to tie left-wing militancy in the union to the right-wing Labour mafia that festered around Poulson and T. Dan Smith. No possible connection between these elements could be imagined: so the *Eye* constructed one, in geography, by pointing out that Chapels fighting for a closed shop were sometimes in the very same counties that Poulson's mates ran in the fifties! Which is like saying Ulrike Meinhof was a Nazi. There was no factual evidence. The one Chapel actually mentioned (the *Eye* just said "Northamptonshire," but presumably it meant the *Evening Telegraph*, Kettering) had indeed decided not to pursue the closed shop by industrial action some five weeks before the *Eye* came out.

"Construct" is the word. The stories that have got the *Eye* into trouble have nearly always been simply wrong. Hearsay is too often greedily accepted and thrown into print without checking. Forget politics for a minute, the *Eye's* practice is indefensible by the standards of the much-reviled Street of Shame itself, where reporters, however loaded their final stories may be are at least supposed to get deeply into their subjects. That's why the *Eye*

is always apologising — for cock-ups that could have been prevented by a single phone-call.

One useful function of frequent lost lawsuits has been to promote the *Eye's* precious image, "too poor to be worth suing." Despite its growing prosperity the *Eye* has by careful accounting been able to preserve this facade. Pressdram Ltd. turns in losses, always near £50,000 a year, in its annual balance sheet, and the appeals it has launched have always brought in more than the relevant actions have cost. And they're marvellous things for readership identity, these appeals. Any circulation manager will tell you that. Now Goldsmith is calling the bluff.

The *Eye* has another safety valve, in addition to the Deep Grovel. This is innuendo. It can write, for instance: "It is utterly untrue that Lord Farface has been having deep discussions on Uganda with his secretary Caroline Crumpet." Now, to the *Eye* readers that means: "Lord F is fucking Miss C." On the other hand the *Eye* can say it means the exact opposite. The truth, of course, is that it means *nothing at all*.

The *Eye's* sexual attitudes are wholly coloured by this smutty behind-the-bicycle-sheds approach. The mag is, after all, largely written by a closed group of ex-public schoolboys (Ingrams, the brothers Rushton, Fantoni, and Peter Cook, the man with the money) who seem, in particular, to have a positive terror of women and homosexuals. There never was anything liberating in the Rushtonian obsession with "pooves". And they never write about women, ever (except in a "Ugandan" context).

How sick it all is, and how sad. Oh for the days of the Poulson exposures, Ronan Point, the B Specials (what do we get on Northern Ireland now?), the heart transplanters, Jerome Hoffman. . . but *Private Eye* has served its historical purpose. The time has come to close down, and if Comrade Goldsmith has been ordained as the *deus ex machina*, so be it.

Tim Gopsill.

## THE LEVELLER INTERVIEW

## TREVOR AND BILL

## On putting politics before News at Ten

*POLITICAL* theatre implies some kind of feeling, experience or understanding to be shared with an audience. And if it's worth sharing at all, then surely it's worth sharing with as many as possible. Which is why anybody who has ever done anything in that line of business regards TV, and it's freedom to drop in on almost everybody in the nation, with a mixture of horror and longing.

As far as the openly marxist drama goes, Trevor Griffiths has gone further than most simply by taking over the prime nine o'clock slot for eleven episodes of *Bill Brand*, an everyday tale of a Labour MP up to and including a leadership battle inside the party.

I suppose the idea was to try and set out an extended critique of parliamentary democracy and social democracy in the form of a popular TV series.

The genesis of the idea came to me on General Election night in 1974. I happened to be in a restaurant where a lot of rich showbiz types were confidently awaiting results, having laid fairly substantial bets on the Tories winning. And it was interesting to watch what happened as the results began to trickle through and computer forecasts made it look as if Labour were going to get in by about 30 seats, and suddenly it all changed.

I don't really know why that was resonant, but it was, and it seemed to me that was what I ought to do.

For very obvious reasons, electoral politics are still what most people consider to be politics in this country, and it's important that that should be demystified, or at least beset by questions.

What I was trying to say throughout the series was that the traditions of the labour movement were inadequate to take the struggle further, and that we had to discover new traditions, or revive even older ones. And that we had to seek connective tissue between electoral party politics, which still has a mystifying mass appeal, and extra-parliamentary socialist activity.

I do believe in those connections. I do believe in genuinely mass parties. I cannot see even the germs of those mass parties in existing revolutionary groupings, IS, IMG, WRP and so on....

In so far as the series did not come up with the statements and conclusions about what everybody who watched should now do, it reflected something in me which is not didactic or preachy, I mean in the way I write.

But then I don't write plays like people who write *Socialist Worker* or *Red Weekly*.

*The way in which Griffiths writes is in the central tradition of our cultural history. In the mainstream mode of naturalism. So the characters have a life of their own; they don't have to stand for anything, their lives don't automatically lead to general conclusions.*

Bill Brand was certainly closest in the play to how I would express my political perception, and undeniably elements of my own psychological make-up were involved in the creation of the character. But I think Brand was expressly criticised for certain inadequacies,

certain incapacities and certain limitations of vision.

On the whole it seemed to me that he was attacking the Labour Party from the left, from the left of the Tribune group. I think it's wrong to over-identify Brand with Tribune. I think the sharpest criticism of the whole series was of Tribune itself, and of its relative impotence, it's nature as a pawn in the game. Brand was a curious composite of a whole lot of things that are still tolerable just inside the Labour Party: a kind of marxism, a kind of democratism. I think the Labour Party is going to split in the early eighties in a very serious way. And when that happens, it's important to know where those people on the far left of the party are going to go.

*If that's one problem, how to present it dramatically is another. Naturalism as a mode of political theatre has been attacked, most recently by John McGrath at the Edinburgh Festival, because it fails to reveal the full range of social forces which act on the characters and give meaning and direction to their actions. But then there is also the problem of reaching that massive audience which gets its drama exclusively through the magic box.*

"Strategic penetrations" is a phrase I use a lot about the work of socialists and marxists in bourgeois cultures. And the essence of strategic penetration is to pick your ground, and to know it fairly well. I think people are still wandering around with quite inappropriate notions of what they can do and what they can't do.

**"I have to work with the popular imagination which has been shaped by naturalism. I am not interested in talking to 38 university graduates in a cellar in Soho."**

I simply cannot understand socialist playwrights who do not devote most of their time to television. That they can write for the Royal Court and the National Theatre, and only that, seems to me a wilful self-delusion about the nature of theatre in a bourgeois culture now

I'm not conscious of making compromises in what I want to say and how I want to say it. The real limitation is one's own understanding of the political system and the political process. A failure to perceive adequately will be reflected in what you say and how you say it. But it's just thunderingly exciting to be able to talk to large numbers of people in the working class, and I just can't understand why everybody doesn't want to do it.

It interfaces with the whole problem of form, which is to do with realistic modes as against non-realistic alienating modes.

I chose to work in those modes because I have to work now. I have to work with the popular imagination which has been shaped by naturalism. I am not interested in talking to 38 university graduates in a cellar in Soho.

It's my guess that we still have to handle realism. One of the things about realistic modes is still that you can offer through them demystifying, undistorted, more accurate, counter descriptions of political processes and social reality than people get through other uses of naturalism. So that if for every *Sweeney* that went out, a *Bill Brand* went out, there would be a real struggle for the popular imagination. The two things would be saying, "It's like this isn't it?" and people would be free to make liberating choices about where reality lies. Testing both against their own experience.

*Realism means that the enemy wears a human face. You can't stick black hats on the bad MPs and white hats on the good ones. Which side is which can get confused. Who wins the debate when the goodie has failings and the baddie has something going for him?*

I try to occupy the space of all the people I'm talking about. I have actually met almost nobody who goes around saying to people, "Well the trouble with me is I'm a total shit. I tell lies all the time, and all I'm about is self-advancement; I don't give a fuck for anybody." People don't seem to operate that way.

But when I read about these people in *Socialist Worker* there is a sense in which the guy knows he's a shit. So that everybody who does not agree with you is in some way cynically distanced from his own reality, and wholly self-consciously so. I've never found that to be the case. So when I write this way, it's with a feeling that it's kind of truthful. But it certainly doesn't lead to any snap conclusions from scenes or speeches.

If we're going to have a post-revolutionary society where people really are to become agents of their own destiny; if people are going to make themselves and not be made by others, then we have to come to terms with this complexity. And the sooner we start that, by art and culture generally, the better.

It's no answer to one form of mystification to counter it with another. I'll give you an example. I saw a play done by a terrific group. They were talking about something very important, multinationals. Two scenes: First is about the people who run Phillips, the Dutch firm. They're juggling plant and labour forces and money around the world seeking the maximisation of profit. Now they are Dutch, so of course they have to speak a risible English which invites an audience to laugh. But there's enough to say about what they're doing without inviting the

# TREVOR GRIFFITHS



What are they all playing at ? Jack Sheperd as Bill Brand in a scene from the TV series.

\*bits of poetry, little bits of movies, little bits of television that still lodge and resonate in our own minds.

It is interesting that John McGrath, after being story editor and director of some of Troy Kennedy Martin's early work, then helped to devise the first twelve *Z Cars*. A series looking for a purchase on a really large popular audience, and succeeding magnificently.

But what was *Z Cars* ? Was it two men with a baton and a zoot suit standing in front of a set which said Police ? No, it was guys in an illusory set, a set which represented a real room, and a real world therefore, and so on. It was speeded-up naturalism. What they did, and they did it brilliantly, was that they had three scenes on a page instead of one scene on three pages. But they didn't transform the nature of the mode. The mode remained naturalistic. There is a disjuncture which John hasn't explained and I'm deeply interested in it.

*But the political theatre groups - Cast, 7.84, Red Ladder, General Will and others, are working with increasing success in a non-naturalistic mode. Didactic political drama is alive and its kicks get heftier.*

They are doing extraordinary work, and are laying the foundation for a genuinely popular theatre, not just a drama, which I think is going to be very important in five to ten years' time.

It's not the only battleground to be fighting, is what I'm saying. There are still big and important battles to be fought on and for television. Because if we evacuate that ground, it is an instrument for fascist repression. I mean like hand-made. It's just there and ready, and the signs are that it could be used very quickly and very efficiently.

So I don't see any contradiction or exclusivity here. They are both important.

*And in one other way, the plays could have got involved in immediate politics; they were written before Wilson resigned and the leadership struggle in the Labour Party. Newspaper critics were very struck with this. With the accuracy with which Griffiths seemed to have predicted those few months in Labour history. Coo, they said, what a clever playwright to have got so close to reality.*

*But if Bill Brand had been screened, as was originally intended, in the Spring schedules, that is, before the Wilson resignation 'bomb-shell', things might have been different.*

When I began to write it, it could have well been an interventionist piece in the sense that a lot of us knew that Wilson was not going to go full-term and therefore there was going to be a crisis of some sort which we could locate in the struggle for leadership.

I thought it would be possible to talk to the labour movement and the Labour Party through the plays and say, "it seems to me that these are the sorts of issues that are going to be raised, these are the personalities that are going to emerge, and these are the dangers that will ensue should a revisionist such as Jenkins be placed in power."

I think I was also right to say that the only way the Foot figure could have won is in a direct confrontation with the revisionist.

I was also right to say that the centre would finally back a revisionist candidate against the left Tribune candidate. But all that would have been much more potent had it happened before the leadership struggle took place.

Nigel Thomas

audience to respond chauvinistically. Goddamit, three scenes later we get the final speech of Allende, just before he's gunned down. It's an important and moving statement. When that's presented he suddenly speaks beautiful English. So beautiful it's almost Welsh, it sounds like Richard Burton. He is wonderfully lit from beneath. Mounting chords of sympathetic music. This in a non-naturalistic mode by the way. There is a demand for awed reverence in the audience. It seems to me impermissible, because that is training people to respond in manipulated and indiscriminating ways.

*Not that the worker in a realistic mode cannot use his craft to help the audience along to the response he wants. Naturalistic does not mean objective or without bias. There's one scene where Willie Moores, a character not unlike Jack Jones, brings the full moral power of having fought in the Spanish Civil War to bear on Bill Brand.*

It actually happened last year at the Labour Party conference, in front of a Tribune meeting of a thousand people.

But how did it go on TV ?

"I didn't come back, and my father didn't die so that I could sell out my class, okay ?" that was his last line. And then as he was walking out, Brand asks one question : "Oh, Daly asks what's going to happen if they drop the commitment to nationalise the docks ?" And he looks at him and goes out. And the last shot of the scene is a foreground of a picture of Lord Citrine hanging on the wall. Slightly manipulative if you like, but I think the scene is delivering a rather complex point in a subtle way.

*Nevertheless, McGrath singled out Brand as an example of a failure to achieve its political intentions precisely because it was in the naturalistic mode. And reaction to the plays did vary greatly, even down to what they were really about. Many read into them merely a depiction of the horse-trading, unprincipled approach to politics of the leaders of the labour movement. And there was the case of the Lady journalist who saw in them a fascinating study of "a man unable to make relationships".*

I don't know how you can prevent people getting out of the play what they want. It's very interesting that Brecht himself has been celebrated most fulsomely in precisely those areas where he was selling a realistic mode against an alienated mode. It's only in that sense that he's been assimilated into this dramatic culture.

"There are still big and important battles to be fought on and for television. Because if we evacuate that ground, it is an instrument for fascist repression."

I'm not sure that plays don't resonate at different levels in the same person. People are going to make one response, which is a *Coronation Street* or *Crassroads* response, immediately, because after all the stuff is coming out like wallpaper, and *Bill Brand* is wedged between Auberon Waugh, or whatever it is, and *News At Ten*. Interesting interfaces there, by the way.

And in a different way, and with a different time-span, things might recur in the consciousness of people who watched it.

We know virtually nothing about this. We can only hazard guesses. We can only, in a way, introspect, and ask questions about little

# Letters

WRITE TO US : Send Letters to 155a, Drummond Street, London NW 1.

## REPRESSION-NOT ONLY GUNS

Dear *Leveller*,

A number of people commented on the 'bitty' feel of the pilot. The paper seemed to be composed of very disparate pieces and to lack an overall editorial direction. It is very difficult to tread the line between being another sectarian rag or being so diffuse that the effect is utter confusion. But it's an effort which I think *The Leveller* has to consciously attempt. More worrying, what editorial direction the pilot did have seemed to be positively unhelpful.

My main objection was to Tony Bunyan's piece on the agit-police, and your cover on the Balcombe Street siege. There is a left wing myth abroad which holds that the ruling classes only maintain their control through overt state repression. There is some truth in this, of course, but overall it is grossly exaggerated. Ruling classes do not usually maintain control by armed force, but by successful psychological dominance. Despite all the fashionable discussion of Gramsci and hegemony over the past decade, the left finds it hard to accept this. After all, it indicates that the ruling classes do have mass popular support and an understanding of popular psychology that the left does not - and the left finds this a hard pill to swallow.

Are you suggesting that the Balcombe Street siege was an example of a repressive state machine opera-



ting against a popular movement? Well, you might be able to argue an intellectual case for this, but I doubt it would win much sympathy in working class circles.

To the ordinary workers I know, Balcombe Street was a situation where a group of armed men burst into a working class home and held up a couple of ordinary people - who had no direct involvement with the Irish situation - at gunpoint for several days. The police were not seen as oppressors, but as rescuers of the people concerned, who were widely seen as victims.

These points seem to me to be fundamental, because the left/alternative press seems to operate with a series of over-simplified ideas which serve to convince none but the already converted. Those papers at the 'alternative' end of the scale adopt a populist rhetoric which often serves to strengthen the right or centre instead of socialists.

For instance, the culmination of a long period of anti-corruption exposes by *Rebecca* and other South Wales papers was seen at the last municipal elections in Swansea, where the discredited Labour Group was swept from office by the right wing ratepayers alliance.

While the hard left papers adopt a simplistic economism which keeps debate at the level of wage bargaining. Both groups have the crude and vulgar perspective on social control displayed by the Bunyan piece, and both groups, when asked when the revolution starts, keep postponing until tomorrow. It would be sad to see *The Leveller* caught up in the same dead ends.

There are no easy answers for those tackling the problems of establishment hegemony, but one approach which I have found helpful myself is that of Warren and Prior in their pamphlet 'Advanced Capitalism and Backward Socialism'\*. Their analysis of the failure on the left to come to terms with modern capitalist development either at the level of economic theory or political development is a powerful one.

While it doesn't solve all the problems, it points the way to an alternative to capitalist hegemony which certainly deserves consideration.

Still, the important thing at the moment is to encourage the maximum exchange of ideas and information on the left, and in this *The Leveller* is a valuable addition to the scene. All socialists worth the name will support it and wish it well. Good luck.

Yours fraternally

Terry Fowler,  
*Birmingham Broadside*,  
Handsworth, Birmingham.

\*This is Spokesman Pamphlet 46 available at 30p plus postage from Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham.

## TOP LEVEL CP FOOTBALLERS.

Re: the article on page 27 of the pilot issue about Jackie McNamara, 'thought to be the only member of the Communist Party in top-level football.'

Another party member, Peter C Cordwell, plays professionally in the Finnish First Division. Bearing in mind that Finland play England in the World Cup in June and that Reipas Lahti nearly knocked West Ham out of the European Cup-Winners' Cup, perhaps Pete can be considered to be playing in top-level football - though I agree that is debatable.

Best wishes,

Terry Bushell, Sports Dept,  
*Morning Star*, London.

*Readers south of the border may be unaware of the rumpus in Scotland over the interview with Celtic midfield player Jackie McNamara in The Leveller's pilot issue. In this he said he was a CP member and sounded off about the exploitation of footballers in Scotland. The popular press in Glasgow started a "Red Jackie" witch-hunt, and despite half-hearted support from the secretary of the Scottish Professional Footballers' Association, McNamara felt he had to deny the whole contents of the interview to keep his job. The Scottish journalist, John Hodgman, who did the interview for us, took a lot of stick as well, and because McNamara was a friend, did not challenge his withdrawal. In the end it did not profit him anyway; Jackie was transferred to Hibernian, the Edinburgh team, last month.*

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## BRIANTS - 'NEVER WANTED A CO-OP'

Your article 'Socialism in One Factory' - with which I agree in broad outline, contained, however, some errors of fact, which I thought I should point out.

The Briant 'Work-In' came to a formal close when a Mr Brokdorf offered to take over the plant as a new manager. The Occupation Committee had spent many months trying to attract a new owner - they had no intention of forming a co-op - and Brokdorf and others had been blowing hot and cold for some time. Eventually the deal was clinched and the workforce (less a few who had been made redundant by joint-agreement) returned to work.

However the new owner soon ran into capitalisation difficulties of some sort, or, some say, had been a 'plant' anyway, (or else just got cold feet) because one evening at the end of a shift when the building was deserted, several dozen hired security police with dogs, turned up and took possession. There was no chance of a sit-in and the factory remained closed (as you say) to this day.

True, during the work-in itself, before the re-start under new managers, numbers had got down to a few dozen, and lower over weekends... and certainly the union bureaucrats were pretty antagonistic. But the Briants workers got tremendous support from the dockers and their stewards and from the labour movement generally.

Yours fraternally

Dave Elliott  
London W11.

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## TRADE UNIONS... NOT JUST A BUREAUCRACY

It is an achievement to have produced a pilot issue of *The Leveller* and I hesitate to be critical but hope that the following is useful. I write as a member of the CP and a minor honorary TU bureaucrat - a Trades Council Chairman.

My two main criticisms concern 'Socialism in one factory' and your Founding Statement. Your claims that you are not here to push a line... and that you don't represent any faction or tendency, will be hard to maintain if 'Soc. in One Fact.' is an example of what we can expect in the future. This article quite clearly has a line in the CP and the official TU leadership.

I doubt whether J. Reid or any other members of the CP were trying to create Socialism in one factory - 'pre-Stalinism.' The CP is well aware of the limitations of 'workers control' within a capitalist system and innumerable articles on these have been produced in our publications.

I accept that you desire to help the progressive movement but over-reaction to shortcomings in the TU leadership is not helpful. The movement despite its present limitations and short sighted concentration on economic matters, is essentially and potentially one of the main areas for working class and socialist advance. I believe that even now the TU movement organised at branch, work places, Trades Councils, Union Conferen-

# SHOCK HORROR

Don't get seduced into thinking you've got to expose scandals all the time; lots of shock-horror drama. The capitalist system works more subtly. And more to the point, it suits them well if the press create a fuss about scandals (Poulson, Lonrho, etc) because they can then argue that by taking action on 'excesses' or the unacceptable face, they've demonstrated that the system has the capacity to exorcise the occasional (atypical) abuse.

The best example was Watergate. The message of the Redford film was... 'the little man can sort

things out and everything'll be OK if we work together.' It's not true so don't play into their hands.

Also, I worry a bit about the cultural coverage. 'Putting it in its political context' is all very well but often turns out strident, naive and exceptionally boring. I speak from experience of a sociology of art course; nothing but Lukacs and bourgeois individualism the whole time.

For the time being, all goodwill,  
John Wiltshire,  
York.

ces, etc provides the setting for socialists and progressives to work in.

Comments on TU bureaucracy in the article are I believe a red-herring. The problem which has and continues to hold back the movement is not that the TU bureaucracy is an impediment, as all bureaucracies can be, but that the leadership is still influenced by reformist ideas. However, I believe that advances have been made in changing this achieved by patient and sometimes frustrating work over a number of years.

Merely to dismiss the official TU movement as a bureaucracy is barren and ensures a continuance of the reformist grip on the TU machinery. Utmost pressure from the rank and file is necessary to demand progressive policies and to see that they are carried out. . . I may be wrong but I get the feeling that there is a tendency for non-industrial trade-unionists to draw back from being active at their workplace. I expect this arises from a fear of jeopardising job prospects, and you might run an article on how to overcome this.

Best wishes  
Reg Deering  
Hemel Hempstead.

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#### A NON-SECTARIAN INITIATIVE

We need to answer questions like : what does *The Leveller*, in particular, have to offer at this point in time? Why does it represent a political initiative which (a) should be supported in order to advance the socialist movement, and (b) could well succeed where others have failed?

How have things in Britain changed in the last five years which mean that *The Leveller* is something every serious socialist, of no matter what brand, should support?

In sum, why is a non-sectarian, 'broad left' initiative like *The Leveller* important and appropriate NOW.

My tentative answer goes something like this:

1. Since the post war political revival of the left in Britain some eight or so years ago, a particular model of how the left is going to grow and expand has tended to dominate (not necessarily by merit perhaps by default and inexperience, I don't know). Basically the model has been that we build our political group - on whatever section of the left we are - and that the groups represent the embryo of the future revolutionary challenge to capitalism. How they'll do this has been uncertain. Some believe their groups will hegemonise the left.

Others see a fusion sometime in the future into some kind of group none of us can yet conceive of. The important point is that the groups are the repository of the best and most progressive elements in the anti-capitalist challenge, and the most valuable thing revolutionaries can do at the moment is develop their organisations with a greater or lesser degree of sectarianism. We all know the argument.

2. However, during the recent years of crisis it has become apparent to many people that the groups

have been unable to respond adequately to the situation, either in theory or in practice. My impression is that two things have happened as a result:

- a) the groups have split and split again; often becoming more sectarian and dogmatic as they become more defensive and frustrated at not being able to handle what appears to be a period of unprecedented revolutionary upheaval.
  - b) Large numbers of experienced militants have voted with their feet and left the groups. In small ways up and down the country they have begun building open, non partisan political focuses with the people around them.
  - c) At the same time the general crisis has drawn a lot more people into the socialist camp, so that the revolutionary movement is much larger in this country than it has been for many years.
- 3) As a result we have a situation something like this:
- a) The groups are attracting very large peripheries around them of people drawn to them because there is no other focus. Now more than ever the groups peripheries are much larger and more important than the groups themselves. Yet they seem to be making very little headway in recruiting this periphery - this may even be impossible, often for the right reasons.
  - b) Much of the most exciting and interesting political work is taking place outside the groups. Theoretically none of the groups are advancing our understanding far, and certainly have far less credibility than things like Critique, CSE and so on.

Some of the most exciting organising is being done by non partisan people (often ex the groups - beaver away in local situations).

In general, the richness of the current political experience is throwing up an incredible diversity of ideas and initiatives which the organised groups have been totally unable to match - whether it's Portugal, Angola, sexual politics, alternative technology, the women's movement, therapy, culture, etc. . .

Looked at from another point of view (which our brothers and sisters in *Race Today* would approve of) it can be argued that developments in capital have created probably the most complex and diversified working class that has ever existed. And in Britain there are often almost watertight compartments between the different sections which means that it is impossible, at this time, for any one organisation to comprehend them all. The process of unification is apparently a long way off and certainly won't be the result of any one group calling for it.

4) Therefore, it can be argued that the dominant model of revolutionary development has, for the time being in Britain, reached its useful limits. The organised left groups have been for many of us a valuable training ground, but their limits are now constraining our development and negating the richness and complexity of the present political movement.

We are in a situation which requires an open-minded political approach and a flexible organisational one. In the future an organised political group will undoubtedly have a role to play (I can't myself throw out Lenin quite so easily) but they will have to grow out of the new soil of today. Reconstituted groups, reconstituted ideas.

5) This is the context in which *The Leveller* is being born and will make a contribution.

Nick Davison,  
London W10.

#### WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Many thanks for sending the pilot issue of *The Leveller*

What chance of me becoming a Founding Subscriber? Not a chance in the world. Let me be brutally frank. If this is what Marxist publishing is really all about, give me KUNG FU MONTHLY any day of the week.

Best wishes

Felix Dennis,  
Managing Director,  
Bunch Books.

## The thoughts of



## Tony Blackburn

Kneeling down with water up to the bottom of my shorts, I was rocking back and forwards in the motion of shovelling the water-soaked stone at the 'rip' on the edge of the coalface. My knee pads rubbed into my bones and the straps bit into my legs.

The water was pouring in from the 'roof' like a waterfall. It was cascading down my helmet and face, running in streams down my back. The shaft of my shovel was covered in small pieces of wet coal and stone which made a firm grip an added pain.

Feeling fairly fed up with the seemingly endless pile of stones I remember that Chinese miners give them themselves inspiration by repeating quotations from leading figures. The words of disc jockey Tony Blackburn (interviewed in the *Guardian*) came to mind.

"Being a DJ is a risky business-in contrast with mining, for example, where a miner is assured of a job in the pits for life-and it merits in consequence a high rate of pay. Not anyone could do it. Anyone could be a miner."

Yes, I certainly had little to grum-

ble about compared with a brave disc jockey like Mr Blackburn. Whey Aye-a miner killed in Yorkshire every nine days - if you're not him you've got a job for life. And that's if the dust doesn't get you.

A miner in 1930 had a seven per cent higher chance of being killed than anyone else. Why don't we stop being bolshie and realise how well off we are? After all we could have all become disc jockies like examiner Jimmy Saville, who would really love to go back down the pit, of course!

Every day when I go to draw my identity discs from the time office I pass lines of DJs just begging for a chance at the big time down the pits.

Tony Blackburn earns £20,000 per year plus expenses, holidays, etc. With £60 at the top of the miner's 'note', he takes home £38 after deductions.

I was brought back down to earth just then by a shout from a mate. I jumped aside as a ½-ton lump of stone missed crushing me to pulp.

David Douglass  
Doncaster NUM

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# Is the ultra-right as dangerous as it is nasty?

The ideas of the extreme right are being given an increasingly sympathetic hearing. The press, even as they condemn them, are taking their ideas more seriously. Could Britain be vulnerable to a fascist take-over. Colin Jordan, left, just released from prison is holding a newspaper, the bottom line of which reads "Hitler Was Right". The following articles discuss where the ultra-rightists come from, how they operate, what sort of threat they really are, and how they can be beaten.

## HOW THE NATIONAL FRONT ORGANISED IN ROTHERHAM

ONE of the most telling indications this year of the potential appeal of the National Front for the working class was the Rotherham Byelection on 24 June.

In a solidly working-class industrial South Yorkshire conurbation the NF was able to poll 1,696 votes, and to go within 500 votes of overtaking the Liberals as the third party behind Labour and Tory. The NF achieved 6 per cent of the poll without ever having had a presence in the area before. The Labour vote dropped from 26,000 to 14,000.

The National Front branch that now exists in Rotherham was born out of the campaign waged around the election by a very small number of NF activists; in particular, out of the march held through the immigrant neighbourhood of Eastwood on Saturday 19 June.

The organising base of the branch was decidedly lower middle class in character. The election agent was Ivan Peirson, 32, describing himself as an accountant (though he is not a member of any of the professional associations of accountants). In 1974, Peirson had been the Front's agent in the nearby marginal constituency of Sheffield (Heeley). This proved an unhappy campaign for him, his main election rally being taken over, without violence, by a predominately left-wing audience.

Shortly after the 1974 election, Peirson moved to a new house on a lower middle-class 'in-fill' estate in Kimberworth, Rotherham, a comfortable mile and half from the central industrial areas. Surrounded by a mixture of decaying terraces and council estates, the new owner-

occupiers there experienced a sense of insecurity, struggling as they were with mortgages, hire purchase and fuel charges. Working on the anxieties of their neighbours, Ivan and Ivy Peirson, with outside help, were able to build the embryo of an organisation with which to support the candidature of George Wright, a 48-year-old housebuilder and long-time NF member, for the hastily-called Parliamentary Byelection.

The consequence of this intriguing exercise in suburban neighbourliness was that a dozen out of the twenty nominators signing the papers for the NF candidate were neighbours on Wilding Way. A loudspeaker van was subsequently sent around the congested terraces of Eastwood, on the other side of town, where a few more signatures were collected from residents, who shared the problems of overcrowding with recent Asian arrivals. The letters column of the local paper, the *Rotherham Advertiser*, were put to use; pub meetings held and an extensive poster campaign initiated.

But the crucial way the NF mustered support was with a march through Eastwood, from its national membership, with police protection, and a rally, held in a local school. Coaches were arranged from Leicester, Henley-in-Arden, Slough, Blackburn and Keighley. With this move, the Front was able not only to avoid the Heeley fiascos, but also to move off their lower middle class estate into the streets in order to angle for popular support. The ease with which the NF was able to march through Rotherham, and the stealth with which it arranged a route through the town centre and the immigrant

neighbourhood (a tactic that is central to its current strategy of showing white strength in black areas), contrasts rather markedly with the inept response of the official Left in South Yorkshire, and poses questions about the responsiveness of the police to local political authority.

The Labour Movement in South Yorkshire is dominated by a fairly solid Left Labour-Communist Party alliance, confident of its influence over the local working population - except, perhaps, in the area of racism. The response of this alliance to the emergence of the NF took the form of ignorance (the Rotherham Labour Party election office on the Kimberworth estate was unaware of the NF presence some 300 yards from its doors) and avoidance of confrontation.

Wearing its engineering union hat, the Broad Left alliance called a march "for peace and racial harmony," to be followed by a meeting in a park addressed by Frank Hooley (MP for Heeley), a local clergyman, and a leader of the immigrant community. The march was held on the same afternoon as that of the Front; when supporters of the Left arrived at the briefing meeting, they were told by George Caborn, AUEW District Secretary, that the route had already been arranged with police and would be steering well clear of the Front, that publicity was already printed, and the themes of the banners already agreed upon. Left supporters were told that they could join the march with their



own banners, but that if these clashed with the tone of the peaceful march, or if any attempts were made to urge confrontations with the Front, they would be taken out of the march by AEUW marshals.

Tactics of passive resistance, or of 'violent' obstruction to the Front's attempt to march through the immigrant areas (both of which were requested at the meeting) were ruled out. In the event, the 4,000-strong "AEUW March" was patrolled both by Broad Left marshals and by 1,400 police (bussed in from Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and elsewhere); a circuitous route was taken, away from the centre and around the town's suburban periphery.

The Front, meanwhile, assembled in a park in the town centre. Ageing mods mixed with shopkeepers in sports jackets, a few immaculate teddy boys, businessmen and managers, with a few, as yet un-uniformed, paunchy storm-troopers mingling amongst the 1,000 or so NF supporters, under the metal-tipped Union Jacks. Some younger boys, out for aggro, were able to keep the few left-wing photographers and journalists on their toes.

Martin Webster made a short speech, concentrating on the idea of the NF as a respectable family party, a party of national pride and loyalty. Silent contempt was urged as a response to the 'hysteria' of left-wing opposition. Needless to say, as the march passed through Eastwood, the NF's show of contempt was far from silent, with white girls, linking arms with Asians in the cordons protecting the back streets, the main target for racist abuse. The rally in the school was a success for the Front; no hecklers succeeding in penetrating police lines.

## Some Lessons

The Front's ability to take to the streets with police protection, and the Left groups' opposition being weakened by the absence of the Broad Left rally a mile or so away, resulted, as intended, in the establishment of an NF branch, with a working-class as well as a lower middle class membership, in the heartland of a Labour area. From two members in May, isolated in suburbia, the NF in Rotherham moved on to become a branch of committed, and more confident, activists, with regular meetings and links to branches elsewhere.

Some specific lessons can be learnt from the Rotherham events. The establishment of an organising base in lower middle class areas, from

# CAUSING TROUBLE IN DEPTFORD

A SWELTERINGLY HOT evening in late June during London's heat-wave. Down on the Pepys Estate in Deptford the youngsters are playing in the sand-pit, the teenagers try out each others' motor-cycles, and boys play football and eye up the girls hanging around outside the youth club.

It's a multi-racial estate, built on the site of the old Naval Dock Yard: black and white children play happily together, a white teenage girl dances on the pavement outside the youth club with a black boy. Inside, the disc jockey is playing "Jungle Rock".

Suddenly the sound of a loudspeaker: "It's time to stop immigration, start repatriation. Vote for Richard Edmonds, and the National Front, the only party which puts Britain first."

A battered old white Ford Cortina is driving slowly round the estate, the loudspeaker attached to its roof. Inside are three men canvassing for the coming election, brought about by the resignation of the previous Labour Councillor. With a majority of 1,400 in the 1974 council elections, it should have been a rock-solid Labour seat.

Spray painted on the walls is "Vote National

Front." One of a group of older teenagers drinking outside a pub says "I'm voting for the Keep Britain White Party." Her friends nod their agreement.

33-year-old Richard Edmonds is already notorious in South London: in 1974 he became a teacher at Tulse Hill School, a comprehensive with a large proportion of black children. Staff would not speak to him and pupils attacked him for his racist views. A year later he left.

"Eighty per cent of muggers are black" he says. "Eighty per cent of their victims are white women. The National Front will not tolerate this state of affairs. Sentences of hard labour and the restoration of the birch will stop the muggers. Women must be protected."

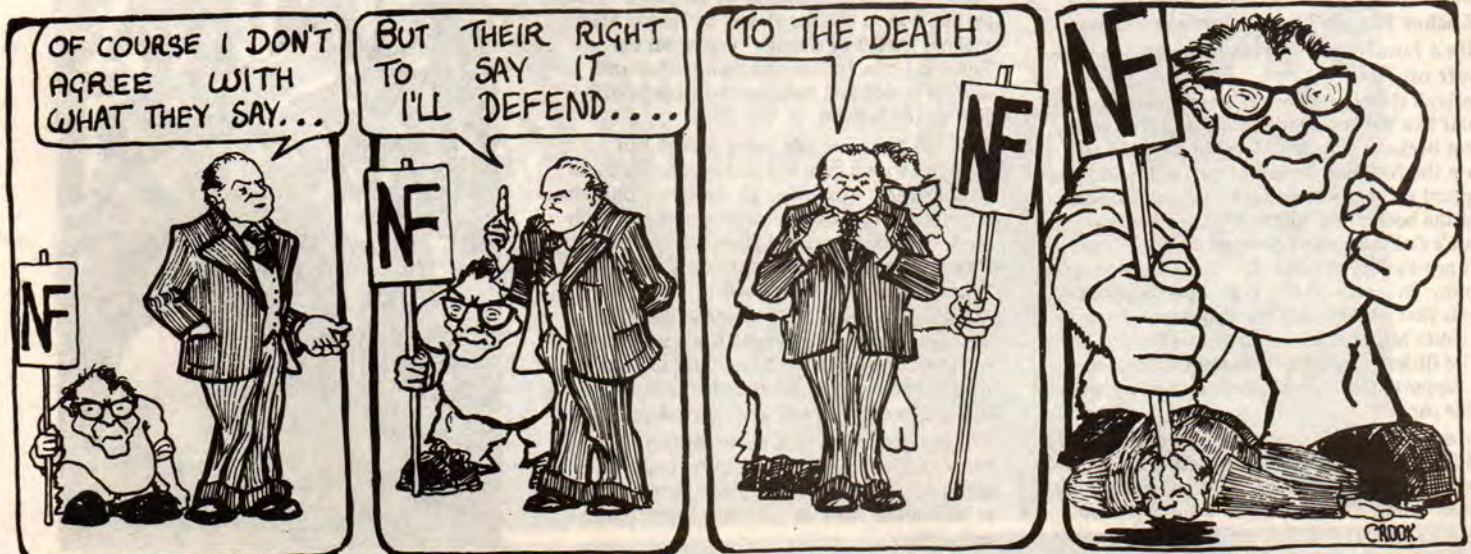
The National Party is making a fight of it too. Candidate Malcolm Dixon, an electrical engineer, puts forward a programme of 'Britain for the British', a strong populist appeal for more industry in Deptford, lower rates and sending the blacks back home.

The result is well-known. Labour held on by the skin of their teeth with 43.5% of the poll. Between them the fascists had 44.5%, enough to have taken the seat if the vote hadn't been split. And black residents of the area know that one in eight of their neighbours cast a vote against them at the last council by-election.

which to move out to the working class (in particular to unemployed youth) may be a pattern that the NF will adopt in other areas as a part of their intention to field over 300 candidates in the next General Election. In doing so, the NF will rely upon the failure of established political parties to alleviate the social and political anxieties of the newly-mortgaged, upwardly mobile lower middle class. Much of their current propaganda is, of course, aimed at this highly susceptible section of the population. This move from the lower middle class base into the working class, may pose problems for the NF; it could over-extend its existing resources, which are not especially strong in the industrial north.

To point to possible contradictions in the Front's tactics at this time, however, is not to deny the urgency of the task confronting the Left. Racist ideology is part of the dominant consciousness of our age and not an unfamiliar intrusion. It is evident always in the presence of the "hang 'em, flog 'em" brigade in the ruling class and in mass media "commonsense"; but it predominates now, as a necessary response of the ruling class to its contemporary crisis. It is an ideology, too, which cannot be combatted by a Labour Party committed to 'Law and Order', attacks on working class wages and jobs, and the weapon of silence as a response to the rebirth of Fascism in the streets of England.

Nick Howard & Ian Taylor.



# The gutters they crawled from



Dennis Pirie, now in the leadership of the National Party. He is pictured in the fifties, wearing the uniform of the paramilitary Spearhead group.

In 1919 Henry Hamilton Beamish returned from the Soviet Union, bringing with him the forged 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion.' This document was first used by the Czar against Jewish opponents, later by Fascists throughout Europe. Beamish set up the Britons Publishing Society, which became a focus for racist and anti-working class propagandists. The Society is still in existence.

Mussolini's success inspired Miss Rotha Lintorn-Orman to form a British Fascist group which lasted throughout the '20's, and was active on the bosses' side in the General Strike. They were superseded by Arnold Leese's Imperial Fascist League in 1929, a hard-line anti-Jewish group which lasted until the early '50's. He was hard-line enough to accuse Mosley of being a "Kosher Fascist" because Mosley's first wife's family had Jewish links and he was "soft on Jews."

Mosley's closest supporters were out-and-out Nazis like William Lord Haw Haw Joyce and John Beckett, who both left him in 1937 to form the National Socialist League. He also had support from industrialists like Lord Nuffield and the bosses of Courtaulds; Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* and *Evening News* churned out pro-Fascist propaganda. Mussolini sent money: in excess of £70,000. After the death of his first wife Mosley married Diana, sister of Unity Mitford, who was at one time thought to be Hitler's mistress. Rothermere dropped his support after a threatened Jewish boycott of his papers.

In the war Mosley's followers were rounded up and interned, except those who defected to the Nazis like Joyce and those members of the British Union of Fascists who were organised into a section of the Waffen SS by John Amery,

brother of Tory MP Julian Amery. After the war they were released and immediately started parades again, sometimes even with former SS men who had escaped and were sheltered by British Fascists. At this time Arnold Leese was sent to jail, for sheltering two former Waffen SS.

## THE 1950s WATERSHED.

In 1950 an ex-Royal Marine medic turned University student formed the Birmingham Nationalist Club. Colin Jordan was in the fascism business. During the next few years Arnold Leese and the pre-war racists taught Jordan his trade. And although the early fifties were doldrum years for most fascists, by the end of the decade they had found themselves a new target in Britain's black immigrant population.

In 1954, Mosley's former secretary and biographer, AK Chesterton - now a dissident Tory - formed the League of Empire Loyalists. Its line was to call for an end to Harold Macmillan's "Wind of Change" policy on the Empire. Colin Jordan and many other anti-semites joined and became enthusiastic officials of the League.

By 1958 two viciously racist groups had emerged with a base in London: the National Labour Party was set up by Andrew Fountaine, a former Tory parliamentary candidate, while Jordan formed a second group, the White Defence League. In the ranks were men like John Tyndall and John Bean.

Mosley re-emerged for a brief but hopeless electoral campaign after the Notting Hill riots of 1958. Both the WDL and NLP took an openly Nazi stance and launched attacks on anti-fascists, blacks and Jews on the streets.

The two groups merged as the British National Party in 1960, published *Combat* under Bean's editorship and used Fountaine's family estate at Narford in Norfolk for international camps and rallies.

Jordan was given the use of a large house in Notting Hill by Arnold Leese's widow; for those who had been BNP members for six months, here was a chance to join the private army. Spearhead went into training, ostensibly as a stewarding organisation, but in reality an embryonic attack force.

But the leadership of the movement was the big issue by 1962, with the Tyndall/Jordan grouping leaving to form the National Socialist Movement on April 20, the anniversary of Hitler's birth. A fat young man called Martin Webster became involved at this stage. Their first public activity was a rally in Trafalgar Square at which uniformed men driving Land Rovers and declaring "Hitler was Right" led to a riot as the forces of the left attacked the fascists.

Jordan and his associates were subsequently sent to prison for running a private army. Tyndall also got sent down, along with Ian Kerr-Ritchie and Dennis Pirie, later to be a leading member of Tyndall's breakaway Nazi Party, the Greater Britain Movement. Pirie is now a prominent member of the National Party. At the same time Mosley staged an abortive come-back with an attempted rally in Trafalgar Square. He never reached the rostrum and for the next year all fascist rallies were stopped by public outcry.

## OPEN WAR

Jordan's marriage to French heiress and Nazi Françoise Dior led to a new power struggle, and by late 1963, Tyndall, Pirie and Webster were in the leadership of the Greater Britain Movement. Open war for control of the membership and finance broke out. The patronage of Lincoln Rockwell, American leader of the World Union of National Socialists, was sought by all sides. Eventually, Rockwell gave Jordan control of the European side of the world Nazi movement. He was later assassinated in an internal feud in the American Nazi movement.

During the period 1964-65, members of the NSM and GBM set fire to 34 Jewish buildings: in one fire a teenage boy was burned to death. The fires were followed by a wave of attacks on black people and in 1966 several NSM and GBM members were tried and convicted at the Old Bailey. Most were youngsters, but some were soldiers and businessmen. Other members of the NSM, including Robert Relf, were convicted of wearing Klan regalia.





*Unholy alliance : Police protect the Front at Red Lion Square*

During the mid sixties a series of anti-immigrant societies was set up, including the Racial Preservation Society (RPS) and the Immigration Control Association (ICA). RPS was led by Jimmy Doyle, a crooked Brighton antique dealer and member of the Tory Party, and Robin Beauclaire – a racist businessman who later helped finance publishing activities for the NF and NP. The ICA was set up by Joy Page, the epitome of middle class outrage and founder of a resident's association in London.

The great leap forward for the splintered right in Europe was the amalgamations in Britain, France, Austria, Germany and Italy. In November 1966 in Britain, The League of Empire Loyalists, the British National Party and sections of the RPS joined together under the leadership of AK Chesterton to form the National Front.

Initially, Tyndall's men were excluded from the leadership because of their association with Tyndall's imprisonment on firearms charges. But within six months they were brought into the new party and within a year commanded all the key administrative jobs: thus a Nazi group, the GBM, with only 132 members had taken over a group with 4,000 members. The fledgling National Front got off to a rocky financial start when Francoise Jordan imprisoned for her part in the arsons while Colin Jordan went back to prison for an offence under the Race Relations Act.

On his release, Jordan dropped the swastika and adopted the pagan sunwheel symbol for his new British Movement. Those of his Nazi followers who hadn't deserted him for the ranks of the National Front were allowed to join the undercover Nazi "National Socialist Group."

The group lasted only a few months. About the same time it is likely that "Column 88" was set up from members of all the organisations of the right.

**THE NF GOES ON**

Tyndall, though the medium of *Spearhead*, and Webster through his organisational ability, were able to keep the NF going. But every temporary success was lost by internal bickering. Fountaine was ousted by Chesterton, soon to be followed by Chesterton himself. Former Tory and Powellite John O'Brien departed, leaving Tyndall a top dog.

Enoch Powell's racist speeches gave the NF re-



spectability, but revelations of its Nazi past offset whatever progress it seemed to make. Much publicity surrounded the 1970 meeting in Brighton of the Northern League, a Dutch Nazi group with ex-SS members supported financially by Roger Pearson. The meeting was attended by members of the Monday Club, the NF, Column 88 and Colin Jordan. The future of the whole right was discussed and several members of the Monday Club expelled for their participation. Among those who remained in the Monday Club was Lady Jane Birdwood, a well-known right winger.

The NF's fortunes were looking up, and in 1973 they managed to save their deposit at the West Bromwich by-election by getting 16.4% of the poll. The target was the Kenyan Asians. Four million propaganda items were put out and in the 1974 General Elections they put up 54 and 96 candidates. Every candidate lost his deposit, but their overall share of the poll rose, and in the Newham by-election that same year they did better than the Tories.

An important shift now occurred as the NF, following Mosely's example, began work inside unions, financed partly by Rhodesian and South African funds. Yet in June 1974 the fascists had a major setback when a student, Kevin Gately, was killed at the Red Lion Square demonstration against a Fascist march. Since then, wherever the fascists have appeared, they have been met on the streets by the left.

Internal squabbles broke out in the Front once more when the leadership was siezed by an ex-Tory, Kingsley Read. He took a fake working class line. His reign, however, was brief as Tyndall returned to power within a few months ejecting Read, who left at Christmas 1975, with some 20% of the members to form the National Party. It is this split which has since dominated the right.

Nevertheless, the NF is boasting that it will stand 300 candidates at the next General Election. Results do not, however, support this optimism. The expected funds have not materialised, and membership has stuck around a maximum of 12,000 with at least as many leaving each year as joining.

*Eddie Smith.*

*National Front demonstrator, left, demonstrates his love of a free society by belting the photographer. Below : fascists on the march.*



# Assessing the fascist

## John Merrington —

### It's not a Thirties rerun

HOW far can the fascist tendencies visible today in the capitalist West be seen as signs of a repetition of the Twenties and Thirties?

The memory of the greatest-ever defeat of democracy and the labour movement dies hard. But simple parallels and "lessons" are drawn too easily — fascism is a convenient bogey on the left.

Fascism was only one alternative political solution among others to the universal capitalist crisis of the inter-war period. It succeeded where the democratic organisation of the state had broken down, where no secure Parliamentary majority could be found to ensure mass support behind national policies for reconstruction and full employment.

Left organisations — who might, in theory, have benefited from the situation — had no policies, and by default were identified with the universal policy of austerity and wage cuts. Reformists and revolutionaries alike believed nothing needed to be done either to kill capitalism or to save it. If this was an ordinary crisis, it would blow over, and the main thing was to preserve organisation and bargaining power at all costs.

If it was not an ordinary crisis, capitalism was finished and no action was necessary to reveal this to everybody. They failed to use the armed force they had available, waited, and participated in elections. The fascists had no such qualms about illegality.

Fascism replaced the liberal state by a one party "movement-state" which operated by means of terror and the militarisation of everyday life; and destroyed all independent working class organisation. But the tendency towards new and stronger forms of state control was a universal feature, common to the democracies as well. At the end of the Twenties British and German social democrat governments collapsed. In Britain, right-wing labour leaders joined the National Government of 1931 on a platform of austerity designed to save sterling. With such a coalition a fascist solution was unnecessary from the start.

In no case did fascist movements seize power by force: their leaders took office as caretakers of National Governments. Even Mussolini's March on Rome was stage-managed in collaboration with conservative parliamentarians. Conservative leaders turned to the fascists as a last resort because only they had a right-wing mass following. The fascist revolution is a myth, but a myth that had to be fostered in order to give their supporters the illusion of real change.

The recovery programmes of the democracies did not differ very much from the fascist ones. The "National Self-Sufficiency" programme Keynes advocated in 1933 was followed through more fully in fascist countries than elsewhere.

It is no accident that the most radical and plausible proposals to deal with the mass unemployment of the early thirties came from Mosley, later leader of the Blackshirts. They were Keynesian proposals, they could have been applied by any party, but were rejected by all,

forcing Mosley to found the British Union of Fascists. Too radical for Britain at the time, they were put into practice by Roosevelt in the USA, and by the Nazis, and subsequently in Britain. People who still say that Mosley could have been leader of either the Tory or the Labour Party forget how much this reveals about both.

Keynes himself had a sneaking admiration for the radical possibilities of the Nazi economic system. In 1936 he wrote in the preface to the German edition of his *General Theory*: "The theory of production as a whole which is the goal of this book, can much more easily be adapted to the conditions of the total state... in which state intervention is more extensive."

Fascist regimes were not an aberration in this context, let alone proof of the "bankruptcy" of the system (as the marxist left claimed) — they represented one political way to reach a planned, full employment capitalism, satisfying the demand for work through militarisation. As such they were widely admired in Western ruling circles.

What can we learn from this about the situation that confronts the Left today?

Fascism is not, as is often thought, the same as it was 40 years ago. The liberal state, that the fascists overthrew, has died long ago. The incorporation of the Trades Unions into the state planning apparatus is now accepted by all parliamentary parties; it is the condition upon



Martin Webster : National Front.

which capitalism today can continue to function. To abolish working class organisations, as the fascists did, is unthinkable to modern capitalists. Putting Jack Jones in a concentration camp would not serve anybody's interests. Who needs fascism when you've got the Social Contract?

Secondly, the masses will no longer accept work work at any price, as they were driven to in the '30's. The industrial reserve army cannot be manipulated and subjected to military discipline in the old way. Unemployment is now a permanent feature of a more capital intensive industrial system, and it was after all the success of the Nazis in providing work that was their main source of mass support. Nobody is going to march happily along in a labour battalion singing patriotic songs in 1976.

If fascism today is not an alternative project for power, what is it? It is reduced to its racist, anti-minority component, which was not the force that brought any fascist regime to power between the wars. But it has a no less important function today: exploiting competition for jobs, dividing and isolating different sectors of struggle, and thereby contributing to the overall "strategy of permanent crisis." This is essential to the state's policy of austerity now being forced on the working class throughout the capitalist world.

## Nigel Thomas —

### Need for a common front

THE FASCISTS are coming on strong, and once again it is time to stop them. But although their tactics are much the same as they have always been, there is confusion and dissension among those who oppose them.

Three things are clear to everybody: The growing strength of the ultra right is feeding off the economic slump; the bait which is attracting that strength is racist and a lot of people are agreeing with some of what the fascists are saying.

There is disagreement about what is really going on. Some think that the National Front, the National Party, and others are "merely" racist organisations who are to be fought because they are morally wrong, not because they are politically dangerous.

Of course it also happens that they are becoming electorally significant, pulling in a vote in the by-elections at Thurrock and Rotherham which our traditional third party, the Liberals, would be proud of. And these votes seem to be



Kingsley Read : National Party

coming mainly from Labour supporters.

So the Labour leadership's sense of moral duty suddenly becomes urgent, and they launch a low key campaign to fight racism.

On the other side are those on the Left who say that the fascist growth is the inevitable extreme spin-off from the move to the right by the capitalist class and its allies.

As the ruling class draws itself in for a final, unambiguous defence of its system of exploitation, so they say, it is inevitable that irregular forces will coalesce out of the messier end of the political spectrum to fight the same war with different tactics.

Both attitudes are wrong. Fascism is an aberration. It is not a movement that serves the in-interest of any economic class, although it will invariably manage to dupe large sections of the bourgeoisie that it offers them some sort of solution to the mess they've got themselves into.

But then, fascism dupes all its supporters. It tries to change the way its supporters see economic reality without making any serious efforts to change that reality. It doesn't solve economic problems, it only offers a mystical froth to insulate the faithful from the feeling of being crushed by these problems.

Unreal it may be, but it's not unpowerful. The

# threat

fallacy exists that fascism gets voted into power. This is not true. It bullies and fights its way to power. And an essential part of the technique is to undermine the institutions of social democracy and change the language of political debate.

This is what the ultra right are doing now. They provoke. Their "peaceful" marches, the language of their propaganda, and the apparently individual terrorism of racist street attacks, petrol bombings and window smashings, are all designed to foster hate, and purposeless violence.

At the same time the fascist's own organisations are built up in the trappings of discipline and control, although they make it clear that their troops are straining at the leash. An effective fascist coup is built on the fork of this dilemma. They need to be able to promise and threaten at the same time. To have the strength to reimpose order on the chaos they have created. But to also have the strength to prevent anyone else doing so against their will.

The military side of the Right in Britain is barely existent now. Column 88 is at worst a tiny terrorist organisation. But already the "respectable" political parties of the right are changing the atmosphere in their favour.

They are shifting discussion away from reality. When they talk about unemployment, they offer only hatred of "alien hordes." When they talk about unsatisfactory work and un-



Dennis Pirie : National Party.

satisfactory living, they offer National Greatness and Racial Pride.

And social democracy, which is responsible for the conditions in which fascism does well, responds in kind. When the Labour government talks about action it means mystifying legislation. When they talk about greater involvement with the product they mean putting seven nuts on a car instead of three.

The true battlefield of politics, which is the real condition of life, is being evacuated, leaving behind a vacuum which the fascist will fill if nobody else will.

There is no point in arguing with the ranters and refuting their unreal arguments.

The ultra right organisations must be harassed. They must be out-numbered. They must always be seen to be out-numbered. Wherever two or three fascists are gathered together, there should be a hundred of us.

Only by demonstrating over and over again the strength and the reality of the political movement which is fighting for real change to solve real problems in a real society will the mass support of the fascists be detached from mystical rhetoric and brought to its senses.

The fascists must be beaten quickly and got out of the way. Then we can return to the politics of the means of production.

# 'We Pakis Are Fightin' Back...'

**CIVIL DISORDER** is, in our times, a necessary precursor of revolutionary insurrection. That it is not a sufficient condition is amply demonstrated by Northern Ireland, and time will tell whether Soweto can prove that what starts as a mass movement ends with the seizure of power.

Some there are who would put to us that the roots of mass civil disorder is the withdrawal of consent for law on the part of a significant section of the population. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, sums up the battle of Notting Hill '76, in which young British Caribbeans defeated an overwhelming police force, as an indication of the extent to which West Indians have "withdrawn their consent" for the forces that operate law and order in this country.

That's true in a sense. But before we agree, we must also agree that the Metropolitan Police rule by consent. Young West Indians who threw up the barricades on the streets of Notting Hill will not readily assent to that.

One of them said "Yesterday it was Soweto, today it's Notting Hill." Another, discussing this no-consent, no-go argument said "a mahogany baton is not a weapon of consent." No. Another sort of persuasion operates. What we have in Britain today is a black population which has not so much withdrawn its co-operation with the forces of the state, but one that will await opportunities to meet force with superior force.

Behind the antagonism lies an inescapable history. Under the history lie the material springs of the antagonism. Young West Indians have been fighting British police for years and will continue to do so when they feel their strength in numbers, when a spontaneous assessment of the balance of forces leads them to the impulses of attack. That's what happened at the Peckham Fair in 1973, at Brockwell Park in 1974, on bonfire night in Leeds in 1975 and in Notting Hill during carnival 1976. What marks this year on the British calendar are the signs of the relentless gestation of the equivalent phenomenon in the Asian communities of this island. We Pakis are fighting back.

Only in the realm of concept is there a divide between fighting back and moving forward. In practice, in the Asian communities of Southall, Whitechapel, Blackburn, Bradford, the necessity for self-defence has called a new generation of British Asians onto the political stage. They have been summoned by the random acts of those in the white population who have responded to the racist call to arms of politicians and parties.

In Southall and in the East End of London, they have offered consistent defence against the stabbing and beating of Asians on the streets. Their self-defence is inseparable from their self-organisation, and their self-organisation is informed by the recent history of action that this same section has taken in the schools, in the factories, on the council estates.

That is the connection between striking against all odds at the Imperial Typewriter factory in Leicester (closing it down when the profit of the international cartel could not be reconciled



with the demands of the workers) and being able to say today: "we will rely on our own strength and not on the benevolences of the trade union movement." A generation of Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and African Asians has now amply demonstrated that it is here to stay; and if staying entails physically taking on the racists, then it also entails the evolution of a political strategy for the material advance of the whole community.

What actually happens on the ground? With money and publicity, elements within the British state encourage the growth of organisations such as the National Party and National Front whose programme, fundamentally, is "send the wogs home." Our day to day experience tells us that the police will do nothing to discourage the growth of these organisations.

In Spitalfields, for instance, after years of waiting on the list, years of living in a slum, an Asian family is allocated a flat by the GLC in one of their relatively new, segregated white estates. The family takes furniture and rent card and attempts to move into the allocated flat. A gang of fifty whites gather to see that they don't. "No Pakis here, Vote NF" is scrawled on their door. The police arrive. The Asians are advised by the police to go back to the GLC. The GLC, apologetic but unprincipled, tells the family that they can have any other flat they choose.

That's one instance. The Bengali Housing Action Group (BHAG) of London's East End, has on its files a hundred others. Around these instances a political strategy grows. The Bangladeshis of the East End, sweat-shop workers all, now fight for the right to live in enclaves from which they can protect each other. When an isolated Asian family is threatened and attacked on a council estate, there's no point calling the police, no point in calling in those political elements who have nothing to sell but their sincerity - the only option is to bring down a force of young Asians and evacuate the family, demanding at the same time, accommodation from the council in a safer area.

In the growth of this demand, defence and attack merge. In tapping the reservoir of racist opinion in this time of political drought, Enoch *et al* have not, as they expected, catalysed the demoralisation of the Asian population. They have instead, by fuelling the racist bandwagon, occasioned the throwing up of the barricades that will refuse to let it pass.

Farrukh Dhondy.

**ULTRA-RIGHT** election successes, the growing presence of fascism and racism on the streets, attacks on blacks and the murder of Gurdip Singh Chagger, have forced the left to organise against them. The fight is on, at the grass roots.

More than 200 anti-racist/anti-fascist committees have got to work. But due to the spontaneous character of the movement, co-ordination has been sporadic.

There is a northern regional co-ordination body, which has been going for over a year, and a new newly-formed caucus of committees around Oxford, but at a national level, plans are still undeveloped.

The northern body takes in Rochdale, Merseyside, Manchester, Oldham and Bolton, with representatives from Action Against Racism Blackburn, and from Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Nottingham and Birmingham attending from time to time.

Nationally, an informal conference of anti-fascist committees, sponsored by *Searchlight*, held in Birmingham on September 5, decided to appoint a co-ordinator for a big national conference, and in London, in July, there was another conference, with representatives of Labour Parties, trades unions, co-ops, immigrant groups and anti-racist committees.

London has as yet no organised framework for the exchange of information between committees. The London Co-op Political Committee assists with leaflets and meetings, but only where there is local demand. And they have formed an informal tripartite with the Greater London Regional Council of the Labour Party, and the London area of Liberation, for the production of pamphlets.

Trades Council support for the committees has not been uniform. In the north, Trades Council and trade union support has been longstanding; in London there are half a dozen which have anti-racist committees. But they are there when needed, as for a march or demonstration; most are committed in principle to the anti-fascist movement, and they have local contacts, experience, and the ability to distribute leaflets in factories.

The TUC itself has not been very effective. It has two relevant committees, with broad terms of reference, but little has been done. Perhaps its contribution will increase with the Congress resolution to ban the NF and NP, and join the Labour Party campaign.

Local Labour Party involvement is also patchy. Several have initiated committees and many take part in them, but they are of course inhibited by the party's national policies. The party's much-vaunted Campaign Against Racism grew largely from its fear of losing votes to the ultra-right, and since the party is committed to an abysmal policy on immigration, it seems to be trying to go some way to meet them. But the Campaign should encourage local participation in the committees.

#### OTHER LEFT GROUPS

Other left groups are involved in the committees: IS, IMG, CP, The Indian Workers Association and other immigrant groups. But party lines on the nature of fascism, and the tactics to combat it, vary widely.

The CP say (in the *Morning Star*, June 26): "To answer the appearance of fascism with impulsive, unthought out, little supported, but understandable, reactions leading to impromptu violence or physical confrontation has proved counter-productive." The CP line is that the committees must represent a broad spectrum of opinion; people join an anti-racist committee

*Anti-fascists during a successful demonstration to prevent the National Front from meeting in a local school*



## Organising for the fight back

for a large number of reasons – religious, humanist, socialist... – and the committees should build a broad anti-fascist movement with strong links in the labour movement. Violence is only condoned if absolutely necessary; if the NF attacks an anti-racist march then one must fight back.

IMG and IS have many members active in the committees. The IMG position is no immigration laws, no free speech for fascists, and it is for black self defence; it does not think that the ruling class is planning to impose a fascist solution in Britain.

IS view the fascist threat as more immediate; it upholds a standpoint of "No platform for the fascists" and advocates driving them off the streets wherever they appear.

The Workers Revolutionary Party does not participate in local anti-fascist committees, instead it calls for the formation of Workers Defence Squads; fascism is not seen as the major threat.

The IWA maintains that blacks must unite as they are the most oppressed section of the population, and without this unity the anti-fascist struggle will be ineffective. It advocates blacks joining the trade union movement and forcing the leadership to conduct re-education classes for the white working class to wean them off imperialist ideology. Given this position, the IWA encourages its local branches to join and support anti-racist committees.

With such different stands, the committees have become a forum for thrashing out theories and applying them to practice – which varies; one of the strength of the movement is that the committees can respond in different ways to different situations.

The Southall Committee Against Racism (SCAR), set up in the week after Curdip Singh Chagger's murder on June 4, organised a demonstration the following Saturday. SCAR has the support of a cross-section of the main local organisations – Trade Unions, Trades Councils, Labour and Liberal Party, CP, Churches, including Asian, and representatives of the immigrant community: IS and IMG have also been involved. The demonstration was 7,500 strong,

was peaceful, and showed the opposition to racism of a large section of Southall's population. SCAR now proposes a three-point fight: to campaign against the myths and lies spread about Black people; to attempt to provide legal aid in cases of discrimination and harassment; to organise inter-community events.

In Bradford the Manningham Defence Committee has used a different form of peaceful protest to demonstrate its opposition to racism. On May 1 it called for a sit down in Manningham Lane; 200 took part and some were arrested. On June 19 it organised a large carnival and sit-down, to show that one can have fun and be positive and peaceful when making a political point, and to demonstrate that anti-racist committees can initiate activity and do not have to wait to respond to actions by the National Front or National Party.

All anti-fascist protests are not as peaceful as these. At the anti-fascist counter-demonstration in Birmingham on May 15 police protected NF marchers from the counter-demonstrators; they replied to police cavalry charges with a hail of stones. Violence in the struggle cannot be limited to defence from NF attacks; there can be instances of NF propaganda-making, like the pro-Relf demonstration on May 15, which necessitate an anti-fascist committee taking physical action. NF meetings as well may have to be broken up, if attempts to ban them fail. What is needed is a flexibility of response.

Links in the labour movement are also important. The battle of ideas, which will be won both by struggle to solve the problems (housing, living conditions, employment etc), experienced by blacks, and by education, pamphlets and information, requires a broad movement so that anti-racist ideas are spread widely. How broad will depend on local conditions – for instance SCAR was able to gain the immediate support of churches perhaps largely because of the emotional reaction of the community to the murder.

In other areas committees have not been initiated in response to a murder, and such a broad spectrum of support may not at first be there. But Trades Council and trade union support for the committees is increasing and a wide range of organisations are becoming aware of the need to contribute to the struggle: 30 Liberal parties, for instance, have recently written to *Searchlight* asking to be put in touch with local anti-racist committees. The committees are not revolutionary organisations, nor political parties, but rather a broad front against fascism and racism, so they should welcome participation from such organisations.

Exchange of information and advice on tactics on a regional and national level is vital to the movement and there are hopeful signs of its emergence.

*Dorothy Jones.*

## WOMEN'S HEALTH

# The Things We Women Suffer

FLAT on the bed I lay, the crooks of my knees resting on cold metal stirrups. The doctor examining me decided that the time was appropriate to deliver a short lecture to the two student nurses in attendance.

He began quite well: "This young lady has a bacterial infection called thrush. It is not a form of VD, and that is why we no longer call clinics like these — where we treat such infections — VD clinics. We prefer to call them genito-urinary clinics."

This nicety had obviously proved too subtle for the person who had scrawled POX on the door — in case anyone should be in doubt. It also proved to be the limit of this particular doctor's enlightened approach. He continues: "Of course, we treat more men — especially homosexual men — than women here. This is because women possess something called a 'nesting instinct' which makes them naturally monogamous; at the other extreme, homosexual men are very promiscuous because both partners lack this nesting instinct." The two nurses drank in this wisdom as though it were the Gospel according to Hippocrates.

In health, we can denounce the ideology of the medical profession and fight for a better understanding of the nature of sexuality, especially in areas such as venereology and gynaecology. But in sickness, it is these experts on whom we must rely. When self-help and hoping-it-will-go-away fail; when alternative medicine is costly, unavailable, or simply too mystical, most of us trust our bodies, as I did, to the medical procedures of the NHS. Minor ailments like thrush are quickly dealt with and easily cured. But when a woman goes to a doctor complaining of pain in that mysterious region between the

navel and the groin — pain that the routine five-minute examination cannot explain — the response is altogether different.

Most women have some kind of gynaecological disorder ('women's complaint') at some time in their lives. These problems are predominantly dealt with by male doctors; and even women doctors have often absorbed male-dominated ideology to such an extent that they too see before them a 'patient' rather than a sister in pain. What is the attitude of most doctors to their female patients?

My experience is overwhelmingly that they not only accept but strongly reinforce every current myth about femininity and the role of women. Add a dash of vulgar Freudianism — women are often hysterical and neurotic — and the picture is almost complete. Too biased? Too extreme? Then ponder this. Few patients with grumbling appendices or rheumatic pains are labelled 'neurotic', 'over-emotional' or 'subject to hypochondria.' Yet scores of women who complain of abdominal pain get precisely that treatment. Sometimes it is accompanied by Valium prescriptions. Other commonly reported methods of treating 'women's complaints' include courses of antibiotics for unspecified infections and advice to have a baby.

In eight months I was given all this, at great expense to the NHS but with little relief for me. It is perfectly possible for several doctors between them to convince a fairly sane and generally sceptical young woman that she is IMAGINING or EXAGGERATING the pain she feels. Were it not for the support of my friends — many of them feminists who had suffered similarly — I should have given up then and there and followed the Valium trail. Instead, I followed the consultant trail, seeking second, third and fourth opinions.

Weeks of unsuccessful treatment followed, during which my only relief was the familiar self-prescribed diet of two aspirin every four hours. After a woman GP friend finally arranged to have me admitted to a woman's hospital, a simple exploratory operation located the cause of my troubles. The other women in my ward practically covered the spectrum of gynaecological disorders, and many of their histories were more dramatic than mine, though they related them more in sorrow than in anger.

The reasons for this treatment of female patients are not easily explained. Doctors may be paternalistic, careless, thoughtless, male chauvinist, or simply ignorant; but the majority genuinely wish to help the patient recover. (Ann Oakley has contributed to an explanation in her detailed analysis of the process by which medical care of the reproductive system passed from woman to men. "Wisewoman and Medicine Man", by Ann Oakley in *Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds) The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin, 1976).

The analysis of social relations by the Women's Movement provides a general context; as do various examinations of the general patient/doctor relationship in terms of authority relations.

The point is to change it. Handbooks giving detailed information on symptoms, diseases and treatment are a welcome start. But in the last analysis, there is no substitute for consulting someone who knows more than you can glean from books. So we have to learn to deal with the medical profession we've got. One approach, as Nancy McKeith suggests, is to compile a clandestine register of sympathetic and trustworthy doctors; but these, as I found, are hard to come by, and on a national scale are dispersed unevenly.

Experience does not necessarily provide the right formula: I am still dealing with doctors on a trial-and-error basis.

- 1) The you-know-best doctor cooperative approach is the one they often prefer (for obvious reasons) but it makes it too easy for them to dole out drugs and other treatment without explanation.
- 2) The heavy approach: "I demand a second opinion/I refuse to take those drugs because they induce severe side-effects etc." sometimes achieves a short-term payoff, but beware of being labelled 'difficult'. At one point I walked out of a consulting room because the doctor was so hostile that I was afraid he would take his revenge when examining me internally.
- 3) The 'we're both sensible adults who can talk frankly' approach: This seems to work better (predictably) for men than for women. The barriers of professionalism and the type of sexist ideology I quoted at the beginning of this article are often insurmountable. If you hit the right doctor, through, this is definitely the best approach. My emotional recovery was considerably assisted by one who drew a diagram for me of my condition.

Perhaps the worst feature of the medical profession is that its collective loyalty always proves more powerful than any individual member's desire to help. They go to absurd lengths to reconcile obviously contradictory diagnoses. The patient's motto: Ours not to reason why. Yet within the white-coated ranks there are some who dissent, with whom we must forge unity to achieve change. The fight against most orthodox medical practice — particularly where women are concerned — is a fight to persuade doctors to respect our bodies and ourselves.

Karen Margolis.



# CONFUSED DEVIANTS

Elana Ehrlich reviews *Abortion In Demand* by Victoria Greenwood and Jock Young. (Pluto Press : £1.65)

**ABORTION IN DEMAND** attempts to be a political analysis of the abortion movement in Britain. Although written from a stand-point of abortion on demand, its main concern is to expose what it sees as the political failures of the movement for abortion reform.

The authors are writing from a radical criminological viewpoint. They have produced a highly controversial but basically academic book whose contribution to the abortion campaign is open to question.

Basic to Greenwood and Young's argument is a three-fold categorization of positions on abortion: (1) fundamentally anti-abortion, (2) a reformist position and (3) abortion on demand. Many readers will be horrified at the inclusion in the second category of the notorious James White and Leo Abse alongside the prime movers of the 1967 Abortion Act. The authors basically ignore differences between those who now seek a restrictive abortion law and those who campaigned vigorously for real gains, but incomplete measures, in abortion law reform 10 years ago. Throughout the book, a minimal distinction of "conservative" and "progressive" reformers is discarded to criticise the latter.

It is difficult to explain this classification since it only raises more questions than it solves. It

would seem more plausible to acknowledge similarities between reactionary anti-abortionists (SPUC, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) as one category and those conservatives like White and company who may publicly concede some grounds (of their own choosing) for terminations of pregnancy. It would also seem more plausible to acknowledge that past reformers may well have been in favour of free abortion even though it was not openly demanded.

## Threat to the state

Merely to categorise the National Abortion Campaign and the women's movement simply under the rubric of abortion on demand is to short-circuit important debates within both. Having adopted this classification and particularly the catch-all reformer category, enables the authors to attribute to past abortion reformers responsibility for allowing the state to incorporate social palliatives instead of revolutionary transformation. Whether or not abortion on demand would in fact be the threat to the state assumed by the authors is not adequately dealt with.

Before proceeding, one must recount the historical facts to understand how the authors have distorted them. Over the past year, many people will have learned of threats to the 1967

Abortion Act. What is not common knowledge is that abortion in Britain is still a crime punishable by life imprisonment of the doctor and the woman. The 1967 Act merely stated four exceptions (1) a risk to the woman's life, (2) a risk of grave foetal deformity, (3) a greater risk to the physical and mental health of the woman by a pregnancy carried to term compared to a termination and (4) similarly to the physical and mental health of existing children.

Influential in the passage of the Act (but never mentioned by Greenwood and Young) was the thalidomide disaster. To a great extent, it was in order to protect doctors from prosecution for illegal abortion because of the thalidomide drug that the Act was passed. Never was it intended by Parliament that women should have freedom of choice in the matter.

According to Greenwood and Young, it was only after implementation of the Act that medical knowledge revealed the safer nature of terminations compared to pregnancies which completely changed interpretations of what "greater risk" meant. It is this fact which has broadened the scope for women to be granted abortion far beyond that intended by MPs. The authors' fundamental criticism of the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) is for not having openly argued for abortion on demand rather than allowing it through the back door. This again distorts the facts, contrary to in-

# 'The authors are pro-abortion'

## HELP YOURSELF TO MEDICAL ADVICE

A SOLUTION to the obstacles that women encounter in Britain while trying to obtain a satisfactory health service are found in a new British handbook, 'Women's Health Handbook' — a self help guide, compiled by Nancy MacKeith.

She decided to publish a British handbook because there wasn't one. Previous women's health literature has been about America, the information already available is not specific enough to the situation here.

The handbook contains information on self examination, contraception, abortion, VD and vaginal discharges, the reproductive cycle, drugs, psychiatry, smoking, the NHS etc. It was written with the aim of reaching women who are isolated from the women's movement, to get the idea of self help over to women who do not have access to a self help group. Much of the information will probably be common knowledge to an established self help group, in which women monitor changes in their bodies and discuss health problems.

The book, therefore, is important on two levels. Firstly to make it clear that self examination is not eccentric, to dispel the idea that to regularly study your female sexual organs is a perverted occupation. Regular self examination teaches women to understand their own cycles better, to know what is normal for themselves and what is abnormal, and to alert women of possible diseases at an early stage. Self examina-





## WOMEN'S HEALTH

formation in the book; the implications of the comparative risk clause were so apparent that ALRA members in the political situation of the time were careful *not* to welcome it (excepting one public statement by Gambell Williams, then president of ALRA) for fear that it might be removed. Young and Greenwood argue that a more aggressive stance from ALRA at that time would have pre-empted the present attack on the 1967 Act. Consistent with their views, the authors note the present anti-abortion stance on this clause as if it were a new line of attack. But Norman St. John Stevas took exactly this line at the time.

### Public awareness

This is selective reporting and it's far from the only example. In analysing ALRA publications, the authors show an astonishing lack of appreciation for the level of individual and public awareness about abortion both in the past and the current climate. Are they seriously criticising ALRA for not having spearheaded a mass campaign for abortion on demand 10 years ago?

What little can be gleaned about the authors' support for abortion on demand rests on their belief that free abortion would rock the state and that there is a potentially enormous demand by women for abortions. They in fact, accept the anti-abortionist claim that the great-

er the abortion facilities, the greater will be the demand.

In a bewildering chapter entitled "The Magic Figure", the authors discuss various ways in which illegal abortion figures can be calculated and to what use a high or low number can be directed. They conclude that the overall figure for abortions could not possibly remain static. An interesting circular argument then occurs. They argue that if it does remain static - which it has - then it is only because "... there is a magic figure governing the politically permissible level of abortion". Do the authors mean by this that if this figure were exceeded, the state would be threatened? Must it follow that freedom of choice for women will cause this figure to rise dramatically since "... in no way is the potential demand for abortions being satisfied"? Have Greenwood and Young totally misunderstood that women are *not* clamouring to have abortions, but to have the right to choose?

The brutal fact for any woman faced with an unwanted pregnancy is that abortion is a necessary evil - not an abstract statistic. Wide support for abortion rights has come from an individual awareness of the crucial importance of fertility control to the liberation of woman. At the present time we are faced with the concerted onslaught of anti-abortionists against the limited gains existing in the 1967 Act. However will we defend these gains let alone go further to obtain a woman's right to choose both in law and in practice? This should involve positive

legislation which Greenwood and Young touch on but it would be still better had they tried to build it into the existing movement. To amend the NHS Act to provide abortion facilities in the same way as contraception means contending with the difficult questions of time limits and state licensing of personnel and facilities.

### Detached perspective

The authors of *Abortion in Demand* may be pro-abortion but their book is mis-directed and serves to attack the movement. The exercise, one hopes, may have fulfilled at least their apparent personal need to justify commitment to the battle for women's rights. Indeed, the books' timely publication by Pluto Press and opening sentence about massive abortion demonstrations indicate their recent conversion and yet detached perspective on the subject. If anything, their contribution to the ongoing struggles for abortion rights may be the lesson to avoid the sort of confused thinking exemplified by this book. A detailed constructive criticism of the movement could have been helpful to its development, but this book unfortunately may say more about the current state of the "radical deviancy school" than it does about abortion.

*Elana Ehrlich - member of the National Abortion Campaign Steering Committee, written in personal capacity.*

# but their book is mis-directed'

tion also demystified the role of the GP. Secondly the book is important on a political level. Nancy MacKeith thinks that women's health is probably the greatest common denominator for all women. There are few women who do not complain of the treatment they receive as regards health matters, and for such women a reading of the handbook can be a political step forward. It is a starting point for women to fight for better health care; beginning with individual self examination, progressing to forming your own self help group and branching out to fight for free abortion on demand. From Nancy's experience, many of the small self help groups up and down the country progress in this way, and one of the important outcomes of self help has been an understanding of the need for speedy abortions under 12 weeks.

### The right to control

The struggle for women to control their bodies is seen in the handbook as a political struggle. In its section on the pill it states "Undoubtedly many women will feel forced to take the pill because if they used another method, they could not rely on abortion facilities. This only

serves to show how politics enters into the most personal parts of our lives. Whatever choice you make, you are not able to make a free one. Women will only be able to make such a choice when we have come together and win the fight for free, safe contraception and abortion for all."

Other constraints on the right of women to control their own bodies are evident in the book. In the section on menstrual extraction there is a conversation on its use and the point is made that through menstrual extraction women can choose to have their periods over within a very short time as opposed to a few days. Details of this method however could not be given as under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act it is 'illegal to perform an abortion whether or not the woman is pregnant' but there hasn't yet been a prosecution involving menstrual extraction in this country.

The handbook contains a valuable section on the NHS and its effects on women. There is a good explanation on the inbuilt alienation of the system, the way in which it safeguards the doctor profession, and a guide to how women can fight for their rights within the system. Nancy MacKeith is for the setting up of feminist clinics in the NHS, and in the present climate of cuts in the NHS it is important that women

organise to safeguard and improve existing services; already two of the three British hospitals for women are threatened with closure, one in Edinburgh and the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Women in Euston, London.

There are two main criticisms that can be made of the book. Firstly, while attempting to demystify medical jargon, it makes the mistake of talking about a 'speculum' on the opening page without explaining that a speculum is a cylindrical shaped instrument which is inserted into the vagina for internal examination. Secondly more information is needed on the setting up of a self help group for beginners.

Self help does not start and end with the Women's Health Handbook. Self help is an ongoing activity, growing in strength. On September 25 a conference of self help groups was held in Manchester as evidence of this. Proceeds from the book itself will be used to further the Women's Health movement; having sold a thousand already any profits will go towards a reprint and/or facilities for women such as pregnancy testing equipment.

'Women's Health Handbook' available in left-wing bookshops (£1) and individual copies from from N. MacKeith, 16 Methley Terrace, Leeds LS7 3NL for £1 plus 25p postage.

*Dorothy Jones.*

# 'Self examination is not eccentric'