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**SENSE**

No.5 DECEMBER 1988

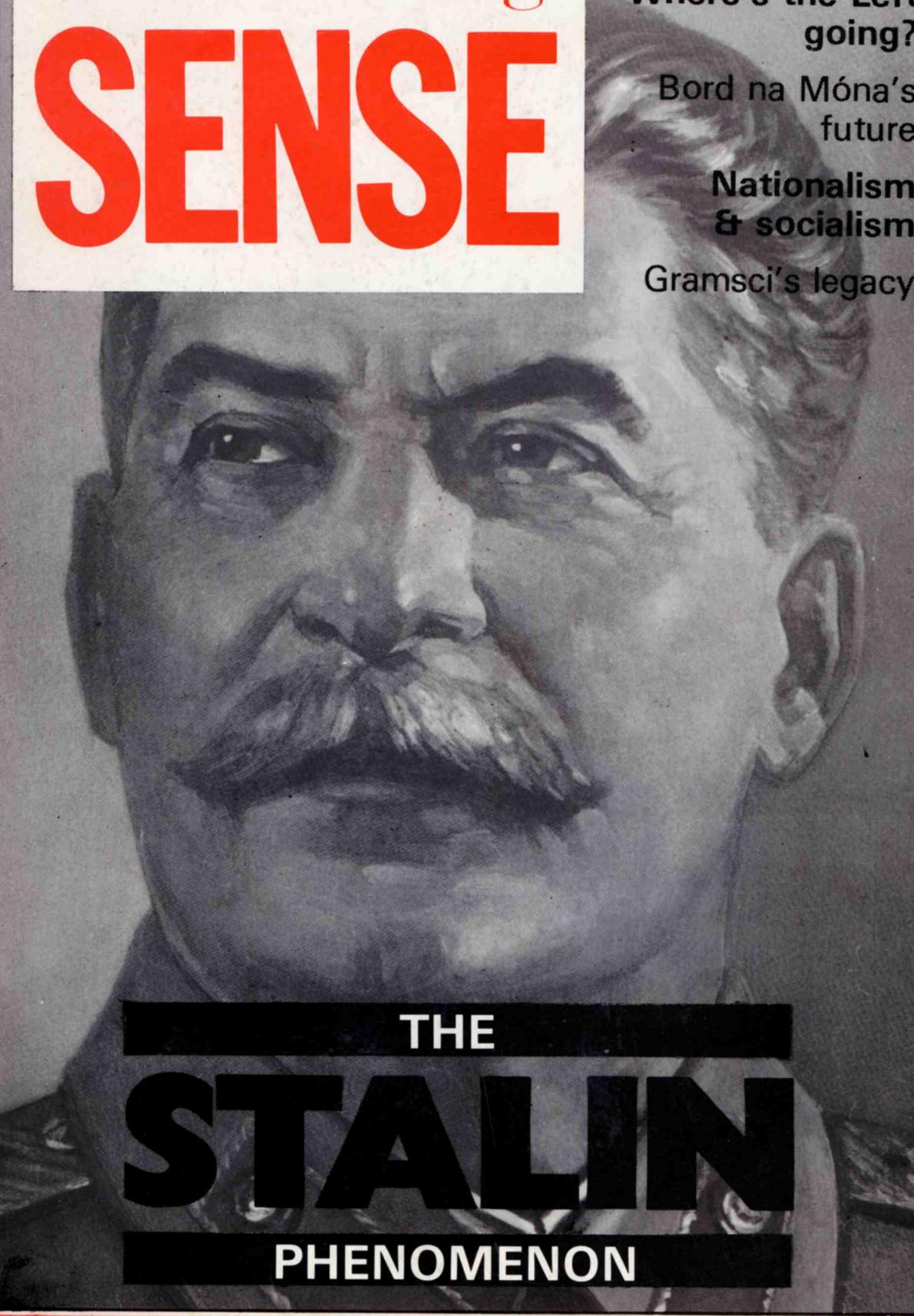
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**Where's the Left  
going?**

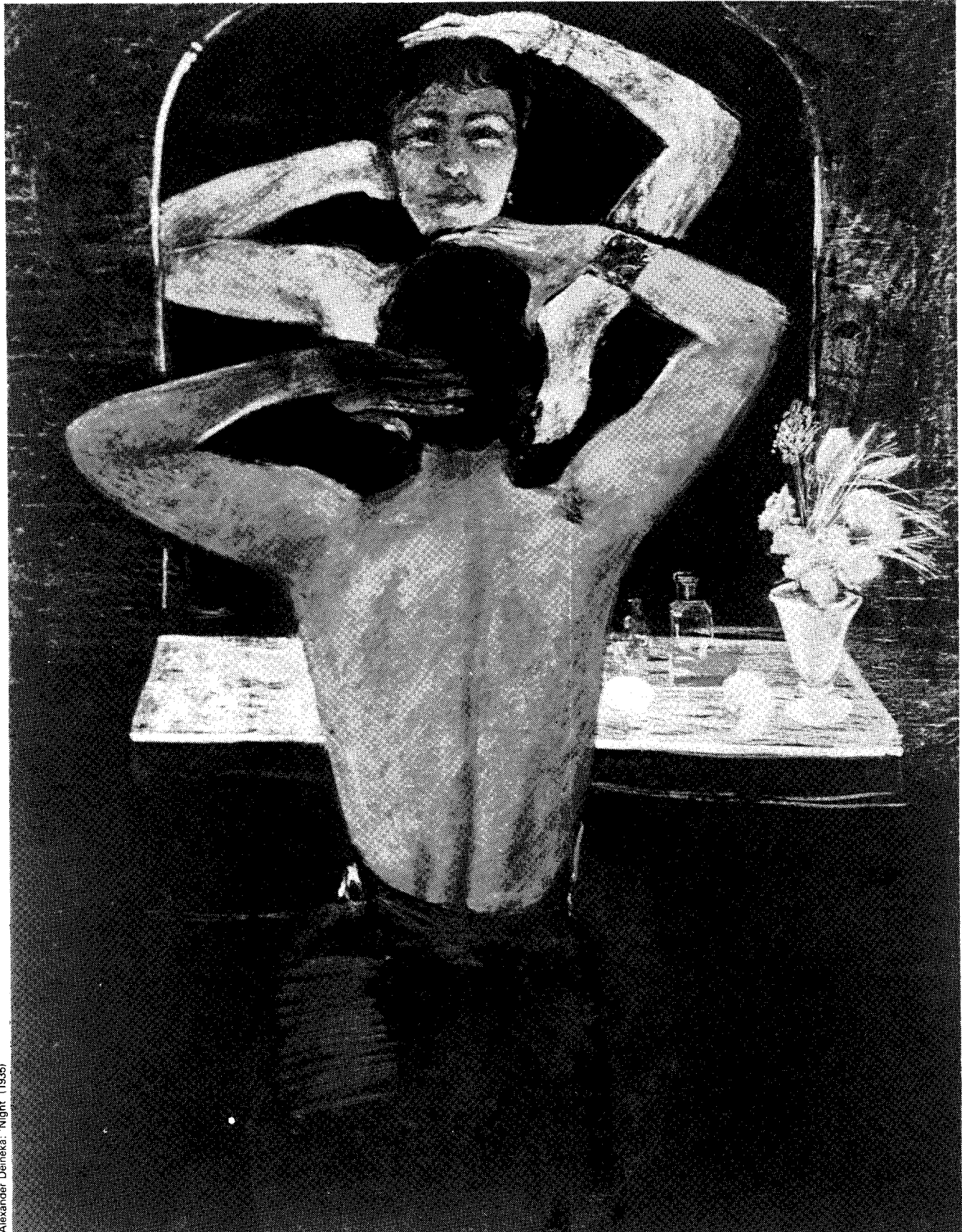
**Bord na Móna's  
future**

**Nationalism  
& socialism**

**Gramsci's legacy**



**THE  
STALIN  
PHENOMENON**



Alexander Deineka: "Night" (1935)

# AURORA

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Distributed in Ireland by Repsol Ltd., 30 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1

**5**

Proinsias Breathnach considers the new 'enterprise-led' approach adopted by Bórd na Móna, and argues that it deserves the support of the Left

**10**

Is socialism in Ireland doomed to remain a noble ideal, dressed up in flowery rhetoric? Senator Brendan Ryan considers the challenge facing the Irish Left

**12**

Letters

**14**

Colm Breathnach talks to Victor Rubio of the FMLN of El Salvador

**15**

'Only a very few people are destined to outlive their time. Stalin is one of them. Arguments about his role in Soviet history accompanied by epithets tainted with worship, hatred, bitterness and everlasting bewilderment, are sure to continue unabated for a long time.' Dmitry Volkogonov looks at the Stalin phenomenon.

**22**

Lorraine Kennedy welcomes the opening of a new Dublin cinema

**24**

Book reviews: Fearghal Ross *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916—1935*; Richie Keane *Living with Glasnost*; Charles Davidson *Political Strikes/A History of British Trade Unionism*; Dick Walsh *Corruptions of Empire: Life Studies and the Reagan Era*.

**30**

Filíocht: Tranh Quang le Gabriel Rosenstock



## By hook or by crook...

HAVING TWICE FAILED to abolish Proportional Representation, Fianna Fáil has now attempted to undermine the voting system which was designed to elect TD's roughly in proportion to the number of votes their respective parties receive at election time. The terms of reference given to the Commission on Electoral Boundaries were deliberately designed to distort the proportionality and gerrymander an inbuilt Fianna Fáil majority. Fianna Fáil seem to consider that they are entitled to expect more than 50% of the seats for 44% of the popular vote (1987 General Election).

Historically, of course, Fianna Fáil had long considered themselves to be the lawful government of Ireland. And by 1959, in Harold Wilson's phrase, they had come to regard themselves as 'the natural party of Government'. But by then, the Republic had begun to stumble into the twentieth century. The Lemass policy of dismantling the tariff barriers he himself had erected, and throwing the country open to foreign capital weakened Civil War political structures and, at least in cities and towns, was to lead to left/right political conflict. This was not helpful to the notion of perpetual rule. Previously, the emergence of Clann na Poblachta with its peculiar brand of nationalism allied to social concern had cost Fianna Fáil two brief periods in Government.

Fianna Fáil was taking no more chances. A referendum to abolish PR was tagged on to de Valera's coat-tails when he stood for President in 1959. In the event, de Valera proved sufficiently popular to be elected President, but not popular enough to tip the balance against PR.

The result gave rise to some recriminations in Fine Gael. A minority in the party favoured the abolition of PR which, they anticipated, would lead to a two-party State on the Colombian model with power switching from one civil war conservative party to the other.

Frightened by changing attitudes and a society growing more open and self critical in the '60s, Fianna Fáil launched another referendum to abolish PR in 1968 and were again rebuffed. As a result, they were obliged to make do with gerrymandering the system and they found in Kevin Boland a natural exponent of the art. Distorting the proportionality of the STV-PR electoral system is indeed a considerable art as the Coalition Government were to discover in

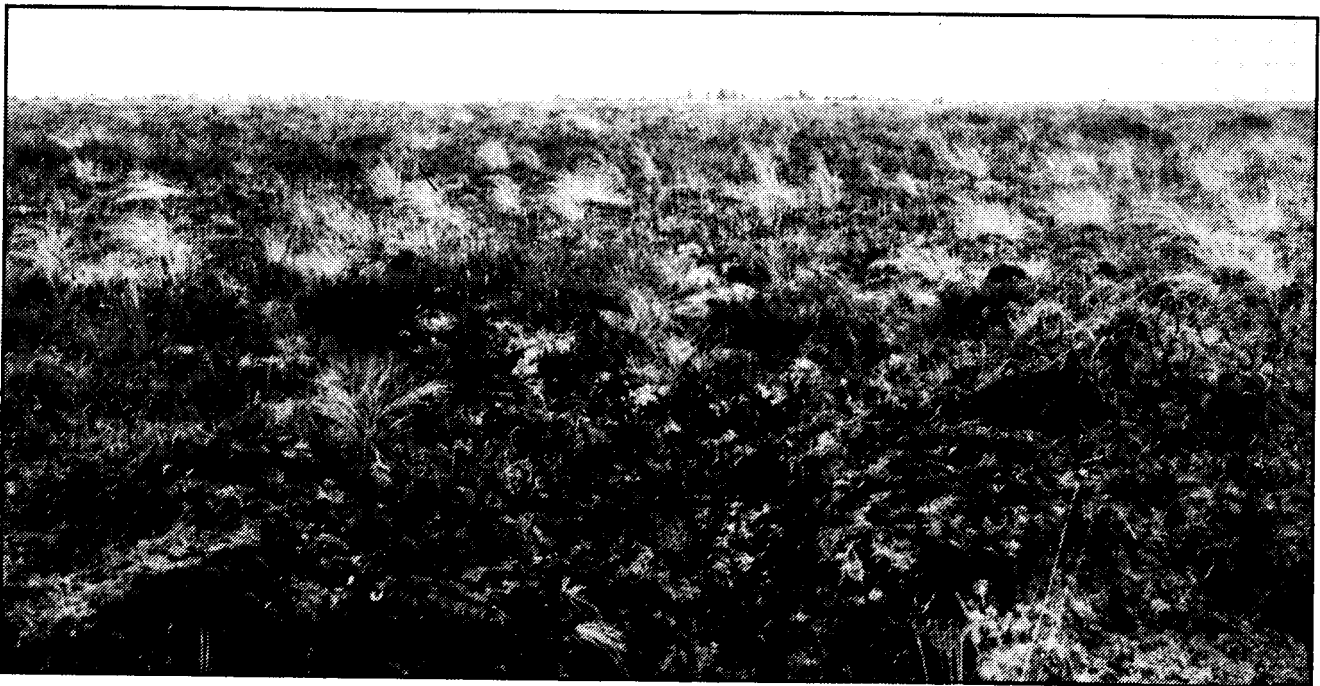
the '70s. Coalition Minister James Tully's conscientious efforts to rig the system in favour of the Coalition parties backfired giving us a new political term — Tullymander.

The ensuing Fianna Fáil landslide led to the creation of a Commission on Electoral Boundaries which would — terms of reference allowing — be (nominally?) independent. However on this occasion the terms of reference given to the Commission by the Government ensured that its independence was eroded and its conclusions predictable. The Commission's recommendations would, if implemented, give both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael a disproportionate share of the seats, and ensure that each of the three smaller parties would be under-represented.

Since socialism is still a minority political platform, the changes would have the effect of giving serious under representation in the Dáil to the proportion of people who vote for socialist policies. The recent failures of Fianna Fáil or any combination of the conservative parties to gain an overall majority have predictably led to establishment outcries about 'stable Government'. But as Tomás Mac Giolla remarked in the Dáil, 'Stable government is for horses, what we need is good government'.

What really is at stake is the STV-PR system. In its manifesto for the '87 General Election, Fine Gael proposed a hybrid system where two-thirds of TDs would be returned by the Alternative Vote (i.e. STV in single member constituencies). The remainder apparently would be allocated from a national list system. However unless a party reached a certain arbitrary threshold it would not qualify for seats. Fianna Fáil in 1984 suggested — but did not include in its manifesto — the Alternative Vote system to elect the entire Dáil. The AV system has been advanced in terms of 'PR in a single member constituency', and from the establishment viewpoint it has the distinct advantage of minimising, if not snuffing out, parliamentary representation of left wing politics.

So it can be safely assumed that Fianna Fáil and elements in Fine Gael will not let up on their efforts to undermine PR. By hook or by crook, they intend to render it ineffective, and thus copperfasten the right-wing consensus. The defence of PR would be a useful starting point for Left co-operation. Its preservation is essential to the development of socialism in Ireland.



*Before...*

# HAS BÓRD NA MÓNA GOT A FUTURE?

*Proinsias Breathnach*

IT IS PROBABLE that no other Irish state-owned company has a more positive public image than Bord na Móna. Established in 1946 in response to the recognition, driven home by the war, of the strategic importance of the country's extensive peat resources, Bord na Móna subsequently captured the public imagination via the lunar-type landscapes created by its own home-grown technology, straight out of science fiction (and used to such telling effect in the film *Eat the Peace*). The seemingly incongruous cooling towers of the associated electricity generating stations, rearing up out of the flat midland landscape, and the picturesque villages and housing estates built by the Bord for its workers, added further to the sense of wonderment and pride created by the Bord's achievements. The stream of foreign visitors, come to study the Bord's equipment and methods, allowed us all to bask in the Bord's reflected glory.

Apart from its contribution to national pride and energy security, Bord na Móna has had a massive regional impact, particularly in the midlands. Most of the Bord's almost 6,000 permanent employees work in this region, a large proportion of them in skilled and well-paid jobs. The same applies to the 1,150 workers in the peat-fired power stations. In addition, many small farmers have been able to boost their incomes significantly by participating in the Bord's large (over 1,000) seasonal workforce. Local spending by all of these

workers has, in turn, generated hundreds of other spin-off jobs. Almost by definition, the Bord's bogs are mainly found in areas of poor agricultural land where low farm incomes and persistent outmigration had been endemic features. For scores of local communities in these areas, the advent of Bord na Móna was of almost messianic dimensions.

However, despite its vital national and regional contribution, Bord na Móna has not had a trouble-free history. Its vulnerability to Ireland's notoriously unreliable weather conditions has left it open to periodic financial crises. Unlike other state companies, it has never been placed on a sound financial footing, and has had to finance all of its heavy investment requirements from borrowing. The implications of this state of affairs may be gauged from the company's financial report for 1985/86, when almost all of the operating surplus of over £18 millions was eaten up by interest payments. Essentially, Bord na Móna is now working for the Irish banking system.

## LACK OF ENERGY POLICY

Bord na Móna has also suffered from the absence of a coherent national energy policy. In the absence of significant alternative indigenous energy sources (prior to the discovery of natural gas), the strategic importance of Ireland's peat resources was generally recognised. However, for most of the Bord's life, peat has been

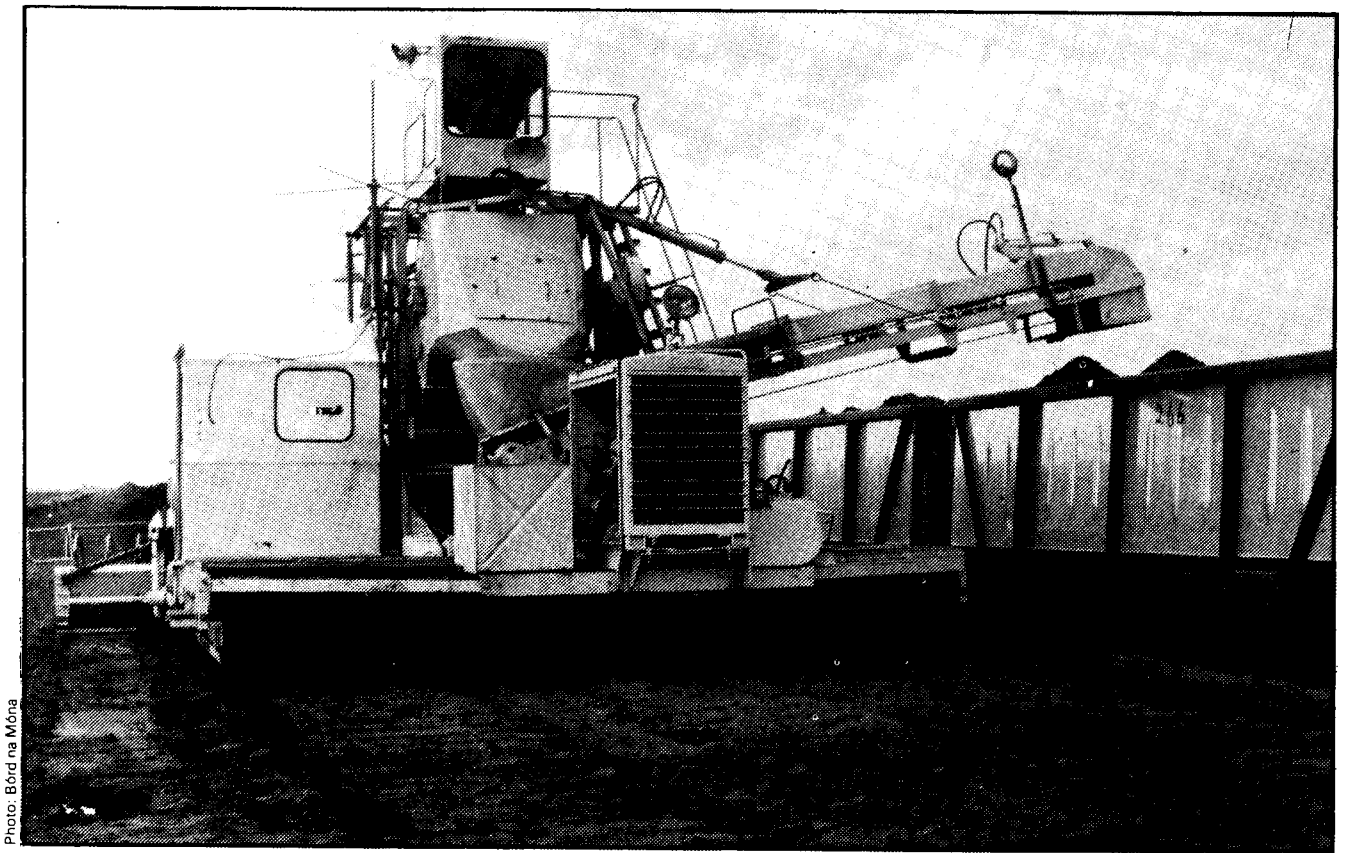


Photo: Bord na Móna

...and after

more expensive to produce than alternative imported fuels. Since the great bulk of the Bord's output goes towards electricity generation, the Electricity Supply Board has frequently been required to pay what would, in an open market situation, be regarded as an uneconomic price for peat fuel. This has been the case particularly in recent years, with world oil prices plummeting, and with the ESB now availing of cheap coal bought in bulk for its new Moneypoint power station.

The ESB has come under growing pressure in recent years to reduce the prices it charges for its electricity. This is but one component of a general campaign to remove alleged obstacles to economic development in Ireland. Although the arguments lying behind this campaign cannot stand up to serious scrutiny, they have found a fruitful breeding ground in the growing permeation of Irish political philosophy by Thatcherite thinking. Under fierce pressure from so-called 'public' opinion, the ESB sought to unburden itself of some, if not all, of its responsibility for absorbing Bord na Móna's output. Plans for extensive closures of peat-fired power stations were announced and set off an inevitable political outcry, albeit mainly leading to equally inevitable compromise. Some stations have been closed, or are about to be, while public opinion has become conditioned to the idea of gradual ESB withdrawal from peat-fired generation.

Throughout this elaborate charade, there has not been the least semblance of a coherent policy approach on the part of the government, despite its control of the two main actors involved, the ESB and Bord na Móna. What is needed is a clear statement acknowledging the strategic and social roles played by the Bord, accompanied by a commitment to underwrite any financial losses

arising from these roles. A policy whereby the ESB would pay the 'energy equivalent' price for peat supplied by the Bord, with the state paying the Bord a subsidy to make up for any losses arising as a result, would both eliminate the chronic sense of insecurity which has come to permeate the Bord's workforce in recent years and allow a public valuation to be placed on the social dimension of the Bord's operations.

#### AMBITIOUS PLANS

It may transpire, however, that Bord na Móna will require no subsidy, hidden or otherwise, if the ambitious plans envisaged for the company by its new Managing Director, Eddie O'Connor, are brought to fruition. O'Connor, a former radical student union president at University College, Dublin, had a meteoric rise within the vast ESB hierarchy prior to his appointment to Bord na Móna where he lost no time getting to grips with the company's growing problems. There are two main elements to the far-reaching set of proposals which he produced within a year of taking up his new job.

The first of these is now familiar to production workers everywhere — namely, technological innovation, rationalisation and job shedding. In all, Bord na Móna is seeking to reduce its workforce by 1,100 — including 650 permanent and 450 seasonal jobs. Already, applications for redundancy have exceeded this target figure — especially among long-service permanent workers to whom the redundancy terms are particularly attractive. This question of rationalisation induced by technological change provides a major quandary for socialists. Apart from Bord na Móna's argument that it has to rationalise in order to retain competitiveness in an open market

situation, in principle it is difficult to oppose technological progress which improves social productivity generally.

The key question here concerns the subsequent social and geographical distribution of the fruits of this enhanced productivity. It is clear that in the western capitalist world generally, job growth in materially productive industries has been arrested by technological change, but that this has been more than offset by additional service jobs. A major problem with this, however, is that most of these new jobs have been located away from the areas of decline in industrial employment. In the case of Ireland, the phenomenon of massive growth in industrial output in the 1980s allied to overall employment decline is directly related to the high level of external control of the most dynamic industrial sectors, leading to high levels of profit outflow and reliance on externally based support services.

In the case of Bord na Móna, there is a need to use at least part of the savings resulting from rationalisation to create replacement employment in the areas where job losses will be felt most. The Bord has already responded to this argument by proposing to relocate the bulk of its substantial head-office staff from Dublin to the midlands. This, while undoubtedly welcome in itself, will not involve any additional job creation. Perhaps Bord na Móna should take a leaf out of the book of its fellow state company, the Sugar Company, which intends to set up an electrical components factory in Thurles in place of that town's sugar factory which the company plans to close down.

It may be, however, that significant new employment will ensue from the second main element in Eddie O'Connor's development plan for Bord na Móna. According to this, the Bord will be broken up into three subsidiaries under the central control of a holding company. Each of these subsidiaries will focus on one of the three principal areas of the Bord's operations — bulk peat for electricity generation, sod peat and briquettes for the domestic fuel market, and horticultural peat. It is with respect to the latter use that O'Connor envisages the most ambitious developments. As O'Connor sees it, there is a large and growing export market for horticultural peat; further, this end-use offers greater potential for added-value than simply burning peat as a fuel. By the end of the century, O'Connor sees peat sold for horticultural purposes bringing in as much revenue as peat sold as fuel; at present, it accounts for less than one sixth of Bord na Móna's total sales.

O'Connor also sees Bord na Móna moving into exciting new areas in the near future. Because of its peculiar properties, peat has a variety of possible uses in combating pollution, an activity which is likely to assume growing significance in the coming years. These uses include the ability to absorb unpleasant odours, to neutralise slurry bacteria, to mop up oil slicks, and to purify effluents. In his projections, O'Connor foresees these uses providing one sixth of the Bord's revenues by the end of the century.

#### **DECISION AWAITED**

Bord na Móna has not yet got the go-ahead for these development plans, but will have to wait the outcome of an independent government study of the Bord's operations. The previous experience of many state

companies suggests that government policy in relation to them is determined at least as much by the interests of the private sector as by the interests of the companies themselves or by the national interest generally. In particular, there is a clear danger that, given the current ideological drive against state enterprise, an attempt may be made to shackle Bord na Móna's development plans by, for example, hiving off the new market openings identified by the Bord to private enterprise.

Some scepticism of O'Connor's 'enterprise-led' approach has been expressed in left-wing circles. Echoing the phraseology of Thatcher-speak, O'Connor envisages a 'fitter and leaner' Bord na Móna, much less dependent on economically dubious and therefore politically vulnerable sales to the ESB, and thus able to provide more secure employment for a reduced workforce. At the same time, O'Connor is articulating a sense of ambition and vision for Bord na Móna as a corporate entity which has become only too rare among the beleaguered commercial state companies. He not only deserves but needs the vocal support of the left, whose energies should be devoted not to preventing the changes which he proposes to bring about, but to ensuring that the proceeds of the consequent enhanced productivity are used for the direct benefit of those areas which have become heavily dependent on Bord na Móna.

In the long-term, of course, Bord na Móna necessarily has a limited future due to the finite nature of the country's peat resources. While technological and market developments may render many of the currently uneconomic smaller bogs viable for eventual exploitation, in a mere thirty years time the Bord will be faced with rapid depletion of its resource base. As things stand, cutaway bog is already becoming available in significant quantities, so that the question of what is to be done with this cutaway is assuming some urgency.

#### **CUTAWAY BOGS**

Research into possible uses of cutaway bogs has been going on for over thirty years now. In this light, it was quite disturbing to find at a recent major conference on this topic that no progress seems to have been made to bring the various interest groups (including Bord na Móna itself, the Forestry Service, the Agricultural Institute, and conservation and amenity groups) together in an attempt to find a unified approach to the question. Instead, participants were treated to the spectacle of each of these groups jealously stating its claims against the others and querying their rival arguments; sectional interests rather than the common national interest were very much to the fore.

There is a clear lack of political leadership in evidence here. This question has been allowed to drift for years, so that no sense of common purpose has been created. Indeed, the level of confusion has been further accentuated by the fact that the Interdepartmental Committee set up to look into possible uses of cutaway bog — a body that has been in existence for eleven years — has, apparently, at last submitted its final report to the Government which has chosen not to publish it. However, the trend in Government thinking on the matter may be indicated by the fact that it has directed Bord na Móna to lease one thousand acres of fresh cutaway at Lullymore, County Kildare, to the Forestry Service for afforestation.

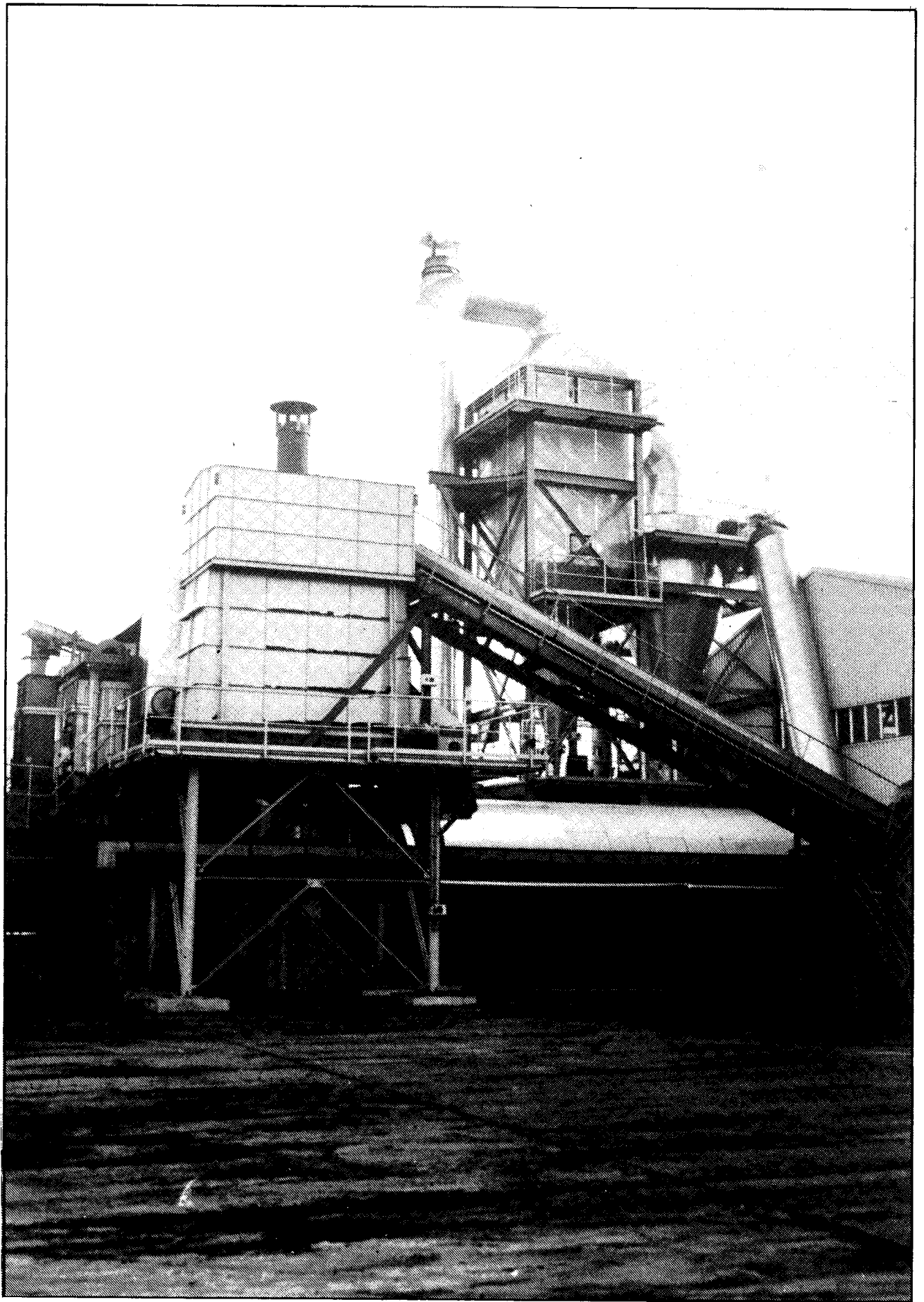


Photo: Bórd na Móna

*Bord na Móna has made a massive impact on the Midlands*



A strong case can be made for an independent authority to oversee the future development of Irish peatlands. The uses to which cutaway peatlands can be put are highly variable from locality to locality depending on such factors as accessibility and the physical and chemical characteristics of the bogs themselves and the underlying subsoil. The potential economic returns from the alternative uses (including, principally, forestry, conventional agriculture, horticulture, and recreational amenity) will also vary over time depending on market trends. There is a need, therefore, for detailed studies to be carried out at local level in order to arrive at recommendations on how different tracts of bogland might be developed. This authority should not confine its attention only to Bord na Móna cutaway. The Bord, in fact, accounts for only one quarter of the total area of peat in the Irish midlands; most of the remainder is used very poorly, if at all. There is a need for a concerted effort to exploit the commercial possibilities of this massive but neglected resource.

The proposed Peatland Authority will also need to tackle boldly a key question which is bound to raise its ugly political head once the commercial potential of cutaway peatland become apparent. This concerns who should be given responsibility for developing the cutaway as it becomes available. Already there is a strong lobby in favour of dividing up the cutaway among midland farmers. In line with current ideological trends, the government has devoted increasing attention to encouraging private afforestation, including extremely generous grants and other payments to farmers prepared to afforest part of their land. Accordingly, there is a danger that future governments might bow to political pressure and opt for subdivision of cutaway peatland among local farmers.

### AFFORESTATION

Such a development would present many drawbacks. Midland farmers generally are of limited technical competence, whereas peatland requires much skill in order to derive the best returns. Many farmers would shy away from afforestation, which offers probably the best overall alternative use for cutaway, because of the lengthy payback period. In any case, forestry requires special management skills which most farmers do not possess. Piecemeal development of forestry would rule out the potential for achieving major economies of scale such as could be realised by large-scale afforestation of peatland.

The attractions of afforestation are that it appears to offer a better long-term rate of return than alternative uses with respect to most areas of cutaway; a vast market is available (unlike most agricultural products, timber is in very short supply within the EEC); and very considerable value-added can be created by timber processing (chipboard is worth twenty times the value of the timber from which it is made). Forestry also offers significant direct employment prospects: if even half of the area of peat in the midlands were afforested, the resultant employment in forest cultivation, harvesting, transport and processing would amount to around 8,000 permanent, sustainable jobs — considerably more than are currently employed by Bord na Móna.

The establishment of Coillte Teoranta as a state company to operate the state-owned forests on a

commercial basis is a long overdue development. If, at the same time, the main thrust of government policy in relation to Bord na Móna's cutaway bogs is that they be transferred to Coillte Teo for afforestation, this will inevitably mean a gradual winding down and eventual elimination of Bord na Móna as a distinct corporate entity. Apart from the effect this could have on morale within the Bord in its later years, it would also involve the dissipation of the intimate knowledge of bog environments and bog-related technology which the Bord has built up over the years. Since much of this knowledge would also be of value to Coillte Teo, a strong case can be made for an eventual merger of Bord na Móna and Coillte Teo into an entity whose basic remit would be the commercial exploitation of not only peatlands but also other areas of marginal land which are currently being put to little productive use. Such a move was anticipated by the NESC report on Irish forestry policy, which concluded that 'it may well be sensible for Bord na Móna to evolve over its 40—50 year remaining life into Bord na gCrann'.

### DEVELOPMENT

It has been said that if the Dutch had access to Irish land, they would all become millionaires, whereas if the Irish were in charge of Holland's land, they would all drown. There is no doubt that Ireland's land resources are, for the most part, underutilised and that this applies particularly to the marginal land which takes up a large proportion of the country's land area. At a time of mass unemployment nationally, this situation is simply scandalous, and signifies a glaring lack of effective political leadership. The Irish political system has been notoriously sensitive about tackling questions of land and its utilisation. Successive governments have chosen to shirk the issue and look elsewhere for sources of economic growth. Now that the policy of externally-sourced industrial investment has proven to be desperately inadequate in terms of meeting the country's employment needs, there is an urgent need to look increasingly to our indigenous natural resources — unnecessarily undervalued in the past — as a major source of self-sustained economic growth.

Such is the scale of the national economic crisis, and of the extent of land under-utilisation, that what is needed is decisive government-led action to harness these resources in the overall national interest. Such action must be prepared to cut through petty bureaucratic jealousies and localised political and economic interests. While some sensitive toes will have to be stood on, there is no doubt that there would be widespread political support for such action, if it held out the prospect of significant employment growth. Rapid development of these resources can best be achieved through the big state companies such as Bord na Móna, Coillte Teo, and the Sugar Company (through its Erin Foods subsidiary). These have the scale of operation and the technical resources to make significant headway in a short timespan.

The task for the Left is to generate the political support for such a course of action by impressing on the Irish public both the fact that there are major resources available which can be developed, and that this development can most effectively be carried through by a state sector given a clear mandate and legislative support to get on with the job.

# WHERE IS THE LEFT GOING?

THE IRISH LEFT is neither as small nor as uninfluential as it itself often regrettably believes. Opinion polls suggest that the left wing parties and individuals could get at least 15% and perhaps 20% of the vote in the next general election. And that is at a time of fear, of enormous right wing propaganda and when people are bludgeoned by an overwhelming media consensus into believing that they must accept policies and activities which their own experiences and instincts tell them to reject. Our people still believe in generous welfare, public health, public education and public housing.

Many are appalled at the vulgarity and greed of Thatcherite Britain — and equally put off by their increasing awareness of the cruel underside of the USA, 'land of opportunity'.

As well as that they are more and more sceptical about fairness in Irish society. Urban dwellers know that taxation is most unfairly loaded against them, and that farmers and the self employed get off lightly; they know that the cut-backs have been paid for by the poor, the old, and the sick, and are making it known to many politicians that the right wing lobby to reduce the top rate of tax has not persuaded them. Hence Fianna Fáil's increasing reluctance to support such a move.

Why then do we find it so difficult to build from 15% up to 50% and beyond?

## Media consensus

I see a number of reasons. The first is of course the media consensus. Correspondents and commentators consistently portray the theories and prejudices of right wing economists as indisputable fact. The US economic 'miracle' and the British equivalent are two

**'If we on the left aren't organised, if we don't believe we can persuade and trust ordinary people, and if we don't even trust each other, then socialism, however correct, will remain a noble ideal, dressed up in flowery rhetoric, but nowhere nearer reality.'** Senator **BRENDAN RYAN** considers the challenge facing the Irish left.

instances of this.

We know that objective analysis shows that there is no US miracle, simply a spending spree on the backs of the poor and that British industrial production has only now just exceeded 1979 levels. In both countries poverty, hunger and inequality have spiralled, but the rich have had their rewards and the economists and commentators have managed to deceive us all. We must fight back. And that doesn't mean calling for nationalisation — censorship etc. It means rather organising ourselves so that every time (particularly on radio and TV) economic policy, taxation policy, industrial policy etc. are discussed, we make it known that there are 'experts' available, equally competent and articulate, to challenge the established view.

Every Today Tonight programme, news programme, current affairs programme etc, which continues the consensus distortion should be systematically contacted and an alternative view offered. We should make our own experts as well known as Sean Barrett etc.

That means organisation. And most of us, I believe, don't like that. Indeed I often think that anarchy rather than socialism is the preferred option of many on the Irish left!

Challenging the consensus simply means confirming the suspicions of ordinary people that they're being ripped off and hoodwinked over the past number of years. It's a necessary start — the people are waiting for an alternative.

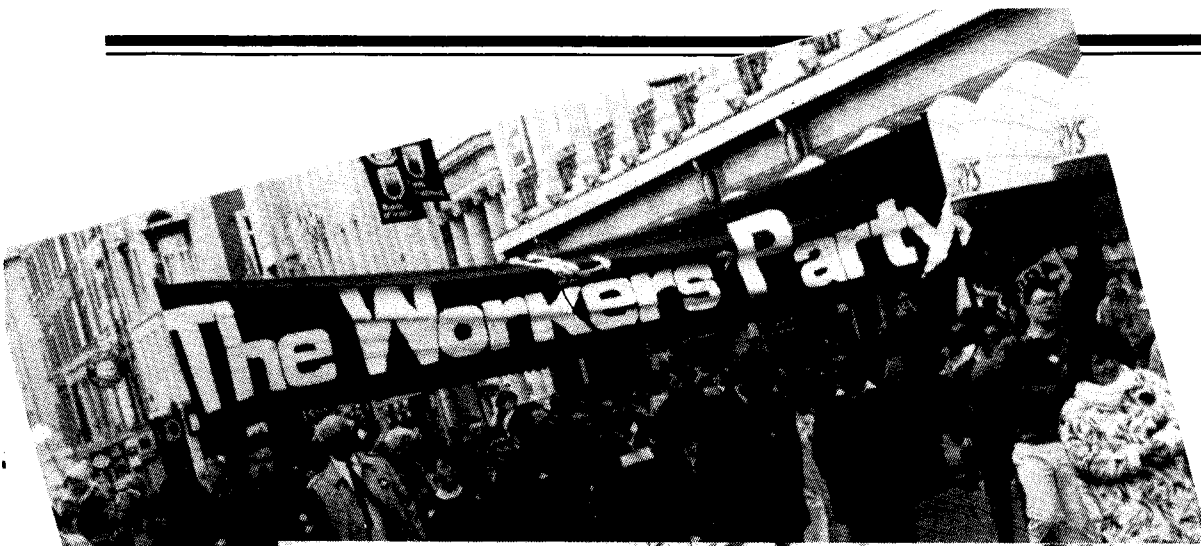
## Trust

Confirming people's doubts is not the same as persuading them to change. We must also offer people real policies — detailed, costed, realistic — and as radical as we need subject to those conditions. We must convince people that full employment is possible and achievable, and that good compassionate welfare services are necessary, desirable, and affordable.

Above all we must make it clear to people that we speak for them — that we believe in and respect ordinary people. What we are looking for is trust. We want people to trust us with their future and we can only earn that trust if we ourselves trust the people. That means a commitment to expanding democracy, within our political movement, in local and national government, and in the trade unions.

To what extent do working people regard trade union leaders as their representatives? Do they rather see them as alternative bosses or controllers? Democracy is universal — all institutions of working class power must be seen to be clearly and directly under working class control. That is hardly the experience of working people today.

Equally, political parties of the



working class must be seen to be democratic, accountable and open. Those who claim to represent the working class must be seen to trust the working class.

But perhaps above all else the people expect leadership from us, leadership based on conviction and vision. What they often seem to get is suspicion, rivalry and distrust. Too often I hear complaints from the Labour Party about the Workers' Party, from the Workers' Party about the Labour Party, and God knows what's being said about me!!

#### **The only solution**

Of course there are historical differences — differences of policy and of origins between the various

individuals and groups. Labour's participation in coalition was and still is a major source of friction and criticism. Equally however, attacks on Michael D Higgins in the 1987 election, or for that matter, silly satire in this magazine, means the Workers' Party has a lot to answer for. (Indeed, if we want, we'll be able to go on distrusting each other for ever!)

But it's time now to end the mistakes (and too many of the recent ones have been by the WP!!) and to begin to work together. Nothing could rally the people better than a common campaign launched by all of us on the left, based on facts, intelligent analysis, and a response to the real

needs of ordinary people.

People haven't changed, they still need security, peace, participation, affection, community, subsistence, meaning etc. These are not commodities and the market economy therefore is no solution. Socialism was, and is, the only solution. It is nevertheless not an easy solution — but a solution based on organisation, persuasion and trust. If we on the left aren't organised, if we don't believe we can persuade and trust ordinary people, and if we don't even trust each other, then socialism, however correct, will remain a noble ideal, dressed up in flowery rhetoric but nowhere nearer reality.

# Nationalism and socialism

Hedgehogs, animals with remarkably small minds, have only one response to a perceived attack: they roll themselves into prickly balls, burying their heads as close to their fundamentals as possible.

John Sullivan's response (November 1988) to my review (September 1988) of his book *ETA and Basque Nationalism, The Fight for Euskadi 1890-1986* is a depressing example of such behaviour. The review attempted to give a brief account and analysis of the book, in the process raising the issue of the relationship of nationalism and socialism, which seemed very relevant in view of the book's strongly anti-nationalist tone.

I would be grateful if you could give me space to raise this issue again, this time with more specific reference to the Irish situation. Before that, however, I must refute just a few of the dense array of barbed distortions and poisonous insults which form the substance of John Sullivan's response.

Firstly, my review was not so hostile as he suggests, nor does it misrepresent the book's contents. In some cases, it is much closer to his own avowed point of view than he seems willing to acknowledge.

'Readers of the review might think the book is a general study of Basque nationalism rather than of ETA and its supporters,' he writes.

I wrote: 'This book is a meticulously detailed account of the complex evolution of ETA over the last three decades, and deserves to become a definitive English language work of reference on the subject.' I continued: 'But his evident hostility to Basque nationalism, and his indifference to the richness of Basque culture, makes his analysis of ETA's relationship to Basque society, and of the Basques in general to the Spanish state, superficial and unproductive.'

The fact that he repeatedly attempts to make such analyses, and indeed the book's very title (*ETA was founded 70 years after 1890*), all make his charge that I was misrepresenting it somewhat ludicrous.

If he has forgotten his own title, he has a similar problem in reading his own quotations. I concluded my review by quoting the following sentence of his in its entirety: 'The experience of the Franco dictatorship

## letters

MAKING SENSE  
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had created a peculiar situation in Euskadi, as the level of political involvement was very high while the level of political understanding was abysmal.'

'Compared to where? To Madrid? Moscow? Mullingar? We are never told,' I commented.

John Sullivan replies by omitting the first part of his own sentence, and telling us that 'the intended comparison is with the last years of the Franco era and of the transition to a parliamentary system'. He would have seen that his explanation is gobbledegook if he had taken the trouble to read his own words in their own context.

I could go on, and on, but to avoid further tedium I will end by rejecting, for the record, his noxious assertion that 'Woodworth... finds the radical nationalist ideology attractive when he notes that people are more prone to lay down their lives for their country than their class'. Now that is getting dirty, Mr Sullivan, as anyone who reads my references to 'murderous Chauvinism' and 'strident patriotism' in the same review will surely agree.

Let us draw a veil over his crude attempt to smear me with crypto-Provosim, and over his bizarre distortion of feminism, and get back to the point I was really raising: Whether socialists like it not, nationalism, in its many forms, has proved to be an ideology which remains stubbornly resistant to even the more sophisticated forms of class politics. (Events in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Scotland since I wrote my review make this clearer than ever).

The history of this century, under any objective analysis, shows that workers (to say nothing of intellectuals) are more likely to fight for their country than their class.

Like (I think) Mr Sullivan, and many many others, I regret that fact very deeply. I have also been sickened by

the reactionary nationalism of the IRA and ETA. But regret and revolution are a poor foundation for a political programme, and I have become increasingly sceptical about both the theoretical accuracy, and the practical efficiency, of the programmes based on the premises of 'anti-nationalism'.

These programmes have emanated from the B&ICO, the Workers' Party, the DSP and O'Brienite intelligentsia. They emerged from courageous and painful rethinking by groups which had previously operated on the basis of a romantic, albeit leftwing, 'anti-imperialism', the 'National Liberation Front' model, which I referred to, and implicitly rejected in my review of John Sullivan's book.

On an ideological level, historians working in more or less proximity with these groups have exposed some of the central tenets of Irish nationalism to be hollow dogmas, often tainted with racism.

Even the best of new thinking, however, becomes old thinking in time. In Marxist terms, if nationalism is the thesis, the socialist anti-nationalism is the antithesis, it is surely necessary that a fresh synthesis now be achieved. It will require a great deal of open-minded debate to achieve such a new departure and I would simply like to pose some questions here, in the hope that they might make a small contribution to initiating such a debate.

Firstly, instead of being content to condemn every manifestation of nationalism from the sidelines, might it not be useful to look again at the factors which make nationalism so appealing to such large numbers of people?

Language, gastronomy, landscape, music, dance and popular customs are part of the tapestry of our lives. Demands from minority cultures to maintain and develop their particular characteristics are not in themselves reactionary. They can go hand in hand with socialist demands for better wages, working conditions, housing and public services. One set of demands does not exclude the other, but to present either set in isolation is to have a disastrously mutilated political programme.

Secondly, anti-nationalists put great stress on 'defeating nationalist terrorism'. But do they not, very often, fuel the very fire they are trying to



extinguish, by their uncritical acceptance of both the ideology and the repressive apparatus ranged against that terrorism?

On the level of ideology, anti-nationalism in Ireland often appears to be anti-green nationalism, since it rarely challenges the adherence of the Orange community to its British nationalism. Something has gone badly wrong with the balance here. If one side can wave its union jacks and poppies, surely the other can wave its tricolours and Easter lilies, the lily and the poppy both being emblems of nationalist blood sacrifice.

On the issue of repression, I cannot state the case better than Kevin Smyth has done in 'Policing Within the Law' (*Making Sense* September): 'The real beneficiaries of all the incidents which constitute the subject matter of this (Amnesty International) report have

been the Provisionals and their allies'.

Exactly. Every time the State uses torture, plastic bullets or assassination squads, terrorism gets a blood transfusion, not a wound. As well as being wrong in themselves, these measures are counter-productive. John Sullivan himself, in 'Hired Guns and Secret Funds' (*Making Sense* October) makes a strong case against the use of anti-ETA death squads by elements within the Spanish police. Had he made such a strong case in his book, it would have been a much more balanced account of the Basque situation.

Cultural repression also tends to produce a mirror-image reaction. Ban the Basque language from public life for 40 years, as Franco did, and it should be no surprise that some Basque nationalists today want to see Spanish eliminated from the Basque

civil service. This is not to support such demands, which are in themselves racist, but simply to put them in context.

Finally, do not anti-nationalists tend to ignore the fact that the centralist power, be it Britain or Spain, is often itself motivated by nationalism? Too often the centralists are eulogised as the instrument of civilising progress, bringing enlightenment to 'backward' regions. Those on the receiving end of such policies can be forgiven for perceiving them as national oppression by a larger, and highly chauvinist, neighbour.

The vicious circles of nationalism/imperialism and terrorism/repression will not be broken easily. There are too many 'interests' — on both sides — to allow that. But we can only move outside and beyond them if we take on board again the legitimate and positive aspects of nationalist demands, while continuing to jettison all that smacks of racism and reaction. Discriminating between these two cargoes will require a lot of hard work, but it is the only way to put the socialist ship back on course for international solidarity, which can only be based on mutual respect between free nations and never on domination.

**PADDY WOODWORTH**

### **Disappointing**

I read with great interest the article 'Let Sleeping Dogs Lie' by John Dunne (October), and while I did not agree with the arguments made in the article I felt that it stimulated discussion with my friends and other Party comrades who had read it. The response from Gerard O'Quigley took Mr Dunne's position to task and, in my opinion, argued intelligently against his analysis.

What I found disappointing was the correspondence from both Charlotte Bielenburg and Deirdre O'Connell. Charlotte, in her letter, resorts to quoting Proinsias De Rossa TD to infer that the author is in some way not toeing the Party line. Deirdre goes one step further: 'For the benefit of John Dunne and those of your readers who are not familiar with Workers' Party policy...' If we are going to run to the Workers' Party Ard Fheis Clár every time an article that provokes discussion is published in *Making Sense* I feel this will detract from the magazine, and it will cease to be the enjoyable read that it has been to date.

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## **LEFT BANK**

*Books*

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DUBLIN'S NEWEST  
BOOKSHOP

DURING the early eighties El Salvador was constantly in the headlines because of both the extreme human rights abuses being perpetrated by government forces and the popular war being waged by the forces of the FMLN. In recent years however, the situation has received little or no coverage in the western media.

This is at least partly due to the success of the US government's propaganda machine. The scenario outlined by the Americans went as follows: The government of the Christian Democratic President Jose Napoleon Duarte which came to power in 1980 was in the process of gradually reforming the political and socio-economic system in El Salvador. The human rights record of the government was improving and the activities of the Death Squads being tackled. The army was under firm control, and rapidly regaining control of the countryside at the expense of the guerilla organisations who were dubbed 'the extreme Left'. It was only a matter of years before El Salvador would become a model for other Latin American countries.

Just how far from reality this rosy picture was can only be appreciated today in the light of recent developments. It is now clear that Duarte's 'Christian Democratic' administration was never more than a front by which the oligarchy (known as the 14 Families) and the army retained their control of society. The activities of the Death Squads continued and if the number of murders per year dropped, this was only because the activists of the people's organisation had gone underground so that there were fewer 'targets' available. Certainly the government felt more secure in the mid-eighties, and curbed the murder gangs (largely composed of off-duty security forces members), but this was simply because it mistakenly considered the liberation movement a spent force.

However neither the sham democracy imposed by the Americans nor the so-called reforms introduced by Duarte's government could divert or defeat the opposition. As 1988 draws to a close, the government is in a chaotic state as popular resistance increases and the Death Squads engage in another orgy of murder.

This resurgence of resistance has been two-pronged. On the one hand the guerilla armies of the FMLN have extended their control to such an extent that they now control 30% of the country (especially in the north and east) while they now operate

## El Salvador's crisis

Victor Rubio, representative of the FMLN of El Salvador visited Ireland recently. He told COLM BREATHNACH of the continuing crisis affecting his country.



*El Salvadorean peasants bear the brunt of the continuing crisis.*

in all 14 provinces (as opposed to two in the early eighties) and are active in urban areas as well as rural zones. The FMLN is of course not a single organisation but an alliance of five left-wing politico-military groups of which the two largest are the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) and the Popular Liberation Army. In the areas under popular control the seeds of a new society are being sown as peasants, for the first time in the country's history, exercise control over their own land, and have a real say in decision making.

Allied to the FMLN is the FDR which is composed of two political parties: The social democratic party of Guillermo Unge and a progressive section of the Christian Democratic party led by Ruben Zancona. This then is the 'extreme Left' of the American propaganda.

A new aspect of the struggle however has been the growth of trade union activity. Many unions were almost completely destroyed or driven underground during the early Duarte

years. Now they are once more openly organising and agitating and, in a significant move, have united to set up an umbrella organisation (UNTS) which includes all major trade unions, even those which were formerly united with the right-wing Christian Democrats.

El Salvador's ruling class is desperately looking for a way to control the situation. So they have unleashed the Death Squads once again. Over 50 people have been killed by them in the first six months of this year, and this figure is likely to increase in the future. However violence is not the only means by which they intend to thwart their own people.

Since Duarte himself is dying of cancer and his party has collapsed, it now seems likely that the far-right party ARENA will win the next election (1989). Already the Americans are doing their best to clean up the image of this dubious outfit by ensuring that its leader Roberto D'Aubuisson does not run for president leaving a more accept-

able (though equally right-wing) candidate to take the field. Needless to say the elections are not held on a fair and democratic basis in El Salvador. Despite this fact the FDR have decided to participate under the title Democratic Convergence, simply to highlight the need for negotiations between the government and the FMLN as the only solution to the present war. In this the FDR is simply repeating the terms set out by the Arias peace plan signed by all Central American governments in 1987.

The El Salvadorean Government have refused to implement the provisions of the plan (genuine dialogue with opposition forces being the most important one) and indeed have cynically used it to release many of those responsible for the murder of activists in the early eighties, under the amnesty for political prisoners clause of the plan. This is in stark contrast with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, who are the only government to make a serious attempt to implement the Arias agreement.

Not surprisingly the FMLN have repeatedly called for negotiations with the government. There should be no pre-conditions and the aim of the talks should be to set up a new government of broad participation which would represent all sectors of society. Such a government could then begin to bring about real social and economic reforms as well as achieving genuine national independence, through a policy of positive non-alignment.

Victor Rubio is the representative of the FMLN in the Mid West of the USA. He knows from bitter experience how difficult the struggle for liberation just is, as his father who was an opposition politician was murdered by government forces in the 1950s. While in Ireland he addressed a number of public meetings at which he outlined the present situation in his country. He also had a meeting with representatives of Trocaire, the LGPSU and the Department of Foreign Affairs. His main message to Irish people was to pressurise our government to take a strong stand on human rights violations in El Salvador and to press for genuine implementation of the Arias Peace Plan.

One comment from Victor perhaps sums up the prospects for the future: 'It may take two years or it may take longer but victory is now certain.'

# THE STALIN PHENOMENON

Dmitry Volkogonov

ONLY STALIN KNEW all there is to know about Stalin. Stalin liked things to be black or white, with no shades of grey. He clearly saw to it that his biography would be written in glowing terms. I do not know whether he knew about the existence in ancient Rome of the 'Law of Denouncing Memory' according to which everything that did not suit the new emperor was consigned to oblivion. However, as we know, that law only emphasised the futility of attempts to regulate human memory. For this memory lives (or dies) according to entirely different laws — its own laws. The abyss of history is bottomless. However, not everyone falls through the meshes of the giant net spread over the chasm of oblivion. Such stupendous figures as Stalin have a chance to remain in the annals of history.

We are all gratified that an active process is now under way not only of renovating the present, but also of 'restoring' the past. And the personality of Stalin seems to have become the centre of public interest, both emotional and intellectual, in the past. I do not think there has ever been a more contradictory personality in our history (both Russian and Soviet). He has received enough praise and condemnation for a legion of illustrious names.

A journey into the future is marked by difficulties and uncertainty. A journey into the past is not any easier. As Ludwig Feuerbach once aptly said, it is always a 'prick in the heart', alarming and disturbing. Stalin is one of the most complex people in all history. Whether we like it or not, such people belong not only to the past, but also to the present and to the future. Their fate is eternal ideological 'food' for thought about life, time and conscience. One of the conclusions suggesting itself at the very outset of research on Stalin is that the story of his life highlights the extremely intricate dialectics of his epoch. The conditions of those days were just as complex as the personality of the man leading the Party and people. To be honest before truth and history, one cannot but acknowledge Stalin's

contribution to the struggle for socialism and its defence. Nor can one ignore his unforgivable political mistakes and crimes which manifested themselves in unjustified reprisals against thousands of innocent people. Stalin and the Party nucleus that defended Leninism in an ideological and political struggle paved the way for the accelerated construction of socialism. And then, when it seemed that the worst was over (in terms of the inner Party struggle), when major achievements had been scored in many spheres of the building of a new life, there emerged a profoundly erroneous political concept 'sanctified' by Stalin — as socialism moved forward the class struggle would intensify. And this meant that the dictatorship of the proletariat for the common cause would come to perform punitive rather than constructive functions more and more. As the truth of history unfolds, there have naturally been radical changes in the evaluation of Stalin's character. Compere, for instance, the Message of Greetings from the Central Committee of the AUCP (B)<sup>1</sup> and the USSR Council of Ministers on Stalin's 70th birthday in December 1949, and the dramatic report Nikita Khrushchev made to the 20th Congress of the CPSU on the night of February 24—25, 1956. Two entirely opposite views, and essentially the same people expressed them over a period of just a few years. After that the process of society recovering its sight entered a period of a kind of moratorium.

UPON HEARING Stalin's name many people think first

1. The Central Committee of the AUCP (B) — the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). At its First Congress (1898) the Party was named the RSDLP (the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party). In 1917 it became the RSDLP (B). The Seventh Congress (1918) renamed the Party the RCP (B), that is, the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks); at the 14th Congress (1925) it was named the AUCP (B) and the 19th Congress (1952) gave it the name of the CPSU.

of all of the tragic year 1937, the reprisals, dehumanisation. It was as if invisible Valkyries, which, as is known, choose who is to be slain and who is to be left alive, began hovering over society. Yes, all that did happen. The people guilty of those crimes cannot be pardoned. But we also remember that it was in those very years that the Dnieper Hydropower Station and the Magnitogorsk Steel Complex<sup>2</sup> were built, and that those years knew such people as Papanin, Angelina, Stakhanov, and Busygin... Those years saw the laying of the foundations for everything we stand upon today: the Soviet people held out to defeat fascism in the Great Patriotic War, and the human spirit soared. That is why, while denouncing Stalin for the crimes, it is politically and morally incorrect to call into doubt the real achievements of socialism and its basic possibilities. It is wrong when assessing Stalin and his entourage to mechanically extend these assessments to the Party and the millions of ordinary people who fervently believed in the sincerity of the revolutionary ideals.

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*'There are no good deeds  
that can justify savagery.'*

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The veteran Bolshevik Kuptsov, who carried his tragic cross through many camps, terrible humiliations and trials, today says with great conviction, decades after his trying experiences: 'Many of us in the camps had landed there as a result of arbitrary actions. But not once, I would like to repeat this in particular, not once did it even cross my mind that there was something wrong with our ideas, our system, our ideals. The monstrous injustice was associated only with some tragic mistakes, with errors of concrete persons. All my companions sharing my unfortunate fate thought likewise. We sincerely rejoiced when we got news from the outside about the commissioning of new plants and Chkalov's flights and later agonised over the staggering setbacks in the initial phase of the war... The prison did not and could not tear us away from the Motherland, from the cause to which we remained devoted even as we stood behind the barbed wire of Siberian camps.'

It is impossible to assess the past in terms of arithmetic: which are more numerous in Stalin's record, his crimes or his good deeds? The question itself is immoral, for there are no good deeds that can justify savagery. The problem is much more complex — it involves learning more about the factors that caused the deformation of the mechanism of power. How could it happen that the great coexisted with the base, and evil camouflaged itself as good? Why did the social degeneration of many persons occur? Was the tragedy inevitable? Why did the institutions of social protection 'fail to work'? These and many other questions are often raised in our press, reflecting a rapid increase in the political and historical culture of the Soviet people that had taken place since the 27th Party Congress. People, especially young people, having only a sketchy knowledge of the country's history, develop a kind of intellectual confusion as a result of the directly opposite opinions and subjectivist assessments they come across. And this confusion may lead to social nihilism and disrespect for our values. Under these circumstances the best way to quench the thirst for knowledge is to learn the truth.

LENIN'S METHOD of analysing the 1917 Socialist Revolution and its prospects as well as of assessing the political and human qualities of its leaders should be used

as a basis for painting a philosophical and political portrait Stalin remembered all his life that Lenin, in his notes to the Congress in December 1922, called him and Trotsky 'two outstanding leaders'. Nor did he ever forget Lenin's assessment of his complex and difficult character, an assessment scathing in its frankness and depth. And Stalin could not accept Lenin calling Bukharin 'the favourite of the whole Party'. A study of Stalin's speeches reveals that he disputed Lenin's assessments on more than one occasion, although he did this very cautiously and in a roundabout way. For instance, arguing in his head with Lenin, he once said in one of his speeches: 'We like Bukharin, but we like the truth, the Party and the Comintern even more'.<sup>3</sup> This phrase just about sums up Stalin: devoted to an idea, but cunning and crafty.

General Secretary Stalin once interpreted in a speech Lenin's statement 'Stalin is too rude' as meaning 'he is rude only to enemies'. When one turns to Lenin in analysing the Stalin phenomenon, one can see again and again that in his brilliant thinking Lenin was way ahead of us, as always. This is the quality of not merely wise and profound truths, this is the quality of prophetic truths.

In recent years Soviet biographies of many historical figures have appeared, including political biographies of Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Sir Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, and other persons who will remain in the annals of history forever. In our country it is not considered shameful or improper to publish books even about such a sinister figure as Hitler. But there is no biography of Stalin, while at the same time dozens of books have been written about him abroad. This gap in our history is today being filled by a multitude of literary and historical publications about separate features of Stalin's activities. Their appearance shows the effect of rain after a long drought. Undoubtedly, historians will be making further serious studies of Stalin, as well as of Bukharin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and other leading figures of the Party and the state.

One of the reasons for this interest in Stalin lies in the fact that in terms of history Stalin departed this life only recently, less than four decades ago. And this means that his fate is closely connected with the fate of those alive today and their immediate predecessors.

Another reason for the unremitting interest in the story of Stalin's life stems from the new understanding of such social and human values as socialism, humanism, justice, truth, and moral ideals. The years of stagnation have shown once again that dogmatism in thinking can build only an illusory philosophical shrine in which everything is supposed to play the role of the 'eternal'. But it seems nothing is eternal except change. Dogmatic blindness is dangerous because it can turn an ideology into a religion. Dogmatism puts off all earthly joys until 'tomorrow', while tomorrow is put off until the 'day after tomorrow'. The period of revolutionary renovation our society has entered has touched upon social consciousness first and foremost. And it is significant that the dogmatism and bureaucracy rooted in the years of Stalin's autocratic leadership have now become the main targets of criticism and negation.

Finally, there is yet another reason (there are even more reasons, of course) for the steady interest in the life of the man who was at the top of the power pyramid for more than thirty years. And he was not next to such people as

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2. Large development projects started in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

3. The Comintern (full name: The Communist International), the international revolutionary proletarian organisation of the Communist Parties of various countries (1919—1943).



Lenin, not among them as Lenin had been. He stood above them. The Soviet people actually knew nothing about Stalin despite the countless laudatory articles, portraits, statues, and numerous copies of his works. His short biography which came out after World War II has only 'compilers' as is stated on the title-page and not authors. The biography, which had been edited by Stalin himself, gives a sketch of a man's heroic deeds while the man himself is absent from it.

True, some of his contemporaries did make attempts to paint a political portrait of him. For instance, before World War II academician E.M. Yaroslavsky published the book *About Comrade Stalin* in which, besides the unbridled eulogising, he observed quite correctly that to write about Stalin meant to describe all the twists and turns of the Party struggle in the course of building socialism in the Soviet Union. Karl Radek, in his book *Portraits and Pamphlets* (1933) devoted a lengthy article to Stalin which was essentially an unrestrained glorification of the Messiah. Incidentally, the eulogy of the leader did not save the author of *Portraits and Pamphlets* from a sad fate. Needless to say, such works are of little scientific value.

A HUMAN LIFE burns out quickly, like a Northern summer. One could also compare human life with a fire: the sparks, the merry, light tongues of the fire, the strong flames, the quiet embers, the weak shimmering, the smouldering embers, and the cold ashes. Sooner or later non-existence awaits us all, both the great and the ordinary. And this is an eternal night, which will most definitely arrive, and this is the day that will never come again. This truth is equally merciless to all. Stalin realised that. Stalin and his associates have a lot to do with the many 'blank' spots in Soviet history, and with the places where the pages of the annals have been distorted or simply ripped out. This is one difficulty.

Another difficulty is of a more general nature. The mind of a person is a hidden, enigmatic world which dies with that person. We will never know everything about the dead. But the scope for discovery is infinite here. Stalin's essays, memoranda and resolutions tell us less about the man's thoughts than his deeds, his accomplishments, actions, and, to our regret, crimes. In this sense the mysteries of the mind are not so much mysteries if one knows what 'feeds' them, how they express themselves, and what their source of inspiration is. The multi-coloured, many-stringed, long-suffering world of human existence around us is the master key to unravelling the mysteries of any human mind, including the mind of such a man as Stalin. But at times the logic of a scientific analysis of his actions leads us into a blind alley when we try to explain some of those actions.

For instance, Stalin knew of Lenin's warm feelings for Bukharin. For years Stalin himself maintained friendly relations with Bukharin and his family. Bukharin gave Stalin considerable help in the fight against Trotsky and Trotskyism. Stalin must have realised that the charges of spying, conspiracy, etc., brought against Bukharin were absurd. Bukharin, with his high intellectual and cultural standards, knew how to respect argumentation. And when

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*'Dogmatic blindness is dangerous because it can turn an ideology into a religion.'*



he saw that his programme of *unhurried* social development might lead to failure, for history had given our country no time for 'getting into gear', he honestly admitted his mistakes. Moreover, he took an active part in the efforts to carry out Party directives. But all that did not prevent Stalin from sanctioning the death of the exceptionally popular Party worker and in fact, a close Party comrade. How can this be explained or understood?

A few years ago, as I was preparing to write a philosophical and biographical essay on Stalin, I somehow, without noticing it myself, began to take interest in literature on Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Oliver Cromwell, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great... I became interested in the psychology of 'leaders', dictators, tyrants, and other absolutist rulers. And although I understand that any historical parallels are risky, I would like to present one preliminary conviction I reached. People with unlimited power who are beyond democratic control, inevitably develop a sense of infallibility. They come to believe they have a licence to do anything and tend to overestimate their personal abilities. As a rule, such people, although they live among others, are infinitely lonely. Although, as has been established, Stalin very seldom talked with anyone tête-à-tête, (he always had either Molotov or Kaganovich, Voroshilov or Malenkov, Beria, etc., with him), he was extremely lonely at heart. He had nobody to relate to, discuss things with or argue and explain himself to... Isolation at the top and unlimited power, chilling in its reality, desiccated his feelings and turned his mind into a cold calculator. Every step that immediately becomes 'historic', 'fateful' and 'decisive' gradually kills everything human in a man.

Stalin tried his whole life (and not without success!) to turn one of his weaknesses into a strength. Even during the revolutionary days, when it was necessary to go to factories, army regiments, street rallies, to go to the crowds, Stalin suffered from a lack of self-confidence and anxiety which, true enough, he managed to conceal. Stalin did not like and indeed did not know how to speak in front of people. His speech was simple, clear and bore no flight of fancy, or aphoristic element specially for the rostrum. A strong Georgian accent, constraint and monotony, made his speeches inexpressive. It is no accident that Stalin spoke at meetings, rallies and manifestations less frequently than any other Lenin's associate. He preferred to draw up directives and instructions, write essays, articles, and commentaries for newspapers on various political events. For instance, after his return from exile in mid-March 1917, Stalin published more than sixty articles and reviews in such newspapers as *Pravda*, *Soldatskaya Pravda*, *Rabochiy i Soldat*, and other newspapers! He was a mediocre writer in terms of style, but he was consistent, precise and invariably categorical in his conclusions. In Gori, where Stalin was born, at noon the sun lies directly above head, casting no shadows.<sup>4</sup> And the same was true of his newspaper articles: they were always written in black and white, with no shadowy grey.

Later Stalin would get used to the rostrum at congresses and conferences. But the situation would be different then: people would listen to his low, quiet voice in a ringing silence, ever ready to break that silence with loud applause that would grow into an ovation. Stalin made restraint in direct contacts with the masses a rule. For rare exceptions, he never visited factories, cooperative farms, other Soviet Republics or frontline units. The leader's voice sounded only occasionally from the very top of the pyramid. Millions listened to it at the foot of that pyramid with sacred trepidation. The leader turned his unsociable and withdrawn features into attributes of his cult and his

exclusiveness.

I ONCE AGAIN EMPHASISE that I am not a historian. I am sure that more detailed *historical* works will see the light of day. But as a philosopher I have tried to keep to the principle of the unity of the historical and the logical. My analysis and conclusions are first and foremost based on Lenin's works, Party documents, and materials from a number of archives. For instance, while studying the military aspect of Stalin's activities I acquainted myself with many interesting original documents that have not been published from the Defence Ministry Archives. Even a first glance at Stalin's resolutions in military documents reveals the extremely contradictory nature of their author. Here is just one example. Stalin reads a report saying that attempts to master night flights led to numerous accidents in the Air Force. The report submitted by the People's Commissar of Defence points out that the accidents are due to the lack of discipline encouraged by the Air Force command. In those days such an assessment was tantamount to an indictment. Stalin decides that it is necessary to give pilots better training and that the Air Force commander accused of 'aiding and abetting laxity' should be sent to the Military Academy for further training. But resolutions on the issue in other papers next to that document are quite different, even cruel.

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*'People with unlimited power who are beyond democratic control, inevitably develop a sense of infallibility'.*

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Glancing at the well-preserved lines of Stalin's resolutions, written, as a rule, in red or blue pencil, legibly and in a sweeping manner, one asks: where were the roots of this man's irrationality? Perhaps in the religious dogmatism he was subjected to in his childhood? Or perhaps in the strange intellectual jealousy he felt when listening to the brilliant speeches of Lenin, Plekhanov, Akselrod and Martov at the Party congresses in London and Stockholm? Or perhaps the origins of that irrationality lie in the bitterness he developed even before the 1917 Revolution? In a letter written on December 30, 1922, Lenin noted that one of the features of Stalin's character was spite. And, as Lenin observed, 'in politics spite generally plays the basest of roles'. Stalin's record prior to the 1917 Revolution includes seven arrests and five escapes. From the age of nineteen he had to go into hiding time and again as he carried our Party committee instructions. He was arrested, changed his name, secured false passports, expropriated money to give to the Party, and moved from place to place... He never stayed long in prison. He would escape and go into hiding again. However, the idea of going abroad never crossed his mind.

I have read the works of Stalin's political and ideological opponents inside the country: Trotsky, Zinovyev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky, and others. All of them were associates and pupils of Lenin. And not one of

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4. Gori, a town in the Georgian SSR, where the Joseph Stalin museum house is located.

them considered himself to be a protege of Stalin, while later Kaganovich, Molotov, Voroshilov and other new figures who had taken their place, openly spoke about themselves as such proteges. Here Stalin followed the ancient rule of all dictators. He knew that people promoted by him would be more loyal to him and would never make claims to the top roles. In the 1920s people like Trotsky, Zinovyev and Kamenev were better known in the Party than Stalin. It should be pointed out that some of them were quite prolific. Trotsky, for example, by 1927 had seventeen volumes of essays to his name. As he created his works, this energetic politician and talented writer, invariably flaunted himself before the mirror of history, trying to justify his claims to Party leadership. As I read the volumes of his correspondence, I was astonished by his concern for what would be left about him for future generations. Letters, applauding him, notes sent up to him during his numerous speeches, the lists of diplomats who sought an audience with him, press comments on his moves and actions — all that was carefully filed and preserved. Trotsky was getting ready to seize Party leadership after Lenin's death.

Stalin was more often than others the target of Trotsky's criticism, both direct and veiled. True, Trotsky published his main anti-Soviet, anti-Stalinist works after having been exiled from the USSR. It is well known that Trotsky described Stalin as 'the most outstanding mediocrity in our Party'. As a matter of fact, Trotsky, who didn't even try to conceal his opinion about himself as an intellectual genius, often resorted to such descriptions to humiliate his opponents (for instance, that was how he spoke about Zinovyev in 1924 describing the latter as an 'importunate mediocrity'; he called Vandervelde a 'brilliant mediocrity', and Tsereteli a 'gifted and honest mediocrity', etc.). After his expulsion from the Soviet Union, Trotsky retained one lasting and maniacal passion to end end of his life: hatred for Stalin. Nobody wrote as many caustic, malicious, offensive, vile and degrading remarks about Stalin as Trotsky. In these works Trotsky's true self shone through even more: he was fighting not for the truth, but for himself, the would-be dictator.

ON THE TRAGIC DAY of January 21, 1924, the day Lenin died, Stalin dictated the following telegram: 'To Comrade Trotsky. At 6.50 am, January 21, Comrade Lenin died suddenly. Cause of death: paralysis of the respiratory centre. Funeral Saturday January 26. Stalin.' As he signed the message, Stalin realised that the time had come for a bitter and uncompromising struggle with Trotsky for the leadership. But little did Stalin suspect that, in overcoming Trotsky, he would never 'get rid of him'. Stalin himself was to assume precisely the command-bureaucracy style, violence and toughness advocated by Trotsky. Is not this one of the sources of the future tragedy? And what are the other sources? Here I can only make the following remark.

One of the reasons for the future tragedy was of a private nature, as it were. After the 11th Party Congress a Central Committee Plenary Meeting on April 3, 1922 established the post of General Secretary.<sup>5</sup> At the time the post was not seen as being so important, otherwise Lenin would most likely have been elected to it. The General Secretary was instituted to control the daily affairs of the Secretariat. Lenin was already ill. Stalin, who had already shown inclinations to office work earlier, was appointed to this post on Kamenev's recommendation (and, evidently, with Lenin's approval). And less than a year after that appointment, on January 4, 1923 Lenin suggested to his Central Committee

5. The 11th Party Congress was held in March and April 1922.



colleagues in his Addition to the well-known *Letter to Congress* that they should 'think about a way of removing Stalin from that post'. It only took Lenin a few months to realise what kind of man the General Secretary was and see traits in him that could become dangerous in the future. Lenin's death stopped his wish from being fulfilled. And here another, special reason is revealed: the failure to fulfil Lenin's will. The members of the Central Committee and the Delegates to the 13th Party Congress proved inconsistent on that issue.<sup>6</sup> Later the Party would pay a dear price for the concession made to Stalin by his well-wishers (in those days!) Zinoviev and Kamenev, although Stalin, having learned about Lenin's letter, even tried to hand in his resignation. It should be pointed out that in 1924 Stalin was just one of many leaders and nobody saw in him a future demon.

However, the main reason for the future tragedies lay somewhere else. It stemmed from the failure of Lenin's successors to implement his directives. In his last letters Lenin repeatedly returned to the idea of democratising Party life and improving the Party apparatus, expanding Central Committee to include workers and peasants and systematically renewing its membership. Regrettably the democratic foundations had been laid down but were not developed. If Stalin's term of office had been limited by the Party Rules, the ugly features of the cult could have been avoided. In Lenin's recommendation to the 12th Party Congress 'How We Should Reorganise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection', one can trace the idea of introducing the mandatory renewal of the leading Party bodies and of distributing the functions between the Central Committee and the Soviet government.<sup>7</sup> The first shoots of democracy were left untended. And gradually waves of dogmatism, bureaucracy, and administration by mere injunction snuffed those shoots out. The future cult of the 'great leader' was no mere coincidence.

I have managed to get hold of eyewitness accounts from many persons who had either met Stalin or were involved in one way or another in the whirlwind of events brought about by his decisions. Even individual voices from the chorus of history are important. They make it possible to get a more keen sense of the historical retrospect, to hear the voices of the dead and to have a better understanding of the motives of the struggle of passions... The echoes of history... They live in us, in our destinies and memories, and sometimes in the new scanty data from the past, from that which has burned out and been hidden. Those echoes are like a few lines from the past which does not want to sink into obscurity forever, to become lost in the expanse of infinity. Perhaps we may even speak about the *unfinished* past. In other words, about that past, that phenomenon of time, for which there is no reliable, complete answer. For instance, subconsciously, the past is not over for me. Although I know that my father was a victim of the repressions in 1937, I do not know where he was buried or what his last words were... Most likely, I will never know, but the mind refuses to come to terms with this. The unfinished past may also exist for the people, who do not know in full the genuine history of their triumphs and tragedies.

IT OFTEN HAPPENS IN HISTORY that the triumph of one man becomes the tragedy of a whole nation. Nikita Khrushchev, addressing the 20th Party Congress, made this point: 'We cannot say that his actions were those of a crazy despot. He thought it was necessary to act that way in the interests of the Party and the working masses, in defence of the revolutionary gains. This is where the tragedy lies!' I do not, however, think that the emphasis was exactly right. As

is stated in Mikhail Gorbachev's report of November 2, 1987, the documents available suggest that Stalin knew about the scale of the reprisals and their mass character. Yes, he knew and knew for sure. For instance, Ulrikh, Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Court, together with Vyshinsky made regular reports to Stalin (more often than not to Molotov and Yezhov at the same time) about the trials and sentences. In 1937 Ulrikh submitted 'summaries' of the total number of people convicted of 'espionage, terrorism and sabotage activities'. Stalin read all the summaries: about harvesting, coal output and, horrible as it may be, about the numbers of people put to death.

Stalin quickly grew accustomed to violence as an indispensable component of unlimited power. Most likely, although this is already from the realm of logical suppositions, the punitive machine Stalin threw into high gear captured the imagination not only of the functionaries in the lower echelon, but also of the leader himself. It is possible that the idea of violence as a universal tool evolved over various stages. First there was the struggle against real enemies, and they did exist; then came the liquidation of his opponents; later the terrible flywheel of violence gained momentum, and, finally, violence came to be regarded as an indication of loyalty and orthodoxy. For instance, even his closest associates, Molotov and Kaganovich, didn't even blink then they heard the news that the wife of one of them and the brother of the other had been arrested as 'enemies of the people'.

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*'It often happens in history that the triumph of one man becomes the tragedy of a whole nation.'*

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At times Stalin already viewed society as a human aquarium: everything was in his power... 'Sabotage', the spy scare, the fight against the windmills of 'double-dealing' became the shameful attributes of orthodoxy, blind faith and loyalty to the leader. How could one even imagine that six of the full and alternate members of the Politburo elected at the 14th Congress of the AUCP (B)<sup>8</sup> would turn out to be enemies!? Stalin destroyed 'enemies', and the waves went farther and farther... That was the tragic triumph of the forces of evil. And who knows, perhaps, although it has never been established, Stalin, along with being cruel, was mentally ill? If he wasn't it is hard to explain why, having removed his rivals, he continued to 'slaughter' the best people in the Party and government just before the severe trials of the war. Incidentally, many Communists in the bodies of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs realised earlier than others the danger stemming from the hysteria of reprisals and generic suspicion. In their midst alone more than 20,000 people fell victim to that orgy of lawlessness.

However, in the final analysis, no grimaces of history could ever deprive the people who created 'the first socialist land' of their achievements, and despite the tragedy, we still uphold our ideals. The dialectics of triumph and tragedy itself harbours the infinite complexity of our existence on

6. The 13th Party Congress was held in May 1924.

7. The 12th Party Congress was held in April 1923.

8. The 14th Party Congress was held in December 1925.



*'If Trotsky had taken up the leadership of the party it would have gone through even more severe trials and the gains made by socialism would have probably been lost.'*

which so much depends, despite the decisive role the masses play (in the long run!), on historical personalities. As Hegel once put it, a man's destiny is not his own personal destiny, it represents the common moral tragic destiny. And its tragedy here lies precisely in the fact that at a certain stage millions of people saw Stalin as not a man in flesh and blood but as a symbol of socialism, as its personification. After all, a lie repeated many times may come to look like the truth. The deification of the leader assumed a higher meaning. In the eyes of the people it justified any bad consequences of the battle to weed out enemies, and on the other hand, all successes were attributed to the will and intellect of one person alone. Stalin liked to quote classics when adopting and announcing his decisions, especially at big forums. In doing so, he displayed a weakness common to the entire human race. People like being protected. Even such a powerful man as Stalin was not averse to taking shelter in the shadow of some authority in theoretical studies, in the shadow of ideological clichés or that of his great predecessor. Triumph and tragedy manifested themselves in the great patriotism and internationalism of the Soviet people and at the same time, in the dogmatism and bureaucracy of many institutions, in the genuine loyalty and self-sacrifice of millions of people, in the absolute power of the administrative staffs and in the spread of the 'cogwheel' mentality.

IT IS MOST EASY to say that every epoch has its own 'Dark Ages'. I am deeply convinced that if after Lenin's death, democracy had not been lacking, the development of society along socialist lines could have gotten by without those deep dents in the shield of our Fatherland's history, dents which appeared contrary to the ideals of Marxism. The tragedy could have been prevented. Of course, it is easier now to speak of a possible alternative than it was to make the right choice in those distant years. It is easy to analyse a situation in retrospect. It is always much more difficult to promptly cope with a specific situation.

Today, as we look back, it seems that after the death of Lenin, who was revered even by the opposition inside the Party, it was either Trotsky or Bukharin who had a real chance of taking over leadership. Today there is every reason to say that if Trotsky had taken up the leadership of the Party it would have gone through even more severe trials and the gains made by socialism would have probably been lost. All the more so because Trotsky had no clearcut

scientific programme for building socialism in the USSR. Bukharin, however, did have such a programme, he had his own vision of Party objectives. However, for all the attractive features of his personality, his high intellect, gentleness, and humaneness, Bukharin for a long time failed to understand the historical necessity for a sharp dash ahead in building up the country's economic might.

Of course, there were also Rudzutak, Frunze and Rykov... However, it appears that from the time of Lenin's death almost until the 1930s, Stalin was by far the most strong-willed of the revolutionary leaders in defending the Party course to consolidate the first socialist state and assert its right to existence in the world. Of course, he lacked Lenin's qualities to be his successor. But then so did all the others. Of course, Stalin did not possess Lenin's brilliant spiritual power, the depth of Plekhanov's theoretical knowledge, or Lunacharsky's culture. He was neither a leading theoretician, not an orator, nor an attractive personality. He was inferior to many both morally and intellectually. But he became the leader. A leader's sense of purpose and political willpower were crucial as the new system fought to survive. And after Lenin there were probably no equals to Stalin in this. To quote Hamlet, besides the burden of his imperfections, Stalin also possessed something which others did not have. Stalin's ability to muster the Party apparatus towards his goals played a role of no small importance here. Also, many of those who remained with Stalin after Lenin's death did not prove equal to the task. In those conditions there was little chance of other leaders coming to the fore.

However, in the final analysis, it is not the personalities that matter. What matters is the fact that the democratic potential Lenin had begun to build was not preserved. That is the whole point. If democratic guarantees of social defence against setbacks had been created, whether the leader was outstanding or not quite outstanding would not have been of decisive importance. Otherwise the country becomes too heavily dependent on the choice of history — who will stand at the helm? Stalin, who did a great deal in asserting socialism in our country and who did not give in to any opposition, nevertheless failed to pass the test of power, first of all, from the point of view of his attitude towards human moral values. Stalin was not merely ruthless to his political opponents. He believed that any point of view other than his own was opportunistic. Anyone not with him was regarded as an enemy. In Stalin's mind the idea of duty, which he understood as unqualified obedience, prevailed over the idea of human rights.

Few people are destined to outlive their time. Stalin is one of them. But his immortality is a troubled one. Arguments about his role in Soviet history accompanied by epithets tainted by worship, hatred, bitterness, and everlasting bewilderment, are sure to continue unabated for a long time. Be that as it may, Stalin's fate shows us once again that in the long run the power of great ideas proves stronger than the power of individual people. The tragic success of Stalin's abuses could not, of course, undermine the enormous attraction of the ideals put forward by the classics of Marxism.

The judgement of people can be illusory. The judgement of history is everlasting.

*This article first appeared in Literaturnaya Gazeta, weekly newspaper of the Board of the USSR Union of Writers*

# CULTURAL FRONT

## Independent screen

THE OPENING of the Light House Cinema, Middle Abbey Street, marks an important reversal in the pattern of cinema closures which has been a feature of Dublin popular entertainment for more than two decades. The declared policy of the Light House's promoters, (the Irish Film Institute, and Dublin Film Festival Executive-Director, Neil Connolly), is to present films not normally seen by Dublin cinema audiences. According to IFI Director, David Kavanagh, while the policy of the cinema will be to feature 'art' house and specialist independent films, it is felt that there is now a much greater cross-over by audiences from the ordinary commercial cinema to more adventurous independent programming. He adds that the cinema should help get rid of the old distinction between art cinema and entertainment. In that regard a considerable advantage which the new cinema will have over the old Irish Film Theatre is that there are no membership requirements since all films screened will have a film censor's certificate for screening to public audiences.

The selection of film will be crucial to the new venture. Neil Connolly has declared that the policy will excite and provoke Dublin audiences. This month one of the best regarded British films for many years, Terence Davies *Distant Voices, Still Lives* will open. This story of the home lives of Liverpool working class families is set in the 1940s and 1950s. It is a faithful depiction of the tensions between children and parents and how communal solidarity, humour and even songs overcome adversity. It is assured of a long Dublin run and should not be missed as it is one of the few films made for the commercial cinema

### CINEMA

**LORRAINE KENNEDY welcomes the opening of the Light House cinema, and asks why it has taken so long for an independent cinema showing films outside the mainstream to open in Dublin.**

to sympathetically depict working class experience.

Whether such films will continue to be readily available to the Light House is a matter which no doubt agitates the minds of the cinema's promoters. Indeed, if we look at the experience of other independent cinemas since the 1960s we would need to be cautious about its chances of survival. This is, of course, not to suggest that the Light House's promoters do not have the necessary skills with which to successfully run the cinema, but merely to recall a cautionary tale from history. During the period when cinemas were either closing permanently in the 1960s and 1970s, or else being converted into multiple screen cinema complexes, a fundamental change in cinema ownership patterns emerged.

From the mid-1940s to the early 1970s, Irish film exhibition was dominated by two major British companies, Rank and ABC, later bought by EMI and now owned by Cannon. Rank has now completely disengaged from Irish exhibition, while Cannon owns only the Adelphi and Carlton in Dublin and, like Rank, long ago disposed of its suburban and provincial cinemas. The reduced influence of

foreign exhibitors in Ireland should have provided a healthy spur to competition and an increased diversity of product for Irish cinema-goers. In fact the opposite happened and here lies a tale that tells us as much about Irish business as it does about the film companies.

As Rank and EMI withdrew from Irish exhibition, and many small Irish cinema owners closed down their cinemas or converted them to supermarkets or bingo halls, two Irish film distributors, Leo Ward and Kevin Anderson, began acquiring cinemas throughout the country. As the number of cinemas under their control expanded, their power in both film exhibition and distribution grew as well. By the mid-1970s when they owned the majority of cinemas in the major provincial centres of Cork, Limerick and Galway, as well as in smaller towns, their bargaining power was already of concern to smaller exhibitors. It was alleged that arrangements had been entered into between the Ward/Anderson companies and the major foreign distributors whereby preferential treatment would be accorded the increasingly monopolistic Ward/Anderson cinemas. As a result of these complaints a public enquiry was held to investigate the structure of film exhibition and distribution in Ireland.

The enquiry could find no overt agreement between the Ward/Anderson interests, and the film distributors which conferred unfair advantage to the former. In practice, of course, the normal commercial arrangements of business made it administratively convenient for the large foreign distributors to deal with a company with a large number of cinemas. Ever voracious as a



*A scene from 'Distant Voices, Still Lives'*

business, the Ward/Anderson companies continued to acquire more cinemas. This is best illustrated by what happened in Dublin city centre.

As cinemas became available in central Dublin, Ward and Anderson began to acquire them. By the mid-1980s they owned the Green, Academy, Ambassador and Regent. At this point there were four independent cinemas: the Astor, Film Centre, Cameo and Curzon, which is now the Light House. In addition to these cinemas were the EMI-owned Carlton and Adelphi, and the Rank-owned Savoy, Corinthian and Metropole. When these latter three cinemas came on the market, the Ward/Anderson companies bought them too. The result is that there are only two independent cinemas left in central Dublin: the Light House and Cameo. The independent exhibitors loudly complained that they were driven out of business by the increasingly monopolistic practices of the large Ward/Anderson group of companies. Yet the main thrust of

Irish business since the 1960s has been towards amalgamations into large corporations. The Ward/Anderson acquisitions are thus no different to what has happened in industries as diverse as builders providers and beer. So, therefore, should the complaints of the small scale Irish exhibitor be dismissed in the same way as his equally aggrieved counterpart throughout the Irish economy? Perhaps not.

Cinema is a mass medium which is not just an entertainment. While most people go to the cinema to enjoy themselves and be entertained, they also take from it views of the world which are not presented with the same force in any other medium. As a result we should be aware of what is, and what is not, shown in our cinemas. At present less than 200 feature films are released in Ireland every year, yet many thousands are produced worldwide. As the Dublin and Cork Film festivals have demonstrated, there is a very wide diversity of films available outside the Anglo-American

mainstream commercial cinema. Yet only a small fraction of these films are ever released in Ireland. That is until now, with the policy of the Light House to show the unusual or merely the different.

Why has this not happened until now? While we might expect the larger exhibitors to show only mainstream films, it is astonishing that the independent Dublin cinema-owners did not attempt to maintain a consistent policy of showing films from outside the mainstream. But perhaps we should not be too surprised when we observe the notoriously conservative nature of Irish business which is more adept at complaining to government and seeking state assistance than being innovative and developing new products. In the case of cinema, new audiences could be created and lost patrons attracted back with the showing of original work by directors from emerging and established cinemas. It is likely, at least, that the Light House will change that aspect of independent exhibition in Ireland.

# Something 'for eternity'

ANTONIO GRAMSCI has arguably been the greatest single influence on contemporary Marxism since Lenin. The publication of this new selection of the Italian Marxist's work, bringing together a broad and representative sample of his writings in one volume, is therefore to be welcomed. His early political journalism is here as are sections from the famous *Prison Notebooks* — writings on politics, philosophy and culture he produced while imprisoned by Mussolini's fascist regime. Included are selections from four of the five volumes of his work available in English; the two volumes of *Political Writings* (covering the years 1910—1926), the aforementioned *Prison Notebooks* and his *Cultural Writings*, the one exclusion being his *Letters from Prison*.

Many people are disinclined towards reading works by certain Marxist thinkers because of their reputation as being a 'hard read'. Some Marxist theorists do unfortunately (both for us and them), merit this reputation, but Gramsci cannot be numbered among them. The difficulties in reading Gramsci are mainly due to the disjointed and fragmentary nature of some of his writings — the prison notebooks were not intended by him for publication, and to certain of the terms he uses to which he gives his own specific and individual meaning. However this book overcomes these problems to a great extent by an intelligent arrangement of its contents into various sections covering different topics or periods, and by providing a background note at the start of each of these sections. Also included is a glossary of key terms at the end of the book. Both the notes and glossary are very useful for anyone reading Gramsci for the first time.

Although his name has rarely been heard in Ireland, Gramsci's work has been at the centre of much of the debate about socialist strategy, at least since the late sixties. For although he died in 1937, the first selection of his writings to appear in English, *The Modern Prince and other writings* wasn't published until 1957, and it wasn't until 1971 that a more comprehensive *Selections from Prison Notebooks* became available in English. The Italian Communist Party (PCI), of which he was a founder and briefly, General Secretary, claim him as the inspiration for their 'Via Italiana', a not insignificant point as they are the largest Communist Party outside of the Socialist countries with over 1.5 million members, massive popular support and control of local government in many areas. But besides his association with

## BOOKS

### A GRAMSCI READER: Selected Writings 1916—1935 edited by David Forgacs; Lawrence and Wishart; UK£8.95

the impressive advancement of the PCI, why has there been so much interest in Gramsci outside of his native Italy? Primarily it is because, in his concept of 'hegemony' and his vision of the revolutionary process, he provides a framework for answering the major questions asked by all serious Marxists since the decline of the revolutionary upsurges that swept Europe at the start of this century. How has capitalism, which has gone through so many profound crises, actually survived? Why has the working-class not yet led a socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist world? What should be the strategy of a revolutionary party working within an advanced capitalist society with strong parliamentary and democratic traditions and institutions? It's not that Gramsci provides readymade answers to these questions, or even formulates them as succinctly as this, but what he does is provide us with the tools to carry out a fresh analysis of these fundamental problems in this century.

This collection is divided into two main parts. Part one consists of articles and speeches from the period 1916 to 1926, when he was arrested and imprisoned. These early writings are by and large concerned with the immediate political questions of the day. Gramsci had joined the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in 1913 while a student in Turin University, and by 1914 was contributing to the PSI paper *Il Grido del Popolo* and later *Avanti*. Turin was one of the main industrial centres in Northern Italy. It had a militant working-class, and in August 1917 there was a spontaneous four-day uprising by workers in the city. Many PSI leaders were arrested after this and Gramsci was elected to the Provisional Committee of the Party. He was deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution of that year and helped organise the reception of delegates from the Russian Soviets in Italy. In 1919 he founded, along with Palmiro Togliatti and others, the weekly journal, *L'ordine Nuovo* which provided the inspiration for the Factory Councils in Turin. The Factory Councils

movement led to a general strike in Turin and Piedmont the following year. The Socialist Party and trade-union leadership refused to extend the strike and it was eventually defeated.

This class-collaboration of the PSI was the last straw for Gramsci. Disillusionment with the reformism of the PSI and the example of the Bolsheviks led Gramsci and many others in the Party to propose the establishment of a Communist Party which would affiliate to the Third International. At its 1921 congress the PSI split, the Italian Communist Party was formed, and Gramsci was elected to its Central Committee. The following year he left for Moscow to work for the Comintern. Five months after his departure Mussolini's fascists seized power. Many leading members of the PCI were arrested, including the General Secretary, Amadeo Bordiga. In April 1924 Gramsci returned to Italy as General Secretary of the Party. He had also been elected to the Italian Parliament the previous month. Two years later, in November 1926, Gramsci himself was arrested in Rome and sentenced to twenty years in prison.

Gramsci was first and foremost a committed political activist during this period and his writings are mainly concerned with questions of the strategy and tactics of the PSI, the Factory Councils movement, and the Communist Party. However many of the themes that are central to the later prison writings can be seen in these early writings. This is particularly so in the latter writings from this period, such as the 'Lyons Theses' (written for the 1926 PCI congress at Lyons in France), and his essay 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question'. His concern with the nature and function of intellectuals, the relationship between the party and the working-class and between the working-class and the peasantry, are all evident here. It isn't until the prison writings however that 'hegemony' is formulated as a new and identifiable theoretical concept (although he had first used the term in 1926). It is fair to say that this concept of 'hegemony' is the fundamental and unifying idea in the prison writings, of which part two of this book consists, and is Gramsci's most important contribution to Marxist theory.

The term had been used before Gramsci, firstly by Plekhanov and other Russian Marxists in the 1880s and then by Lenin. Lenin had used the term to describe the leading role of the working-class in an alliance with the peasantry, and thus used it to denote a strategy.



Gramsci however developed the meaning of the term considerably, and used it as a means of analysing how a dominant class wins and exercises power in any society. The power of a dominant class for Gramsci does not rest on the exercise of force alone. For any class to be a successful ruling class it must combine consent with coercion. This leadership by consent is basically what Gramsci means by hegemony: 'A social group can, indeed must, already exercise leadership before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power), it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to lead as well.' So how does a rising class construct and maintain its 'hegemony'? To be hegemonic, Gramsci says that a class must build an alliance with other classes or fractions of classes and engage in ideological struggle. To build these alliances and create what he calls an 'historic bloc' of forces, a class must move beyond its own sectional interests, and find ways of combining these interests with other classes, or compromise on them, to the extent that it can. A rising class must also take on board what he calls 'National—Popular' demands, that is, various popular and democratic struggles.

The concept of hegemony is founded on a distinction between 'Civil Society' and 'Political Society'. Gramsci divides the Marxist metaphor of the 'Superstructure' into two sections: the state-apparatus, which is 'Political Society', and the chain of voluntary organisations and associations outside of this which he terms 'Civil Society'. It is on this terrain of Civil Society that hegemony is constructed and maintained. Also fundamental to the concept is Gramsci's theory of the 'intellectuals'. Gramsci has his own distinct definition of intellectuals and their function in society. Although he believes that everyone is an intellectual to some extent, he says: 'All men are intellectuals... not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.' He identifies intellectuals not just as writers, artists, those in the sphere of politics and culture, but also those who function as organisers in the sphere of production, the state-apparatus, and other areas of society. The function of the intellectuals is to give a class: 'Homogeneity and an awareness of its function, not only in the economic but also the social and political fields.'

Gramsci then distinguishes between what he calls 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals. The organic intellectuals are those most closely connected to their class, and who directly articulate and organise its views and interests. The traditional intellectuals on the other hand are those who consider themselves

*'The type of frontal attack as practised in Russia in 1917 is not appropriate to the advanced capitalist world'*



independent of any class, such as writers, artists, philosophers, and especially ecclesiastics. They are the remnants of a previous historical epoch, the once organic intellectuals of a now extinct mode of production.

Gramsci sees the organic intellectuals of the capitalist class as actively organising its hegemony throughout civil society and its domination through the state-apparatus. The ideology which these intellectuals articulate is, for Gramsci, the cement which holds an 'historic bloc' together. This ideology is not simply a system of ideas worked out and imposed by the capitalist class, it is negotiated rather than imposed, it is a complex web of beliefs and values, incorporating both class and national-popular themes. It is: 'A cultural-social unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, as the basis of an equal and common conception of the world.' For Gramsci, as for Lenin, the question of any revolution is that of power, but Gramsci has a much deeper analysis of the nature of power, and how it is exercised by the ruling class, particularly in an advanced capitalist society. Power for him is located not just in the state-apparatus but also in civil society. He draws a very important and much quoted distinction between East and West: 'In Russia the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West there was a proper relationship between state and civil society and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.'

Gramsci thus sees a very different strategy being necessary in the developed capitalist countries. The type of frontal attack as practised in Russia in 1917 is not appropriate to the advanced capitalist world, where the bourgeoisie are hegemonic. Using military metaphors, Gramsci characterises this frontal attack of October 1917 as a 'War of Movement' and the strategy needed in the West as a 'War of Position' (a form of protracted trench warfare): 'The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as state organisations and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were, the "trenches" and the permanent fortifications in the war of position, they render merely "partial" the element of movement which before used to be "the whole" of war.'

This 'War of Position' does not however rule out a 'War of Movement' at some stage, but the latter is now conceived as a tactic suited to a particular conjuncture and not the overall strategy. So how is the working-class

in an advanced capitalist society to prosecute this 'War of Position' and build its own hegemony? Gramsci believes that the working-class must create its own organic intellectuals and win over traditional intellectuals, and that ultimately the Revolutionary Party is the only way through which this can be done: 'The political party for some social groups is nothing other than their specific way of elaborating their own category of organic intellectuals in the political and philosophical field and not just the field of productive techniques. These intellectuals are formed in this way and cannot indeed be formed in any other way given the general character and conditions of formation, life and development of the social group'.

Gramsci sees the function of the Party as being not only to technically prepare for taking control of the state-apparatus, but to organise a counter-culture, engage in ideological struggle and so gain ascendancy in civil society. In an allusion to Machiavelli, he calls the Party the 'Modern Prince.' Gramsci believes that Machiavelli was important in his time in stressing the primacy and necessity of political action, and by using this term Gramsci also wants to stress this primacy, concerned as he is to undermine the fatalism and economism of some of his contemporaries: 'The Modern Prince must, and cannot but be, the proclaimer and organiser of an intellectual and moral reform, which also means creating the grounds for a subsequent development of the National-Popular collective will towards the accomplishment of a superior and total form of modern civilisation.'

The phrase 'Intellectual and Moral Reform' is an important one here. Gramsci believes that the working-class must engage in a constant process of ideological struggle. It cannot simply wait until it has control of the means of production to proclaim the new socialist morality and culture. The working-class and the Revolutionary Party must continually challenge the prevalent ideology or 'Common Sense' as Gramsci calls it, and begin the process of creating a new ideology, whilst maintaining elements of this 'Common Sense'. You cannot wipe the board clean and begin anew. Any socialist ideology will be a combination of old and new. The other distinguishing feature which Gramsci ascribes to a working-class and socialist revolution is that it must be an 'Active' rather than a 'Passive' revolution. A 'Passive Revolution' for Gramsci is basically change from above, 'Revolution without "Revolution"', a far-reaching transformation of the political and economic system instituted by the bourgeoisie in a time of crisis, without any upheavals or the active participation of the masses. The socialist revolution however must be 'anti-passive', an



Gramsci by Fabrizio Maffi.

'Active Revolution'. For without this, while a revolutionary party might actually hold the "reins of power" it could not create socialism properly understood.

The historian James Joll has called Gramsci a 'true intellectual hero of our time' a title he undoubtedly deserves. At Gramsci's trial in 1926 the prosecutor is alleged to have said: 'We must prevent this brain from functioning for twenty years'. This they failed to do however as Gramsci went on, despite tremendous hardships, to fill thirty-three of his prison notebooks during eleven years of captivity. He had poor health from early on in his life and a deformity which left him a hunchback. In prison he had recurring illnesses; hypertension, angina, tuberculosis and Potts disease, to name but a few. He eventually died from a cerebral haemorrhage in 1937, at the relatively young age of 46.

On entering prison Gramsci wrote to his sister-in-law that he wanted to do something 'fur-ewig — to use Goethe's complex conception...' roughly translated as something 'for eternity'.

One of his university lecturers also later recalled how the young Gramsci was concerned with "how thinking makes one act... how and why one can act with ideas... how ideas become practical forces'. Gramsci's intellectual legacy is certainly an achievement 'for eternity' and his own ideas have become a 'practical force', and not just in his native Italy.

For while Gramsci's work cannot be construed as providing a blueprint for action or a handbook of successful socialist revolution, it does illuminate the path we must take as we approach the end of the twentieth century. There are no easy answers, but many questions which must be addressed if we are to build the hegemony of the working-class. How are we to wage an effective ideological struggle and build on what is best in popular consciousness, maintain a correct relationship between the revolutionary party and the working-class; forge an alliance between popular/democratic struggles and the struggle for socialism; present a non-utopian vision of a future socialist society; build an alliance between the working-class and other classes or fractions of classes; create organic intellectuals of the working-class and win over traditional intellectuals ... in essence, how are we to build a broadly-based, popular movement for fundamental social change, led by the working-class and the revolutionary party?

*Fearghal Ross*

## Alive with change

**LIVING WITH GLASNOST: Youth and Society in a changing Russia by Andrew Wilson and Nina Bachkatov; Penguin Books; UK£3.99**

IT IS over 70 years since the Bolsheviks came to power in the October Revolution of 1917. Much has been done to catapult a vast nation of 15 constituent republics with 160 nationalities speaking 131 languages from a backward and feudal society to the socialist state we know today. We remember that this has been achieved at an untold price in sweat and blood. Its streets have witnessed some of the most violent events of this century, two wars, two revolutions, two great hungers, Stalinism and the years of stagnation under Breshnev. More recently, we have come to witness what may be called the

Soviet Union's third great revolution under Mikhail Gorbachev. *Glasnost* and *perestroika* have entered the world's vocabulary. Any journalist with savvy would want to be in the Soviet Union where all over Moscow, the telex machines of foreign correspondents have been whirring and clicking to the changes that have happened with the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Two such journalists are Andrew Wilson and Nina Bachkatov. Wilson has been the Moscow correspondent for the *Observer* newspaper and Bachkatov (of Russo-Belgian extraction) is the Moscow correspondent of the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*. Bachkatov, it appears, has the strongest background having spent long periods in the Soviet Union reporting and researching, and visiting her family. Their book is sure to find a ready market given the subject matter, and is the most comprehensive indepth study of Soviet society and events that you will find on the bookshelves.

The book is dedicated to 'those who are trying to change it, truly, there and here'. This puts the authors firmly in the



*Growing pains under glasnost*

pro-Gorbachev camp. In their introduction they look hopefully for the ultimate success of Mikhail Gorbachev's 'restructuring'. They believe in its necessity and in its sincerity. This is their look at some of the murkier, but also, they hope, brighter parts of the Soviet scene in the first years of the 'Gorbachev revolution'. It is also their portrait of the *perestroika* generation, in which they have concentrated on the questions that concern people most directly, what they talk about, and write about to the papers: frustration at work, the shortage of flats, the break-up of families, the 'rebellion' of youth, the disappearance of 'values' and morality.

The racy tabloid style blurb on the back cover is a bit off-putting but what is in between the covers is a thoroughly good read. The text is broken up with humorous illustrations from *Krokodil*

magazine, a pro-glasnost magazine (Vitaly Vitaliev, a 34-year old award-winning Russian journalist on the magazine has just spent a month at the *Guardian* newspaper).

The book begins with Gorbachev's first speech as General Secretary at the 27th Party Congress. Analysis and research on the role of the party in Soviet society, the urban-rural divide, the role of the family, the education system, work and leisure, army life (with reference to Afghanistan returnees), youth cults and culture and the generation gap fill the rest of the book.

Social issues are also dealt with: the high divorce and abortion rates, one parent families, sexual ignorance, prostitution, drugs, alcoholism, black marketeering, abuses of the system, the scandal of abandoned children and (in Soviet Asia) — arranged marriages and

dowries.

Soviet journalism under *glasnost* emerges as the hero of this book. Journalists, not without personal risk to themselves, have spotlighted prejudice and uncovered abuses and social scandals. (Roger Cook lives here too, it seems.) For all its 232 pages, a bigger volume might have served it better given the subject matter. It tends to read like Open University in print in places, but the illustrations and pace serve to break this up. The book mentions the post-*glasnost* documentary 'Is it easy to be young?' recently shown on Channel 4. If you saw this, you'll like this book. Read it for £3.99 sterling. It's a good *glasnost* read.

*Richie Keane*

## United we stand...

**POLITICAL STRIKES — The State and Trade Unionism in Britain by Peter Hain; Pelican (Penguin); UK£4.95**

**A HISTORY OF BRITISH TRADE UNIONISM by Henry Pelling; Pelican (Penguin); UK£4.95**

PETER HAIN's long survey (historical as well as analytical) addresses the many issues raised by the essential confrontation between the classes in strikes. At the heart of the book is an exposé of the role of the state as the ultimate antagonist of the striker. Whereas even Margaret Thatcher can praise the right to strike as a democratic freedom, her governments have done more than any other during this century to make that right an almost empty formula. The law is now hedging the strike about with so many procedures and sanctions that the striker is relegated almost to the legal status of the prostitute — picketing become importuning, fund collecting becomes living off immoral earnings, running a union office becomes keeping a disorderly house. Thus all strikes have become 'political' i.e. politicised, even where there is no overt political aim or motivation. This serves to beat the trade unions into the ground as proper defiance of bosses or government is redefined as improper defiance of the law. Accordingly, the high tide of union power and influence has ebbed, with pliant leaders succeeding militant ones even though even this process has not halted the marginalisation of the former "social partners" as they are excluded

from consultation and even from collaboration by the triumphalist Right.

Running with this, the enforcement of sanctions has been made possible by increasing the powers of the police, and that body has, ironically, become a power elite itself. To a great extent the police have become 'paramilitarised', with a long term latent threat to the civil liberties of all. Beyond the immediate issue of the strikes, Hain tackles other issues raised by militant unionism. His treatment of the feminist critique is perhaps a little cursory: it is taken seriously and sympathetically but it is peripheral to his main theme and should either have been left out or more firmly integrated. On the general role of unions in the working class movement, he does not quite resolve the problem of the unions' less than adequate ability to resist Thatcherism through what must be the faults in leadership; nor does he tackle the paradox embodied in the experience of the steel industry, when a crippling strike was lost by the union with the eventual reconstruction of the industry into a situation of great profitability.

The miners' strike naturally accounts for much of the book, because it was not only an important attempt at a last ditch stand by a dying sector, but its suppression exposed the alliance between police, courts, media and government in confronting working class militancy. Strangely, the strike that Hain does not refer to is that of the Ulster Loyalist Workers: the one example of a political strike in a classical syndicalist sense that was totally success-



*Thatcher's approach to industrial relations became clear during the miners' strike.*

ful. Peter Hain writes in a terse style that is polemical without rhetoric and makes compelling reading. His anger never clouds his judgment, and he assembles his material with a clarity and detail that the Webbs might have envied. It is a valuable and chilling book, but the conclusion that the unions may yet rally and return sounds in late 1988 like

whistling in the dark.

Nevertheless, the history of British trade unionism is a long one, and one can hope that Thatcherism may pass like some colonial regime once 'the natives are restless'; although this would need middle class acquiescence, if historical precedent is an indication. This, and the strenuous fight of unions down the decades, is well depicted in the fourth edition of Pelling's standard Pelican history. Henry Pelling is surely one of the doyens of British labour historiography, writing with immense learning and authority in a style that is perhaps a little too reminiscent of the lecture theatre for those who see labour history more as a weapon in the struggle than as an interesting subject for donnish discourse. But this style, so much more classical than Hain's, is immensely readable, and this book is a quite indispensable work for those interested in the subject.

The two books run well together and it would be interesting to read a review by Hain of Pelling and by Pelling of Hain. Pelling, taking the long view, is persuaded that the rôle of the unions has been sufficiently benign for them to survive, while Hain, charting their demolition as a locus of power by a government determined to smash all such loci, is only optimistic in a sort of cheery goodbye to his readers. If Thatcher, however, says goodbye to the British unions, there will be no cheer in that for us on this side of the Irish Sea either.

*Charles Davidson*

## With unblinking eye

**CORRUPTIONS OF EMPIRE: Life Studies and the Reagan Era** by Alexander Cockburn; Verso; UK£7.95

*Corruptions of Empire* is a splendid,

provocative, sometimes mischievous book by a radical journalist who has reported on American and international affairs with an unblinking eye and stinging wit since the early Seventies.

It is also uncomfortable and truly worrying, for its theme is the slide to Reaganism in all its forms; a decline mutely accepted by a largely compliant press, with an opposition that has been reduced to paralysis by its engagement in consensus politics.

Alexander Cockburn is too much a professional to fall into the trap of

turning this into a well-meaning but soporific tract: chunks of Marxist analysis sounding as if its translators had had difficulty getting to grips with the original Bulgarian.

Instead, he has collected a set of journalistic pieces — some of them substantial essays, others no more than a paragraph or two snatched from syndicated columns — which define his point of departure and describe what he has observed, in the United States and elsewhere, over the past 15 years with special emphasis on the period of Reagan's rule.

Reaganism he describes as shorthand for a particular culture of consumption, a reverie of militarism, of violence redeemed; of a manic, corrupted and malevolent idealism. Its priorities are the transfer of income from poor to rich, the expansion of war production and an activist foreign policy.

To explain what he means by an activist foreign policy he quotes Naom Chomsky who places it at an extreme point on the political spectrum: it means intervention, aggression, international terrorism, general gangsterism and law-

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lessness, the essential content of the 'Reagan doctrine', The only thing that could change the central theme of *Corruption of Empire* would be if George Bush were now to throw most of his predecessor's policies into reverse; and that, as yet, seems unlikely.

Cockburn begins with an elegant and affectionate description of his childhood in Youghal and his schooldays in England. Even if he had not been in any other respect an outsider, the fact that his father, Claud, was one of the most gifted journalists of the century, and an old communist to boot, would have been enough to equip him with an air of distinction.

Outsiders often make shrewd observers; and even among observers, certainly after his arrival in the United States in the month of the Watergate break-in, Cockburn proved to be more detached than most. Some of his pieces here on colleagues in mainstream journalism are quite devastating.

With pointed humour, he exposes the self-protective clichés of the foreign correspondent and the illusions of omniscience of the opinion former or pundit. The pundit he chooses to exhume is Walter Lippmann from whose work he extracts some extraordinary opinions of the American electorate. In a book published in 1922, for example, Lippmann wrote: 'The common interest very largely elude public opinion entirely and can be managed only by a specialised class.' And on the eve of the Wall Street crash Lippmann declared that democracy 'cannot last

*'The fact that his father, Claud, was one of the most gifted journalists of the century, and an old communist to boot, would have been enough to equip him with an air of distinction.'*



A portrait of Helena Moloney by Geraldine O'Reilly is one of the exhibits from the ICTU exhibition 'People at Work' organised with the assistance of the Association of Artists in Ireland. The exhibition is on view this month at the Temple Bar Gallery in Dublin, and will be on show throughout the country in the coming year.

long; it must, and inevitably it will, give way to a more settled social order.' He praised Hitler for delivering 'a genuinely statesmanlike address' expressing the 'authentic voice of a genuinely civilised people' in 1933, and three years later suggested that neither side in the Spanish Civil War was 'fit to organise Government.'

Cockburn chooses similar (if somewhat less devastating) quotations to expose more recent luminaries of a profession which he describes as 'hugely self-complacent and odiously Pecksniffian' though, to be fair, he takes an equally tough line with the politicians, including those of the Left. Here he is in a wonderfully prescient comment written in July, 1984: 'With hardly a backward — or forward — look the bulk of the surviving American left has blithely joined the Democratic Party centre, without the will to inflect debate, the influence to inform policy or the leverage to share power. The capitulation of the left... is almost without precedent.'

His views on the campaign of '84 might well have been written this year: 'In the beginning, of course, there was a certain somebody within the Democratic fold who was a candidate not only of principle but of opportunity for the Left. Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition he proposed represented the historical base, the organised movement and the radical programme for which the Left has been hunting the last 35 years. But... no. Jackson is usually taunted for failing to broaden his Coalition, but when he made personal pitches to each likely constituency, the invitees almost invariably declined.'

The Left, in Cockburn's view, has allowed Reaganism to triumph — almost by default. And in a couple of side swipes at the Labour movement in Britain, he accuses Neil Kinnock and his colleagues of having done much the same for Thatcherism. Indeed, if there is anything missing from *Corruption of Empire* it is a comparison between Reagan and Thatcher, the heights (or depths) they've reached outside the mainstreams of their parties and the corresponding problems they present to those who succeed them. An interview with a black activist in England exposes the latent racism there; it would have been interesting to hear Cockburn himself on the likelihood that race, as an extension of class, will underpin British electoral debates in the way that it shaped much of the American debate this year.

Perhaps he regards it as a subject too big to be covered in a short piece. May we hope to find it included in his next collection?

**Dick Walsh**

(Dick Walsh is Political Editor of the Irish Times)



TRANH QUANG  
*Le Gabriel Rosenstock*

Dhóigh Tranh Quang  
Bean rialta  
Í féin  
Ar an 30ú Bealtaine, 1966.  
Bhí grianghrafadóirí i láthair  
Grianghrafadh na lasracha  
Is féidir a lámha  
Agus imlíne a colainne  
A dhéanamh amach  
Ach níl an teas  
Ná boladh an pheitрил  
Sa ghrianghraf  
Níl a naofacht  
Níl a híobairt  
A hanam  
A cruinnchíocha  
A súile...  
Ach in dhiaidh sin is uile  
Dónn Tranh Quang de shíor  
Do chách

*Is cad é sin*

*don té sin*

*nach mbaineann*

*sin dó.*

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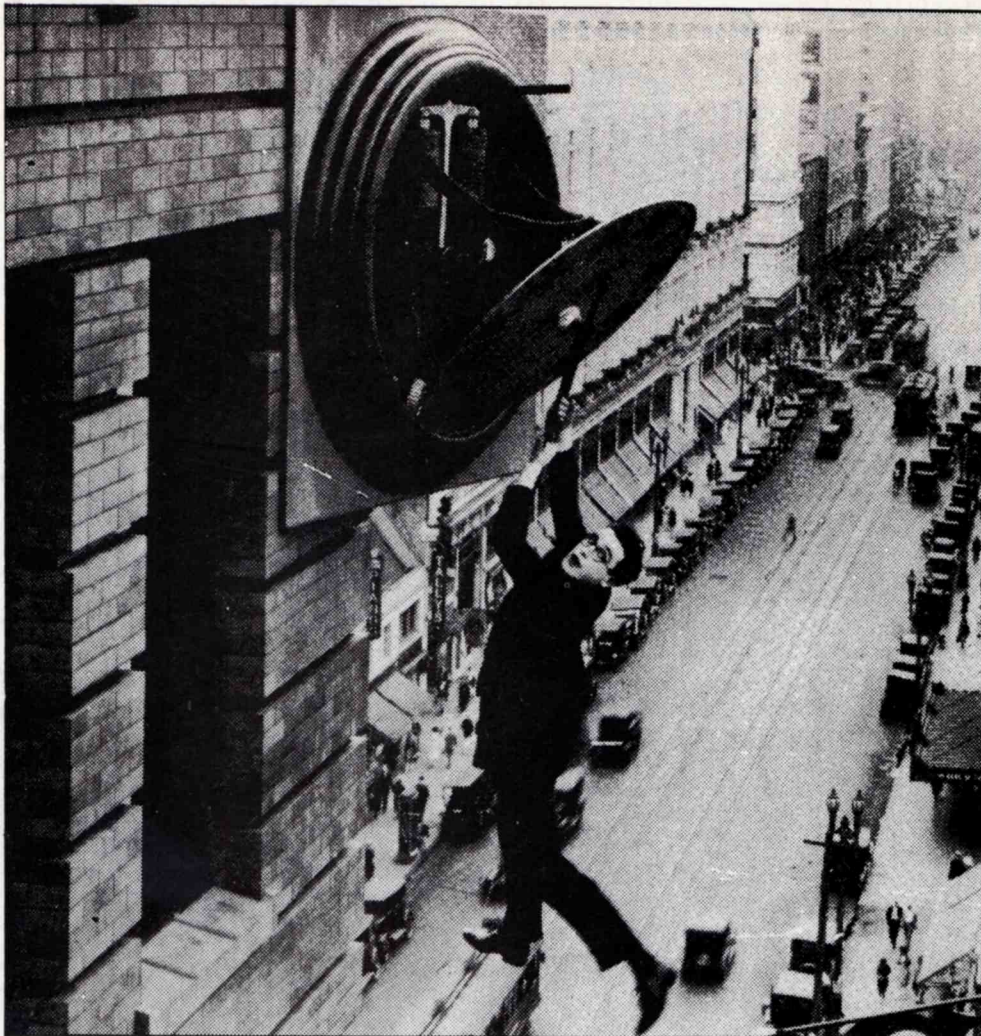
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