RADICAL AMERICA
Vol. 13, No. 3

SOCIETE NUCLEAIRE
SOCIETE POLICIÈRE
LIBEREZ LE PONT

NUCLEAR FASCISM:
A FRENCH ANALYSIS

THE IRANIAN LEFT
EARLY SOCIALIST FEMINISM
Cover: Scene from the occupation of Melville, proposed site of the 1200 megawatt "Super Phoenix" reactor in Southeastern France.

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RADICAL AMERICA (USPS 873-880) is published bi-monthly by the Alternative Education Project, Inc. at 324 Somerville Ave., Somerville, MA 02143. Copyright © 1979 by Radical America. Subscription rates: $10 per year, $18 for two years, $7 per year for the unemployed. Add $2.00 per year to all prices for foreign subscriptions. Double rates for institutions. Free to prisoners. Bulk rates: 40% reduction from cover price for five or more copies. Bookstores may order from Carrier Pigeon, 88 Fisher Ave., Boston, MA 02120. Typesetting by Carrier Pigeon.

Second class postage paid at Boston, Mass. and additional post offices.
INTRODUCTION

The article by Andre Gorz in this issue of RA was originally written over four years ago, but it anticipates most of the pressing problems of nuclear energy which have been raised by the accident at Three Mile Island. The dangers, he reminds us, are not only those of accidents and disposal of radioactive waste — as real as those are — but also the kind of social and political developments called for by the growth of nuclear power. As he wrote then, the choices about nuclear energy are "political in the deepest sense of the word."

The political nature of these choices is revealed by the attempts of supposedly independent and apolitical scientists and technicians to drum up support for nuclear energy. With all the contortions that the experts go through in trying to convince the public of the safety of nuclear energy, their arguments are finally couched in the political-economic contexts of OPEC control of foreign oil, fear of inflation, a new-found and deeply cynical concern for the lives of coal miners, etc. The evaluation of the relative safety of nukes is a consequence of the kind of society these professionals think is possible and preferable.

Nevertheless, the pro-nuke forces try to de-politicize the debate as much as possible, by rigidly maintaining that the issues are purely technical and economic and can best be solved by rational procedures of trained experts unhampered by democratic excesses. Their attempt to mask the fundamental irrationality of nuclear energy by a pose of cool-headed reasonableness is exposed, particularly in the wake of Three Mile Island, by their fumbling attempts to underplay the seriousness of the accident, by their lies, scare tactics, and use of repression.

From the released tapes of meetings of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) we not only learn that its members were, in the words of Chairman Hendrie, "operating almost totally in the blind;" that they were abysmally unprepared for an accident at all (they didn’t even have a map of the Harrisburg area); that they did not think an accident of this sort possible; and that they had little confidence in the ability of Metropolitan Edison to deal with the accident; but we also learn that their main concern was to underplay the danger to the public; to hide their distrust of the utility company; to obscure their lack of knowledge about particular events by resorting to fanciful extrapolations based on computer simulations. Their continual press conferences were not for disseminating information. They were one way the NRC carried out a policy of concealment meant to contain dissent from the "nuclear option." Their accessibility to the media, their nightly presence on network news was part of their reflex to contain debate to technical aspects of the particular accident rather than allowing it to be a wedge that could open up the whole topic to political argument and struggle. In this way they are at one with the multinationals' efforts to head off debate of alternative forms of energy and alternative ways of organizing the economy and society.

The pro-nuke forces not only try to contain the dimensions of the nuclear debate — they also attempt to restrict the information available to the debaters, which is to say, all of us. The CIA suppressed information about a major nuclear accident causing many deaths in the Soviet Union not out of pro-communist sympathies but out of fear it would increase anti-nuclear opinion in the U.S. In the early '50s, Eisenhower asked that the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) "keep the public confused" about nuclear energy even as radiation was falling on citizens in the West.

The denial of freedom of the press, by hiding and distorting information, is tied to other threats to civil liberties. Suppression goes hand in hand with repression. Strongarm tactics, spying, harassment and even possible murder (in the Karen Silkwood case) are used along with the suppression of information. For instance, in the recent referendum about nuclear energy in Austin, Texas, some of its opponents were roughed up. Gorz makes it clear that the development of the nuclear industry cannot take place without a parallel development of a garrison state meant to protect the radioactive material, to guard installations, etc. But when opposition to the industry arises, those policing capabilities can be used to intimidate and harass opponents. The repressive tactics of the pro-nuke forces are thus part of the larger picture of increasing repression that is today based in larger private police forces, videotapes of demonstrations, computer storage of intelligence data, etc., as well as continued use of spies, provocateurs, selective violence, etc.

Gorz shows that the push for nuclear energy is a consequence of the indifference of capitalism to any value that cannot be translated into profits. We think, however, that a simple focus on monopoly capitalism would be too narrow a perspective for a truly critical analysis. The analysis called for does not dismiss the importance of the profit motive, class structure and exploitation, but includes in it an analysis of the overall direction of capitalist growth, including those forms of growth more or less replicated in the socialist bloc countries. After all, nuclear power is being developed in the Soviet Union and the countries in its orbit (including Cuba).

The vanguardist structure of the communist movements and the technocratic ideology of capitalist industry both serve to constrain democratic decision-making, and are deeply tied to economistic visions of progress. They are tied to such visions of progress because their
major claims to power are their supposed capacities for efficiency, planning, and knowledge; and these are among the rationales for economism, according to which it is assumed that more is better. In this way the very ends of science and technology, the ways in which nature is viewed, approached and transformed, have been tied to Western models of economic growth. While there are important tensions within the sciences and within the scientific professions, the dominant tendencies subordinate other goals to those of instrumentality and domination. The centralizing tendency, that links undemocratic hierarchy with planning, justifies social domination as the means to a more ruthless domination of nature by human-kind. In the end, neither the voice of the people nor the developmental patterns in nature are given any credence when they are at odds with the will of those at the top.

A politics that seeks major social transformation and that overcomes hierarchical politics of left and right is called for time and again; but nowhere is it more thoroughly called for than in the politics of nuclear energy. Just as the anti-war movement's analysis of Vietnam pointed to the overall structure of imperialism, so does the analysis of nuclear energy point to the antidemocratic and death-dealing imperatives of capitalist-style development. And just as the anti-war movement could learn and educate about the broader questions and also have strategies focussed on particular outrages, the no-nuke movement is already doing the same. The danger is that so much energy will be put into particular campaigns that the overall analysis, and the associated politics, will be lost or pushed aside in the attempt to win support for particular actions. To our mind this danger is particularly evident in electoral campaigns, attempts to influence and control regulatory commissions, and in the fascination with alternative technologies — as important as each of these might be in specific circumstances. All, especially the last, are necessary; none is sufficient.

In the anti-war movement, confrontation politics, mass demonstrations and agitation were crucial complements to all other forms of anti-war activity. Similarly the original actions by Clamshell at Seabrook and other groups throughout the country and the world have sparked and sustained a movement which in its turn creates a demand for information and ideas.

There are a variety of ways the anti-war movement educated itself and others, from teach-ins to study groups, movies and lectures and slide-shows. The no-nuke movement's job in this regard is both easier and harder. It is easier because so many people know that the issues deeply affect them; they are cynical and disbelieve so-called experts and business leaders. It is harder, in part, because of confusion over the technical issue of alternatives. "Out Now!" was a solution as well as a slogan for the anti-war movement. "No-nukes!" is a slogan and demand but is not adequate as a solution to energy problems.

But even though the study of alternative technologies is a crucial complement to anti-nuke organizing, it has to be tied to alternative conceptions of social organization, to workers' control and the democratization of decision-making, to the resolution of tensions between regional, national and international imperatives. It is clear that many people with ideas, initiative and a bit of money will enrich themselves from these new technologies; and — just as with abortion clinics and other necessary social services — the self-interest of the "providers" will distort the potential of their work. These kinds of problems can be anticipated if we develop an overall critical socialist analysis at the same time that we fight nuclear power.
We are very glad to be inaugurating a new series of articles, biographies of socialists, feminists, and other too-little-known people from our revolutionary tradition. We have been working on this series for a long time and have had to postpone beginning it because our issues get crowded with more timely articles. But our commitment to digging up and popularizing useful history remains. There is a connection between the relative weakness of democratic, anti-authoritarian socialist movements today and the suppression of the history of such movements. The hegemony of Stalinism in the international socialist movement distorted history in many ways. Not only in the Soviet Union but throughout the world socialist publishing and teaching tended to honor only those of our forebears who conformed to the Comintern lines. Traditions of workers control, socialist-feminism, anarchism, and cultural radicalism are just some of our common heritage that has been forgotten. We are attempting an exploration of some of that too-little-known heritage through a series of biographical sketches of individuals. We begin with Sylvia Pankhurst here; in future issues we will publish articles about Alexandra Kollontai, C. Wright Mills, William Morris and many others; and we hope our readers will send us suggestions and perhaps offers to write about other figures.

We would also like our readers’ help in choosing an appropriate title for the series. We tossed about many suggestions (“Dead Reds,” “Mary Hartmann Mary Hartmann,” “The Grateful Living”) and laughed a lot, but could not agree on the perfect name. The sender of a title we adopt wins a free sub or gift sub for a friend.

We are publishing this series of biographies not because we want to promote any cults of individuals! In fact, we are looking for individu-
separate working-class women’s suffrage league. The East London group, however, as David Widgery describes in his article here, also fought for other needs and interests of the community, the working class and the women in both. Furthermore, Sylvia distinguished herself not only from most of the liberal feminists but also from much of the socialist movement by helping to lead a small but vociferous anti-imperialist opposition to World War I. Yet another important political contribution of Sylvia Pankhurst was her continuation of anti-imperialist work after the War. At a time when much of the Left focussed its anti-fascist energies on support for the Soviet Union and defense of Republican Spain — in other words, paying attention to Europe exclusively — Sylvia Pankhurst was again one of a small minority of socialists whose anti-racist consciousness led her to work on the defense of Ethiopia against the brutal Italian fascist invasion and occupation.

Like most socialists throughout the world, we were overjoyed at the fall of the shah of Iran. Particularly the manner of his overthrow was heartening: not as a result of a coup but from a sustained mass movement facing one of the best armed military machines in the world, a movement persevering despite some of the most vicious repression in the world. Furthermore, as Americans we are especially delighted that the Iranian rebels were able to deal a material defeat to the international U.S. military network. In an era in which the U.S. Left has been concentrating primarily on domestic issues, the consequences of the Iranian revolution — in shaking up the whole middle East and forcing the U.S. to organize a whole new system of control — remind us that our domestic enemies are part of an international system.

Many questions remain about what will happen in Iran. The Islamic revival does not fill us with confidence. As usual, the ignorance of Americans about the non-western world combined with the incompetent and biased reporting in the western press makes it more difficult to understand a complicated system. For this reason it seemed to us useful to publish this discussion of the Left in Iran. In a future issue, we hope to publish a more historical article about the nature of the shah’s regime and the contradictions within it that shaped this revolution.
LE NUCLEAIRE À VOTRE PORTE !

NON À LA CENTRALE DE NOGENT/SEINE
NUCLEAR ENERGY
AND THE LOGIC OF TOOLS

André Gorz

1. NUCLEAR ENERGY: A PREEMINENTLY POLITICAL CHOICE

It is estimated that from now to the end of the century 3500 nuclear reactors will be built in the world, at a cost of two trillion dollars [current estimate is under 1000 — eds.]. In 25 years these reactors will be worn out and new ones, undoubtedly more sophisticated and more expensive, will have to be built. This is an unprecedented and long-term opportunity for profitable investments with unprecedented amounts of capital.

Thanks to nuclear energy, American technology, spurred by the two largest financial groups in the world [the Morgan group and the Rockefeller group — eds.] will extend its hegemony over the planet. Companies with this technology at their disposal will find themselves a part of the tight net with which the two U.S. multinationals [General Electric and Westinghouse — eds.] cover the earth. Proud vassals of U.S. houses [here Gorz again refers to the Morgan and Rockefeller groups, respectively — eds.] will dominate the Third World countries, where political and technological dependency will assure them maximum income with minimum risk.

The parliament is currently debating a French nuclear program that would fit well into this overall conception of a multinational network. Above all, this program represents a political choice, consistent with the strategy of the biggest firms of French capitalism.... The enormous political and financial interests at stake account for the intensity of the propaganda campaign waged by the “nuclear lobby.” This lobby has been particularly untroubled by public scrutiny and criticism because it includes public companies and...
organizations as well as private ones, and because the multinationals have not had to argue the case for nuclear power themselves (as not long ago they had to argue the case for oil). Nuclear power has been put forward mainly by government officials and bureaucrats who have been happy to hide behind the technical arguments of engineers who are in love with the “big machines.”

This is how a fundamentally political choice can be presented as a technical option — an option apparently endorsed by allegedly impartial scientists. The public — that is to say, everyone — is invited to yield to the opinion of the experts and to give them their trust. All objections are discarded as unenlightened, and any inclination toward democratic and popular control is brushed aside on the pretext that the technical complexity of the question makes it the exclusive province of specialists. From the very beginning the nuclear option has been described as incompatible with democracy.

In the end, however, this technocratic arrogance on the pronuclear side has put the best arguments in the hands of their opponents: by hiding behind the “impartiality” of science, the advocates of nuclear energy have aroused the suspicions of many scientists. These scientists have looked more closely and have discovered with indignation the biased, mistaken, or lying nature of many of the arguments put forth in favor of atomic energy. Thanks to them, the following problems have come to light:

- analysis of the accident risk has been largely arbitrary;
- the principal safety mechanism of the reactors has never been proved reliable;
- storage of wastes is an unresolved question and industry has not yet been able to use the officially chosen method;
- the 85% use coefficient (load factor) on which the French program depends has yet to be reached in any power station. The record to date is 68%;
- contrary to official information, when nuclear power is intended for private or industrial heating it will save not 1.5 million tons of fuel oil, but only 500,000 tons for every 1000 MW [megawatt: one million watts of electrical generating capacity — eds.];
- the official comparison of net cost fails to take into account the (particularly heavy) cost of distributing the power;
- there is no assurance of a supply of enriched uranium for the 1979-1981 period; by 1979 a second factory for isotope separation will have to be started up (effective cost: twelve billion current dollars), which itself will consume the energy produced by three or four reactors;
- the nuclear program may actually consume more energy than it produces. The procedure for reckoning the energy balance sheet of the power stations is the subject of a highly interesting methodological argument.

The arguments among the experts and disagreements among scientists have had one major virtue: they have shown the public that specialists have no absolute authority and that science is a servant, not a master. It is neutral only in that it can be put to the service of any cause. Science can shape the means, it cannot define the goals. Goals depend on the highest ethical and political choices of people themselves.¹

In short, the disagreements among scientists give the choice back to the people and confront them with fundamental political questions:

- what kind of growth does a nuclear program assume?
- can the quasi-military operation of a nuclear power plant and the permanent police surveillance of those who work there, their families, and the surrounding population be compatible with independence for political and union activity?
- would we create more or less employment if
instead of a nuclear program we invested in renewable energy sources and energy conservation — that is, thermal insulation, greater product durability, product design for repair and recycling, improvement of common services, etc.?

- would we be better or worse off if economic and cultural development were not based on increased energy consumption?

These questions, and many others, will still be unanswered when the parliamentary debate is over. What is called for is cooperation among the experts to organize the facts so that the answers can be systematic and consistent. But the answers themselves cannot be supplied by specialists. They involve the choice of the kind of society and civilization we want. The answers are political in the deepest sense of the word.

2. FROM NUCLEAR ELECTRICITY TO FASCIST ELECTRICITY

The nuclear energy program does not rest on a technological choice; it arises from choices that are political and ideological. Nuclear installations are not one means to ends that might be attained in other ways. They are a means that predetermines which ends are to be reached and that irrevocably prescribes a particular kind of society, to the exclusion of all others.

Beneath its technological outer form the nuclear option has a hidden agenda, in conception the work of political and business leaders, but which lies also on the consciences of all those who are pro-nuclear. It is this hidden agenda, more than the direct perils of nuclear energy, that we have to understand and fight. It illustrates better than anything one might devise the logic and the direction of French and world capitalism in the current phase of the crisis.

TOTAL ELECTRICITY

The decision that France should have a large nuclear industry was taken well before the “oil crisis” of October 1973. It goes back more than 10 years, from the time when EDF [the state-controlled Electricité de France — eds.] introduced “total electricity,” an entirely electric heating system. From a strictly economic point of view, the prejudice in favor of electrification was dazzlingly senseless. Rather than burning fuel (oil or coal) in domestic and public heating systems, at 85% efficiency, the idea was to change these fuels into electric current at the power plant, retaining a yield of 30%, then to carry and distribute this current in spite of a high loss rate and a heavy capital investment, and finally to transform the electricity back into heat.

In this way barely a quarter of the thermal energy originally consumed by the EDF plant is recovered at the end of the line. The cost and the burden of the distribution equipment needed (the network of high and low tension wires, power stations, underground cables in cities, etc.) contribute to keep electrical heating from being efficient and competitive with other forms of energy use.

To get around this latter obstacle, dwellings heated by electricity were given a double advantage. They had exclusive right to an insulation
that would lower their heat consumption by half, and they were given a discount for electricity which was based on typically capitalist calculations of amortization of the plants and marginal costs.

In fact, the introduction of “total electricity” can only be explained from the perspective of “total nuclearization.” It was supposed to prepare the ground, the atmosphere, and the network for the atom to take over from combustible fuel. EDF saw further ahead than anyone thought.

THE AMERICAN MODEL

The nuclear takeover would nevertheless be of little interest to the French ruling class unless it was accompanied by one of the most important political and industrial turnarounds in the last 30 years. The takeover had to go along with the amalgamation of the French nuclear industry and its integration into the world strategy of the two U.S. multinationals that were maneuvering for (but didn’t yet have) hegemony over the big plants.

The French industrial bourgeoisie, in other words, was only interested in nuclear power insofar as the French program allowed them to be pulled along by the Americans. The latter were to take care of licensing and manufacturing specifications, guarantee the reliability of the product, and insure to their French subsidiaries subcontracted markets all over the world. In this way the French ruling class thought to protect themselves against all technological hazards and commercial risk. They were going to put French labor at the service of American grey matter, and then square it by giving up some of their profits to the Americans . . . . This was in 1968-69 . . . .

In October 1969, Marcel Boiteux, executive director of EDF, stated in a confidential speech:

We have to acknowledge that a light-water model is not more reliable than a graphite-gas model... But the world currently has around 80,000 MW under construction or on order from light-water models, while there are 8000 in service or on order from graphite-gas models. You see then the disproportion....

For France, within our little borders, to continue pursuing a technology in which the world has no interest [sic] doesn’t make sense today. The fact that the world market is now clearly oriented towards light-water models means that our industrialists will only be able to enter the industrial world insofar as they have their own valid experience with the models the world is interested in.²

The morning following this speech a machine operator deliberately made an error of judgment which put a plant out of commission. The advocates for the U.S. design had a free field.

THE TECHNOCRATIC FAIT-ACCOMPLI

Up to now nuclear plants have been advertised essentially as merchandise. They are something the Americans manufacture or will manufacture, things that can be sold, and thus things that French capitalism has a stake in producing. How useful these things actually are, and whether their drawbacks are important or not, are side issues entirely. No one questioned the external costs or the energy balance sheet of one projected nuclear installation any more than they questioned the usefulness of the space program or the Concorde.

Thus the nuclear lobby had a clear field in the wake of the “oil crisis” of October, 1973, when the government was anxiously wondering how France would pay for oil when it became four times more expensive and how it would replace an energy source due to run out by the beginning of the next century. In this atmosphere the econometricians of the EDF seemed like sav-
iors. They had made precise calculations, to the hundredth of a centime. This calculation showed that, from this point on, nuclear energy would cost half as much as oil and that if 25 years hence the French were to consume three times more energy than in 1970, they would need a program of about two hundred nuclear units of 1000 MW each.

The government swam to this life-preserver held out by the nuclear lobby. Construction of nuclear plants was to be both the necessary condition and the engine for the industrial growth to come. No government agency is equipped to check the EDF's calculations, nor to submit their predictions and hypotheses to a critical examination. And so, on March 4, 1974, the Messmer government, without investigation or full hearing, decided on the French nuclear program.

Nothing was left but to convince, or at least anesthetize, the public by quickly showing them enormously important facts accomplis, always presented as technical decisions that could be competently made only by technocrats.

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**FEIFFER**

I AM A TECHNICIAN.

I BUILD THE OIL PIPELINE.

I DESIGN THE NEW CARS.

I WRITE NEW YORK CITY's ELECTRICAL SYSTEM.

SOONLY NEAR YOUR TOWN I WILL CONSTRUCT A NUCLEAR BREEDER REACTOR.

TRUST ME.

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**THE RISE OF ELECTROFASCISM**

Throughout the past year, EDF, supported by those who are responsible for nuclear safety and protection against radioactivity, has tried to keep people from interfering in something which is their business. Plutonium radiation poisoning? Foolishness. Absorption of radioactive wastes into the food chain? Scientific impossibility. Accident risk? So far not one victim. Thermal pollution? Rubbish — people fish right below the plants at Chinon. The objections of ecologists? They are weirdos whose goal, says a confidential EDF circular, "is to impede the proper functioning of today's society."

The present social order, which, as everyone knows, is good, won't be able to function without nuclear energy. And nuclear power will not be able to develop unless people have confidence in technicians and experts, who are the only true custodians of knowledge, the only trustees of the public interest, the only ones competent to make decisions. "It's pointless to waste time trying to convince professional pro-
testers (sic),” continues the EDF circular. “We must do whatever is necessary to keep the populace from being contaminated by adverse propaganda (sic).” EDF is automatically reinventing the language and the mentality of the cops. Those who oppose nuclear energy are “internal enemies,” professional subversives.

Under the wing of an exultant and reassuring propaganda campaign, whose only opposition is the ecological and/or leftist press — whose tools are absurdly ineffectual — fundamental decisions go through like a letter in the mail. For example:

- France is to have the privilege of harboring at Tricastin on the Rhone — the biggest gaseous diffusion plant [to produce enriched uranium to be used in nuclear power plants — eds.] in Europe. Sixty percent of its production will be exported. The plant will consume all of the current produced by four huge reactors. Tricastin I will be followed by Tricastin II and by Tricastin III: that is, at least 12,000 MW. It is hoped that enriched uranium will bring higher and higher prices, and construction of the Tricastins means enormous amounts of capital can be made to turn a profit. The climate of the Rhone valley, on the other hand, its fauna, its flora, its landscape, the health and well-being of its population, are not profitable at all and bring in nothing to anyone. You can’t sell people replacements for their pleasures and scenic spots until they have been destroyed. That’s what progress is.

- Without a statement of public utility or permission to build, EDF is building at Creys-Malville the first of three breeder reactors of 1200 MW, flanked by four refrigeration towers that in the end will plunge the whole area into a permanent fog. The “four hundred” (who are now nearly 200) concerned scientists write: These breeder reactors are prone to accidents whose mechanisms are exactly the same as those for atomic bombs. These accidents are prudishly called “nuclear digressions,” and, as far as we can calculate them in advance, they are equal to a few tons of old-fashioned explosives. Even though the probability is small, an accident would be of unprecedented and catastrophic proportions, releasing into the atmosphere an enormous amount of radioactivity, containing in particular plutonium 239. Our question is, were the people of the Lyon area consulted or even informed about the risks to which the government or its agencies had deliberately decided to subject them, risks that the experts can neither calculate nor a fortiori anticipate?
The answer is no.

When no one was watching, "they" (who, exactly?) decided to make France the nuclear sewer of Europe and Japan. Starting in 1979, the factory in The Hague will be sloughing off 800 tons of irradiated fuel a year. In other words, from that date on, France will be crossed every year by hundreds and eventually by a thousand special convoys carrying lead casks of highly radioactive material. Since each convoy will take more than a day to reach its destination, there will always be several on the roads, with all the political, administrative, and accident risks that this implies.

But this is only the beginning. At The Hague the irradiated fuel is dissolved. After the (always incomplete) precipitation of plutonium, uranium, and the transuranian elements, the solution contains a number of extremely radioactive wastes. To prepare it for storage, it is reconcentrated 80 times and then dumped into stainless steel casks and covered with concrete more than a yard thick. The radioactive overheating of these wastes is so intense that they must be permanently cooled by a refrigeration circuit and kept under continuous supervision — for seven centuries!

There is a possibility of putting these wastes into glass blocks. "But," write the "four hundred," "the effect of the temperature and the sunlight on these blocks over the long term is absolutely unknown."

The American physicist Alvin Weinberg, director of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, has talked about this "Faustian deal." Humans must pay for access to an "inexhaustible energy source with a vow of eternal vigilance." But EDF’s Boiteux sees in this analogy only a "metaphysical uneasiness." That’s only to be expected. Attention to the long run has always been foreign to the nature of capitalist civilization. "In the long run we will all be dead," said Keynes. Do what’s immediately profitable, we’ll look after the future later.

In order to solve some short term problems we are running the risk of completely insoluble problems in the long run. One hundredth of one percent of the wastes accumulated in a century will be equivalent to the radioactive fallout of 10 thermonuclear bombs of 5 megatons each. Who can guarantee that .01 percent of the contents will not escape from the nuclear dumps every year, or even every week?

A NEW DESPOTISM

"The all-nuclear society is a society full of cops. I don’t like that at all. There isn’t the slightest self-management in a society based on such an energy choice," said Louis Puiseux in an interview at La Gueule Ouverte.... But now listen to Jean-Claud Leny, executive director of Framatone, the company in charge of running the pressurized water reactors (a Westinghouse subsidiary):

Nuclear plants are not dangerous...if they are run by competent staffs and are strictly organized with a strong sense of responsibility.... If we were to install small reactors to heat individual cities, there would be this risk — their operation could be entrusted to local groups which would give control to various companies which may or may not be up to the job.

In my opinion it is essential that few nuclear plants be constructed, and therefore that they be large, installed on ad hoc sites, and controlled in a quasi-military way.3

There you have it. When Puiseux speaks of a "society full of cops," he is still this side of the truth. Nuclear society assumes the creation of a caste of militarized technicians, obedient like a medieval knighthood, with its own code and its own internal hierarchy, which would be exempt from the common law and invested with exten-
sive powers of control, surveillance, and regulation.

The missions of the nuclear knighthood will include in particular: running the fifty units of the four central plants, training and supervising the people working in the plants, managing the radioactive material and coordinating the special convoys, producing and disposing of the fissible material, supervising the production and disposal establishment and their personnel, managing the final dumps that will store the wastes for centuries (hundreds of thousands of years in the case of the transuranian wastes), choosing the sites for future nuclear installations, planning the long range number of plants....

So the nuclear knighthood will include tens of thousands of members and will control and manage hundreds of thousands of civilians. It will rule as a military apparatus in the name of technical imperatives required by the nuclear megamachine.

A tendency toward despotism has always been inherent in capitalist organization of production. The entrance of every factory could bear this inscription: "Here end democratic freedoms and the control of one's own fate." The basis of this "factory tyranny" (Marx's expression) is the subdivision of jobs. In order for capital to stay in charge — that is, the boss or the group of managers who represents the boss — every worker, group of workers, and shop must only produce pieces with neither use value nor market value. Only the programmed recombination of these pieces creates a usable product. And the recombination of this fragmented product of fragmented work is of course the monopoly of the managerial hierarchy.

Its power is based on this monopoly. It is the necessary intermediary between the different work skills and between the different pieces of the product. Without it, the skilled labor of the workers is worthless.

The rule of capital and the impossibility of worker power (of "self-management") are built into the basic organization of the factories. Nationalizing them changes nothing and will change nothing.

Furthermore, the functions that the managerial hierarchy assumes at the factory level, the government assumes at the societal level. Technological, economic, and territorial integration of production means that no community, city, or region produces what it consumes or consumes what it produces. In general, an area produces things that have to be combined with or exchanged for things produced elsewhere in order for local production to survive. The government plans, coordinates, and more or less guarantees the functioning of these combinations and exchanges. As social, territorial, and labor divisions increase, the function of the centralized government becomes more important, and its technobureaucratic power increases accordingly.

Both the industrial bourgeoisie and the public technocracy have a stake in seeing that the centralized grip of the government is as strong as possible, and the local power and autonomy are as weak as possible. Centralization of energy production and distribution, in both the technological and the geographical sense, is the road to an unprecedented strengthening of the central government. It makes a new despotism possible.

SELF-DEVOURING MACHINERY

"Assuming all this is true," say the nuclear advocates, "what are you going to substitute for the atomic plants, without which we will suffer a reduced standard of living and more unemployment?" This question is the perfect fool's snare. In fact it is based on three implicit premises, all of which are false:

A. The first premise is that the standard of
living and employment depend on increased energy consumption and on the substitution of nuclear electricity for oil. In fact it can be shown that:

- development based on zero energy growth will lead to a greater number of jobs of all kinds than development based on increased consumption of energy. The Ford Foundation inadvertently demonstrated this in a voluminous study. These jobs, furthermore, would be more enjoyable than those that go along with big factories and complex administrative machinery;
- contrary to the myth, nuclear energy is only cheaper than oil when that oil is used to produce electricity — and only in that case. As soon as it is used to replace oil in industrial furnaces or the heating systems of public buildings and private homes, electronuclear heating costs two or three times as much as oil heat. It follows from this that substituting electronuclear energy for oil would lower the standard of living;
- to raise the standard of living we must center our investment primarily in saving energy, not in producing it. Investment in energy savings requires much more labor than capital; it is a small, localized investment which creates jobs (and beyond that, it reduces environmental damage). But it is precisely because it calls for human labor rather than capital that this kind

July, 1987. This cozy all-American scene of Mr. & Mrs. O. Zone, toddler Cesium, and doggie Trontium, of Clinton, Ill, relaxing in their lovely warm back yard, ought to reassure the likes of Phyllis Schlafly, Eagle Forum, Anita Bryant and local senators and preachers. Yes, the nuclear family does have a future.
of investment doesn’t interest capitalism. In short, the standard of living could be considerably raised by different and better uses of the available energy.

B. The second premise is that the only fuel that is capable of replacing oil is nuclear power. In fact, in spite of its comprehensiveness, the French nuclear program is not meant to reduce French hydrocarbon imports, but only to keep them at the present level...and that not until the year 2000. But...that stabilization could also be obtained if we called a halt to the nuclear program and invested primarily in geothermal and solar heating.

Beyond the year 2000, harnessing solar energy not only for heating, but especially for the production of energy in small decentralized units, is not an insurmountable problem.

C. The third premise is that the nuclear program will increase the amount of available energy. In fact, a study by a group of university professors and engineers from Lyon, “Diogenes,” has established that until the end of the century the French electronuclear program will consume more energy than it will produce.

Is that unbelievable? No, the Diogenes group is merely taking into account the external energy costs of the program that the EDF economists persist in ignoring. These include the costs of the networks that distribute the electricity, the costs of the Tricastin factories, the costs of the plants themselves and their cooling towers, the costs of various support elements, the costs of waste-treatment plants, the amazingly heavy costs of teaching and research institutes....

The bottom line says that seven plants under construction consume annually as much energy as could be produced by four plants in full operation.

“Far from resolving the energy crisis, which is the apparent justification for its adoption,” writes the Diogenes group, “this program will thus continue and even exaggerate it. A self-devouring monster, growing for its own sake, and artificially inflating the Gross Energy Product, electronuclear energy is the crowning achievement of a society that has become more and more complex, and more and more frenetic, but which offers less and less of profit and value to the individual.”

THE ALTERNATIVE

Are you thinking that if all this were true the business economists would have been aware of it long ago? Disabuse yourself of that idea. No one said the nuclear program wasn’t profitable. All the economic calculations of the Diogenes
group merely established that the nuclear program would not increase the net amount of energy available for anything besides the production of power plants.

But this is not an unusual paradox. All the richest opportunities of advanced capitalism consist in consuming and destroying free resources in order to reproduce them by complicated means and resell them to people in the guise of goods and services. And when, for one reason or another, the expansion of the market is blocked at the consumer level, capitalism arranges to have the government consume a special kind of merchandise, whose only purpose is its own self-destruction. This special merchandise, which is very profitable for industry, is armaments.

Well then, in many of its facets the nuclear program serves the same purpose as an arms program. It keeps capital in circulation and seems to afford it profits that nevertheless don’t correspond to the real situation.

The development of light technologies that call for geothermal and solar energy would have an entirely different economic nature, and are thus of no interest to capital. For investment would be decentralized, and the technology could be learned and used by even small communities or individuals. There would be no need to transport energy (especially solar energy), and large units would have no advantage at all over small ones. Thus no firm, no bank, no government body would be able to monopolize these technologies. They would give local groups and not-yet-industrialized nations a high degree of independence, and they would make a completely different kind of development possible.

This is the “alternative” that capitalism fights with all its might — at the level of multinational firms and national governments. To refuse the nuclear program is to refuse the logic of capitalism and the power of its state.

Le Sauvage, April 1975

NOTES

1. On this point see the testimony and research in No. 2 of Impascience, 1, rue des Fosses-Saint-Jacques, 75005 Paris.
2. I think I am the only journalist to have published quotations from this speech, in Le Nouvel Observateur, June 1, 1970.
4. These calculations were done by the Institut Economique et Juridique de l’Energie (IEJE) at Grenoble, in Alternatives au Nucleaire, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, BP 47, 38040 Grenoble Cedex.

ANDRE GORZ is a French socialist writer, journalist for Le Nouvel Observateur, and an editor of Les Temps Modernes. Among his works available in English are Strategy for Labor, Socialism and Revolution, and The Division of Labour [ed.]. This article is a slightly edited version of two pieces of journalism originally written in April and May, 1975. The full length version will appear in Ecology as Politics, a collection of Gorz’s writings, to be published by South End Press this summer. We are grateful to the Press for permission to use this article. Patricia Vigderman is the translator.

AFTERWORD

-Barry Feldman

Gorz’s relevance to the U.S. public at this time is twofold. First, his analysis of the irrationality of a nuclear program is fundamentally correct. If anything, a nuclear program is more irrational in the United States than in France because of easier access to fossil fuels here. Second, he explains that nuclear power is a quintessential product of the monopoly capitalist system and an integral part of that system’s strategy to expand its grip across the planet.
The intervening years have added strength to all his arguments. U.S. attempts to control European nuclear export policies through restrictions on the sale of uranium has been keenly felt in Europe as an attempt to introduce morality into nuclear sales only because European reactor manufacturers were regularly beating out U.S. manufacturers on overseas sales. The U.S. reader might be skeptical as to the dark motivation of U.S. actions, but it is all too clear to the Europeans.

In 1975 there was a collapse in the international market for new reactors and a wave of cancellations of existing orders. This bursting bubble was a direct result of the fundamental irrationalities of the nuclear vision which Gorz accurately articulated. There was simply not enough business to go around and the United States was not content to let the Europeans be successful when American capitalism could not compete.

Three Mile Island and the NRC’s withdrawal of support for the Rasmussen Nuclear Safety Study amply demonstrate the arrogance of the exaggerated claims for the safety of nuclear plants. The Rasmussen study was supposedly an exhaustive study of every possible accident that could happen in a reactor. Yet the NRC’s head of reactor safety could say of the Harrisburg disaster, “We saw failure modes, the likes of which has never been analyzed.”

Gorz’s use of words like “electrofascism” and the “despotism nuclear knighthood” might have seemed uncalled for at the time. Now, however, we have seen the confusion, lies and turmoil that government and industry foisted on the public. NRC Chairman Hendrie quipped during the Three Mile Island crisis, “Which Amendment is it that guarantees freedom of the press? Well, I’m against it.”

The principal shortcoming of Gorz’s article is one still common in public debate over energy sources. He is willing to concede that nuclear power is the cheapest way to generate electricity in the near future.

But time has also made it clear that there are plenty of alternatives to nuclear power and that many of them are considerably cheaper. Most of these are decentralized technologies that use fossil fuels to make heat and electricity at the same time. They make electricity much more cheaply. The reason they are not used is that they cannot be monopolized and would open the flood gates to decentralized energy development — leaving the private utilities and state-owned ones as well with little to do. Those who have protested against nuclear power and have held out the option of a renewable resource future have often been painted into a corner because of the apparent unavailability of these decentralized sources at the present time. The nuclear establishment is trying to forestall a solar future by preventing the deployment of transitional decentralized technologies which are necessary for the transition to a solar future. We cannot let them succeed.

The last article on nuclear power in Radical America (by Marty Jezer, vol. 11, no. 5) dwelled on the potential and urgency for socialist organizing in the no-nuke movement. Gorz’s article underlines the importance of a political analysis for understanding nuclear power and by so doing implies the necessity for action.

BARRY FELDMAN is a member of the Fruit Salad affinity group of the Boston Clamshell Coalition. He is also an economic consultant for the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group.
The Curious Courtship of Women’s Liberation and Socialism
by Batya Weinbaum
$4.00 paper/$10.50 cloth

The curious courtship of women’s liberation and socialism by Batya Weinbaum is a theoretical guide to the shortcomings of Marxism and the pitfalls of socialism for the feminist movement. In the course of the book, the author explores the fundamental question for radical feminists: What must be done, in addition to socializing the means of production, to liberate women? Weinbaum traces the interaction of Marxism and feminism since the beginnings of those movements in the nineteenth century. She draws on material from Russia, China, Chile, and other radical movements, and in so doing seeks to redefine the concept of revolution. The theoretical solution which emerges utilizes three major paradigms of modern times: the class struggle of Marx, the generational struggle of Freud, and the struggle between the sexes of radical feminists.

The Marxist concept of revolution is that the means of production should be taken away from those who currently own them. But even after removal of productive properties from the once-ruling classes, women’s oppression has continued in socialist countries. Socialists explain this, inadequately, in two ways: either as a problem of inherited consciousness and ideology lagging behind structural economic change, or as a problem of underdevelopment, forcing women to continue sacrificing equality no matter what class takes control. I have been pursuing a further problem: What other structural changes must be made to free women from oppression?

—from CURIOUS COURTSHIP

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SYLVIA PANKHURST
Pioneer of Working Class Feminism

David Widgery

Three women of the Pankhurst family dominated the struggle for women's suffrage in Britain. Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst married into a family with a history of radical and suffrage agitation and moved towards the socialism of the Independent Labour Party in the 1890s. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded in her front room in 1903 with the slogan 'Votes for Women'. Christabel, born 1880, her favoured elder daughter, was her fiery lieutenant in the suffragettes' war of broken windows, slashed paintings and burnt out churches as the Votes for Women agitation reached its crescendo.

Sylvia, born 1882, middle, less glamorous and less well-known daughter, broke, painfully, from her mother and sister.* Between 1912 and 1922 she attempted to remake the once intimate connections between socialism and feminism, not in the industrial north where the women's suffrage movement began, but in proletarian London. Sylvia Pankhurst's political progress took her from the drawing rooms of 19th century Manchester radicalism to the cramped streets of East London in the First World War, from suffrage to revolutionary socialism, from the circle of William Morris and Keir Hardie to polemics with Lenin and Gramsci. And that attempt to do justice to socialism and feminism was, and is, a precarious, painful, and continuing effort.

My interest, affection, it's hard not to call it love, for Sylvia Pankhurst has grown over the last five years spent practicing as a doctor not half a mile from her old home in the Old Ford Road. East London is different now, studded with tower blocks and fenced with

* Adela Pankhurst, the third and youngest daughter of Dr. Richard and Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, born in 1885, emigrated to Australia where she also worked in the women suffrage movement. The Pankhurts also had a son who died in childhood. — ed.
corrugated iron. But curiously the same. Still solidly proletarian, still the sweatshops and street-fights and rent strikes and plenty of old lady patients who remember ‘our Sylvia’ with a twinkle. Still the migrants, speaking Bangla Deshi rather than Yiddish, still the dole queues, longer now than ever. And still a revolutionary socialist minority, of which I’m part, spouting at street corners, dishing out leaflets, spreading union membership, occupying hospitals due for closure. Sometimes I feel Sylvia’s presence so sharply, it’s like a political ghost leaning over my shoulder to look with anger and compassion at the wheezy infants and cooped up young mothers and panicky grannies who live in the council blocks [public housing — eds.] the Labour Council has had the nerve to name after Shelley, Morris and Dickens.

I.

From 1910 onwards there was growing unease within the Pankhurst family and the WSPU. After 1912, on Christabel’s instructions, the organisation concentrated on direct attacks on the property and person of the male members of the ruling class, carried out with much melodrama. Yet only two years later the same women became the most fervent opponents of Germany and Mrs. Pankhurst transferred her vitriol to new targets — ‘conscientious objectors, passive resisters and shirkers’. Working men did have a role after all, to bayonet each other in the trenches of the Somme. Christabel had been early to complain at Sylvia’s speaking at mixed meetings; by the end of World War I, she had bundled Bolshevism, sexual intercourse, strikes and venereal disease into a unified masculine conspiracy. As the WSPU became more despotic, it relied more and more on rich women who appear to have combined a radical break with sexual orthodoxy with a fairly conventional upper class mixture of patronage and loathing for the lower orders. Socialists ought to insist on the right of oppressed groups to organise independently and to exclude even people who see themselves as allies if necessary and see that right as a matter of principle and not just expediency. But all-women or all-black organisations, while they are released from the permanent defensiveness and exclusion of male or white dominated organisation, are not thereby immune from the general pressures of any radical in a hostile society. If separation becomes permanent, it can end imprisoned by the very barricades it sets up as its protection.

Sylvia Pankhurst didn’t deny her feminism, she denied theirs. At the outbreak of War, she travelled back from Ireland to a London alive with patriotism and hatred of ‘The Hun’ in which all the bottled up misery of workers was surfacing, where pinched faces lit up not with socialist ardour but the cry for revenge. She was unable to sleep, ‘Tormented by the visions of those drunken faces at the station, seared by the thought that men were going to die, without heed to the purpose and beauty of life.’ She could not bear what the suffrage movement had become, flawlessly tailored women lending their weight passionately to the chariots of war. ‘Every woman who is putting her hand to the wheel is releasing a man for the trenches. Even if she still had a chauffeur in the background, for certain occasions, she was making a gesture...giving the men a cue for the trenches... ‘The women are wonderful!’ It was Northcliffe, our old opponent, who said it, seeing their new emancipation...for war...for the slaughter,’” she wrote. In 1914 the long awaited breach between Emmeline Pankhurst and her socialist daughter was made public with Sylvia’s expulsion from the Women’s Social and Political Union.

Sylvia Pankhurst reported that the split came because “we had more faith in what could be done by stirring up working women than was
from the West End, as they did not say anything about our work in the East End at the meeting at the Empress Theatre and that Sylvia Pankhurst was to the point too: "It is evident that the House of Commons and even its Labour members were more impressed by the feminine bourgeoisie than by the female proletariat," and, to the East Londoners: "You have a democratic constitution and we don't agree to that."

Sylvia Pankhurst had moved in 1909 to live at Bow at the house of the Paynes, who were both shoemakers, and began to build suffragette branches with the help of a handful of middle-class friends who shared her politics. She first approached known radicals, but soon attracted a group of working-class women leaders who were born agitators. Women like Charlotte Drake, ex-barmaid, labourer's wife and mother of five, Melvina Walker, a one-time ladies' maid and, like many of Pankhurst's supporters, a docker's wife, whose scandalous tales of high society made her a favourite speaker, and Mrs. Creswell, a mother of six and married to a paint factory worker who eventually became Mayor of Poplar, one of the most radical of the dock area boroughs of London. At first the message spread among the tailoresses, serving women, factory girls and wives of Stepney, Limehouse, Poplar and Bermondsey, by word of mouth. The East London Federation's minutes record, "Membership is growing through afternoon tea parties. The outdoor meetings were not successful; too cold." But the colours of the East London Federation, the old suffragette purple and green with red added, were soon seen at early morning dock gate meetings, Mothering Sunday marches, the traditional speaking sites at Victoria Park and Gardiner's Corner — where the male listeners raised the traditional cry, "Wot about the old man's kippers!" — and on street pitches and outside picture palaces.

felt at headquarters, where they had more faith in what could be done for the vote by people of means and influence. In other words they said they were working from the top down, we from the bottom up."

Mrs. Parsons, a docker's wife from Canning Town, put it more bluntly still: "It was a good thing to have a separate party in the East End
Pankhurst’s constant and hectic political activity in those early years taught her details of the life of East London people. She got to know her way round the blank walls of the docks with their fortified entrances where the wealth of the Empire passed through the hands of the very poorest. She sold papers outside gates which became an early morning parading ground of the workless desperate for casual labour. She was at home down the mean back streets with their barrack dwellings, hard to keep clean, dangerous for play, costly to heat in winter and airless and dark in summer. She knew how hard it was to keep up the rent when work was uncertain. She sheltered in the blackness of Blackwall Tunnel at night, the only underground shelter during the War’s bombing raids where mothers and babies huddled next to munitions wagons awaiting shipment to the Front with the horses shivering and rearing with terror at the noise. Describing a 22 bus ride through London ending in the Isle of Dogs she wrote, “Leaving the broad river in its quiet. Leave the wide sky, mount again to the narrow streets to the mean streets, to the tumble down hovels among the massive factories, to the lovers with nowhere to go, who clasp each other in gloomy doorways, Great chimneys, gaunt, great chimneys, fantastic shapes of elevators, and Venus that shines up there in the quiet sky. Majestic sadness. Stores of wealth kept here in bond amid the poverty.”

Today that part of London is still sadder, its wharves silent, the gaunt factories with their mock-Egyptian facades up ‘To Let,’ the acres of flats blasted with gusts of wind and menacing racist graffiti, and the motorway rattling with cars escaping to Essex. It has become an industrial museum without doors, a series of snap-shots of a country slipping backwards into de-industrialisation (like the traditional working-class districts, of Liverpool and Glasgow and Newcastle.)

East London, then as now, presents particular problems for political organisation. Its long history as a national port and merchant capital defined the geography of the city before industry grew up. Londoners remained divided according to trade and transport, with most manufacturers small, and many service industries. Paper flower-making, hat finishing or driving a cart was more likely than factory work. There are no mines and little ship building in London. There were pockets of high capital investment where working conditions and union politics were more like Glasgow or Yorkshire (the Beckton Gas Works was the world’s largest and employed 20,000), but light engineering, wood working and clothing manufacture in small workplaces were much more general. One in three working women were in service, mainly as cleaners. London trade unionism has been weakened by the ‘commuting artisan,’ by the conservative outlook of the skilled craftsman, the isolation and powerlessness of the unskilled casual worker, by the relatively large proportion and poor organisation of the migrant and women workers. Nonetheless, in the national patchwork of pre-War militancy, London workers of both sexes were as active as those in the provinces. There were long strikes of women cleaners, biscuit makers and jam packers in 1909 and 1910.

With Pankhurst’s leadership, these problems were addressed by the Women’s Dreadnought, newspaper of the East London Federation, established in 1913. It exposed the conditions of women home workers, campaigned on behalf of single mothers and the victims of hat-pin abortions, published articles on “The schooling of the future” and international affairs. It sold about 8000 copies with the Bow branch holding the record with a regular 800 a week and a claimed 1600 one week. Some sellers complained of the police, the difficulty of selling to immigrants who could not speak English and of
male hecklers who "crowded but did not buy...giving us a very rough time." But these problems were countered by determined and imaginative publicity campaigns with late-night Dreadnought 'chalking parties,' 'red sticky-backs' and the hiring of a pleasure boat in Victoria Park from which were unfurled parasols spelling out DREADNOUGHT.

Pankhurst found her first real happiness among the Cockneys, who despite her middle-class background took her to their hearts, calling her 'Our Sylvia' and providing her with a bodyguard called Kosher Hunt, a local prize fighter. From 1912 Mrs. Pankhurst and Christabel, while stepping up the apparent militancy of their campaign for the vote, were moving to the Right. After years of public organising and exhausting constitutionalism, the WSPU was transformed into an upper-middle-class urban guerrilla army, commanded from a secret HQ in Paris.

Contemporary socialist disapproval for the tactics used by the underground suffragettes is often ill aimed. The highly effective use of direct action — heckling, jujitsu resistance to police arrest, damage to the property of the rich — represented a considerable upsurge in the level of struggle and the confidence of the women. A proper objection is that insurrectionary methods were being used for a reformist goal. And that both in the constitutional and incendiary phases, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst saw the mass of working women as passive, useful only in providing numbers. For as working women found their political voice there was bound to be questioning of a campaign of women of all classes carried out on terms defined by the rich ones. Sylvia was right to predict that a pressure group consisting of and appealing to the privileged classes without an active local base could in hard times go into reverse gear and become an instrument to enforce women's sacrifices.

By contrast, Sylvia Pankhurst's efforts to build an independent working women's movement in East London brought her in contact and co-operation with the revolutionary left. In 1914 she intended the Dreadnought (having fortunately rejected such other names as Worker's Mate!) to widen the East London Federation's political interests. But by 1917 the paper was more concerned with the unity of the Left and full of optimism for the Russian Revolution. In October 1917, it was re-re-named the Workers Dreadnought. But the insistence on women's issues continued, both on local matters and in re-publishing articles by Alexandra Kollontai, Clara Zetkin, and Zinoviev on the
necessity for women’s councils and a Woman’s International Congress. The extent and the sophistication of socialist feminist agitation carried out by the women’s organisations of the Third International in the early twenties remains curiously neglected by feminist historians.

The War had effectively put a pistol to the political head of every political organisation and interrupted the steady growth of the causes of women and Labour. It enabled state-organised official obedience to push back the initiatives being taken by the women, the workers and the Irish. The overwhelming majority of the socialist organisations, with various complicated rationales ended backing the most pointless and brutal military slaughter in history, even those who had pledged, at conference after conference, their utter opposition.

The Suffrage movement also fell first obediently, then enthusiastically, behind the war effort. Just as Pankhurst moved away from the woman’s vote issue towards general political agitation, so in 1915 her mother, financed by leading industrialists, went on a speaking tour of industrial and mining areas of Britain appealing to wives to resist Bolshevism and stop supporting the shop stewards. The polarisation was to gather speed; just before Pankhurst arrived in Moscow eager to debate with Lenin, her mother had been in the same city trying to rally support to the dying Kerensky regime. But even by 1914 the ways were parting. The prospect of martyrdom and glory did not appeal to the working women who had until then supported the suffrage campaign. The ladies broke the windows but the working women hung back.

Sylvia’s sustained community organising in East London tried instead to get to grips with their more immediate problems — food, rent, and working conditions. The East London Federation campaigned against government calls for food rationing. When bread prices went up, they suggested: “Someone should go into the shop and ask for it at normal prices and if it were refused, go and get a number to back her up and then take it.” They tried to start a “No Vote, No Rent” strike but the idea was rejected by the WSPU because “it was impossible to work it through their organizations as their people were widely scattered and it is only in working-class homes that women pay the rent.” They also suggested to the Poplar Trades Council that “the Russian example be followed and the empty houses in any part be commandeered for people now in the workhouse.” The Federation was accustomed to working with local men trade unionists. They joined the general campaign against the “Sweated Trades” and particularly took up the cause of women finishers who sewed buttons and seams on soldiers’ trousers and demanded that “if a woman does a man’s work she shall have a man’s pay.” Equal pay was of particular importance because women were sucked into traditionally male jobs when those men were sent to war. Union branches of the Stratford gasworkers and the Stratford and Bromley railmen heard women speakers on Adult Suffrage, and the trades councils turned their members out on suffrage demonstrations.

The scale of these activities is hard to estimate but an impressive degree of organisation must have been necessary for the People’s Army of Defence to have drilled men and women recruits in street fighting tactics against the police. They turned out 700 people armed with staves and marching in tight formation. The Army was formed to give women a way to defend themselves against the Police. This was before the 1936 Public Order Act, introduced after the success of the East Londoners in turning back Mosley’s Union of Fascists, had banned such organisations. The police were still hated outsiders in most of East London and
enforced their rule with according brutality; they were trying to conquer an area rather than police it. The official purpose of the People's Army was to defend free speech, to drive out police spies (who were detected by their hygienic smell!) and prevent wrongful arrest, particularly common in the alcoholic chaos of Saturday nights. The force could also prevent evictions attempted by the landlords in the ‘No Vote, No Rent’ strike, and even attend auctions. ‘If there was any attempt to sell the furniture of any of them, “the army” would attend the sale and “rescue” the furniture.’ Drilling in public was then common and up to 1000 people, mainly women, used to turn out in front of Bow Town Hall armed with Saturday Night Clubs, rope coshes knotted with lead. When police tried to arrest protesters at Shoreditch in 1914 the women escaped by heaving a table at the arresting officers. Pankhurst’s advice was a mixture of the practical and the insurrectionary: “The police know ju-jitsu. I advise you to learn ju-jitsu. Women should practice it as well as men. We are going to fight and we will do far more than the Ulster people. Get on with this drilling. Arm yourselves. Let us fight and we shall win.”

The Federation was also adept at disguise and decoy so that Pankhurst and others could defy the 1913 Prisoner’s (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act, the ‘Cat and Mouse’ Act aimed to neutralise the tactic of hunger strike by allowing for temporary release and return to prison once health improved. Once out Sylvia Pankhurst resisted re-arrest and made a defiant speech to the faces of the police in Trafalgar Square. The Federation also took up a campaign about the conditions in Holloway Jail where the women succeeded in getting the garters and proper teaspoons they had pleaded for, tiny victories that meant so much to women crushed by well regimented pain. The scale of this East London agitation challenged the Government. In 1920, during the intervention into Russia, the British Socialist Party, the Workers’ Suffrage Federation and the shop stewards’ movement led a united campaign for “Hands Off Russia.” Dockers refused to load munitions for the Polish army of invasion and the seamen refused to coal the ship. The Workers’ Suffrage Federation called on dockers’ wives to support not only their husbands’ campaign but also to agitate at their own workplaces and on the public housing estates. This activity, which at one point had public speakers operative at over 30 open-air speaking sites in East London, did much for the Hands-Off-Russia campaign. British support for the Poles was stopped in its tracks.

Sylvia Pankhurst spread her ideas to other industrial towns in Britain and lectured in Denmark, Norway, Budapest and Vienna on socialism, suffrage, education and child care. In America she spoke on “the garment workers strike, drug fiends and juvenile delinquents, the Negro question.” She had particularly close links with the male engineering workers in Glasgow. But the activities in East London were in continual danger of caving in under sheer weight of misery. The Federation had to create places where working class housewives could meet and support each other practically. Once it sprang a creche where “working mothers can leave their babies for the day at a charge of 3d a head. For this the children receive three meals, the loan of suitable clothes and are cared for in every way.” A pub, The Gunmakers Arms, was converted to a maternity centre, The Mothers Arms, with a resident nurse, cheap maternity foods and hygiene and health talks. By 1915 mother and baby clinics had been set up in Bow, Bromley,
Poplar and West Ham, connected to Dreadnought readers’ groups. Cost-price restaurants linked to the paper served stew and rice and meat pie and potatoes in Bow and Poplar. In Walthamstow a League of Rights was set up by the wives of soldiers and sailors to campaign for better treatment for servicemen.

It is true that by 1917 the East London Federation had not produced great results. The distress relief always tended to become a disguised form of charity instead of the working women’s self-activity that was intended. What with people running off with the cash, the co-operative factory being bankrupted by commercial firms and the maternity nurse watering down the milk, only bits of the Federation’s private welfare schemes remained to be taken up by Poplar Council. The Federation was aware of the danger of merely providing services as a form of political charity, but certain that without collective provision for some of the working woman’s burdens, it was fanciful to demand she step forward and emancipate herself. And the creches, kitchens, choirs and clinics were themselves organised in a radical fashion. Socialist doctors and psychologists gave talks on sexual matters, the nursery nurses practised Montessori methods, advice on contraception was almost certainly given informally. During the War the Federation spread itself from its East London heartland to form branches in Birmingham, Nottingham, Glasgow and Wales. By 1918 it had small groupings in 12 of the major towns which emphasised day-to-day women’s issues within a wider framework of socialist demands.

Sylvia Pankhurst’s fierce and consistent opposition to the war, although applauded by the Scots engineers and Welsh colliers, in fact cut her off from her old friends in East London. Hope came only form afar, from the Bolsheviks and the Soviets in Russia. It was to them and the Communist Parties being organised throughout the world in the glow of the Russian revolution that Pankhurst and her supporters turned. Like most British socialists, she was probably unsure what exactly Bolshevism was and certainly unclear about its relationship to her feminism, but she was to adopt wholly for the next few years its aim, the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. As she told the judge who tried her in 1919 for agitating among the forces; “I started four clinics and have sat up night after night with the little ones. I also set up a day nursery but all my experience shows me it was useless to try to palliate an impossible system. It is the wrong system and has got to be smashed. I would give my life to smash it.”

The world had been utterly altered by war including production itself. The insides of factories didn’t look the same and the way work was organised was itself transformed. The first
A generation of automated machine tools, turret and capstan lathes, and universal milling machines had been set up, the skilled men were no longer left alone, their protected positions were dislodged, pushed and shoved aside by the rattle and thud of the production line. The power was being dug from underneath their top-hatted trade unionism by the influx of less skilled workers. They were no longer sheltered by the possession of their craft. The discipline which the pressure of war enabled the factory owners to introduce stayed, of course, and became more strict when the war was over.

But after the war these changes produced a new arrangement of class forces. The armaments industry, on which the growth of the metal trades depended, collapsed and, after a brief post war boom, manufacturing slumped too. The war had given the national unions time and authority to recover initiative, the TUC was strengthened, unions were merged and amalgamated and the resulting headquarters exerted more power over their members. There was a corresponding change in industrial politics in the factories. In order to resist the employer and the state, to recover mastery at work, to make organizations which might become the form of governing in a socialist stage — all three demanded an independent rank-and-file movement, organised at the shop-steward level, capable of resisting the union bureaucrats. Such a movement was the first priority of the British revolutionaries inspired by Soviet Russia.

When Pankhurst drew up the agenda for the Rank-and-File convention which met in 1919 to discuss the theories of soviet power and to which she proposed her idea of the “social
soviet" which would organise workers where they lived, far from abandoning her feminism, she was attempting to relate it to a new political era. For example, in an article on the shop steward movement published in Gramsci's *L'Ordine Nuovo*, she explained to Italian readers the meaning of the foreign phrase, "rank-and-file movement." Her perception of the potential of the rank and file movement and the need to link the factory council with the social soviet...the need to 'translate' the Soviet experience into Western European conditions are a contribution which make her a founding mother of today's revolutionary movement, even if she was fated to make connections in her head which she couldn't forge in practice.

Her political insight is all the more remarkable because the revolutionary left in Britain, with the exception of the tiny Socialist Labour Party, had never seen workplace activity or the unions as especially important; and because the Soviets, Factory Councils, were entirely new, a working-class invention in response to changes in advanced capitalist industry.

Her relation to the foundation of the British Communist Party is complicated. There is no doubt that she was impatient. She felt that the East London Federation (although its popular bases had withered), the London Shop Stewards around the magazine *Solidarity*, and the SLP and the Welsh Socialist Societies, the groups which had fought hardest against the war, British intervention, and conscription, had established their right to be the core of the Party. She found it hard to conceal her contempt for some of the shams who negotiated their way into the hack-packed leadership of the CPGB in the course of the amalgamation process, so she established her very own Communist Party, advertised as 'affiliated to the Third International,' more as a Pankhurst act of will than a piece of political democracy.

But the facts that the two most outstanding and original revolutionaries in Britain in 1920, Pankhurst in East London and John MacLean, the leader of the "Red Clyde" engineering workers, were both out of the Party by 1922, that many others never joined or swiftly left, and that the Party was so swiftly overtaken by a conservative bureaucracy which has an essential continuity from the early twenties to the present day — these facts cast some doubts on the way the CP was formed in Britain. Pankhurst and MacLean had in common considerable prestige in the international movement (MacLean was appointed by Lenin Bolshevik Consul in Glasgow and Pankhurst became correspondent for the Petrograd edition of 'Communist International,' the theoretical and news organ of the International.) They shared a decade of practical organising and through neither were industrial workers, they had constant contact with the industrial movement. Added to that was experience in socialist publishing and propaganda, agitation over housing and community issues and against the war. Both were independently minded, politically frank and acutely aware from personal experience of the need to hold hard against the purely industrial vantage point of the shop stewards movement and the deeply reformist instincts of the class as a whole. They had in common, too, a certain liking for a rather schematic purity which they mistook for rigour and both were capable of going very emphatically wrong. The Communist Party was born in Britain into harsh circumstances, with the immediate post-war militancy ebbing away rapidly and the labour movement in retreat. It was a small and isolated party and the Labour establishment did its best to keep it that way. Nevertheless, some of its problems were of its own making, notably its heavy-handed internal regime for which Pankhurst had scant respect: "The CPGB is at present passing through a sort of political measles called discipline which makes it fear free expression and the circulation
of opinions within the party.” She was not penitent for having been cast from the temple at King Street (CP headquarters): “I do not regret my expulsion...that it has occurred shows the feeble and unsatisfactory condition of the party, its placing of small things before great.”

It is quite clear, whatever the prestige of Bolshevik Russia on sexual matters, that the early CPGB attracted very few feminists who wished to unite class and sexual politics. Its “Bolshevik” hostility to issues of subjective experience and autonomous organisation touched directly on the predicament of women as a sex. The political implications of women’s control over sex and reproduction were not allowed into the orthodox Marxists’ definition of the Woman Question and were left stranded in the utopian-socialist and anarchist-communist groups who could not take them very far. Women, and this has a chillingly contemporary ring, were often forced by the hostility of the socialist left into the broader non-revolutionary parties, where at least they were left alone. In the 1920s women interested in birth control, abortion and maternity provisions for the working class were effectively forced into the Labour Party or the Malthusian League by the Communist Party’s conservative positions. The whole circumstances of the CP’s formation and its excessive loyalty to Soviet orthodoxy fundamentally flawed it and excluded many worthy native strains of revolutionary thought and activity. For example, the movement for workers’ control exemplified by MacLean and his Glasgow comrades, and mass community and rent struggles of East London were beginning to meet each other, as Pankhurst’s group became more committed to the rank-and-file shop stewards movement and the Glasgow rent strikes during the war linked the Scottish industrial movement to women in the homes and estates. But that sort of movement was rapidly extinguished in the early Twenties. Not only did the steady rise of unemployment weaken the class and enable the employers to sack the industrial activists, but the bleak perspective of the Communist International reflected the stark extremity of Russia under siege, attempting to co-ordinate a world uprising while unable to provide its own townspeople with bread or candles. The movement towards workers’ control by the factory councils, the Commune-State sketched by Lenin in ‘State and Revolution,’ was replaced by an insistence on the construction of parties of the Bolshevik kind. The absence of organisations clear-sighted in aims, committed to workers’ future power but rooted in the workers own present organisations, was recognised by the most serious socialists as a fundamental weakness on the European left. But founding such parties in the ebb wave of the thwarted workers’ offensive was another matter. Pankhurst was brutally accurate about Russia of the early Twenties, it was no longer the herald of proletarian uprising, workers control and the liberation of women. ‘They pose now as the prophets of efficiency, trustification, state control and discipline of the proletariat, in the interest of increased production.’ The possibility for genuinely revolutionary industrial politics, let alone sexual politics, was bleak.

Against these narrow possibilities Sylvia Pankhurst’s political achievement deserves to be forcefully reasserted. It is a very good example of the masculine bias of the revolutionary movement that she is generally known as no more than a woman who received the blunt end of the Lenin pamphlet, ‘Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder.’ (In the same way, Kollontai, until she was rescued by modern socialist feminists, was known, if known at all, simply for her role in the Workers’ Opposition.) In the revolutionary movement, like everywhere else, women have to do better than
men before they achieve equal recognition.

For Sylvia Pankhurst is in many ways a critical missing political link who, as an agitator, an organiser and a thinker, has direct relevance today. It’s truly amazing that socialists who have made themselves experts on Plekhanov, Trotsky and the First 4 Congresses of the 3rd International remain so magnificently condescending of Sylvia.

She is a link between the British revolutionary movement of the late 19th century, the world of Engels, Eleanor Marx, Kropotkin, Louise Michel, William Morris, the era of briefly triumphant Bolshevism and the Third International of Lenin, Gramsci, Bordiga. And on her journey between the two she collaborated politically with the outstanding British revolutionaries and labour leaders of the time, Tillet, Thorne Mann and Pollit, Jim Larkin and Victor Grayson. The cultural pre-occupations of the 19th century socialists and her own creative gifts coloured her initial aims in life, ‘to work as an artist in the service of popular movements, decorating halls, producing banners, cartoons, designs, etc., whatever might serve to beautify and inspire the movements of the masses, the drab ugliness which smote my soul with pity.’ But although she won two scholarships, was the first woman in Manchester to attend nude drawing classes and travelled Britain to sketch and paint working women from the shoe makers of Leicester, the “pibrow girls” of the Wigan mines, Berwickshire farm labourers, and Glasgow cotton mill workers, she decided, ‘to abandon’ her artistic work and go to East London to build a movement, ‘not merely for votes, but towards an egalitarian society.’ But her insight as a political organiser was to see that a new spirit of pride among women chaffing against their lack of sexual rights might link, not to the vote, but to the resentment surfacing against their servile state in service and at work. And that such a move-

ment had an affinity with the new unofficial movement among male rank-and-file trade unionists. If the industrial rebels and the suffrage rebels could march together a new force for change and the beginnings of a different sort of power was possible.

To build such an organisation she attempted to fight not just about the working day but the working life. She helped organise rent strikes with the slogan, ‘Please Landlord, don’t be offended/Don’t come for the rent “till the war is ended”,’ sought to organise the unemployed and took up political issues of the right to free speech and expression and self-defense against the police. She saw the importance of organising collectively to create practical solutions to the material problems which weighed so heavy on working women and to consciously help develop the confidence of the dockers’ wives

Sylvia Pankhurst escorted from prison.
who were her main allies. There was no After-The-Revolution; instead, ‘I feel that my first work must be to do what I can to secure for women the entrance into the political scheme, without which they can never play anything but a subordinate part in the social reconstruction.’ She didn’t want to be a radical version of her mother’s organisation but instead a ‘strong self-reliant movement among working women’ who could be ‘fighters in their own right.’

In this process her work as a political editor and journalist was as important as her personal bravery and ardour as an agitator and orator. The Dreadnought is a most readable and lively socialist weekly, probably the only British parallel to Gramsci’s L’Ordine Nuovo in its range of concerns and direct connection to working class life, if not its theoretical intransigence. She wanted a paper by workers for workers and what is markedly less common, she did the work to make it happen. ‘I took infinite pains in correcting and arranging their manuscripts to preserve the spirit and unsophisticated freshness of the original.’ She achieved that ultimate accolade of a socialist editor, being locked up for her journal. The offending articles give a good idea of the vitality of the Dreadnought and range of its contributors: Anderson the Finn’s ‘Discontent on the Lower Deck’; an anti-racist article written by a black seaman entitled ‘The Yellow Peril and the Dockers’ (which the Crown alleged advocated organised looting of the bonded warehouses); ‘How to Get a Labour Government;’ and an attack on Government welfare policy called ‘The Datum Line.’ From her room in Old Ford Road, she scrawled articles for the Merthyr Pioneer, the Glasgow Forward, Avanti, the Italian Socialist Party’s paper, and became L’Ordine Nuovo’s only permanent foreign correspondent. Her writing has a sharpness and a freshness of imagery which did not fade as she became more physically exhausted, or more pressured by the demands of weekly socialist journalism. Although her retrospective accounts of the movement are dull, her agitational journalism has great poignancy and fire. Even in prison she scribbled poems with the pencil and paper hidden beneath her skirts. The prison provided a blackboard and chalk but insisted it was washed clean after use... ‘the inconsistent slate destined to swift extinction,’ she called it. Her clandestine poems catch glimpses of the sisterhood of women in prison without sentiment.

Perhaps most important were her stands in international politics. She argued consistently in favour of the Irish rebels and organised East Londoners to care for the children of the Dublin lockout. The Federation was the first British group to establish links with Soviet Russia. She led a ‘Great Push’ as she called it against the British intervention, stopping people herself in the Bow Road to talk about Russia from the scanty supply of news which arrived by sympathetic seamen and cooks on the Baltic shipping lines. She mastered and took up sides in the infant Communist International speaking at the 1919 Congress of the Italian Socialist Party and debating fiercely but fraternally with Lenin, who never seems to have understood that part of her hostility to parliamentary politics was the bitterness of her experience with the vote-fixated WSPU and her first-hand knowledge of an older, more corrupting assembly than the Duma the Russian workers had forced the Tsar to grant them. In the British Parliament she said, ‘Courage seems to evaporate like a child’s soap bubble!’ And writing in the review Communismo in support of Amadeo Bordiga she stated, “It is difficult for me to understand how you can possibly make propaganda to win seats in Parliament — a body you mean to abolish in a few months — when you ought to be absorbed in the work of revolutionary preparation and when the most urgent need is to convince workers that the time
for Parliaments is passed."

She was a sympathetic and understanding supporter of the Workers' Opposition in Russia which was the first and the most principled challenge to the political retreats being made in besieged Soviet Russia. This skeptical open-mindedness towards the debates within the Russian Party underlay her curt evaluations of British Communist Officialdom and concern with the rank-and-file and the stop-stewards movements. Her politics were a real threat to the hacks, not just in King Street but in Moscow. Her apparent idiosyncrasy was the consequence of holding a very advanced political position. Her affinity with Kollontai was as much for her trenchant criticism of the rising Soviet bureaucracy as for her ideas on maternity, education and prostitution.

Sylvia Pankhurst had to challenge head-on the male domination of the existing revolutionary movement, and did so with some success. She recruited men like John Scurr, a docker who resigned from the BSP for its anti-feminism. She transformed an all-woman organisation into a mixed socialist organisation where the lead was given by working-class women and where socialist activity about women's and child health, childcare, schooling and domestic work were an integral part of the political work. Men were neither excluded nor morally reviled.

It must be said that she was, for all, still a Pankhurst and prone to use sheer will power when democracy seemed too time-consuming. Her East London base ebbed just as her prestige in the international movement was growing. The community self-activity was only kept going by constant begging from the liberal rich in the West End and later subsidised by Government grants. But Harry Pollitt, a founder-member of the Communist Party of G.B., testified against the implication, made by the CPers who expelled her echoing the lying campaign made against MacLean, that she was an impossible megalomaniac: "Sylvia Pankhurst was, of course, the leading spirit of the Federation and had the remarkable gift of extracting every last ounce of energy as well as the last penny from anyone with whom she came into contact... although I often heard that Sylvia was difficult to get on with, I never found it so. I covered the greater part of London with her group."

The charge that her 1917 enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution meant she abandoned her feminism and succumbed to a male dominated politics which effectively excluded feminist concerns is more recent criticism which also lacks weight. For though it is not guaranteed that women's position is necessarily improved as the working class cause is advanced, it seems to be true that women are pushed back when the class as a whole is defeated. And attempting to force a connection between feminism of the early days of the ELF and the shop stewards movement was an audacious step. If the feminist aspect was almost bound to suffer, this was not due so much to the male domination of London heavy industry in Arsenal and the ship-repair

"The Food Queue," a pastel by C.R.W. Nevinson
yards, the industrial base of the movement, as to the collapse of the suffrage movement as a whole into the War effort by 1916. As late as 1918 when popular support was waning and international events were filling the sky, the Federation fought on specifically women’s issues, including prostitution, the campaign against compulsory inspection for VD, and the rights of soldiers’ wives. Thus the Women’s Dreadnought argued in 1917 against the Sexual Crimes Bill which had been brought out after Army officers wrote to the press demanding the punishment of women and girls who were “preying” on soldiers and sailors. The punishments dramatised the hypocrisy: up to two years at a time when the maximum penalty for rape was six months. The ELF instead organised a campaign which included vigilantes and the compulsory examination of the male clients; and insisted that wages and conditions for East London women had to improve before any “solution” to prostitution could be discussed. Interestingly, it was only Emmeline Pankhurst’s “Women’s Party” which offered a specific post-war policy for women, and that was of a proto-fascist type.

Sylvia Pankhurst’s personal and sexual feelings can only be guessed at. Most of her passion was directed straight to political life. As a girl she wrote, “Flirting I regard as a most sinful folly, considering it cruel to play with the affections of another being, if one’s own are not involved. Foolish and wrong to squander the emotions which should be reserved for the one great love.” And again, more somberly still, “My sisters will marry, I thought; but I was destined to worship love only in the abstract, and to serve humanity by a life of ascetic self-denial.” But she began to live with an Italian journalist, Silvio Corrio, in 1912, with whom she was to stay for 42 years. In the mid-1920s they left East London for good to live in Ethiopia. She got involved in the Ethiopian nationalist movement, especially in the struggle against the Italian invasion. After repeated imprisonment, hunger strikes, forced feedings, and incessant political activity for over a decade, this journey to Africa, some say, saved her health and life.

Sylvia Pankhurst is important to our generation of socialists because of her efforts to bring together feminism and socialism. There are those in political movements who make original and creative advances in theory, those who can communicate established political ideas imaginatively, and those who have the gift of organising to make political change. She always insisted on doing all three.

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ITALIAN FASCISTS IN ETHIOPIA (ABYSSINIA)
PHOTOGRAPH THEIR OWN WAR CRIMES

NO TRUSTEESHIP FOR ITALY!
HONOUR BRITISH PLEDGES TO RETURN EX-COLONIES TO THEIR MOTHERLAND!

Sylvia Pankhurst on militant poster parade outside the House of Commons, 1946.
MR. NORRIS

Remember old barber in Barbados
(I was waiting to catch a plane back to Cuba)
who was halfway through my haircut
when he said in a serious, confidential tone:

"I’m not a barber, really..."

I wasn’t sure I understood his thick West Indian accent
but anyway I asked:

"Then what are you?"

(which is what he wanted me to ask...
hell, I was curious
but didn’t care all that much
some of my best haircuts
have been non-professional jobs...)

And he smiled and said:

"Violinist and violin-maker"
in the proudest of voices.
and in the middle of my haircut
(I mean it literally — the left side)
he got out his violin case
cradling it in his arms like a baby
and told me how it took him 18 months to make this violin
"back in 1938."
He said: "Never put together a better one before or since"
and he opened the case
took out the baby and began to play
(pausing every few minutes to explain how hard
it was to get the right kinds of wood, glue, etc.)
It was beautiful
not so much the music but the player
the barber who wasn’t a barber, really,
in Barbados.
and me with half a haircut in Barbados
and tears in my eyes
realizing again how many of us have to live lives of
"I’m not an X, really..."
how many of us not doing what we’d like to be doing
so many with secret identities
frustrated pent-up music
beauty clandestine and stored-up...

I swear, Mr. Norris,
I swear one day the barbers of Barbados
and everywhere else
will really be barbers
and violinists
and violin-makers
if it costs us our lives!

—Bridgetown-Havana
October 1974
SYLVIA COHEN

"tell them not to cry.  
tell them in the storm  
a drop of blood is thinking."
—Steve Becker

My mother is talking to the radio  
my mother is talking to her plants  
there is a talk show on the radio  
my mother is talking to the talk show  
she’s angry and the talk show isn’t listening  
the radio is also angry at something  
(I can’t tell what)  
people are angry  
the host of the show is cutting people off  
who want to say something  
my mother is angry at that  
she loves the talk shows  
she talks to the radio  
gets angry at crazy callers and the reactionary hosts  
she tells me someone called up and said  
"Joseph McCarthy was a great patriot, a great American"  
my mother told me she once called up  
and tried to say something about education in Cuba  
"I saw it with my own eyes!" she told them
but the radio didn’t listen
the host said “Thank you for calling”
in a voice that said “I hate you”
and my mother is transplanting the plants
which have grown too big for little pots
and now need big pots
the roots are all bunched up
twisted around themselves a million times
my mother calls me in to help her
with a hammer she breaks the flowerpot as I hold
“Look at those roots!” she cries
my mother with a hammer in her hand
my mother is talking to the radio
my mother is talking to the plants
I don’t want her to be cut off
I want my mother to be heard
I want my mother’s roots
—twisted around themselves a million times
but still strong and surging with life—
to make their way
to make room
for her growth
my mother has had limbs chopped off
my mother had lived in a flowerpot way too small
this morning she described her life as a tiny circle
she traced the circle on the yellow blanket
she was sewing
her eyes looked so sad
my mother is the sad sculpture of pain she made
my mother is beginning to sculpt her own life
hammer in hand
at 61 my mother
is talking to the world!

—Bronx, N. Y.
February 7, 1977

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POLITICAL FORCES IN
THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Ervand Abrahamian

"Your Majesty, Where are your supporters?"
The Shah: "Search Me."

A Worker to an American correspondent:
"We want Khomenie. He will take power from the rich
and give it to us."

INTRODUCTION
The recent revolution in Iran was a spontaneous movement of the urban masses rather
than a planned uprising led by any organized political party. It began in late 1977 with
members of the intelligentsia — especially lawyers, judges, writers, professors, publishers,
journalists, and university students — protesting the lack of political freedom and the
violation of human rights, and demanding that the shah should respect the constitutional
laws of 1905-09. It dramatically escalated in early 1978 when the clergy and the commercial
petit bourgeoisie — particularly shopkeepers, small traders, and traditional handi-
craftsmen — took to the streets and organized massive bazaar strikes demanding the
removal of government controls over prices, guilds, and seminaries. They also called for

*An earlier and shorter version of this article appeared in Middle East Research and Information Project, (MERIP),
Nos. 75-76 (March-April 1979). For background articles on the revolution see MERIP, No. 69 (July-August 1978),
and No. 71 (October 1978).

Opposite: A women's demonstration in support of the Mujahedin. The picture on the banner is Dr. Shari'ati. Photo by
Eva Cockcroft.
the immediate return of Ayatollah Khomenie, a prominent clergyman who had been exiled since 1963 because of his outspoken denunciations of the regime.¹

The revolution further escalated in late 1978 when government employees, notably bank clerks, teachers, and customs officials, as well as crucial sectors of the industrial proletariat, especially oil, textile, and construction workers, struck, and thereby brought the whole economy to a grinding halt. These strikers were protesting not only spiraling inflation, rising unemployment, recent cancellation of annual bonuses, but also the refusal of the regime to permit Khomenie's return, lift martial law, implement the constitutional laws, allow employees participation in the running of factories and government offices, and punish those responsible for the massacre of peaceful demonstrators during the previous months. As one refinery worker informed an American correspondent, "We'll export oil when we have exported the shah."²

By the time the regime collapsed in February, 1979, the government had lost all sources of income, over 10,000 demonstrators had been killed, every town had been shaken by general strikes, and public meetings for the abolition of the monarchy were attracting as many as two million protestors in Tehran alone.

Although the revolution was made by social forces rather than political forces, the three months since the shah’s removal have seen the rapid emergence of numerous political organizations. Consequently, the divisions in Iran are no longer that of a simple dichotomy of the shah versus the people; but of a complex arena formed of many separate and often rival political forces, each with its own ideology, its own social base, and its own vision of the future. The intention of the present article is to survey these political forces, tracing their historical origins, describing their social bases, and locating their relative strengths in the three separate power centers that have appeared in Iran since the revolution: the cabinet heading the state bureaucracy, the Komitehs (committees) controlling the religious militias, and the workers’ councils set up in many factories and government offices in the past year.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (1949-53)

The roots of the 1977-79 revolution reach back to 1949. In that year the shah began the long process of creating an autocratic state that would stifle all opposition, including aristocratic and liberal bourgeois opposition, and would attempt to remodel society in his own — or rather, in the image of his dictatorial father. In the period after the Allied invasion of 1941 and the subsequent abdication of Reza Shah, the new shah had kept a low political profile, retaining control of the army but permitting parliament to elect cabinet ministers and allowing political parties, including the Marxist Tudeh Party, to organize bazaar guilds, professional associations, and trade unions. By early 1949, however, the shah, according to the American State Department, was seeking an opportunity to free himself of constitutional restraints and to establish himself as the undisputed ruler of Iran.³

The opportunity presented itself in February, 1949, when a lone assailant tried to shoot the shah. Although no evidence was ever produced to link the would-be assassin to any political organization, the shah used the incident to repress the opposition. He declared martial law, banned all newspapers critical of his family, detained many of the opposition politicians, including Mossadeq, and, outlawing the Tudeh, arrested many of its organizers and sentenced to death in absentia many of its leaders who had gone underground. He convened a Constituent Assembly which unanimously voted him the right to dissolve Parliament whenever he wished, and created a Senate
half of whose members would be appointed by the monarch. The Assembly also voted to return to the royal family the lands which had been stolen by Reza Shah and then confiscated by the government in 1941. The opposition complained that the Shah had turned the assassination attempt into a royalist *coup d'état*.

Inevitably the *volte face* of 1949 created a public backlash. In the following months, a circle of prominent liberal politicians headed by Mossadeq, a group of religious leaders, notably Ayatollah Kashani, representing predominantly the bazaar middle class, and a variety of secular, nationalistic, and social democratic parties, articulating mainly the interests of the salaried middle class, all allied to form the National Front. They demanded honest elections, free press, end to martial law, and, most important of all, nationalization of the British-owned oil industry. By 1950, the National Front was holding mass rallies and drawing large crowds. Many supporters came from the salaried middle class, especially university students, teachers, professionals, white collar workers, and other sectors of the modern intelligentsia. Another main source of popular support was the bazaar middle class, particularly workshop owners, shop keepers, small merchants, clergymen, and other strata of the traditional petit bourgeoisie. Thus the National Front brought together two diverse forces: the secular intelligentsia and the religious petit bourgeoisie.

Frightened by the mass demonstrations and further shaken by a massive general strike in the oil industry organized by the reemerged Tudeh Party, the shah in May, 1951, appointed Mossadeq as Prime Minister as a “safety-valve” for public discontent. As one royalist Senator exclaimed: “Class tensions have reached such point that they threaten the whole fabric of society. . . . The only way to save Iran is to unite all the classes against the foreign enemy.” And as the Shah himself proclaimed over national radio: “Class antagonisms are Iran’s greatest misfortune. These antagonisms poison our minds and political life. The best way to alleviate them is to apply the true laws of Islam. If we live as true Muslims class conflict will give way to class harmony and national unity.”

*The Times* of London assessed the situation in these words: “The inner tensions of Persian society — caused by the stupidity, greed, and lack of judgment by the ruling class — has now become such that it can be met only by an acceleration of the drive against the external scapegoat, namely Britain.”

Mossadeq, however, was not willing to act as a mere safety-valve. Having nationalized the oil company, he turned his attention to the shah, accused the court of interfering in politics, and in July, 1952, demanded civilian control over the armed forces. When the shah refused to comply, Mossadeq appealed directly to the public. Tens of thousands of citizens, led by both the National Front and the Tudeh, responded to the appeal, poured into the streets, and after three days of bloodshed forced the shah to relinquish control over the army. For the first time a civilian had broken the direct lines of command between the Pahlevi dynasty and the officer corps.

Armed with the victory of July 1952, Mossadeq proceeded to attack the whole military-royalist complex. He transferred the stolen lands back to the state; shifted much of the court budget to the Ministry of Health; forbade the shah to communicate with foreign diplomats; and eventually forced members of the royal family, including the shah, to flee the country. Mossadeq announced that the country would in the future buy only defensive weapons. He reduced the military budget by 15 per cent; cut the draft by 50 per cent; transferred 15,000 men from the infantry to the less royalist gendarmerie; purged 130 senior officers; and established parliamentary committees to inves-
tigate corruption among the top brass, to scrutinize the qualifications of senior officers, and to prove that the constitutional laws intended the Monarch to be Commander-in-Chief in name only. Convinced that without the shah there would be no military, the senior officers formed a secret Committee to Save the Nation from "republicanism," and established contact not only with the CIA but also with conservative religious leaders who feared that Mossadeq was paving the way for a social revolution.

Mossadeq's victories, however, were deceptive. For as soon as he forced the shah out of politics and threw the British out of Iran, he removed the two main targets that had united his followers, and thereby unwittingly exposed the ideological differences between the secular and the religious wings of the National Front. These differences evolved over six major issues: nationalization of large corporations, especially the bus and telephone companies; extension of the vote to women; drafting of a land reform bill; relaxation of control on the sale of alcoholic beverages; appointment of anti-clerical intellectuals to be Ministers of Justice and Education; and the forging of an alliance, even though a tacit one, with the Tudeh Party. Denouncing Mossadeq for having "betrayed Islam" and imposed a "socialist dictatorship" on Iran, the clerical wing, headed by Kashani, withdrew from the National Front and inevitably weakened Mossadeq's support among the petit bourgeoisie. This became apparent in July, 1953, on the anniversary of the 1952 uprising, when the National Front rally drew only 10,000 while the Tudeh demonstration attracted more than 100,000. These two meetings convinced the CIA that Mossadeq had to be overthrown to prevent a gradual takeover by the Tudeh.

Encouraged by the National Front split, and financed by the CIA, the army officers took to the offensive. As troops occupied the govern-

ment offices and thirty-seven tanks attacked the Premier's residence, thugs paid by the CIA and affiliated with reactionary clerical leaders gathered mobs from the red-light district and marched through Tehran to provide acoustical effects for the military coup d'etat. Of course, Western newspapers used pictures of this mob to create the image that the shah was brought back by a "popular revolution" against an "unpopular leftist" Prime Minister.

REPRESSION (1953-77)

Returning home triumphant, the shah proceeded to create the dictatorship he had always planned. With the help of the U.S. and Isreal, he established a new secret police known as SAVAK. And with the help of the rapidly increasing oil revenues, he built for himself one of the world's largest military establishments. The armed forces grew from 120,000 men in 1953 to over 400,000 in 1976 — making it the world's fifth largest military machine. The annual defense budget rose from $60 million to over $2 billion in 1976, adjusted to constant prices. The arms bought abroad but not included in the budget figures jumped from a mere $10 million between 1941 and 1953 to $700 million between 1953 and 1966, and further from $2 billion between 1965 and 1972 to almost $17 billion between 1972 and 1976. By 1976, Iran was not only the main customer for American and British arms manufacturers, but also the buyer of the most sophisticated weaponry Western technology could produce.

The shah's concern with the military was not purely budgetary. He took a personal interest in the well-being of the officer corps, especially in their training, salaries, travel abroad, promotions, fringe benefits, housing, low-priced stores, and decorations. Some of the senior officers received so many medals that they resembled over-decorated Christmas trees. He glorified the officer corps as the country's true
elitist and the nation’s real savior in 1953. He also extended his interest to the lower ranks. By 1977, a private in the army earned as much as $600 per month while an unskilled worker no more than $340. Thus the shah ruled first and foremost as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and only secondly as the head of state. In his own words, he considered himself, because of his deep “devotion” to the military, not as the state, a la Louis XIV, but as the army, in the tradition of Reza Shah.\textsuperscript{10}

Armed with the military and the secret police, the shah was able to dismantle the opposition. Immediately after the 1953 coup, the shah outlawed the National Front, arrested most of its leaders, including Mossadeq, and executed his Foreign Minister for having advocated the establishment of a republic. After serving a three-year sentence, Mossadeq was placed under house arrest where he died in 1967. The Tudeh, however, bore the main brunt of the repression. Over five thousand party members were arrested, forty were executed, another fourteen died under torture, and over two hundred were sentenced to life imprisonment. By the late 1950’s, both the Tudeh and the National Front had lost their vast array of grass-roots organizations, especially their provincial branches, trade unions, and professional associations. They were left with scattered underground cells in Iran and a few branches in Europe, publishing newspapers and forming caucuses within the Iranian Student Confederation. The destruction of these grass-roots organizations created a vacuum which was filled in 1977-79 by the clergy.

In the early 1960’s, moreover, both the Tudeh and the National Front were further weakened by defections. With the eruption of the Sino-Soviet dispute in 1963, three Tudeh leaders left the party and formed another, called the Organization of Marxist-Leninists. At the same time, some members of the party’s youth section left and formed the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party. (After the death of Mao, the Organization of Marxist-Leninists allied with Albania, while the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh continued to support China.)

The most significant defection, however, came from the National Front. In 1961, a group of religious-minded technocrats, who felt disturbed on one hand by their secular colleague’s criticism of religion and on the other hand by the clerical refusal to accept social reforms, left the National Front and created an organization called the Movement for the Liberation of Iran. Led by Mehdi Bazargan, an engineer and staunch supporter of Mossadeq, the new organization hoped to bring together Iranian Shi’ism with European socialism, and to create an ideology that would appeal both to the religious-minded and to the nationalistic intelligentsia. In short, they aimed at formulating a secular religion that would be acceptable both to the clergy, especially to the lower-rank clergy, and to the modern-educated middle class, particularly the discontented intelligentsia.

Their aim was attained in the mid-1960s with the emergence of a young dynamic intellectual named Dr. Ali Shari’ati. From a clerical family, Shari’ati had participated in the campaign to nationalize the oil company, joined the Movement for the Liberation of Iran soon after it was formed, and read widely contemporary revolutionary theorists, especially Fanon, while studying sociology in the Sorbonne. Returning to Iran, he opened a religious school where he gave a series of highly influential sermons interpreting Shi’ism to be an uncompromising revolutionary ideology for national liberation against imperialism, for fundamental social change against the ruling class, and for a violent uprising against the monarchy. Although Shari’ati borrowed heavily from Marxism, he has four crucial differences with the Iranian
clauses, Ayatollah Khomenie, one of the six leading Shi’i authorities, raised the banner of revolt in 1963 by denouncing the shah for selling the country to Western imperialism and granting legal immunity to American military advisers. As the bazaars throughout the country closed in support of Khomenie, the armed forces struck at peaceful demonstrators, killing thousands in Tehran alone. The shah had declared war on the petit bourgeoisie, a class that had helped him survive in 1953. In the following years, the government exiled Khomenie; periodically ordered vicious police attacks on seminary students in Qum; extended SAVAK surveillance over the bazaars; undermined the traditional independence of the trade and craft guilds; financed modern banks which lent money to wealthy entrepreneurs but not to small businessmen; encouraged large corporations, such as department stores, at the expense of small shopkeepers; imposed price controls on the bazaars; and, most irritating of all, used the minor merchants and the hardpressed shopkeepers as scapegoats for the rampant inflation that hit Iran from 1973 until 1977.

The intolerable repression of the 1960s, together with the successful armed uprisings in Cuba, Algeria, and Vietnam, persuaded some radical members of the intelligentsia that the only way to smash the police state was through guerrilla warfare. Of the many armed groups that appeared in Iran, the most important are the *Cherikha-yi Fedayi Khalq* (The People’s Devoted Guerrillas) and the *Sazman-i Mujahedin-i Khalq* (The Organization of the People’s Fighters). The first, the *Fedayi* was formed in 1971 of young dissidents both from the Tudeh and the National Front who argued that the defeats of 1953 and 1963 had shown that a political struggle, without an armed struggle, could not defeat the comprador-bourgeois police state. Militantly Marxist, the *Fedayi* advocate a class struggle against imper-
ialism and the shah’s “fascist state.” Since starting their armed campaign, the Fedayi, together with other Marxist guerrillas, have lost over 150 men before firing squads, under torture, and in shoot-outs with the police. The other major guerrilla organization, the Mujahedin, was formed in 1972 of dissidents from the Movement for the Liberation of Iran. They too argued that the 1963 massacre necessitated an armed struggle. Staunchly Islamic, the Mujahedin analyze politics not so much through a class perspective as through a nationalism-religious struggle against all forms of foreign influence, including Marxism. In 1975, however, the Mujahedin violently split into two rival factions. One faction remained loyal to Islam, especially to Shari’ati’s interpretation of Shi’ism. The other faction, which eventually died out, rejected Islam and accepted wholeheartedly a Maoist construction of Marxism. The regime has killed as many as 200 guerrillas belonging to the two Mujahedin factions. In fact, unknown to outside observers, Iran between 1971 and 1977 had one of the world’s worst records on number of secret executions, deaths under torture, and killings in the streets. Over 90 per cent of the victims have been members of the intelligentsia — teachers, engineers, office employees, and, of course, undergraduates and highschool students.

REEMERGENCE OF THE OPPOSITION (1977-79)

The mass uprisings of 1977-79 shattered the dictatorship and thus allowed the opposition organizations to reemerge into the open. Although the uprisings have been predominantly the spontaneous expression of the discontented masses, although the symbolic leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeine, has intentionally talked in vague terms of “social justice” in order not to alienate any of the diverse social forces active in the revolution, and although the situation remains highly fluid and unpredictable, six distinct tendencies can be identified:

1. The Religious Reactionaries. Drawn predominantly from the lower clergy who organized the bazaar demonstrations of 1978, the religious reactionaries control many of the Komitehs that have sprung up throughout the country. Armed with local militas, most of whose members are bazaar youth and unemployed workers, the Komitehs have the power to enforce their will on the population. They have been able to set food prices, search homes, arrest officials of the fallen regime, inflict corporal
punishments on those violating Koranic regulations, and execute sex offenders as well as high-ranking members of the Pahlavi dynasty. Convinced that most ills of contemporary society, especially alcoholism, breakdown of families, unemployment, and lack of discipline among youth are all caused by the failure of the government to implement Koranic regulations, the religious reactionaries hope to replace the “permissive” secular courts with their own “true” Islamic courts, and draft a new constitution based on “truly” Muslim concepts and traditions. They oppose democratic pluralism, equality between the sexes, and the right of judicial appeal as “degenerate” Western concepts. They also distrust modern-educated technocrats as Western-influenced “egg-heads.”

Although in his Paris exile Khomeini was careful not to alienate other groups by identifying himself too much with the religious reactionaries, he has moved closer to them since the fall of the shah. He has appointed mostly reactionaries to the Revolutionary Council and to the Revolutionary Islamic Komiteh in Tehran which oversees the provincial Komitehs. He has openly denounced other groups that have tried to organize workers and unemployed laborers as “agents of the shah.” Moreover, he has fully supported the local Komitehs in their endeavor to enforce Koranic laws. Furthermore, in the referendum to abolish the monarchy he denied the electorate a choice between an Islamic Republic and a Democratic Islamic Republic on the grounds that democracy was a Western term.

2. Religious Conservatives. Although this group fully participated in the political revolution against the shah, it has no desire to see a fundamental revolution against either the social structure or the established institutions. Its main spokesman is Ayatollah Shariatmadari, the leading figure in Qum before Khomeini’s return, and still considered by some, especially in his native province of Azerbaijan, as the leading theologian throughout Iran. While Shariatmadari favors the enforcement of some Koranic regulations, he opposes the establishment of a theocracy, and argues that all groups, including the Left, should have the right to participate in a constitutional democracy. In the recent referendum he openly conflicted with Khomeini and stated that the public should be given a choice between as Islamic Republic and a Democratic Islamic Republic. He has also threatened to leave Qum for Azerbaijan if the reactionaries continue to violate human rights. Shariatmadari finds most of his supporters among the senior clergy, the well-to-do in the bazaars, and the seminary students from Azerbaijan. Excluded from the important Komitehs, Shariatmadari’s supporters have formed an organization called the Party of the People’s Islamic Republic.

3. Religious Reformers. Organized into the Movement for the Liberation of Iran, this group wants gradual social change as well as the destruction of the Pahlavi regime. Headed by Bazargan, the Premier, this group controls six ministries, enjoys considerable support among Western-educated technocrats, and, unlike the religious reactionaries, would like to curb the Komitehs. It would also like to draft a Western-style constitution, place the legal system under modern-educated lawyers and judges, and rebuild the state machinery, especially the demoralized army. Besides the six ministries, the Movement for the Liberation of Iran enjoys the support of Ayatollah Taleqani, the leading religious figure within Tehran. An active opponent of the shah since the early 1950s, Taleqani spent many years in jail, where he was tortured, and headed the mass demonstrations of Tehran during 1978. Although a religious leader, Taleqani finds most of his supporters not among the bazaar clergy and merchants, but among civil
servants, intellectuals, and university students. Since February he has frequently clashed with Khomenie, declaring that the Komitehs were violating “human rights,” including women’s right not to wear a long veil, and warning that there was a real danger that a new despotism would replace the shah’s despotism. Taleqani is also a maverick among the clergy in that since the early 1950s he has talked of the need to synthesize Shi’ism with socialism. He is willing to accept not only the word democracy, but also the term socialism.

4. Religious Radicals. Led by the Mujahedin guerrillas, the religious radicals want a fundamental social revolution. Anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-traditional, and at times even anti-clerical, this group aspires to create a new independent nation that would borrow technology from the West, but on the other hand would remain faithful to the revolutionary spirit of early Shi’ism. The Mujahedin draw much of their support from the university students, especially from the children of Persian-speaking religious families. In the heat of the revolution, the Mujahedin gave full support to Khomenie and even hailed him as their Imam. But since February, they have often found themselves in conflict with the Komitehs and therefore have cooled their support for Khomenie. Moreover, in the first weeks after the revolution they criticized Bazargan for not dismantling the whole army and creating a new people’s army. But in April they decided to back Bazargan in his efforts to limit the Komitehs.

5. The Secular Reformers. Led by the National Front, this group favors the establishment of a modern democratic constitution, fears the creation of a dogmatic theocracy, and, remembering the 1952-53 experiences, distrusts most members of the clergy. While most National Front supporters are liberal reformers, some advocate socialism and even Marxism. After the February revolution, the National Front obtained two ministries. The failure of the government to control the Komiteh’s, however, triggered a split with the National Front. Complaining that the leadership of the National Front was too identified with Khomenie’s entourage, Matin Daftari, a leading human rights lawyer and grandson of Mossadeq, left and formed the Democratic National Front. His program is tailored to bring together against the reactionaries all the other groups, from the religious conservatives on the right to the secular radicals on the left. It calls for the establishment of councils elected by workers, employees, guilds, and students; open trials for those accused of crimes against the people; free trade unions; an elected Constituent Assembly to draft in open debate the new constitution; equality between men and women; end of cen-
sorship; and autonomy for the various linguistic minorities of Iran.

The two National Fronts find much of their support among the professional and the salaried middle class — among such newly-formed organizations as the Writers Association, Lawyers Association, Engineers Association, Professors Association, Teachers Union, and Government Employees Union.

6. The Secular Radicals. Divided into the Fedayi, the Tudeh Party, the Revolutionary Tudeh, and the Marxist-Leninist Organization, as well as a number of smaller groups, the Left as a whole has little mass following. This support is limited to university students, white collar associations, and among some trade unions, especially among oil workers, newspaper printers, and modern factories located in Tehran. Although the Left fully supported the revolution against the Shah, many Marxists realize that the establishment of a dogmatic clerical state would endanger their own existence. In fact, during the mass rallies of one million to two million held in Tehran this year, the Left faced difficulties obtaining permission from the religious organizers to carry its own banners and slogans. By January thirty thousand workers and students were exasperated enough to march in Tehran carrying Khomeinie’s picture, but demanding “equality,” “democracy,” and “a workers’ government.” Moreover, the Fedayi published a statement warning that the people’s revolution should not be monopolized by any one group.14 In March and April, the Left gained some following in the provinces, especially among kurds, Turkomans and Azerbaijani, since it espouses the right of cultural autonomy for the linguistic minorities.

Of these six groupings, the religious ones have so far achieved most success in mobilizing a mass following — especially among the bazaar population, the shanty-town poor, and even the industrial proletariat. This can be explained by a number of factors. First, while the regime crushed all grass-root organizations belonging to the secular opposition, it permitted the bazaar guilds, the clergy, the seminaries, and the local mosques to function. In fact, the oil-boom of the early 1970s brought prosperity to the seminaries and thereby increased the ranks of the lower clergy. One source claims that there are 150,000 clergymen and 80,000 mosques in Iran.15 By 1977, the religious institutions were the only organizations left in the country free of state domination. Not surprisingly, public opposition to the state tended to converge into the mosques.

Second, in recent years a religious revivalist movement has swept the country, especially the lower middle class and the shanty-town poor. For the lower middle class, especially the recent college graduates, religion — notably Shari’ati’s interpretation of Shi’ism — provides a dynamic challenge both to the regime and to the Western-oriented upper middle class. For the shanty-town poor, all of whom are recent migrants, religion is a valuable substitute for the sense of community which they lost when they left their villages. Like Methodism in nineteenth-century England, Shi’ism in contemporary Iran provides the urban poor with a needed sense of community and collectivity. In such a situation, it is easy for one man, whether a John Wesley or an Ayatollah Khomeinie, to appear as the savior of the common people.

Third, the Marxist Left has been hurt in the last ten years by the fact that the Soviet Union and the Chinese People’s Republic have openly supported the shah. Of course, the damage can easily be undone if either of the two governments decides to actively oppose the royalist military. Finally, the lower clergy and the Shari’ati supporters, in their assault on the shah, have eagerly encouraged workers to strike for higher wages in order to bankrupt the state.
No doubt, their eagerness and sense of "social justice" will quickly wane as soon as they consolidate their state control. It is not surprising that the leaders of revolution, in their many pronouncements, have had little to say about the role of free trade unions in their future Islamic Republic.

Recent events in the oil industry illustrate the present strength — and possible future weakness — of the religious groups among the modern working class. When the first wave of strikes began in the oil industry, Left-wing militants, especially from the Tudeh, managed to make significant inroads into the strike committees. But when the second wave began, the clergy and Mehdi Bazargan intervened and helped their own supporters to obtain a majority in the strike committees. At present, these committees in Abadan and the oil fields receive their instructions by phone directly from the Qum seminaries. It is likely that the religious reactionaries will soon begin to lose their hold over the labor movement. The left will then have an easy entry into an arena that includes more than two-and-a-half million wage earners and forms that single largest urban class in contemporary Iran.


NOTES

1. Ayatollah is a term given to high-ranking clergy.
4. R. Shafaq, Parliamentary Proceedings (Muzakerat-i Majlis), 1st Senate, April 13, 1951.
6. The times, March 22, 1951.
7. Itila’at, October 12, 1952.

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IRAN IN REVOLUTION

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C.L.R. James, *The Future in the Present* (Lawrence Hill and Co., Westport, Conn., 1977, $12.95); *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (Lawrence Hill and Co., 1977, $10); and *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Bewick/Ed, 1443 Bewick, Detroit, MI 48214, $3.00).

The publication of these volumes brings together a broad and representative sample of the writings of one of our century’s most creative thinkers. *The Future in the Present* is an anthology of James’ writings, including a short story, essays on sports, art, and literature, and political essays written over a span of forty years. *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, consisting mainly of unpublished writings, restores African liberation to its central place in James’ work. *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* is a study of *Moby Dick*, and through it an interpretation of the world which Melville saw emerging out of American industrial capitalism. Together these books demonstrate the enormous range of James’ thought and action, his evolution through successive stages of revolutionary politics, and his ability to integrate and learn from peoples’ struggles in vastly different times and societies.

James was born in Trinidad at the turn of the century. In the 1920s he wrote fiction and was a cricket enthusiast. In his fiction, he notes, “I speak of the actual life of the ordinary people living in the towns…. I was concerned with their immense vitality and the way they met their problems.” This was a theme which was to permeate a lifetime of political work and analysis. At this time James was also active in the movement for West Indian independence; and his book on the popular mass leader Captain Cipriani, selections of which are included in the anthology, established him as a major spokesman for West Indian nationalism.

In 1932 he went to England, initially earning his living as a cricket reporter for newspapers. He soon became involved in British politics, and in 1936 he helped to form the Revolutionary Socialist League, Britain’s first Trotskyist organization, and was the editor of its newspaper. For the next fifteen years James was a major figure in the world Trotskyist movement. While still in England he wrote the first Trotskyist history of the Comintern; and within six months of his arrival in the U.S. in 1938 his conversations with Trotsky established, at least in theory, that Trotskyist parties would support the autonomous organization of blacks. In 1942 James worked with a sharecroppers movement in southeast Missouri, and a very interesting pamphlet from this struggle is printed in the anthology.

Like many in the American Trotskyist movement in the late 1930s, James became skeptical that the Soviet Union remained a “workers’ state,” a fundamental tenet of Trotskyism. With Raya Dunayevskaya and others James evolved the new paradigm of “state capitalism” to describe the Soviet Union. As the Trotskyist
movement split and recombined over the next decade, this small group returned to the study and interpretation of Marxist theory, concentrating particularly on Hegel and the early Marx. They also circulated a large number of writings, primarily within the Trotskyist milieu that defended the theory of state capitalism not just as an interpretation of the Soviet Union, but as an interpretation of a fundamentally new stage in the development of class struggle East and West. Continuing his theoretical innovations into the 1950s, James and others began to assert the historically limited usefulness of the Leninist vanguard party, particularly in industrialized societies.

After the outbreak of the Korean War James and his co-workers established themselves as a separate organization, publishing the newspaper Correspondence. This paper, like the group's earlier theoretical work, emphasized the creative powers of people; and the selection from the paper reprinted in the anthology is James' wonderful study of Athenian democracy, "Every Cook Can Govern." In 1952 James was interned as an "undesirable alien", and during his year on Ellis Island he wrote Mariners, Renegades and Castaways, a fascinating study of Melville and Moby Dick. James sees Moby Dick as "the first comprehensive statement in literature of the conditions and perspectives for the survival of Western Civilization." His primary focus is on the character of Ahab, a forerunner of the totalitarian personality who is not content to exist within the ordinary confines of capitalist enterprise. In pursuing his megalomaniacal goals, Ahab drags the workers of his world, the "mariners, renegades and castaways" who compose the crew, to their deaths. Though deported to England in 1953, James continued working on the theory of state capitalism, achieving a new synthesis in Facing Reality (1958) under the impact of the revolutionary capacities the working class demonstrated in the Hungarian Revolution.

The bulk of James' political work and writing in the last two decades have centered on revolutionary black nationalism in Africa, the West Indies, and the United States. James' direct involvement in African liberation began in 1934, when he organized the International Friends of Abyssinia to help defend the only independent black nation from conquest by Italian fascism. In 1937, with his boyhood friend George Padmore, James helped form the International African Service Bureau. Though small, the Bureau became the focus for the energies of many exiles and students from Britain's African and West Indian colonies. The Bureau was also important in publishing pathbreaking analyses of the history of Black liberation, including James' own History of Pan-African Revolt, and his classic study of the Haitian revolution and its relation to the French Revolution, Black Jacobins.

According to Nkrumah's autobiography, from his acquaintance with James in the U.S. he learned "how an underground movement worked;" and this began a lifelong acquaintance between the two. Working closely with Padmore, Nkrumah returned to his native Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1947, and in four short years had created a successful movement for self-government whose significance James ranks with the Hungarian Revolution. Ghana achieved its independence in 1957, the first black African colony to do so; and the major part of James' study, Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution, is based on conversations he had with Nkrumah and Padmore in that year. It describes and analyzes the independence movement led by Nkrumah, again emphasizing the creative lead taken by ordinary people, and finding Nkrumah's genius for leadership in his ability, according to James like Lenin, to learn from them. The remainder of the book consists
of essays written in the decade following independence, tracing the decay of the regime which eventually led to the overthrow of Nkrumah. The most interesting of these, "Lenin and the Problem," draws on the last writings of Lenin concerning the bureaucratic impasse to which the Soviet regime had come in 1923, reinterpreting them in light of the African experience.

After James was deported to England in 1953, he again became active in the movement for West Indian independence and federation. In addition to his immediately political writings, during this period he wrote again about West Indian art and culture; and essays on cricket, calypso music, and the role of the artist in creating national consciousness are included in the anthology. His breath-taking reinterpretation of world history, Modern Politics (1960), was characteristically a series of lectures given in the Trinidad adult education program. Most recently James has lived mainly in the United States, and much of his recent writing has again focused on the history and revolutionary potential of black Americans.

In considering James' work as a whole, one is struck by the sheer breadth of his political thought and action, and his demonstration in practice that Marxists must investigate the totality of people's lives in order to understand their capacities for self-emancipation. James is optimistic about these capacities: in contrast to many Marxist thinkers of the "first" and "second" worlds, James' West Indian perspective sees not only a world proletariat crushed between contending superpowers, but also the enormous strides made by the millions of the third world. Finally, there is James' simplicity and directness in language and writing style, illustrating in practice his belief that the world's problems will be solved by ordinary people or not at all, and that it is the task of socialists to help people learn from their own and others' struggles for liberation.

Frank Brodhead


This is an exhilarating book, a rare combination of wonderful reading and a political work in the truest sense of that term.

Tressell was one of the great working-class writers of modern Britain, toiling over this work until his death in 1911. The novel, which was eventually published in 1914, is set in the deeply conservative English seaside town of Hastings, in the early part of this century. Its focus is on a group of workers who are employed by a ruthless firm of redecorators. Hastings, aptly renamed Mugsborough, is presented by Tressell as a microcosm of life in Edwardian capitalism. The capitalist class — personified by such local dignitaries as Sweater, Didlum, and Grinder — rules the town unfettered by the existence of any working class power or resistance. In fact it is the passivity of the workers which is the author's principal theme. Apart from a few honorable exceptions, particularly the main character Owen, who is a socialist, the workers in this novel are unable to grasp the reality of their own exploitation. The most poignant and also the most didactic and effective moments are when Owen tries to convince them that they are the real philanthropists of modern capitalism, for in spite of their ragged trousers, they persist in giving away their labor power for the pittance of a wage.

As the author states: "I wished to describe the relations existing between the workmen and their employers, the attitude and feelings of these two classes towards each other; the condition of the workers during the different seasons of the year, their circumstances when at work and when out of employment; their pleasures, their intellectual outlook, their religious and political opinions and ideals.... I designed to show the conditions resulting from poverty and
umemployment, to expose the futility of measures taken to deal with them and to indicate what I believe to be the only real remedy, namely — Socialism.”

What is so stimulating and readable about this book is the sheer candor and heart felt nature of the author’s emotions and beliefs. Everything is so up-front and strong. More than that, the attention to detail and the sharp perception of the author are compelling, a perception that could only have come through being simultaneously an “insider” and an “outsider.” It is this grasp of the realities of working class life in its minute details that has given Tressell’s book a solid place in the literature of the English working class; and it has been said of this book that it “won the 1945 election for Labour.”

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists inaugurates a new series by Monthly Review Press, the “Leo Huberman People’s Library.” Perhaps no finer volume could begin this series, named after the late co-founder of Monthly Review magazine, for it exemplifies the popular style and absolute commitment to socialism that is also found in Huberman’s own book, Man’s Worldly Goods.

David Kaplan

anna gyorgy and friends, No Nukes: Everyone’s Guide to Nuclear Power, South End Press, Boston, 478 pages, $8.00 paperback.

Columbia Pictures, the producers of The China Syndrome and South End Press, the publishers of No Nukes: Everyone’s Guide to Nuclear Power, share an embarrassing timeliness in their most recent offerings to the public. Let us hope that the fear of “exploiting” the near-catastrophe at Three Mile Island does not prevent the staff at South End Press — a new, collectively-run, non-profit left publishing com-

pany based in Boston — from using the opportunity to get this important book distributed as widely as possible. It is just the kind of book needed by those in the no nuke movements. Written by activists in the Clamshell Alliance, it is directed toward meeting the needs of activists and others who believe that democratic control of major scientific and technical developments is necessary and possible.

This book is accessible to those who know nothing about the technical aspects of nuclear power. It is clearly written and introduces a large number of unfamiliar terms and scientific and technical topics. It has pictures, cartoons, charts, and a useful glossary of terms. It is well-organized and well-indexed, so it is possible to find information on particular topics as one needs it. The book begins with a history of the science and technology of nuclear energy. It then covers the economics and politics of the development of nuclear power in the U.S., and goes on to discuss the technical and social aspects of alternative energy sources, especially solar power. The final sections are devoted to nuclear power developments and the opposition to them outside the U.S.; and an overview of U.S. anti-nuke campaigns, including names and addresses of no nuke groups in different regions.

A.H.
LETTERS

Dear Editors,

I found "City Life: Lessons of the First Five Years" (RA 13, No. 1) to be an exciting and encouraging article, arguing a political position which I largely agree with. In the hope of seeing these ideas developed further, I would like to raise three related questions about the article. The common theme of my questions is that while City Life has done a great job of dealing with the problems of socialist consciousness and the initial steps of organization (in practice as well as in theory), I feel something lacking in their treatment of political power, which will be crucial to the next steps of organization.

First, City Life argues against a major emphasis on winning reforms, both because capitalist crisis now makes it difficult to win much, and because "the means of struggle are as important as the ends." In the appendix to the paper, one of the criteria proposed for choosing which reforms to work on is "Will the process of fighting for the reform (whether we win or lose) help to increase the organization, consciousness and power of the working class people who are involved in the struggle or affected by the reform?" (emphasis added)

But how far is it possible to go in increasing "organization, consciousness and power" without winning at least a fairly high proportion of the reform struggles a group undertakes? A group that always, or even usually loses, will likely reinforce the prevailing mass cynicism — you can't fight City Hall, the boss, etc. Powerlessness and cynicism about change are among the most important obstacles we face in building socialist consciousness and organization. How can these obstacles be overcome unless we can show that it is possible, not always but often, to win victories through organization?

Second, City Life places little emphasis on working in class organizations. Much of their work is done through their own committees, sponsored and controlled by their core group. I agree that explicitly socialist political work is important, and City Life's core group/committee structure sounds like a good form for it. But it seems unlikely that such political work will, in the near future, mobilize enough people to win any but the very smallest struggles. Moreover, in workplace organizing explicitly socialist policies may be nearly impossible to raise for some time.

Isn't it necessary, therefore, to place more of a priority on work in larger mass organizations? This will mean organizations which the left does not control; sometimes it will be possible to raise socialist politics in them, while at other times (especially in the early stages of union work) it will not be. I agree with City Life's critique of closet leftists who pose as populists (and who sometimes even end up attacking more explicit leftists, as part of the "pose"). But the fact that some tendencies on the left do an exaggerated, apolitical job of involving themselves in mass organizations shouldn't lead us to an overreaction, to ignoring such work altogether.

Third, how will the socialist left itself ever become big and powerful enough to seem credible and worth joining in the eyes of the people we work with? City Life stresses internal policies which make working class people without left experience feel comfortable joining their group. This, together with slow, careful recruitment, primarily of working class socialists, is presented as the way the organization will grow. These steps are important, and on one level I am impressed at City Life's success.

On another level, though, I suspect that sheer size is a more basic obstacle. After five years of impressive work, and more than two years after adopting the current structure, City Life has 13 core members in a city of over half a million and a metropolitan area of over two million people. How can such a mouse fighting an elephant be a credible force for most people to join? Important as it is to make working people feel comfortable, it is equally important to create something that looks like it's worth feeling comfortable in.

In other words, it appears to me that the creation of a larger left formation, most immediately at the metropolitan-area level, but ultimately nationally as well, is crucial to the success of the politics which City Life presents. Yet City Life says almost nothing about such questions. Do they expect that networks of collectives such as theirs will link up with each other? Experience by now has shown that this doesn't happen spontaneously. Among existing left organizations, the New American Movement is by far the closest to City Life's politics; yet NAM (like other national left groups) has a far lower proportion of working class membership than City Life has or is aiming for. Does City Life see itself relating to NAM despite this? Whether it is this or not, some perspective on left unity and growth seems essential.

These questions and criticisms are not at all raised in a hostile spirit; in fact, precisely because I liked the original paper, I look forward to hearing their response.

Frank Ackerman
Somerville, MA
To the editors:

Frank has clearly laid out some of the limitations and pitfalls that come with the strategic emphasis we in City Life have chosen. We would like to respond to each part of his criticism separately as it relates to our view that the primary work to be done at this time is to develop working class leadership (cadre) and to raise consciousness among the working class.

1. It is an error of the paper if it conveys the impression that we do not think winning is important for all the reasons that Frank gives. But we believe we can better combat cynicism if we can also envision and put forward a wider range of possible victories than the winning of each specific demand around which a reform campaign might be built. We do not choose obvious losers, but we might choose to work on a campaign which we thought had little chance of victory (e.g., welfare cutbacks in Massachusetts) but where we thought the form of the struggle could move us forward toward our primary goals. For instance, public hearings where newly political people exercise leadership and where the group can push out a class analysis can be a victory, even if the demands are not won, because it may strengthen the movement for future victories.

2. We do work in mass organizations where there seems to be a possibility that working class people can be moved to the left through our influence. The reason we don’t do this more right now is that there is little organized mass activity in the class at this time and what there is is often controlled by conservatives. Where there is little mass activity it is a dead end effort for a group of our size to try to hype it up. Nevertheless, we do look for real opportunities to build, participate in, or influence mass working class organizations or movements. We have been active in rent control coalitions, the Racial-Ethnic Parents Councils in the Boston schools, and unions and union drives. Usually we have had the advantage of being able to participate in such formations as representatives of an organized group with a local base and a socialist vision, rather than as individual or secret leftists.

3. We believe “larger left formations” are necessary. Our main motivation for printing the Radical America article and the paper on “Marxism-Leninism” was to build links and to struggle with other leftists. We have attended conferences and conventions and have established correspondence with other small groups throughout the country. At this time a large gap exists in the left between theory and practice, and we have clearly jumped in on the side of practice. But while we’re most anxious to join with groups with whom we have some practical unity, we also want to continue theoretical discussions with as many groups as possible.

It is true, as Frank says, that our core is small, but focusing on the core group underestimates our strength. There are many non-core members who work on our committees, some doing as much as core members. Also, we are part of the socialist-feminist movement which gives us support for our work and which we in turn support. And, as soon as we can see a way to become part of a “larger left formation” that actually helps us build a stronger working class base for our politics, we will be more than happy to join it.

— City Life

To the editors:

In the article by me which appeared in the January-February issue of RA, “Doug Fraser’s Middle Class Coalition,” (vol. 13, no. 1, Jan.-Feb., 1979), I quoted Roberta Lynch of NAM speaking before the initial meeting of the Coalition in Cobo Hall, Detroit. A humble apology is in order. I not only failed to make clear that in addition to others, she urged the Fraser leadership to organize the Coalition at the grass roots level without delay, but more, I omitted to report that she called for the involvement of the “constituencies,” of the 105 organizations present, in the activities of the coalition.

Stan Weir

To the editors:

This letter relates to the choice of photographs which go with my article (“Home and Work: A New Context for Trade Union History,” in RA, vol. 12, no. 5, Sept.-Oct., 1978). Perhaps you could make it clear to readers that these were not chosen by me. The problem is that my article is about Yorkshire workers in the wool textile industry, whereas the photographs show Lancashire cotton workers. Lancashire and Yorkshire textile workers developed quite different forms of trade union organization and women consequently experienced quite different types of involvement.

This may not seem an important issue to American readers, but to an English audience the Lancashire/Yorkshire divide is of Alpine proportions.

Joanna Bornat
Letter from Italy

On April 7 a large scale police operation in Italy led to the jailing of 20 Leftists, dozens of arrest warrants as well as hundreds of house raids in several Italian cities. Arbitrary political arrests are no news in Italy, where 240 people were jailed during the Moro affair. At the same time, the April 7 arrests represent a turning point in more than one way. Not only were those arrested some of the most well-known militants in the Italian Movement, but the crackdown has been primarily directed against the “theoreticians” of Autonomia [the autonomous Left, part of the movement to the left of the Communist Party]. Among the arrested were Antonio Negri, a well-known Marxist intellectual, several journalists and editors of Movement journals, and most of the Institute of Political Science at the University of Padova [Padua]. In each case, the main evidence against them so far was their writings and speeches said to inspire “violence and subversion”. On such “evidence” they have been charged with conspiracy to subvert the State, constitution or armed groups, membership in the Red Brigades and even involvement in the Moro killing.

The seriousness of the accusations, and the fact that the arrested are the protagonists of the political debate which has taken place in the extra-parliamentary left, indicate that the April 7 police operation is more than an attack on particular groups or individuals. Rather, it appears an attempt to criminalize the entire Movement in Italy, beginning with its theoretical leaders, and thus criminalize political opposition to the Italian party system. That this is more than speculation is indicated by the circumstances in which the arrests have taken place: a month away from the oncoming political elections, called after the stalemate faced by the two leading parties in formulating a viable social and political program.

Fifteen days after the arrests, as this is being written, the entire operation was still surrounded by secrecy. No factual evidence has been presented except for taped phone conversations or “revelations” by alleged witnesses (“repentant” prisoners, we are told). Moreover this already flimsy evidence has, over the last ten days, continuously shifted. For example, the phone conversation that was used at first to frame Prof. Negri has already been dropped by the magistrates, who are now turning their attention to Negri’s alleged “notes used by the Red Brigades for their communiques”. However, as Piperno, who fled underground in the face of an arrest warrant, declared to journalists, “the fact that the charges are so ridiculous should not confuse us as to the seriousness of the operation.”

The common denominator among the arrested is that they are part of Autonomia, i.e. the sector of the Italian movement which has been the harshest critic of both the Government and the Communist Party. Most crucially, Autonomia has taken as its point of reference the rebellion of young workers, students and unemployed, openly supporting their demand for “less work” and an “income by any means”. Thus, Autonomia has grown particularly strong during the crisis of the mid-seventies, when thousands of workers, students and youth were faced with unemployment. Autonomia has been active in many of the struggles to reduce rents, electricity rates, trans-
portation costs, etc. and have supported mass expropriation, "political shopping", in supermarkets. Autonomia also led the 1977 spring demonstrations of unemployed youth and students, which often, as in Rome and Bologna, led to confrontations with the police.

To attack Autonomia, then, is to attack a whole process of struggle which the government has been unable to control. Moreover, Autonomia is an easy target, for it has always insisted on the need for grass roots mobilization and the utmost political visibility. On this basis, it was critical of the Red Brigades, particularly because the latter have chosen clandestinity instead of "mass-wide" mobilization. Autonomia was especially critical of the Moro affair where, it claimed, the Red Brigades reduced political action to a private contest between themselves and the state. Now, ironically, some of the theoretical leaders of Autonomia have been charged with being Red Brigaders and inspiring the very actions they have publicly rejected.

Yet, there is a logic to this maneuver by the state. Criminalizing one of the most militant sectors of the Movement by calling it terrorist is for the government the simplest way not to face its real problems.

This crisis — the last among the many recent years — is a direct result of the failure of the Italian government to control working-class struggle that through the 1960s and 1970s jeopardized corporate profits. Since the early seventies the State has responded to the workers' demands with economic and political terrorism. On a political level, the State has attempted to keep the class on the defensive by the threat of fascist coups and sporadic bombing of trains and banks by fascists (whose connivance with the Italian secret services has been recognized even by the bourgeois press). On the economic level, the attack has been even more severe: massive lay-offs have been followed by blacklisting of militant workers, while a 25% inflation has drastically cut the standard of living of the population. Yet mobilization has continued, from the struggle of the women's movement for divorce and abortion rights to the explosion of a youth movement in the schools and universities. A few months ago, hospital workers launched a massive strike closing down facilities throughout the peninsula. Thus, the confrontation between workers and the state has caused chronic crisis for Italian political institutions with no prospect of solution in sight.

Not only is the government in crisis, so is the Communist Party. After opting for a "historical compromise" with the Christian Democrats, the Communist Party supported austerity programs. For example, in the name of austerity, the Party recently supported a "fair rent" law which has meant a significant increase in rents for Italian tenants. Moreover, in order to gain "respectability" and justify its claim to play a major role in the government, the CP has presented itself as the party of law and order and has even criticized the Christian Democrats for their laxness in dealing with terrorism during the Moro affair. In this attempt, the Party has gone as far as campaigning against the repeal of the Legge Reale, an extension of the fascist Codice Rocco (instituted under Mussolini and still Italy's law of the land), which allows prisoners to be detained even if no charges are levied against them.

As a result of its policies, the Communist Party has come under heavy criticism from its rank and file to the point that it has experienced a collapse in membership and heavy losses at the polls. In the face of opposition, the Party has increasingly labelled all dissidents as either fascist provocateurs or, more recently, terrorists.

It comes then as no surprise that the Communist Party has welcomed the recent arrests, that the prosecutor, Calogero, is a Party man and that precisely his investigations in the
Veneto area gave the signal for the police crackdown. There is, however, one further reason why the Veneto area has been the center of the recent arrests. In this region, which has traditionally been the stronghold of Catholicism, Christian Democracy, and fascist recruiting, Autonomia is particularly strong. (Interestingly enough, precisely for this reason neither the Red Brigades nor any other underground organization has been able to exist in this area). Furthermore, the Padova Institute of Political Science has produced some of the theoretical leaders of the movement, T. Negri, S. Serafini, L. Ferrari Bravo, all arrested. Concentrating the attack on Padova, then, serves two related purposes: striking Autonomia where it is strongest, while at the same time “cutting off the heads” of the whole Movement, i.e., people whose work and writing have a large influence and prestige in the Movement as a whole. This is why the Italian police in Veneto has resorted to measures — like arresting almost an entire academic department — that have not even been tried in Germany.

However, the example of Germany keeps coming to mind these days, as Italy seems determined to adopt the police state German model. With this April 7th move, the Italian government will undoubtedly be applauded by its German partners, who have upheld their model of repression as an example of efficiency and have tried to impose it on their European partners. This German policy has been most strongly directed at Italy, which was given loans on condition that it crack down on its dissidents and was offered “cooperation” in this process.

At the instigation of the German authorities, the member states of the Common Market and other European countries such as Austria, Switzerland and Spain concluded an agreement on “international cooperation to combat terrorism.” This pact includes provisions for regular exchange of information between the various police forces and interior ministries, speedy extradition of “subversive elements” caught abroad, and the establishment of a unified criminal code dealing with “subversion against the state” as soon as possible. On the basis of this agreement a computerized information bank and a surveillance evaluation center at the Bundes Kriminalanstalt, Wiesbaden, West Germany is now being used by all participating states and their police forces.

The fact that the tapes supposedly incriminating Negri have been analyzed by the German police is a clear illustration of what this “cooperation” means. Unlike in Germany, a certain freedom of political discussion still existed in Italy, where the independent Left has traditionally been stronger and the government had to act with more caution. With the arrests of April 7, Italy is obviously trying to catch up.

Thus, the arrests of the Autonomia can be seen as another decisive step towards a Germanization of Europe, i.e. the adoption of measures which in the past were associated only with fascist dictatorships and the ferocious repression launched against political opposition in certain countries of the Third World. As the economic crisis of the seventies has intensified social conflict, more and more the European states are dropping their democratic mask and adopting the most brutal methods to muzzle the struggles of the working class.

Guido Baldi
April 23, 1979

For more information, contact the Committee Against Repression in Italy, which was formed as part of an international response to the April 7 arrests. We need your support and participation in the campaign against repression. The committee is at 159 West 33rd Street, rm. 1010, New York, N.Y. 10001. Our telephone number is (212) 244-4270.
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