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Towards an effective left

Surprise is often expressed by political commentators at the fact that the present unprecedented political and economic crisis in Ireland has not produced a more effective left-wing response. Never before were there so many left-wing organisations and publications yet their total effect is so small as to be almost non-existent.

Objective reasons such as the development of Irish history, the power of the Church and the "sell-out" of the Labour leadership are usually advanced by the left-wing as an explanation for this weakness. That, however, is only part of the story. The fact is that all the smaller left-wing parties are living a political life divorced from the real world. They all claim to be "Marxist", yet their philosophies are the antithesis of his dialectical approach. Instead of an analysis of reality, in each publication one finds a repetition of the tenets of closed metaphysical systems with demi-gods (Stalin, Mao, Trotsky, Breznev) who are also demi-devils, depending on which group is the publisher.

This situation means that the enthusiasm, dedication and intelligence of hundreds of people who could make a big contribution to the building of the Labour movement are going into a hole in the ground. The impotence created by these ways of thinking is nowhere more evident than in relation to the North, with each organisation producing a more weird and wonderful solution than the others.

These weaknesses on the left are not peculiar to Ireland. Their basis lies in the split which took place in the Labour movement after the Russian Revolution. The official Labour movement in much of

the capitalist world was left in the hands of conservative leaders while the Communists went on a sectarian spree of setting up "Red" trade unions and concentrating their attacks on the Social Democrats, calling them "Social Fascists".

It should be remembered that all this ran completely counter to the role of Communists as outlined in the "Communist Manifesto" where they are presented as a force uniting all "democratic" parties and not forming a party on their own. Lenin told Willie Gallagher that the British Communist Party should affiliate to the British Labour Party. This was unrealistic but it showed that he understood the danger of sectarian isolation from the working-class.

SPLIT MOVEMENT

The result of this period was the emergence of Labour Parties in which "Socialism" became a forbidden word and Communist Parties which had no real political line apart from defence of the Soviet Union. It was this political weakness which hamstrung the Communist Parties, in spite of their heroism in class battles.

Organisationally, the Social Democratic Parties became simply electoral machines while the Communist Parties, in advanced democratic countries, clung to forms developed for underground work against semi-feudal tyrannies.

This situation is now changing and in many countries there are united Labour Movements emerging on both the political and trade union fronts. This unity, in turn, is attracting the support of forces outside the Labour movement as is most spectacularly shown in Italy, France and Spain.

"Socialist Quarterly" aims to be a unifying force in the Socialist and democratic movement. It will be a forum for progressive ideas with the view of helping

to formulate realistic policies for the progressive movements both North and South. It will assist in every way possible in the fight not only for the preservation of civil liberties, but for their extension.

"Socialist Quarterly" has an editorial board composed of representatives of the Left Liason Committee and the Irish Marxist Society, but will publish articles by progressives from any party, or none.

A famous trade union leader, not noted for his militancy, declared on retiring that the weakness of Irish Labour was that it had no Socialist philosophy. Not only through this journal, but around it, through lectures, discussions and in action we hope to make our contribution towards the development of such a philosophy.

Paddy Carmody,
Editor

Repression: the politics of bankruptcy

by Noel Browne

(Extracts from Senator Browne's speech in the Seanad
31st August, 1976 on declaration of National Emergency)

There is a fair amount of evidence that some of the more perceptive members of the Government on issues of this kind, and I should like to include the present occupant of the Minister's chair, Deputy Kelly, are beginning to understand that the situation is a very serious one indeed, not only on foot of the case made by the Minister himself in regard to the crimes committed within the State - the killing of the Ambassador, the kidnappings, the bank raids and so on - but also, of course, the rapidly deteriorating and nigh disastrous economic situation: it is quite clear that the State is verging on bankruptcy and that the Government, whatever about the merits or demerits of their record over the past three years and their work during those years, have easily their toughest and hardest year ahead of them in political terms. Most of us, I am sure, know that there is very little hope that they can do anything about the economy.

The first emergency was declared in September, 1939, nearly 40 years ago. While it is true that it was brought about by the war in Europe it was maintained since 1939 because, I understand, of incipient civil war during all that period. I remember the gunmanship and bombings of the thirties, the forties, the fifties, and to a lesser extent the late sixties, and now of course the seventies. How is it that we cannot learn from this, and that we simply continue to repeat this?

To fight and die for one's country is a common occurrence the world over. One does not need to have a

psychopathic urge or need in an individual. It can be, as Bishop Daly said, a noble thing to want to do this, even if one is misguided in what one is doing - to offer one's life for an ideal which you think is an ideal. There is a certain tragic kind of nobility in it. There is a certain element of the psychopath in these people as well. The psycho-dynamics of soldiering is a very complicated one. Surely the Government must see, looking back in our own time since 1939 and looking back before that over seven centuries of oppression, torture, imprisonment, execution, of deportation, every kind of tyranny used on our people throughout the centuries, whether by the British or by our own people and it has not been effective, it has not supplied the answer. Mr John Costello genuinely believed that "We have taken the gun out of politics". How false is that hope now. Here we are, 25 years later, and I do not think that we have moved an inch forward.

WHY SUSPEND CIVIL RIGHTS?

Going back to the Minister's reflection on the relative peace of the South and the origin of the violence being predominantly in the North makes it very difficult to understand why he has then decided that in this sort of predominantly peaceful milieu, with the exception of these other incidents to which he referred, we should effectively suspend the Constitution and all these very important fundamental civil rights of our people. What is the origin for it? If one takes even the blowing up of Ewart-Biggs and the Herrema kidnapping and so on, it has to be taken in the context of a development in recent years of the urban guerrilla-type of activity in many societies. A democracy has to decide whether in defence of democracy it shall destroy its own democracy. That is what is facing us at present. When we delimit the fundamental rights of individual citizens in our society for the preservation of the State - the word used by Senator O'Higgins so much and criticised by Senator Mullins for so doing, and I share Senator Mullins's attitude for the State is nothing to me, the State is only the people, and how the people are treated is important

- this question of the preservation of the State in the context of the urban guerrilla activities is something which the Government are going to have to face.

This Bill of the Minister's is a particularly good example of a very clearly calculated decision by the Government to set aside democracy, not so much in anticipation of doing something about the IRA and the Provos because they have seen from Brian Faulkner's pathetic admission the other day - a man who does not admit easily to making mistakes - that he had been mistaken in his peremptory introduction of internment, and presumably his permission for the use of torture, that none of these things succeeded. In fact these things, it is now generally believed, led to the terrifying situation for the people of the North of Ireland. It was repression that bred further repression, further violence, and the violence seeded the continuing violence of the sectarian murders on both sides.

ENEMIES OF THE STATE

We are gradually moving towards getting a very wide interpretation of the word "subversives". It is not the Provos any more to the same extent. Those who do not see eye to eye with us, as the Taoiseach said recently, those who do not agree with our way of life, or something of that nature - I do not think I am misquoting him - can very quickly and easily become the enemies of the State under this kind of law. That could sound far-fetched if one did not have so many precedents. We all know about the Government of India and Mrs Gandhi. Most of her political opponents are now in jail. Parliament is now being asked to bring in new laws to ban a wide range of anti-national activities.

I want to make it clear that I think that, as in most professions, most trades and most occupations, the vast majority of the men in the Garda Síochána are honourable, good and conscientious men doing their job as best they can under terribly difficult conditions. I should like

to pay tribute to them for the fearful job they must have, being faced with the likelihood of being confronted by armed men when they are trying to make arrests, and so on, as an unarmed police force.

Now we are faced with another emergency. Are we now facing censorship? What kind of censorship? Even heavier censorship than that imposed in the Press as things are? Censorship on television, even heavier censorship than that already imposed on our television services? Censorship on our radio, even heavier censorship than there exists at present? Censorship of any kind of serious radical thinking or talking? Is this the next step we are to expect? There can be no appeal to any court now. This is the nub of the point made by Senator Lenihan that, while you could say that the extension to seven days is a terrifying prospect, it is a relatively minor proposal for the enormity of the suggestion that we should effectively suspend the Constitution. It is difficult to believe that you could declare an emergency simply to extend the right to hold a person from two to five days. It simply does not make sense.

COUNCIL OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

For instance, take this Council for Civil Liberties. What rights are they going to have? Why should they have any rights? If it is decided by the State that these people are "getting in the way", that they are protesting as Senator O'Higgins said, we will come up against these people who will be standing up for civil rights and Civil liberties. Whatever his short-comings politically, he is an honest man and always has been in my experience. He has always said what he thinks and what he believes, but that is what is facing the Irish Council for Civil Liberties. Organise campaigns for the reform of the law. Will they not be in breach of the law? Will they not be a threat to the State? Will they not be considered a threat to the State? The Irish Regional Council of the Labour Party, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties - their days are numbered.

This Government are in that sordid, and for Labour members of the Government, unforgivable tradition of all the petty dictators in history. It is not quite the same for Labour as it is for the Fine Gael and Fianna Fail people. Both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael in their time had taken these steps. That is their business. I have opposed them both in Fianna Fail and in Fine Gael, but for the Labour Party it is difficult. It has been the tradition of Labour Parties, and it certainly was the tradition of its great illustrious founder, James Connolly, the tradition of the liberal socialistic outlook. Nothing mattered more than the personal liberty, the right of the individual before the law and it is a very sad and tragic occasion for me to listen to a Senator with the name of Connolly trying to rationalise his betrayal of his great father's brave and gallant sacrifice of his life in his attempts to build socialism in Ireland through an independent Irish Labour Party.

How socialism would extend our civil liberties

Read "SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY"

by Paddy Carmody

published by the Irish Marxist Society

Man as the centre - Marxism

& modern literature

By: Anthony Cronin

However it might have turned out otherwise, in one respect at least it was unfortunate for the relationship between the Russian revolution and literature that the revolution should have come when it did; for it came, as we all know, in 1917; and 1917 was, more or less, the end of a long era dominated, or apparently dominated, by the doctrine of "Art for Art's sake". In fact as the century wears on and the doctrine penetrated the bourgeois consciousness through the medium of such publicists as Oscar Wilde the tone adopted in its defence becomes so shrill as to be in itself a giveaway.

Nonetheless when Lenin's original mentor George Plekhanov wrote on the subject before the turn of the century he was able with some justification to take the doctrine of art for art's sake as the dominant doctrine of French literature at least throughout the era of the romantics, the Parnassians and the early realists.

With the aid of Gautier's praise of Baudelaire: for having upheld "the absolute autonomy of art and for not admitting that poetry had any aim but itself, or any mission but to excite in the soul of the reader the sensation of beauty in the absolute sense of the term"; and the same author's rejection of the utilitarian view of art in the following words:

"No you fools, no, you goitrous cretins, a book cannot be turned into turtle soup, nor a novel into a pair of seamless boots ... By the intestines of all the Popes, future, past and present: No, and a thousand times no! ... I am one of those who consider the superfluous essential; my love of things and people is in inverse proportion to the services they may render" he was able to tie two rather disparate but major figures together;

and when he added to such quotations from Gautier as: "I would very gladly (tres joyusement) renounce my rights as a Frenchman and citizen for the sake of seeing a genuine Raphael or a beautiful woman in the nude" other statements by Alfred De Vigny, Theodore De Banville, Alfred De Musset, Leconte De Lisle, the Goncourt brothers and Gustave Flaubert, he succeeded in establishing a connecting strand which he chose to identify as a perpetuation of the doctrine of Art for Art's sake. Nor was he alone in this.

YEATS

If you had questioned any highly literate Englishman towards the close of the eighteen-nineties for example, as to what poetry and painting were up to he would have replied Art for Art's sake; and indeed if you had gone further and questioned the poets themselves you would have found that in so far as that doomed generation of tubercular alcoholics had a critical doctrine or were capable of its formulation they would have called it art for art's sake. Although nobody could have said that Tennyson, or Browning, or perhaps even Swinburne would have assented to propositions such as those Plekhanov was able to cite from Gautier and his followers, as far as the generation that included Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symonds and, let us remember, W. B. Yeats were concerned the French influence had supplanted all others and the French, it was understood had not only asserted but clung to the doctrine of Art for Art's sake.

And indeed when in 1937 the then vaguely Marxist W. H. Auden tried in his "Letter to Lord Byron" to sum up what was wrong with the tradition he and his like had had inherited, it was on the to him abhorrent, doctrine of art for art's sake that he chose to pin the blame.

And yet, as I have said the doctrine of art for art's sake was such a monstrous one that it is doubtful if anybody ever held it at all, even Gautier who proclaimed it .

The real doctrine of the century is different; and it is what unites all those so disparate figures whom Plekhanov (and others as well) quite rightly bound together. It might be called the doctrine of the autonomy of the artist. But this autonomy was not claimed for its own sake: it was claimed because the artists concerned were intent upon describing aspects of human nature, the description of which aroused the hostility of the audience. When Baudelaire and Flaubert were prosecuted by the Imperial government of France in 1857, the prosecutions were not undertaken because they claimed the right a la Gautier to create an ideal beauty remote from the actual affairs of men. Nobody is ever, it may be remarked, prosecuted for that. They were prosecuted because of a deepening interest in the realities of human nature and a claim that nothing that was part of it should be beyond the bounds of literary expression. They were prosecuted because in this regard they had left their audience behind and because they disturbed the complacency of the bourgeoisie. Their interests included not only human nature in its sexual manifestations, but many forms of suffering and many forms of sordidity which their audience did not care to contemplate.

"THINGS AS THEY ARE"

Both Baudelaire and Flaubert declared their interest in beauty, but they were both determined to find it in strange places. "Let us try to see things as they are", wrote Flaubert to Louise Colet, "and not wish to be wiser than God. Formerly they thought that only the cane can produce sugar; one can get it now from almost anything. It is the same with poetry. Let us extract it from anything for it exists in everything and everywhere"; and in writing thus he was describing the great movement of the century.

It is true that at the end of the century there was a retreat. In the work of the French symbolists just as

in the work of their English followers of the nineties (including the younger Yeats and the other creators of the Celtic Twilight) there is an attempt at escape into the never never land of the ideal. Many minor artists opposed to the materialist mass of bourgeois society a contemplation of an ideal beauty or the beautiful symbol in which all human suffering could drown or be subsumed away.

But this is not the main line or road of development of the century. The main line of development is the exploration of new aspects of human nature and the refinement of technique necessary to bring this about. It is a line of development which alienated the artist from the society in which he lived, principally because while the art was truly man-centred the society concerned was not and its readers preferred the quasi-religious sentimentalities, the idealist dreams, the melodramatic contortions of plot in the interests of the heroic of the novelists who catered for the audience; and the gimcrack medievalism and schoolboy romanticism of the popular poets.

ALIENATION FROM BOURGEOIS AUDIENCE

Of course the refinements of technique which the artists used to convey the new truths resulted in a further alienation from the bourgeois audience; and if these were sometimes said to be all important in themselves, this was partly a reaction to the fact that the writers concerned lived in an age of mass production when the position of craftsmen of all kinds was threatened; while, if the assertions that art served no useful purpose were shriller than they need have been this was partly because they also lived in a utilitarian age.

Similarly if in many of the great figures of the modern movement deriving from Baudelaire there is a strong vein of transcendentalism we can explain it by the increasing secularisation of an age in which man - true man - is held in contempt and economic man, a being

alienated from his true purpose, is substituted for him. It is also, in the case of such as the founding father of the modern movement in English, T. S. Eliot, to be explained by the need to substitute a classical pessimism for what was rightly felt to be the loose and unfounded optimism of the romantics.

But this transcendentalism, this emphasis on the refinements of technique, this refusal to serve the purposes of the society in which they lived did not provide the more revolutionary - in the literary sense at least - of the writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century with their primary impulse. It was the interest in man as they found him, stripped of his idealisms and heroisms which did that; and it was this which was carried forward into the twentieth century in such works as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Ulysses".

PROPAGANDA

It was however - in so far as there was a real rationale in the attack - the secondary and defensive assumptions and proclamations of modern art and literature - the importance of technique etc. - which were attacked under the name of formalism and in the guise of a vague and ill-defined claim of autonomy for the artist "for the sake of art" through all the vagaries and shifts of Russian policy.

Of course the interest in a true human psychology and the realities of human motive displayed by those writers in the central tradition of the last hundred years or so would not in any case have endeared them to those who were looking for a heroic art. For the deeper interest in human psychology and the interest in the truth of human motive necessarily meant an interest in human weakness and uncertainty which was in conflict with the demand for heroes. Portraying heroes, like portraying villains, needs broad strokes; and to do it is necessary to throw out the nuances in which heroic - i.e. propagandist - art is not interested.

There is of course no reason why you should not have propaganda in a socialist society; nor indeed, as Ernest Fisher has pointed out, is there any reason why you should not have forms of writing and cinematic and theatrical art which are for relaxation only. One thing is certain, however, those who ask their art to do their propagandising for them will get not only inferior art but inferior propaganda as well.

But the great modern writing of the first bourgeois era was already moving towards man-centredness; and it was moving towards it largely in spite of the society in which the writers concerned lived. Communist society will itself be man-centred - otherwise communism, as Marx thought of it, is a meaningless contradiction in terms. A man-centred art for a man-centred society ought to be its slogan. This implies of course an interest in man's weaknesses as well as his strengths; but naturally as human nature changes, the changes ought to be reflected in humanity's literature too. If the truth about man prevailed over bourgeois society and the indifference or hostility of the audience in the work of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Eliot and Joyce; and survived the transcendentalisms and the false idealisms which the era that is passing also produced, how much more might it flourish in the future. I take it for granted that a truly communist society would be anxious for the truth about man in all his aspects and grateful for the illuminations provided by an art which was concerned only with that truth.

The necessity for women's liberation

By Naomi Wayne

The liberation of women has always been claimed as an essential component of the socialist dream. The brutality of working class women's lives and the emptiness of the existence of their middle class sisters was well chronicled by the founding fathers of socialism in the nineteenth century. They even measured the general level of society, its social and political condition by the condition of its female members. For example, the early French socialist writer Charles Fourier wrote:

"The degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation." (1)

What the early socialists and their later followers largely failed to do was analyse the exact nature of women's oppression, why it occurs and how it can be overcome. As a result, consideration of women's oppression - what will henceforth be called the Woman Question - has always been treated in practice as an adjunct to 'serious' socialist debate. Women have always occupied a place on the agenda "somewhere between Youth and Any Other Business". (2)

Woman's political activity has also been relegated to a secondary place. For while trade unions and many other special interest organisations of a not necessarily socialist character in themselves have been regarded as legitimate, indeed natural arenas for the participation of socialists, women's organisations fighting for such groups as battered wives have been largely shunned, and occasionally even attacked as 'middle class'.

Yet at the same time the left and the labour movement generally have tended to throw up their hands in

despair at the lack of industrial or wider political involvement found among the majority of women. It seems rarely to have occurred to anyone to ask why this should be the case, and what serious and consistent action could be taken to remedy the situation.

Of late, due to the efforts of women's liberationists, there has begun a recognition that the socialisation of women into passive, dependent and home-oriented beings may have something to do with the problem. But the notion that socialists themselves might have an important political job to do to combat the effects of this socialisation has yet to take hold. And any suggestion that the (predominantly male) left and trade union movement may have been remiss in carrying out its responsibilities to half the working class is likely to be attacked as 'anti man'.

Yet if we look at the record of socialists in fighting to advance the position of a section of society, knowledge of whose oppression is supposedly a matter of received socialist wisdom, evidence of any real concern much less effective action is thin on the ground.

For women in paid employment what has the left and the labour movement actually tried to do? Generations of male trade unionists have worked alongside women workers who have been receiving levels of pay which, had they been offered to men, would have been rejected as derisory. And men who take it for granted that militancy among male trade unionists is not something solely spontaneous but has to be encouraged and led, have insisted that it is only women's apathy which has prevented the equal pay issue being forced.

For women generally how have the left championed their cause? Contraception, equal education, state nursery facilities to free mothers from constant child care - have any of these been among the left's political priorities?

A hundred and fifty years ago the Irish radical William Thompson found a comparable situation and drew these conclusions about women's lack of enthusiasm for politics:

"What wonder that your sex is indifferent to what many call the progress of society, of freedom of action, of social institutions? Where amongst all their past schemes of liberty or despotism is their freedom of action for you?" (3)

Today his comments have not lost one whit of relevance - indeed with the increasing complexity of the forces which serve to preserve political conformity Thompson's words take on a heightened significance.

THE ROLE OF IDEAS

In modern society the real strength of the ruling class is based not on its military or police power, but on its ability to maintain a hold over the minds of the mass of the people - to persuade them to accept the ruling class explanation for any ills and difficulties society as a whole may be experiencing. On economic questions where the left does constantly present countervailing explanations employers, governments and their propagandists have had varying degrees of success in getting their version of events accepted, so that the working class will shoulder the responsibility for the inadequacies of capitalism.

But the practical consequence of the lack of any real socialist lead on the Woman Question has been to leave women defenceless in the face of bourgeois ideas about their role and status in society - and indeed has resulted in unchallenged acceptance of these ideas among working people generally.

Women learn from the cradle to see themselves chiefly in a supportive capacity - they thus assume that if

they fight for their own interests they will inevitably be doing so at the expense of others. Self interest becomes therefore, a source of guilt. And like virtuoso violinists the ruling class have learned how to play on women's guilt feelings to perfection. In addition, they have also known how to enlist the prejudices of male workers in order to maintain and indeed multiply these feelings of guilt.

The currency that has been given to such views as those of Bro Vivian Cassells, who attacked married women going out to work in a period of great unemployment, is a clear example. Not only can one frequently hear the same opinions expressed among working people of both sexes, but the increasing tendency in redundancy situations for married women workers to be let go first regardless of seniority, constitutes a practical expression of acceptance of these views.

The significance of this is that political concern then focuses on women as a convenient scapegoat. Government and employers are let off the hook and it is that much harder to persuade people of the need and possibility of a socialist alternative. Thus we have ruling class divide and rule tactics at their most sophisticated - where even the left does not realise what is happening!

I am not arguing that women, the working class as a whole or anyone else are being conned. There is, of course, some truth in the argument that throwing married women out of work would release a certain number of jobs for other people currently unemployed (though not as many jobs would be made available as is often supposed). But there are two major faults in this approach. Firstly sacking married women does not solve unemployment - it merely shifts the burden on. Secondly, it involves the built-in assumption that married women are the one section of the adult population with no 'right to work'.

In such a way the ruling class succeeds in maintaining its ideological grip. It is able to identify people's real experience of problems and keep explanations of this experience (and hence the way to tackle the problems) at the level of surface manifestations, so avoiding any examination of underlying causes and fundamental cures.

Without a developed socialist viewpoint on the Woman Question, the left is in no position effectively, to counter such ruling class ideas among the working class. Yet socialists themselves are to a large degree trapped by the same ideas about the role of women in society, and this can be seen no more clearly than by the left's reluctance seriously to consider the Woman Question at all.

THE LEFT AND THE WOMEN QUESTION

For talk of women's rights among socialists brings an automatic and extraordinarily hostile reaction from many otherwise sensitive and thoughtful men. The foolhardy woman who persists in raising some aspect of the Woman Question when everyone else would rather be discussing broad questions of socialism and democracy will be taken to task for being strident, unfeminine, and presenting her arguments in a way that will only put people off. If she raises the same issue more than once she will be informed that she is "always going on about it" - in sharp contrast apparently to the 'correct' approach which appears to be never to go on about 'it' at all! It seems that the following observation by Lenin has completely escaped the attention of even the most widely read left wing men:

"Unless women are brought to take an independent part not only in political life generally, but also in daily and universal public service, it is no use talking about full and stable democracy let alone socialism". (4)

Yet at the same time many socialists are firmly con-

vinced that they are at the forefront in championing women's cause. However, what has passed for the Woman Question on the left has frequently not been that at all. Socialists have sought to involve women in such activities as tenants movements, peace movements, prices campaigns, etc. All of these are an integral part of left wing activity - but should they be regarded as any more the province of women than men? A woman journalist characterises this approach:

"To see (these issues) as the particular interest of women arises from the bourgeois notion that woman is always a relative creature - someone's daughter, wife or mother - never herself.

Women, runs this philosophy, are mothers. Therefore they feel deeply about peace and education - for their children's sake. Women are confined to the home by circumstance. Therefore they are interested in the cost of living." (5)

In this scheme of things there is no need for theory, no obligation to discuss the issues and therefore no possibility of changing ideas or social relationships. Just as wage militancy of itself will not bring about a socialist transformation, simply mitigating the circumstances in which women continue to occupy a secondary role in society will not actually advance these socialist cause any further.

Thus the male lack of concern for and even hostility towards incorporating the Woman Question into any strategy for the achievement of socialism is not only worthy of moral condemnation. It has profound political implications too. In fact, it represents a species of sectarianism - as divisive and destructive as the 'normal' internicine strife on the left over which the ruling class presides with such glee. Its effect is to weaken the forces of the left and the labour movement to a degree with which it is difficult to find comparison. For how can it be possible to pose a real challenge to the ruling class with half of the working class missing from the scene?

It also betrays a dangerously cavalier approach toward potential allies of the working class who come from other sections of society.

LEFT UNITY

History has demonstrated (most notably in recent years in Chile) that even in a situation of numerical strength the left needs allies from outside the working class. As historian Eric Hobsbawm points out, left unity in the form of people's fronts

"remains to this day the socialist strategy which most frightens the enemy ... Why do Ford and Kissinger repeat daily that the entry of communists into any government, especially the Italian, is intolerable? ... They would much prefer the revolutionaires to isolate themselves, the more sectarian in spirit the better". (6)

Women in blue collar or white collar jobs, or employed full time in the home, can be drawn into a left alliance if the left shows itself willing to fight for those cross-class rights which affect all women - contraception, equal pay, etc. But very few women will be drawn in unless the left in particular and the labour movement in general begins to regard the Woman Question as central to its endeavours.

This would involve two kinds of activity. Not only would socialists have to take on as a prime responsibility the fight for the improved economic and legal status of women - this itself could not be done without an onslaught on bourgeois ideas concerning the destiny of womankind. For this to happen there would have to begin a serious examination of what these ideas are and how they are even reflected in both the ideas and the practice of the left and the labour movement.

CHANGING OUR WAYS

For example, while ignoring the Woman Question, the left has shown no reluctance about relying on women to service it in the same way that they service society generally. What can 'politics' mean to so many of the wives of political activists but minding the children, empty evenings and rushed meals in order that their menfolk can go off and change the world outside. Even if an activist's wife was herself engaged in political action before her marriage, afterwards there is rarely any doubt whose involvement will be curtailed, whose contribution to the cause will consist of enabling the other partner to continue in all former activities.

Women who are politically active similarly find that the way internal left wing politics is conducted is precisely such as to exclude them from full participation. For in order to play any part at all they have to do what they have learned all their lives to spurn as unfeminine - project themselves as having both ideas and the force of personality to fight for those ideas. Yet instead of guidance and encouragement to develop political maturity they are likely to come up against a preexisting 'correct line', from which any deviation no matter how inadvertent, will call down at minimum intolerant ridicule.

Now an increasing number of 'political' women are beginning to ask whether the struggle for socialism need necessarily reproduce the inequalities, oppressive structures and general behaviour of the system it is supposed to be trying to replace. Such questions are not what are normally regarded as the stuff of 'politics' at all. They are 'personal' and 'subjective'. Yet if they go some way to confronting the lack of female involvement on the left and indeed some of the left's more general shortcomings, then they deserve to be incorporated into the political consciousness of all who regard themselves as socialists.

CONCLUSION

The founders of the socialist ideal always stressed that the eventual victory of socialism would depend on its ability to represent the interests of all oppressed. By taking a stand against the treatment of women as secondary beings who exist for men's pleasure or convenience socialists will be forced into confrontation with oppressive forces generally, and will begin to win the leadership we claim to be our heritage. And to do this we will have to discover new forms of struggle and a new meaning for 'comradeship' which will eventually determine any ultimate success we may achieve.

NOTES

- (1) C. Fourier: 'Théorie des Quatres Mouvements'.
- (2) S. Rowbotham: 'Women's Consciousness, Man's World'.
- (3) Thompson: 'An Appeal of one half of the human race ...'.
- (4) V. I. Lenin: 'On the Emancipation of Women'.
- (5) Florence Kezworth: 'Women's Role in the Labour Movement' in Red Rag No. 1.
- (6) E. Hobsbawm: 'Forty Years of Popular Front Government' in Marxism Today, (July, 1976).

Change coming to the Labour Movement

By Matt Merrigan

The question of the day is: Are the Unions becoming politicised and moving left? That they are becoming increasingly politicised there is no doubt but whether one can detect a real left swing in socialist terms is questionable. There is also the burning question of the character of their continued relationship with the Labour Party in its current involvement with Fine Gael.

Under the impact of the economic situation and the massive loss of jobs, rising living costs and a general malaise and despondency about the economic and social prospects of workers in Ireland, attacks are being made on trade unions and their members in a futile hunt by private enterprise and its government for a solution to Ireland's problems.

Certain sections of the leadership of the unions see the crisis in the economy and the consequent attacks on the income levels of workers and the process of anti-union pressure by the capitalist establishment and the Government as a stimulus to political action by the trade unions in an extra-parliamentary sense. The Dublin Council of Trade Unions Demonstration demanding more jobs and the Trade Union Support Group of the Resources Protection Campaign are two specific examples of this tendency.

CONFUSION

However, the Labour Party's continued role in the Government sows confusion and disillusion in the minds of workers who appreciate the political limitations of trade union action, and wish, even on the orthodox parliamentary level, to extend the influence of the trade union Movement through its "political wing", the Labour Party.

Objectively the D.C.T.U. Demonstration was a demand that the Labour Party do something about jobs or get out of the Government! However, there is a sort of sentimental and misguided notion amongst most trade union people, who traditionally support the Labour Party that it is somehow a betrayal of working-class interests to openly criticise or demand an end to Labour's whipping-boy role in a Fine Gael dominated Conservative Government.

This attitude derives from, in my view, two causes. The first is a paranoic preoccupation with Fianna Fail and their continuing political potential in government terms. The second cause, flowing from the first, seems to be based on the proposition that ending the administrative frustrations of Labour's career politicians by having a Coalition with Fine Gael advances the interests of the working-class and albeit socialism, leads to a greater acceptability of the Labour Party amongst ordinary people concerned with the cock-steps of progress. In effect it was this well-intentioned though muddled sense of loyalty and paranoic concern with Fianna Fail that allowed on two occasions in the past the career politicians to trade the perspective of a Labour Government for short-term personal gratification and in so doing to breathe life into a moribund and discredited Fine Gael Party and the Labour Party to incur the wrath of a section of their following whose trust they betrayed. Electorally this was expressed as abstention or a reversion to Fianna Fail support.

The rhetorical stirrings about economic planning from Labour's script factory in the dying days of this incompetent administration is an attempt to fireproof the Party in the run-up to the next General Election. With unemployment and attacks on workers' living standards still a reality, the electorate will be offered a Coalition Plan for the economy that will become a Manifesto for "creeping Socialism". Stripped of the verbiage and the demagogy the only plan that matters is keeping Fianna Fail out of the fat jobs and the

economic plan will be a theological playground for political columnists - How to fit the South County Harriers into the five-year plan for circuses etc. etc.?

BANKS

A simple illustration of the spurious nature of the contrived debate on Economic Planning which pressures political and legislative initiatives was the failure of the Parliamentary Party or Barry Desmond on "Seven Days" on August 6 1976 to argue for full public ownership of the Banks, in spite of the fact that it has been Party policy for 30 years. Instead Bank workers were cast in the role of the dragon and the Directors and Shareholders as persons requiring some competition from similar institutions. Economic planning is unthinkable with private enterprise banks in existence.

This is not to say that a debate and plan are not necessary and that Socialist policies in relation to this and other matters are not imperative. What I am saying is that such a plan is most unlikely to be implemented by a Fine Gael or a Fianna Fail dominated Coalition even if agreement was found in broad outline by the Labour Party and the trade unions as one side of the Coalition equation. Fine Gael will not facilitate the socialisation of Irish society. Alexis Fitzgerald very eloquently demonstrated this in relation to resources, which is the main pole around which jobs can be created in something like the numbers required to make an impact on our 12% unemployment rate.

The Trade Unions therefore have an important role to play in this area. A basic condition of any "deal" on all incomes should be a conditional "contractual" arrangement with the Government as legislator and administrator that the bulk of Congress policy in relation to industrial development, resources, extension of public ownership, taxation, finance, banking, industrial democracy, company law, education and health, public ownership and licensing control of urban

The Coalition and Social Welfare

By Dave Neligan

The major feature of Social Welfare policy since 1973, when the Coalition came to office, has been a steady transfer of the cost of the Social Insurance Fund, the main funding mechanism for most Social Welfare payments, from the State to the employer and employee. Allied to this remarkably efficient implementation of conservative anti-socialist policy has been a policy of pay-related sickness and unemployment benefit to which the State does not contribute at all - it being funded entirely by employers' contributions (2% of wages) and workers (1%), an arrangement which has allowed the State to profit - contributions into the scheme last year being £18.8 million and payments of pay-related unemployment and disability benefit being only £8.6 million.

At the same time when the State is actively opting out of or making money from both Social Welfare and Pay-related funds, Labour Party politicians are deliberately disguising this unpalatable fact and boasting of the wonderful benefits "they" are providing for the unemployed, widowed and sick. Like so many of the Coalition's "achievements" this deliberate policy of making the workers pay for any of the benefits they have earned has been dressed up in a public relations exercise to mark the true facts, but Mr Ryan, Minister for Finance, stated categorically in the 1975 Budget debate in Dail Eireann that, not alone does the Government intend reducing the State's contribution to the Social Insurance Fund, but it intends over the next five years to eliminate the State's contribution altogether. The worker and employer will then pay for all the benefits.

building land, ground rents, imports and prices should become an urgent legislative programme of the Government, with a time-table.

This contract should be reviewed on a six-monthly basis and withdrawal from the contract should be possible where the Government have failed or frustrated the carrying out of the legislative programme, or where the employers have not carried out their obligations under the contract.

This would place the trade unions then in the centre of the political stage, using their extra-parliamentary power to secure social, economic and industrial reforms not now attainable through the parliamentary process. It is vital therefore that the Trade Union Movement enlarges in a non-parliamentary way the political role of the trade unions.

The British T.U.C. even in the presence of a majority Labour Government, felt impelled to deploy their economic strength to secure benefits of a non-wage character for their members, including major reforms in industrial relations and trade union legislation, taxation, job protection and industrial development.

The Trade Union Movement in Ireland would need urgently to develop a political strategy to secure for their members non-wage concessions in like areas as that instanced above. This is bound to generate a political momentum in the Labour Movement generally that must facilitate a radicalisation of the members and leadership in spite of the political constraints imposed on the Movement by the Parliamentary Labour Party's seeking to maintain its Coalition position.

The employers of course, as has been seen to happen over the last few years in particular, can recover the increased cost by holding back wages, increasing prices and, in particular by reducing employment.

ABUSIVE CHORUS

Unemployment and prices have risen dramatically while at the same time the employed worker - the real source of the increased benefits - is contributing more than ever before while the State becomes the mere operator of the system. Increasingly, also, an abusive chorus of "welfare spongers" and "why should we pay people for not working" has arisen and has not been seriously opposed by labour politicians, when, for example, in the last budget, Mr Cluskey responded to some of these "criticisms" by introducing legislation restricting maximum pay-related to 80% of the previous year's wages. The abusive chorus, of course, arises almost totally from those whose contribution to the benefits is decreasing steadily year by year with a promise that they will not contribute anything in five more years. No doubt then the chorus will be even louder and more vehement in its ignorant perverse way.

TABLE I

Year	Total Income £	SOCIAL INSURANCE FUND		
		Percentage contributed from		
		Employers	Employees	State
1971	70,924,000	32.2%	31.5%	34.4%
1972	81,217,000	33.5%	31.8%	33.2%
1973	104,357,000	37.3%	30.4%	31.1%
1974	129,004,000	40.2%	31.1%	28.0%
1975	194,000,000	43.0%	32.0%	25.0%

Between 1965 and 1975, contributions by workers and employers to the Social Insurance Fund increased from £16 million to £144 million, a nine-fold increase, but the State contribution rose only 4½ times from £11 to £50 million.

TABLE II

	SOCIAL INSURANCE FUND 1965 AND 1975		
	1965	1975	% increase
Contributions (Employers and Employees)	59%	74%	800%
Exchequer*	41%		355%
* (including investment increase)			

So this policy of divestment of State responsibility for Social Welfare payments from the exchequer, started under Fianna Fail, has continued unabated with a Labour Party Minister (and leader of the party) in control. Such a deliberate cut-back in State spending on Social Welfare has, of course, resulted in considerable savings which were then applied to the electorally more beneficial areas such as children's allowances, but it is important to remember that those increased allowances are being transferred as a saving from one area to another. This has been done at the expense of the employed worker who by virtue of the increase in his and his employer's contribution to the "stamp" has enabled the State to transfer its commitments into other valuable - not least in electoral terms - schemes such as children's allowances.

TABLE III

Social Security in the E.E.C.

	% of G.N.P. spent on Soc. Sec. and Health	Pension for fully disabled worker as % of earnings	Family allowances as % of average ind. earnings (3 children)	Sick Pay as % of earnings
	%	%	%	%
1. Holland	28.0	80	14.3	80
2. Germany	28.9	55	5.3	92
3. Denmark	27.4	68	7.9	73
4. Belgium	24.1	67	20.8	66
5. Luxembourg	26.6	-	13.5	72
6. France	24.4	50	19.9	49
7. Italy	27.3	44	10.9	60
8. Britain	22.1	43	5.2	49
9. Ireland	17.3	35	3.4	36

(From "Social Security in the EEC")
by Lawson and Reed

As the I.C.T.U. statement of October 1975 on Social Welfare pointed out, the total disposable income (after income tax and social insurance deductions) of the average male worker in industry (assuming for tax purposes that he is married with two children) is currently around £42. The old age contributory pension for a married couple is less than half (46%) of this amount and the non-contributory old age pension is only a third (33%) of it. The rates for equivalent welfare

recipients in the E.E.C. are relatively on average 60% higher than here, yet, with a continued lowering of tariff barriers and a common agricultural policy, the prices in Ireland of food, clothing, footwear, medicines, housing and all the major necessities of life are rising inexorably to European levels.

The manifest failure of the Labour Party in Government to alter in any significant way, this catastrophic Social Welfare policy of getting the worker to pay for the benefits through himself and his employer funding the scheme, will, I believe, historically be seen to have been the Irish Labour Party's major failure in this, the third Coalition. Instead of taking the obvious Socialist solutions, as laid down by party policy, such as retention of State control over natural resources, - (the new wealth of the country now rapidly passing, as with the old wealth, into the hands of the 5% who own 75% of the wealth) or nationalisation of the banks so that they could supply finance to the State instead of creating private wealth for the ½% of the population who own their shares, the Coalition has decided that the worker must pay or suffer cut-backs. The inevitable cut-backs needless to remark, with such a conservative and right-wing economic policy, have started in the areas least able to sustain them and producing greatest long-term damage - health and education. The employees cooperate because their profits will continue to expand or if they do not they will render even more workers redundant; the farmers, 22% of the population contributing £1.6 million in 1975 out of a total £357 million income taxation revenue, are bought off by doubling the price of milk, butter and bread, and by not implementing the cosmetic threats to tax them.

WORKERS PAY

The worker is thrown out of a job to reduce industrial costs and his fellow worker pays his unemploy-

ment benefits. Nothing changes and capitalism thrives. The Labour Party wonders then why, in the largest working-class constituency in the country, Ballyfermot, in the most recent bye-election, it lost further working-class support and why 46% of the voters abstained altogether, leaving the Labour candidate to be elected from the transfers of an increased Fine Gael vote. Given the stance of the Labour Party in the eyes of the voters, that is, as being almost indistinguishable in Government from Fine Gael, the large working-class vote attracted to Fianna Fail has not been persuaded that its interests lie with the Labour Party which it sees, as the late Brendan Scott used to say, as the hind end of a pantomime horse and who'll vote for the hind end when the front end at least could see where it is going?

Very clearly, one of the ways it is going is to remove Social Welfare payments from Government responsibility altogether.

The system, therefore, does not change but becomes more readily usable electorally at no extra real cost. It still allows, by virtue of the increased contributions to the "stamp" (1969 cost £1.20; 1976 cost £6.37), the hypocritical politicians to say that "as a percentage of Gross National Product expenditure on Social Welfare has risen from 6½% in 1972 to 9½% in 1975". They neglect to mention of course, that the extra amounts have been contributed by the employer and employee rather than by the entire community.

On every single count Ireland is a comfortable last behind all other E.E.C. countries in social security payments and the conclusions are inescapable. Unless there is a real - not an ephemeral - change in policy, the plight of the underprivileged social welfare recipients and lower paid worker will not change in real terms and the grossly disparate and unjust society in which we live will continue with 25% of our population continuing to live in poverty.

Italy moves left

By George Jeffares

There are 2,000 state-subsidised organisations in Italy which serve no useful purpose whatsoever. One such is the "Society for the Protection of World War 2 Orphans". Since the war ended over 30 years ago, the orphans must be getting on. Another is the "Society for Assistance to the veterans of the Garibaldi campaigns". As the last Garibaldi battle took place in 1867, that would make the youngest veteran at least 120 years old. But these 2,000 useless societies - "enti inutile" - are not entirely without function. They are a handy method of providing jobs and pickings for lesser protégés of the Christian Democrat Party, the upper echelons of which, including cabinet ministers, deal direct with Lockheed.

After 30 years of this sort of thing, 4 million fully or partly unemployed, a devalued lira and an annual inflation rate of 20%, it was hardly surprising that the Christian Democrats did not choose to fight the elections last June on their record of misgovernment - "malgoverno" as it has come to be known. Instead, their simple theme was anti-Communism, and the choice they offered the electorate was between "Freedom" and Communism/atheism/chaos. They were assisted by threats of excommunication, and warnings from Kissinger and Ford of the consequences for the Italian people if they "voted badly".

The Italian communists posed the question differently - not as a choice between two forms of society, but calling for an emergency government, open to all democratic forces, that would tackle the ruinous state of the economy. The C.P. approach was based on

the idea that in the present situation a simple majority of 50.1% would not be sufficient to ensure the carrying out of a new policy for the country, whose institutions were too degraded and the internal and external dangers facing it too great to allow the question to be posed in terms of a left/right alternative, as it might be elsewhere.

UNPRECEDENTED RESPONSE

The Communist approach met with an unprecedented response in circles which up to now have been deaf to CP proposals, particularly among the "Christian current" which has traditionally leaned towards the Christian Democrats. Proof of this is the type of person who stood in the elections on the CP list of candidates - the theologian Mario Gozzini, editor of the new catholicism approved by the Conference of Italian Bishops, General Pasti, former NATO Deputy Commander-in Chief for Nuclear Affairs, and Altiro Spinelli, Italy's EEC Commissioner for industry in Brussels. Dozens of priests called for people to vote Communist, including the former editor of the journal of the Italian Bishops, who himself stood on the CP list.

ADVANCE

The outcome of the elections meant a striking advance for the CP, and marked the end of the Christian Democratic monopoly of political power. The CP share of the vote rose from 27.1% in 1972 to 34.4%. True, the Christian Democrats held on to their 38.7%, but only thanks to the decimation of their former allies from the right and centre.

The impressive Communist gains, first in the general election, and then in the local elections, which resulted in the CP becoming the largest party in Rome (35.4% of the vote), and sharing in the administration of all the major Italian cities - Rome, Naples, Venice, Turin, Florence, Bologna and Genoa - are an indication

of the powerful appeal for the Italian people of the policy being put forward by the CP since early 1972 - the strategy of the "historic compromise".

Essentially the aim of the historic compromise is to achieve a government based on the collaboration of all the popular and democratic forces, particularly the three main elements in Italian political life: the Communists, the Socialists and the Catholics. This strategy is more than a proposal to involve the Communists in government. Directed not only to the other political parties, but to all citizens of democratic leanings, it has been described by Communist Party General Secretary, Enrico Berlinguer, as "a strategy to get Italy out of the crisis, to renew it and to save and develop democracy, a strategy not only for the CP, but for the whole country".

The basic thinking behind the historic compromise has been put by Berlinguer as follows: "to save democracy and achieve a general renewal of society and public life in Italy will require great struggles, exceptional efforts and commitment by the widest variety of popular energies. Precisely because this renewal is opposed by economic groups that, while they may be narrow, are powerful and aggressive, it is indispensable to isolate them and prevent them from establishing a mass base; this is why we maintain that a broad majority must be created that includes all the popular and democratic forces and takes account of the different ideological origins and political traditions in which they identify and around which they are organised."

The election results confirm the correctness of the CP strategy. On the day his minority Christian Democrat government was approved, Andreotti, having stated that the position taken up by some previous speakers in the debate might be regarded as a stage on the way to the "historic compromise", hastened to insist that "There will be none of that. That's not present reality nor our intention for the future". But the reality is that the Andreotti government owes

its very existence to the abstention of the 228 Communist deputies from the vote. Furthermore, the essential economic decisions will be made in the principal parliamentary commissions, eight of which including some of the most important, are presided over by Communists - including finance, the budget, agriculture, health, public works.

The day following the installation of the Andreotti government, the Christian Democrats, for the first time since the war, had to surrender the position of Mayor of Rome to an independent elected on the Communist list. Thus in the space of a few hours it became manifest that whether to rule Italy or administer its capital city, from now on no majority is possible without the Communist Party.

Some on the Left have asked the question as to how the CP, which had fought the Christian Democrats for thirty years and had just achieved such impressive electoral advances, could have refrained from voting against a Christian Democrat single-party government. The CP decision to abstain, as is the case with its policy of the historic compromise, was based on the specific realities of the Italian situation.

The economic, political and moral crisis that Italy is undergoing is a legacy of Fascism and 30 years of CD misgovernment. Over the last few years in particular, increasingly large sections of the Italian people have become convinced that such a powerful force for social advance and the cleaning up of public life as the Communist Party can no longer be kept at arm's length, far from the corridors of power. This was the meaning of the June elections figures. As a result of those elections the balance of forces in the country has changed considerably. But the new situation is complicated and rich in contradictions.

In Parliament, the Christian Democrats would like a return to the coalitions of the past, but its former

partners will not play ball. The CD would like the Communists to take on the role of "constructive opposition". A spokesman for the CP has explained his Party's attitude to the Andreotti Government as follows: "We have said clearly that the government that Italy needs is not this minority government led by Andreotti. The country needs a stable government based on the unity of all the democratic and popular forces, and in which the Communists would participate. But we know that the conditions for the setting up of such a government do not exist at this moment and that they will not be created overnight. The Andreotti government, quite obviously, does not satisfy us. We see its limitations only too well, both as regards its composition, its leadership and its programme. But, on the other hand, Italy needs a government, and that is why we decided to abstain".

The Italian Communists have described their abstention as "an act of national responsibility", a defeat for the reactionary and anti-unity forces which would have preferred to see the country pushed into a confrontation. But, as Berlinguer put it in the debate in Parliament, "it is also a step forward". He went on: "We are not formally in opposition ... but neither are we formally part of the majority". The new relationship that exists between government and parliament is seen by the CP as a step towards the political turning point for which they have been struggling.

Needless to remark, it is not the Andreotti government that will ensure that this first step will bring Italy nearer to the political changes she requires, but the struggle of the CP and its allies. And with a Communist as Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, and Communists presiding over eight parliamentary commissions, the CP is in a new position of strength to exert its influence on political developments.

But even this entirely new situation in Parliament is itself transitory. As one of the CP leadership put it: "The Party, the unions, the workers have new means

at their disposal. They will use them to contribute towards the solution of the problems which beset the country and to go further forward. Besides, everything depends on our ability to mobilise the masses."

Whilst the concept of the historic compromise arises from the specifics of the Italian situation, nevertheless its basic aim of uniting the broadest sections of the people - the majority of the nation - into a force powerful enough to end monopoly rule, is of increasing relevance to the peoples in countries of developed capitalism. The adoption of such a strategy as the surest method of ending capitalist rule, of necessity implies that the socialist society that will replace it will be built by a similar alliance of democratic forces - a multi-party, pluralistic system, in which, as the Italian Communists have made clear, there must be freedom of opinion, publication, organisation and opposition.