

labour. This makes for the distinctive nature of women's *exploitation* under capitalism. It raises very specific questions for the trade union movement which desperately need taking up.

#### 4 The trade union movement and female waged labour

It is customary to dwell on the well-known obstacles to the organisation and active participation of women workers in trade unions. What is less often seen is the variety and breadth of women's interests as trade unionists — the breadth for women of the term 'class struggle'. It is this that the Communist Party and the trade union movement need now to acknowledge, having failed to do so in the past. The daily struggle over wages and conditions means, intrinsically, for women such issues as hours of work, the length of the working week, maternity leave, creche and nursery facilities. The economic crisis is biting especially among women (women in and out of work are the poorest sections of the community). New technology will destroy whole areas of women's employment. The trade union movement is showing signs of waking up to these issues in its defence of jobs.

It is regrettable therefore that Cde Costello reacts so sharply (and without naming them) against socialist feminists who have had the temerity to suggest that any trade union policy (be it on incomes policy or the length of

the working week) must answer to the needs of women workers. (See 'Work to Rule: Wages and the Family', by Beatrix Campbell and Val Charlton, *Red Rag*).

Conflicts of interest *do* exist. To take just one example: the celebrated struggle against dilution of labour in the engineering industry during World War One was a struggle against women workers. These contradictions must be recognised and resolved through strategies which transcend them.

That women's interests are often ignored goes without saying. The Clegg Commission uses arbitrary assumptions and fifth-rate arguments to justify continuing women's position as the lowest paid workers. Indeed it acts to reinforce this position. That it was likely to do so was widely recognised from the moment that it was set up. Yet the trade union movement bound itself in advance to accept the report's conclusions. Why? Can women believe the trade union movement is really committed to ending low pay? What answers has the Left got now on this issue? The political problem for the Party and for the women's movement is to establish to what extent the trade union movement can be expected to confront the special problems of women workers.

Comrade Costello is absolutely correct to stress the limitations as well as the breadth of the trade unions' role and the indispensable role of the Party.

It is the responsibility of the Party, if it is

serious about its role as a revolutionary organisation championing the interests of the whole of the working class, to take up the issue of women at every level in the working class movement. The women's movement even at the present time contains many active trade union militants. Every Party feminist must hope and work for there to be many more. Feminism is still seen in some Party quarters as in some way inimical to working class organisation. The Party needs building and strengthening in every area and women need to be involved in building the Party at every level — above all in the branches, *including* the workplace branches.

The best statement I know on these issues was made more than 60 years ago by a man, the greatest Marxist ever to write in the English language. In 1915 James Connolly wrote:-

'None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling in their souls and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off, and cheer all the louder if in its hatred of thralldom and passion for freedom the women's army forges ahead of the militant army of Labour.'

But whosoever carries the outworks of the citadel of oppression, the working class alone can raze it to the ground.'

(*'Woman' in The Re-Conquest of Ireland*)

## Reviews

### PASSIVE REVOLUTION. POLITICS AND THE CZECHOSLOVAK WORKING CLASS, 1945-8

Jon Bloomfield

Allison & Busby 1979. 290 pp.

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The period covered by Jon Bloomfield has in the past been largely neglected or distorted — in the West by cold war attitudes, in the East by Stalinist or neo-Stalinist treatment. Sadly, the Czechoslovak historians who were attempting a new Marxist analysis in the 1960s have been silenced. We have here, then, the first thoroughly researched account in English based on original sources. And there is much that is relevant to strategies for socialism in advanced capitalist countries, and also to an understanding of some aspects of 'existing socialism'.

The argument running through the book is that 'the working class was largely a willing

accomplice to the revolution, not its driving force,' and 'the decisive influence came from above and abroad'.

The Communist Party emerged from the experience of Munich and the resistance as the dominant party of the working class. There were, however, two views about the strategy to be adopted on liberation. The Moscow-based leadership, its hand strengthened by the victorious advance of the Soviet armies, followed Stalin's line for postwar Europe by negotiating an alliance with the 'national' anti-fascist bourgeoisie to carry through a 'national and democratic revolution'. This defensive Popular Front tactic, as Bloomfield defines it, contrasted with the demands coming from the domestic resistance movement that now, with fascism on the brink of defeat, a more offensive strategy for socialism should be pursued.

The conflict can be seen in the case of nationalisation. Originally the coalition programme allowed only for taking over the property of enemies and collaborators (in fact, the major industrial concerns), but in response to persistent demands from the

workers the measures were soon extended. In arguing for this the Communist Party spoke in national rather than socialist terms, showing that 'nationalism rather than anti-capitalism was the impulse behind this policy. The class character of the issue was blurred.'

The problem posed here is, of course, being faced by other parties today, and Bloomfield rightly states that 'the balance between retaining maximum unity and encouraging the most advanced forces to press ahead always needs fine judgement'. Whether or not the reader agrees that the Czechoslovak Communist Party erred on the side of caution because, lacking any other theory than the Stalinist, it placed the interests of Soviet policy first, the book provides matter for debate. But some considerations have, I think, been overlooked. For in a country just liberated from the national humiliation of occupation, a country which, moreover, had experienced only twenty years of national independence, the battle for the hearts and minds of the people still had to be fought out with the 'national' bourgeoisie. With a large section of the capitalist class

isolated by their collaboration with the Germans, measures to put industry into the hands of the people and to tackle the economic, moral and social crisis of the nation had an implicit class content which was understood by all concerned.

Socialism was the goal, but the contention here is that the tactics of the 'Popular Front' phase (lasting till mid-1947) bore no relation to the Party's vision of that goal. The 'Czechoslovak road to socialism' of that period is described as a Stalinist tactic, merely a different road to Soviet-type one-party socialism. True, many Communists saw it in that way, which made their obedient response to the 1947-8 switch in Soviet policy all the easier. Nevertheless, things were not so clear cut, there were those who genuinely believed that

the road could lead to a democratic socialism of a new, Czechoslovak kind, but their gropings were cut short by the worsening international situation and the 'great February victory' when the 'socialist' phase of the revolution was carried through.

By then the Communist Party was able to rely on well-controlled mass support for a solution of the power crisis by constitutional means from above. A centralised trade union movement had brought the spontaneous works councils of the early days under its control, and the mass organisations in general were becoming 'the passive beneficiaries of party policy', ie 'transmission belts' on the Stalinist model. In this sense the revolution could, at this stage, be termed passive. Moreover, Bloomfield's argument that the seeds of

the monolithic system after 1948 were sown by this approach to working class organisation deserves serious study.

In those first three years, however, the process was still under way. There was a vast amount of independent activity, initiative and discussion in which the working class were certainly more than 'willing accomplices'; at the same time the alliance with the farmers and petit bourgeoisie, so rudely broken after 1948, was being strengthened. Although in 1968 there was a tendency to idealise the period, it contained much of value in the search for a democratic socialist order, as, in a more developed but still unfinished form, is the case with the experience of 1968.

Marian Sling

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE WELFARE STATE

Ian Gough

Macmillan 1979. 196pp. Paperback £3.95

The welfare state is a contradictory phenomenon, it simultaneously tends to enhance social welfare by meeting real needs of the working class, while at the same time it represses and controls those same people in order to adapt them to the requirements of the capitalist economy. The source of this contradiction is that the forms and goals of social policy are not subject to direct capitalist control but are determined by class struggle; yet they are necessary to the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and subject to the structural constraints imposed by the capitalist economy. The consequence of the contradiction is that the welfare state itself becomes the source of further crises within capitalism. This contradiction, which makes the study of the state both interesting and difficult, is the focus of Gough's book.

The aim of the book is to provide an analysis of the welfare state under capitalism using the theory and methods of Marxist political economy. After an introduction which considers the ideological role of the term 'welfare state', Gough provides a short introduction to Marxist political economy and a review of the role of the state under capitalism. He then looks at the origins of social policy and the post-war growth of social expenditure across the advanced capitalist world; followed by an examination of the connection of the welfare state to the capitalist economy and to the current crisis. There is a political postscript, plus four technical appendices, three on Marxist theory of the state and one on the marketed and non-marketed sectors. The series in which the book is published is primarily addressed to practitioners in and students of social work

and the social services. This is reflected in the style of writing chosen and the structure of the argument, which may seem discursive to Marxist economists, and also the tendency to leave some of the theory implicit. This is unfortunate since central to any explanation of the topics he covers are a series of theoretical judgments on such highly controversial areas as the state, crisis, unproductive labour, etc. Although Gough's position has changed somewhat from that taken in some earlier work, no doubt his critics will obtain more fraternal amusement from writing impassioned attacks on the line he has taken here. But while there do seem to be serious questions about his treatment of some of these issues, this does not detract from the fact that this is a serious and useful book which draws together a range of politically important material on a difficult subject within a fairly coherent Marxist structure.

One strength of the book is that it extends the treatment of the crisis in the state from being merely a fiscal crisis to being a production crisis. State organisation of social services has two major roles for capital. It is a response to a realisation problem, providing markets for private firms either directly through state purchase or indirectly through transfer payments which enable the working class to purchase commodities from capital. At this level (of transfer of the surplus), there is a fiscal crisis associated with complaints about the burden of state expenditure and taxation. But more importantly, the state influences the production of surplus directly, by socialising the reproduction of the workforce and thus influencing the value of labour power. Since the state supplies a large range of necessities, either produced as commodities as in housing and the nationalised industries, or as use values, in the case of health and education, the labour process in the state sector is an important determinant of the

value of labour power, and thus the mass of surplus value. But the production is neither under direct capitalist control, nor in many cases is it even commodity production subject to the law of value. With the extension of state organisation of the reproduction of labour power, one source of the expansion of surplus value, the reduction of the value of labour power by cutting the abstract labour time required for the production of necessities, is increasingly removed from capitalist relations of production. Lack of control over the labour process in the state sector then becomes a major obstacle to the reduction of the value of labour power and the expansion of surplus value. Capital can only attempt to enforce the necessary restructuring through the political process, where it faces substantial opposition, from workers in the state sector.

Although Gough does not present the argument in the form given above, he provides much material central to an understanding of the role that capital and class struggle play in determining the character of state production. That understanding is an essential ingredient in the fight to stop capitalist rationality removing the last vestiges of a concern for welfare from the 'welfare state'.

Ron Smith

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