

1986 Christmas Crackers



Lucky Strike

1986 was a year of recovery for the labour and trade union movement. After the disastrous TUC of 1985 we started to find a clear purpose and developed some new ways of working.

This recovery can't yet be measured in rising confidence at the workplace, which is unlikely to come before the next general election. But it can be seen in new initiatives like the GMBA-TU's flare campaign and the TGWU's attempt to make contact with its young members.

With some notable exceptions, including the print workers at Wapping, the members of Silentnight, and the thousands of health workers who continue to fight privatisation, more

Critical Canons

Marxism. Socialism. Pluralism. These ideas and the connection between them have dominated my political reading in 1986. *Jon Elster's* comprehensive **Making Sense of Marx** (Cambridge £10.95), belies its easy-going title and sympathetic sound, but it is bound to be a major reference point in theoretical debates for some years. Coming to praise Marx, he almost ends up burying him.

A more robust and orthodox marxist book is *Ellen Meiksins Wood's* **The Retreat from Class** (Verso £6.95). She does not deal with the important tendency of 'analytical marxism' represented by Elster, but she does take to task all manner of other 'revisionists'. The message is that classical marxism is in

people seem to have written about strikes this year than have taken part in them.

John Lloyd and *Martin Adeney's* analytical account of the miners' strike **The Miners' Strike 1984-5** (Routledge, Keegan & Paul, £14.95) is a powerful book. It has produced strong criticism from many who were involved in the dispute. Others, some equally involved, see the book as the definitive work on the strike. Lloyd won the Journalist of the Year Award for his coverage. If you can stand it all again it is well worth reading, and shows why Lloyd is held in such high esteem by his contemporaries.

The last word, however, for now at least, should go to the women who made such an outstanding contribution. *Joan Witham's* **Hearts and Minds** (Canary Press, £4.95) and *Vicky Seddon*, editor **The Cutting Edge** (Lawrence and Wishart, £4.95), both provide an opportunity to hear the women's story and think about what one of those involved describes as the possibility of a new kind of socialism arising from the women's experience.

good shape and that the kind of bourgeois idealism which poses nowadays as pluralistic marxism should be exposed for what it is. In some cases this critique works well: there is after all a core of materialist propositions at the centre of Marx's project which cannot be revised indefinitely without a rechristening of the ideology becoming necessary.

However, I would suggest against Wood that the historical materialist method does not always involve giving class analysis an absolute priority. And her definition of the modern working class, though strict, actually refers to a very broad group of people - those who have little else to sell than their labour power. Yet however militant we make this class analysis sound, it does not deliver all that much for specific

Peter Hain's **Political Strikes** (Viking, £14.95) and *Phil Bassett's* **Strike Free** (MacMillan, £10.95) are two of the more thoughtful contributions on unions and strikes.

Bassett is one of the sharpest commentators of the union scene but sometimes, as in this book, he tends to overestimate the impact the EET-PU type of business unionism will have on the future of the movement.

Hain on the other hand looks for a new unionism which retains the important principles of struggle and solidarity, but which goes beyond strikes, economism and sectional interests to a much broader political approach. He looks, quite rightly in my view, for a kind of organic change which points to the future, but also retains the important democratic principles of our past.

This organic change is part of the recovery process. It is expressed at the present time in a fairly loose, unstructured way by the new leaders on the centre left in the TGWU, Usdaw, GMBA-TU and Nupe, who between them represent over 3.5m workers, organise some of

the key industries for the future, understand and accept the need for more democracy and equal opportunities among their members, and who will make a major contribution to the labour movement in the years ahead.

In some ways their task is to take over where Jack Jones left off when he retired in 1978. In his biography **Union Man** (Collins £15), Jack explains his philosophy of giving power to lay members, extending the role of activists, making the officers more accountable, and the unions more open and democratic.

The new leaders and their members have to complete this work by making sure that women and black members have power in their unions. Then to go beyond the activists to the members, forming a truly representative, democratic partnership and participative trade union movement, where activists and members play a real part and are not relegated to the sidelines as passive observers in a world of business unionism. ●

Tom Sawyer

strategic and descriptive purposes. But Wood's fundamentalism is strenuous, and despite her annoying 'holier than thou' tone, less canonical marxists should not be tempted into reading it merely polemically.

Once cold war enemies, marxist and pluralist ideas have since moved closer together, especially on the nature of democracy. *Robert Dahl*, the doyen of American pluralist theory, demonstrates in his elegant and succinct **A Preface to Economic Democracy** (Polity £15.00), that pluralism has come a long way since the 1950s. No longer the apologia for the 'free West', pluralism now shares with marxism the concern to understand and remedy the socio-economic obstacles to political self-determination. Dahl doesn't quite say that capitalism is

the root of all evil, but he does argue for a radical extension of cooperative democratic organisation in the economy and an end to private control over corporate assets.

Capitalism is not the root of all democratic difficulties anyway. In democratic socialism there will be important questions of representative decision-making, levels of participation, and differences - maybe even conflicts - amongst people's public priorities and aspirations. In other words, problems associated with a pluralist personal political culture. Michael Rustin's useful collection **For A Pluralist Socialism** (Verso £5.95), helps focus the concrete issues and possibilities, ranging from PR and regional autonomy to the right to work. ●

Gregor McLennan

Gastronomic Pleasures

In writing about my favourite cookery and wine books I have had to face a stark and worrying truth: I'm a conservative. And decidedly 'nouvelle' at that. It is definitely a case of 'professional chefs rule OK' – in particular Mosimann, Roux, Guerard, and Troisgros. Clearly an incomplete hagiography. But together these chefs provide a mass of delightful modern recipes to attract and challenge anyone.

Being of a certain age, having attended a school where boys never learnt cooking, and coming from a culture where preparing food was emphatically 'women's work', cookery books played a critical part in my first fumbling attempts to liberate myself from the wilderness of bad British cooking.

First among these pedagogic giants was **The Constance Spry Cookery Book** (Pan). Comprehensive – it really does tell you how to boil an egg as well as how to jug a hare – and with a chatty yet

lucid style it is hard to better.

The Cookery Year (Reader's Digest), is also a must in this 'anchor class'. It can be a great source of inspiration when you get all-a-dither about what the principal ingredient of the main course should be. Month-by-month **The Cookery Year** tells you what is in season. You need never again experience the maddening frustration of getting to the shops only to find that half of your ingredients for that evening's dinner are not available at all or only at a price which suggests that they have been flown into the country on Concorde.

But more pleasurable by far are the greater tomes of the French 'nouvelle' chefs such as Michel Guérard's **Cuisine Gourmand** (Papermac £7.95), the Roux Brothers **New Classic Cuisine** (Macdonald £14.50), Mosimann's **Cuisine Naturelle** (Macdonald £14.50), or Jean and Pierre Troisgros' **The Nouvelle Cuisine** (Papermac £5.95). Their cooking is healthier and definitely different. Superb ingredients, unusual combinations and the relative simplicity of

their approach mark them out. Home-made stocks and home-made vegetable-based liaisons are obvious cases in point. In these days of stock cubes and ready-made everything, this style of cooking does not save time or money. But the results are definitely worth the effort.

In their own restaurants these chefs are shockingly, prohibitively expensive. By publishing they bring some of the most creative of contemporary French cooking within the reach of far more people. One hesitates before describing their literary products in an overly democratic vocabulary, but equally it would be wrong to think it was 'truffles with everything'.

For accompaniment The Roux Brothers' **New Classic Cuisine** (Macdonald £14.50), often helpfully suggests two wines (one cheaper, one dearer) which they consider to be suitable companions for their different fare. After all, why spend effort preparing a wonderful meal only to swill down a plonk that takes the moisture off the roof of your mouth or makes everything

taste of tannin? If you want to get into this side of things more seriously an excellent way to start is with Hugh Johnson's **World Atlas of Wine** Mitchell Beazley £22.50), and, if funds allow, the **Wine Companion** (Mitchell Beazley £15.95).

Baring one's soul about one's private pleasures can be a risky business in 'this great movement of ours'. However for those comrades who believe that such sybaritic indulgences can lead only to fecklessness, moral turpitude or to cancelling subscriptions to the *Morning Star*, I conclude by recommending **Portrait of a Chef** by Helen Morris (Oxford University Press £1.95). This provides a fascinating insight into early Victorian society but also illustrates much of the grossness of the classical French cooking against which 'nouvelle cuisine' was later to rebel. The book also describes the life of a gifted chef who not only had a genius for invention but was also a passionate social reformer. My own self-image to a tee! ●

John Carr

Cover Stories

Nothing begets interesting activity in the magazine market so much as hard times. When the going is good magazines can coast along; when it's not the choice is often between slowly but inexorably sinking or swimming with new currents. If **Spare Rib** has had to replot its course in order to stay in the swim, the emergence of **Everywoman** and **Women's Review** is the mark of the new. As their covers well indicate.

Spare Rib's old style covers were less meant to please or grab attention than to convey the appropriate seriousness and 'correctness' of a certain feminist politics. They were marked off as *other* than women's glossies. **Spare Rib's** new style covers lean more on a mass market tradition. Glossy and in full colour there's sometimes a note of fun and humour, without the covers

having lost their feminist trace. Thus October's issue offered a moustachioed air hostess (the unadorned image is from the British Airways 'supergirl' ad), and asked: 'Are airlines going unisex?'

For some feminists this foregrounding of design and playing around with the visual vocabulary of popular culture (with all the risks that entails of endorsing that of which one is critical) means that feminism is selling out. My own view is rather that such a ploy culturally transforms in a way that the old strategy could not. More to the point it sells, even though, as **Women's Review's** recent financial troubles reveal, the feminist press is hardly secure.

Troubles however, have not been a feminist prerogative. In its bid for survival **Working Woman** has been tossed from owner to owner. Even the giant of publishers, IPC, has been stemming its losses:

Honey has finally been given the chop, and with the staples – the weeklies – showing falling circulations, editors have been moved along. After six years at **Woman's Own** Iris Burton has been replaced by Bridget Rowe, whose background is the tabloids as well as women's magazines.

Such a pedigree has brought the odd shock to **Woman's Own**, not least a very unusual cover. 'Rape' was brandished in large red capitals and accompanied a small image of a woman, seated, covering her face with her hand: 'The report every woman must read and no man can ignore' (May 10).

The cover signals a shift. On the one hand the feminist press is now more ready to explore the trickier elements of femininity. On the other feminist ideas have been assimilated into more mainstream publishing.

Having engaged in those arguments **Woman's Own**



could not, without compromise, carry the more usual cover image – the mask image of a young, attractive, white woman with her 'come-on' gaze. For is she not, after all, a close cousin of the page three pin-up?

But the cover also highlighted that if one front of the battle around representation and male violence is to challenge tabloid imagery, another is to check the conventional cover image of women's magazines. When that array of pouts and smiles is no longer the dominant visual vocabulary on the magazine stand, then might we have got somewhere? ●

Janice Winship

Photo: Abel Lages