



The last few months have seen the biggest wave of militancy among student youth across the world since the mid-1970s. From France to China to Spain to Mexico to Kazakhstan in the USSR, students have held mass demonstrations and have met with the violent resistance of the police.

In France and Spain in particular this student movement has helped fire working class action. Over the new year, a powerful strike wave, centred on the rail industry, seriously damaged the Chirac government in France. Following the militant action by Spanish school students, the Spanish working class has moved into struggle against the government of 'Socialist' Felipe Gonzalez.

France

The example of France focused our memories quite sharply. In 1968, student demonstrations and clashes with riot police provided the spark that ignited a marvellous general strike of ten million workers. Students were at the core of the movement for democracy in Czechoslovakia that year — before it was crushed by Russian tanks. Across the world there was a growth of revolutionary ideas among students — movements in solidarity with the struggle in Vietnam were one factor, albeit not the main one, in the eventual defeat of the US.

Could 1987 see a re-run of 1968? Are we witnessing a new generation of student revolutionaries coming into being?

There are important *differences* between then and now. But that there is a wave of student struggles is undeniable.

The movement in France was provoked by the Devaquet Bill, which proposed to change the system of entrance to university. At the moment, every French student who passes the Baccalaureat — the equivalent of A levels — has an automatic university place. Devaquet proposed to do away with this, and proposed an increase in fees, which in France students pay themselves.

A wave of student militancy

Youth unemployment in France is very high. So the effect of the Bill would have been to condemn many school leavers to unemployment.

The law had been passed by the Senate but was due to be discussed in the National Assembly on November 27 1986. Action had already started in some universities when a strike was called at the Paris XIII-Villetaneuse University on November 17. It was called by one of the two student unions — UNEF-Independent et Democratique (UNEF-ID), led by a current in the Socialist Party. The other union UNEF-Solidarite Etudiante (UNEF-SE) is run by the Communist Party.

On November 22, mass meetings throughout France voted for a general student strike from the 24th, and a national day of demonstrations on the 27th — when the National Assembly was to discuss the Bill. By now students at the 'lycees' (secondary schools) were joining in the action.

On November 23, students joined a march in Paris organised by the teachers' union. By the 25th, 50 out of 78 universities were on strike. On the 27th, half a million students joined demonstrations, including 200,000 in Paris. The big Communist Party-dominated trade union federation, the CGT, declared support for the students.

The next day, 10,000 high school students demonstrated in Paris. By the beginning of December the Chirac/Mitterrand government was in retreat. Chirac offered to discuss the Bill with students — but the students held firm to their demand for its *complete* withdrawal, and would not accept mere

modification. One million marched in Paris alone on December 4, when violent clashes with the riot police, the CRS, took place. The next day there were demonstrations against police tactics.

Then on the morning of December 6, student Malik Oussekine was beaten to death by the CRS. Now they had gone too far. More demonstrations followed, and on December 8 tens of thousands marched in memory of Malik.

Chirac withdrew the Bill. Two days later, another demonstration commemorated Malik's death and celebrated the students' victory.

The student movement showed that militant *action* could be successful. French workers soon followed their example.

But there were contradictions in the movement politically. On the one hand leftists, and even self-proclaimed Trotskyists, were prominent in the leadership of the movement.*

Yet the student movement as a whole had a 'non-political' streak running through it. Disillusionment with the 'Socialist' government that preceded Chirac had had a big effect. Many students identified 'politics' with *politicians* — and opposed left-wing paper sellers.

Spain

The Spanish movement was similar in many respects to the French, and for certain it must have been inspired by events across the border. Again the issue was a change in university entrance requirements, and again underlying the youth revolt are the deteriorating social conditions of 'socialist' Spain. But the Spanish movement was *younger*, focused on school students, drawing university students behind them.

The first school students' demonstration, on December 4, was called by the small school students' union (SEM) — and amazed everyone by its size and militancy. The SEM's second one-day 'general strike', on December 17, affected schools throughout Spain. *Two million* school students participated. A mass movement was underway that was to galvanise a powerful working class movement of strikes and demonstrations.

A four day strike by school students followed on 20-23 January, by which time the working class was already beginning to move: dockers came out in pursuit of their own demands.

By early February, seasonal farm workers (jornaleros) were taking action, private school teachers, Seat car workers, coal and copper miners were all involved in strikes. February 9-13 saw a 'week of action'. Both the big trade union federations — the UGT and the Communist Party-run Workers' Commissions (CC OO) called a 48-hour strike by Asturian coalminers. 15,000 students marched in Madrid on February 11, and 200,000 on Friday 13th. Workers also joined the march.

The government was forced to back

down. The Minister of Culture, Javier Solana, described the students' struggle as "a state of mind, rather than a movement." He added: "It's difficult to negotiate with a state of mind".

So the school students' victory sparked new working class struggles. University students too have moved into action. Mass action has spread across Spanish universities in protest at new plans for education — a 'process of reform' to adapt the education system to 'modern requirements' — i.e. capitalism. Many universities have been affected in a week of strikes, starting on Monday March 23.

In Salamanca 17,000 students took action in two universities. Teachers are to decide on action next week. In Oviedo, 75% of students were involved in the stoppage; in Valladolid 20,000 students in almost all university faculties and high schools.

50% of the 40,000 students in Valencia have taken action; in Alicante 7,000 out of 12,000 students. Teachers struck in support of students, paralysing the Polytechnic of Catalonia. And in Andalucía (Grenada and Seville universities) the student strikes were solid (El Pais, March 24).

The SEM was only one organisation involved in the school students' action, though it seems to have organised the biggest events. It is run by a group, 'Nuevo Claridad', linked to the British Militant.

Broader-based was the Coordination of Secondary and University Students (Coordinaciones), which involved supporters of the Communist and Socialist Parties, and — prominently — of the Spanish LCR and JCR, the equivalents of the French groups. There was clearly rivalry between the SEM and the Coordinaciones — and so, to this extent, the movement was less united than the French (though this does not seem to have proved damaging).

The Coordinaciones were based on general assemblies in the schools, and favoured localised action. According to the JCR, real national coordination was more apparent than real. For example, separate negotiation took place with the government: the school students' union and the Madrid Coordinacion had separate demands.

The school students' union, they say, is less significant than the Coordinaciones, but has been boosted by the press and the government "who would prefer to negotiate with them rather than with coordinations mandated by general assemblies." (Rouge, paper of the French LCR, Feb12-18).

Militant, for their part, claim that the coordinaciones either collapsed or joined the union, and in any case were adventurist. Neither side is entirely trustworthy — especially Militant; but the rather more sober claims of the LCR are more plausible.

After the big strikes on the 13th, the SEM issued a call to "return to class and await the results of negotiations". Militant comment knowingly: "Privately, the leaders knew that the movement

would go no further. But did the government realise it?" Apparently not.

But this style of politics looks familiar. The Coordinaciones had democratic structures, whatever their other failures may have been. What structures did the union have? Who decided its policy? Calling for the students to 'cool off' while the union's leaders negotiated with the government — from a position of secretly acknowledged weakness — implies a rather high-handed attitude towards the students. On this occasion, fortunately, it did not lead to a setback.

China

On the other side of the world, was the movement for democracy in China, spearheaded by demonstrating students.

The general background to the Chinese students' struggle is the attempt by one faction of the country's bureaucratic rulers to 'modernise' China — by opening the country up to foreign capital and the world market. Indeed, the original impetus to the students' calls for democracy came from the 'modernising' ruling group of Deng Xiaoping.

This opening up of China has involved some intellectual liberalisation. As the memory of the bizarre dogmas of Mao's 'cultural revolution' recedes, there has even been a tentative rehabilitation of Trotsky. China, in other words, is going through a similar kind of crisis to its prototype model, the USSR: unlogging the Stalinist machine means more 'openness', politically as well as economically. And it entails the same problems: 'openness' can get out of hand.

It got out of hand in China over the new year, with tens of thousands of students demonstrating for democratic reform, behind placards carrying quotations from, among others, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburgh address (government of the people, by the people, for the people).

This movement from below sent ripples up into the senior levels of the Party, with dismissals and expulsions ensuing. And — like France and Spain, though on a smaller scale — the student militancy spread into the ranks of the working class.

The student protests, demanding democracy and press freedom, began at the elite Qinghua University, but despite state bans on further demonstrations, soon spread to other universities in other cities.

By 22 December, demonstrations of 40,000 and 70,000 had been witnessed in China's biggest city, Shanghai. On December 29, several thousand protestors braved sub-zero temperatures and a police ban in Peking's Tienanmen Square — which had been flooded deliberately, turning it into a huge block of ice to deter demonstrators. In Shanghai, arrests were reported.

By now the student movement was causing the Chinese rulers alarm. Demands raised included for a multi-party democratic system, and old-fashioned bourgeois-democratic slogans like "government of the people, by the people, for the people". Reports suggest some hostility to the ideologies of of-

ficial 'communism'. And, of course, the authorities denounced the students' 'bourgeois deviationism'. The covert approval of Deng was fading.

By early January, the Communist Party paper People's Daily was calling for a 'clear cut stand' against Western influence 'poisoning' the students. The sharpest criticisms came from the anti-Deng faction — but the sight of thousands of students demonstrating must have frightened all the ruling bureaucrats.

And the movement did spill over from the campuses onto the factory floor. The Financial Times (January 29) commented "a circular, issued by the Party's Central Committee, detailed strike activity in Chinese industry (as well as) the spate of student protests."

In the short term, the Chinese student movement wound down. It did not achieve its demands. But it was a clear illustration of the crisis of China's 'modernisation' — its transition from the old Maoism to a new equilibrium. It is one example of the *general* crisis experienced by the Stalinist systems. The gathering storm in Yugoslavia, where the working class is moving into action against their bureaucratic rulers, promises to be an even sharper expression.

The USSR

In the USSR itself, students demonstrated in Kazakhstan. In December, riots followed the imposition of a new Russian party chief and the dismissal of the Kazakh leader Kunayev. Slogans included "Autonomy! And a separate seat for Kazakhstan in the United Nations", "Kolbin go back to Russia", and the more off-beam "We want to join China" and "America is with us, the Russians are against us". 200 people were hospitalised after the riots in the Kazakh capital, Alma Ata.

Mexico

In Mexico, at the beginning of 1987, a series of student strikes hit the National Autonomous University (UNAM) — the biggest educational establishment in the world. 200,000 students halted traffic in the centre of Mexico City.

Again, the protest was against government proposals to raise fees and 'improve standards'.

Though it is smaller in scope than the great movement following 1968, when many on the left developed all sorts of illusions in students as the 'new revolutionary vanguard' — substituting either for a revolutionary party, or even for the working class itself — the importance of the wave of student militancy should be recognised.

1987 is not 1968. Capitalism and Stalinism are in deep crisis. The working class is and will be central to any movement for change. The basic question for Marxists internationally is whether we can turn the revolutionary students towards the working class.

Why didn't this student movement spread in Britain? Oddly, while just over the Channel there was a powerful militancy, British students seemed singularly uninterested.

For certain a chance to mobilise students was missed. NUS conference voted against an all-round policy for a fight against the Tories last December; and the policy that was passed — on grants, benefits and housing — was quickly shelved by the NUS leadership. The sluggishness and time-serving timidity of the leadership of NUS helped dampen any movement there might have been.

In Britain, the class struggle remains at a low level. There are no deep stirrings affecting the confidence of students. Indeed, throughout NUS, there has been a shift *rightwards*.

Things can change very quickly. The task for socialist students is to prepare the ground for movements in the near future, and strengthen the organisation of students at rank and file and national level.

By Simon Pottinger

*A split from the biggest of France's would-be Trotskyist groups, (the Lambert PCI) were part of the leadership of UNEF-ID. The healthier Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) were prominent in the national coordination committees and among students at a rank and file level. The LCR's youth group, the JCR, produced 50,000 copies of a daily bulletin. The other main would-be Trotskyist group, Lutte Ouvriere (LO), was also involved — and played an important role in the ensuing rail strike.

South Africa: unions and the Emergency

The period from September 1984 to the present has been one of mushrooming growth for trade unionism in South Africa. Roughly twice as many black workers are now involved in the workers' movement compared to the figures before the explosion of black militancy in the townships of late 1984.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) now has in excess of 700,000 members, with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), COSATU's largest single affiliate, organising 360,000 workers.

CUSA/AZACTU, the rival independent federation, now claims a membership in excess of 400,000. However the number of trade unionists is still a small fraction of the black working class.

The months immediately after the formation of COSATU in November/December 1985 saw many previous strike records broken. This shows what a boost to working confidence the formation of the giant federation was.

1986 was a record year for strikes according to official statistics. There were 643 major labour disputes. These Department of Manpower figures do not include "stayaways" which, when taken into account using the figures produced by the Independent Labour Monitoring Group, suggest that there were in excess of five million strike days in 1986.

Already, January and February 1987 have seen 750,000 strike days — more

than the total for any *one* of the years 1980-4.

This pattern of rising militancy was only partially reversed, and only for a short time, by the declaration of the second State of Emergency in June last year.

For instance, in the autumn of 1986, at least 58,000 miners were involved in small scale 'guerrilla action' — not to mention the 300,000 or more who stayed away on November 1 to protest at poor safety standards in the wake of the Kinross mine disaster. The retail sector has seen a ten month long strike wave since the Pick'n'Pay strike in May of last year.

Strikes are tending to get longer, to involve larger groups of workers, and to take on a *national* character.

1985 and 1986 saw the increasing use of the occupation or 'sleep in', as a method of struggle.

The challenge to capitalist power in the workplace that this tactic represented has led to it becoming more difficult to employ under the State of Emergency. There is plenty of evidence of direct collusion between 'liberal' employers and the security forces to break occupations. Despite initial successes — like the Communal Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) occupations against the detention of trade unionists — this tactic has become more and more risky. It became virtually impossible during the recent OK Bazaars wages strike, when even picketing became very difficult.

The overall number of occupations appears to be on the decline.

COSATU's policy of 'one industry, one union' has not yet been fully carried out. So far, only three industrial unions have been established since COSATU's formation — in the transport, food and construction industries.

A merger between the metal union, MAWU, the car union NAAWU and the Motor Industry Component Workers' Union (MICWU) is pending. It will forge a giant steel and engineering union out of the already existing industrial unions.

COSATU has now set a deadline, saying that unions who do not comply will be denied a vote at the next congress of the federation in July.

There was much talk last year of a united living wage campaign from the COSATU unions but it never materialised. The reasons for this were repression, making inter-union coordination difficult, and the convoluted nature of South Africa's "industrial relations" system. For instance the metal workers' and miners' timescales never really fitted together.

The fact that the management at OK Bazaars failed to defeat the wages fight of CCAWUSA last month, in what was widely regarded as a 'test case', means that the conditions for a united living wage campaign in 1987 are much better than they were last year.

As the federation's leadership argued in a recent report, COSATU can't really afford many more flops like the poor response to the July 1986 stayaway against the State of Emergency. It can only lead management and the state to

become more confident in their attitude to the unions.

However, that 'flop' was mainly an expression of the extent to which, in the short run, the State of Emergency reduced militancy and disorganised the unions. Only the shopworkers and chemical workers responded with major industrial action.

The Kinross stayaway on November 1 seems to have marked the end of this chapter. It was the largest ever miners' strike, the largest ever strike over a health and safety issue, and the largest ever strike in a single industry in South African history.

The Kinross stayaway was also a further step in the consolidation of the NUM. However, *neither the NUM nor the Chamber of Mines have yet squared up for an all-out confrontation.*

To a certain extent such a confrontation would not be in the interests of the NUM or the mine bosses. Anglo-American, for instance, is anxious to maintain its 'liberal' and 'anti-apartheid' image, while the NUM has built itself through sectional, guerrilla action, utilising at times the already existing tribal/communal structures in the compound.

This pattern can't go on forever. During the Second World War there were numerous, small-scale, isolated and sectional battles in the mines. This revolt was partly contained by the Communist Party, which had a pro-war line and argued against strikes in the name of 'the struggle against fascism' and 'the defence of the Soviet Union'.

After the war the CPSA was no longer able to hold back this militancy. It erupted, but was defeated in the 1946 mineworkers' strike.

No matter how cautious the NUM leadership is, it is difficult to see how, at a certain point, it will be able to avoid a full scale confrontation, spurred by the appalling conditions that mineworkers face.

In order to face such a confrontation the NUM will have to learn the lessons of the major defeat of the African Mineworkers' Union in 1946.

And the central lesson is that *an all-out confrontation in the mines poses, at least implicitly, the question of who rules South Africa.* The NUM has to prepare for such a confrontation.

The new CUSA/AZACTU federation is an important force. Though its affiliates have been involved in a lot less industrial action than COSATU, it still has considerable forces, especially in the building and mining sectors. And CUSA/AZACTU members have participated in the big stayaways.

It is difficult to see why the differences that exist between CUSA/AZACTU's 'anti-racism' and COSATU's 'non-racism' add up to a sufficient case for separate federations. Both agree that whites *can* be involved in the struggle and *both agree that workers should control.* However it would seem to us that COSATU's position is a much clearer class standpoint.

It would be wrong to characterise CUSA/AZACTU as the left of the trade unions as some people, such as the Cape Action League's Neville Alexander have done.

The collapse of TUCSA (the Trade Union Council of South Africa) is very important. The disintegration of "parallel", acquiescent "African" and "Coloured" trade unionism at federation level could well open up the possibility of winning large numbers of workers at present trapped in bureaucratic unions to the progressive trade union movement.

Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha movement and its Zulu trade union front, the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA) poses a mortal threat to independent trade unionism in Natal.

Even the most 'populist' (i.e. pro-African National Congress and United Democratic Front) forces in COSATU now believe that the federation's early, unprepared attacks on the Inkatha were a mistake. For instance, the NUM has taken a series of blows in Natal as a result of UWUSA activities. The NUM had no delegates from Natal at its recent congress after Inkatha's Zulu membership had succeeded in driving the NUM's mainly Sotho members into retreat and in many cases off the mines.

In northern natal, UWUSA attempted to benefit from the detention of a large number of COSATU militants under the State of Emergency to strengthen its position on the shopfloor in collusion with management. However, COSATU appears to have been successful in checking this development.

UWUSA must be confronted both industrially and politically. It's weaknesses as a "trade union" have already been exposed to a certain extent by COSATU. To undermine UWUSA politically requires a combination of approaches including physical defence and initiatives to draw its 'rank and file' into progressive campaigns.

The workers' movement should also not rule out the possibility of taking on Inkatha and UWUSA on their 'home ground'. The strength of Inkatha rests on its control of the homeland state machine — a control which has never been challenged from the left.

Such a step, (contesting elections), however would mark a radical breach from the established approach of the liberation movement which would carry with it many problems and potential dangers, not least the fact that KwaZulu is a "one party state". It would be a much bolder move than the tactically correct decision to 'register' under apartheid's new labour dispensation taken by the FOSATU unions in the early 1980s.

Working class militancy has held up exceedingly well in the face of recession and industrial restructuring. In the car industry, for instance, the unions have moved to the new areas of production often in Bantustans like Bophutatswana, exceedingly difficult places to organise in, as the car industry has declined in

areas like the Eastern Cape.

It is not yet clear whether the reverses suffered in the township struggle — the dislocation of street committees, large scale detentions and the rise of black vigilantism — will reflect themselves back into a decline in industrial militancy, in the same way that the two struggles fed off each other over the last two years.

So far, the signs are that this has not happened.

The trade unions have not suffered any setback that could be characterised as a major defeat. This is not because the trade unions were not in the forefront of the political struggle. Rather the unions have survived repression better than township-based organisations because of their democratic structures.

By Tom Rigby

The 'Perdition' Affair

WHEN THE Royal Court Theatre decided at the last minute not to go ahead with its scheduled production of Jim Allen's play about the massacre of the Jews of Hungary in 1944, 'Perdition', a flood of discussion, polemic and recrimination was unleashed in the press. It had already been the subject of protests by various prominent Jews and of publicity in the press.

There are at least two issues involved in the 'Perdition' affair: artistic freedom and its limits; and whether or not 'Perdition' is anti-Jewish.

Allen and the director, Ken Loach, immediately raised an outcry against 'censorship', alleging that they were victims of a coordinated Zionist conspiracy. 'Perdition' was being crushed under the 'Zionist juggernaut', as Jim Allen put it when he told his side of the story to the Irish Times.

They have received immense publicity for their assertions about the 'Zionist campaign to kill 'Perdition'.' Predictably the anti-Zionist left, eager for evidence of Zionist conspiracy and Zionist power, rushed to defend 'Perdition' and echoed the charges.

Now, according to the Jewish Chronicle, the Board of Deputies of British Jews did decide to try where possible to prevent the play from being performed. There was an outcry, and no doubt private lobbying too.

But, given the subject of 'Perdition' and the nature of Allen's treatment of it, that is not surprising, nor necessarily very sinister. The charge of being anti-semitic is still one that inhibits, and Allen's script does not (as we'll see) offer the honest reader who is not wearing blinkers much ground on which to build a convincing case that it is not anti-Jewish.

Allen, in that vainglorious, boastful tone which also infects some of his work, told *Time Out*:

"Without any undue humility I'm saying that this is the most lethal attack on Zionism ever written, because it touches at the heart of the most abiding myth of modern history, the Holocaust. Because it says quite plainly that privileged Jewish leaders collaborated in the extermination of their own kind in order

to help bring about a Zionist state, Israel, a state which is itself racist.

I know what I'm doing and I stand by my research and my analysis. I've had to get this right because I know how serious a subject it is".

Now I think 'Perdition' *should* be produced. Those Jews who have campaigned against its being produced are wrong in principle and shortsighted in practice. Ultimately their campaign, which has already boosted 'Perdition', will prove self-defeating and even self-wounding.

That said, the ballyhoo about the 'suppression' of 'Perdition' is disingenuous and no more than a 'smart' political campaign. It has not been banned or 'censored' — in fact it has been assured a greater audience when it is produced, as it surely will be, and not only in Britain*.

There is a corollary to the idea of freedom of artistic expression and to the idea that censorship is to be rejected and opposed: the corollary is that those who disagree with the work also have the right to free speech — that they have the right to protest, denounce, clamour against it and picket it. At a certain point such an outcry may convince some of those involved in the enterprise to abandon it.

The 'freedom' to produce 'Perdition' does not include the right to demand that those who feel badly stung by it should be quiet and passive.

I have read a late draft of the play**. It takes the form of a libel case brought by a surviving Hungarian Jewish leader, Yaron, against the author of a pamphlet accusing him of collaborating in the destruction of the nearly one million strong Hungarian Jewish community in 1944. By virtue of the libel-case mechanism, the usual not-guilty-until-proven rule is reversed. Yaron has to prove his innocence.

The play alleges that 'Zionism', with something like 5 million Jews already dead, needed the corpses of a million more Jews in Hungary to help it strengthen the moral case for setting up Israel after the war. Allen argues that Zionism shared the racist assumptions for Nazism from 'its own' side, and that that was the basis of a collaboration even to the extent of sacrificing the Jewish millions in Europe. Zionism was concerned only with saving the notables and the rich. Basing himself on the well-known 1950s Kastner libel case in Israel, Allen depicts the Jewish leaders as saving their own skins and the skins of a few rich people at the cost of agreeing to the killing of 800,000. Somehow the picture of events in Hungary is also part of the Zionist conspiracy, though it is not clear how it all fits together (at least to this reader).

Yaron is an agent of Zionism, and his 'collaboration' is said to be Zionist collaboration. Yet most references to his motives in the play put it down to the desire to save his own skin.

Allen's play is admittedly 'based on', or mainly based on, the work of Lenni Brenner, 'Zionism in the Age of the Dictators'. This book is a narrow-visioned and narrow-minded polemic aimed at laying part of the blame for the Nazi massacre of the Jews on the international Zionist movement of the time and by extension on Israel now. Grotes-

* It comes out in paperback in April under the imprint of Al Saqi books and reportedly with an introduction by Maxine Rodinson, the scholar and anti-Zionist polemicist (who in fact does not support the 'destroy Israel' camp, believing in the right of the Palestinian Jews to maintain a Jewish state there).

** The play has received a wide circulation in manuscript form. The Royal Court sent copies of it to all the London theatre critics.

quely unfair, narrow and tendentious readings are made of every incident that can be construed against Zionism — and Israel. The argument is developed as if Zionism were something that developed completely outside the Jewish communities, or at most through the machinations of a small and alien minority. This alien force then 'betrayed the Jews'. It is a lawyer's-brief style indictment, intent not on 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth', but on indicting Zionism and Israel.

Allen is far more incoherent than Brenner because Allen is far less in control of his material. His 'aim' strays far more often than Brenner's from the 'Zionist' demon to non-Zionist Jews caught up in the horror of the Nazi ghettos. Allen is Brenner's epigone.

Brenner argues his theme seriously though very unconvincingly. Allen does not argue anything seriously, and this diminishes the quality of the play. You could have an intellectually serious debate, a discussion of the issues, and you could have a dramatic representation of the experience of the Jewish victims of Nazism. Allen gives neither.

As a discussion, the play suffers from utter one-sidedness, from the *rigging* of the element of discussion by the author in favour of his own case. The case against his own thesis is simply not put, beyond a rudimentary comment here and there. The demonology of present-day Israel, read backwards into history as the demonology of Zionism, wipes out everything else.

At first I could not understand why, but the script reminded me of the transcripts of the Moscow Trials of the '30s, those stage-managed affairs in which the old Bolsheviks, broken and morally destroyed, mouthed the scripts that had been prepared for them. I eventually understood why: the heavy hand of the author of the script is always obtrusive. You can see the strings being pulled. The dialogue does not develop naturally, but according to the needs of a one-sided polemic. Yaron breaks down at the end and 'confesses', for himself and for Zionism, but not because of anything the author in his guise as provider of arguments for his opponents has done to him.

Did Jewish leaders in Hungary do 'deals' with the Nazis? Yes, they did. Did those, as it turned out, help the Nazis to massacre the Jews? Perhaps, probably. If in the conditions after the Nazis took over Hungary in 1944, the Jews en masse had refused all compliance, and gone on the run, then tens of thousands would certainly have been killed immediately, but probably a far greater number would have survived.

Did the Jewish leaders intend to help the Nazis? No, they intended the opposite: to salvage something, or to delay until the advancing Russian armies arrived. Did the Jewish leaders offer the Nazis to help them kill off the rest of the Jews if they let the leaders go? It is a grotesque libel to say so. The Nazis tricked the leaders into thinking that they could save *all* Hungary's Jews if the Allies could be persuaded to trade a certain number of trucks for their lives.

Did the Jewish leaders, at this point in history, do anything with the Nazis, or fail to do anything against them, because they were Zionists? There is no reason to think so: assimilationist Jewish leaders responded in much the same way as Zionists. One of the blatant pieces of historical falsification by the Brenner/Allen school is the way that they link hopes and delusions of certain Zionists in the 1930s, when they had no idea what the Nazis would do, that they could do deals with the Nazis to their advantage, with events in the war when certain Zionist (and non-Zionist) leaders 'collaborated' literally at gunpoint. Allen's entire picture of events is a vicious travesty.

There is no real history in Allen, and very little in Brenner. Nor is there any sympathetic

consideration of what was done by men and women living in almost unimaginable conditions and confined to terrible and limited choices.

Because 'Perdition' is not a serious exercise in discussing whether or not the behaviour of the Jewish leaders, including the Zionists, needlessly made things worse for the victims of Nazism, Allen's play is also very bad drama — as stiff and wooden a thing as you would find in a TV Edgar Lustgarten reconstruction of a 'famous crime'.

One of the most striking and classically tragic things about the history of the Zionist movement is the way the Zionists misunderstood the nature of Nazism. They thought they were dealing with a worse but basically similar version of the age-old anti-semitism, and that they could perhaps get some accommodation, terrible but liveable, with it. Maybe they could even use it to the advantage of their project of setting up a Jewish state. As we now know, in fact they were in the grip of men committed to a lethal strain of anti-semitism and intent on reducing them all, those millions of human beings, to dust and ashes. None of this registers with Allen, who has knowledge of the massacre and has had over 40 years to reflect on it — there is nothing but the anti-Zionist demonology. And, as I've said, he does not even make a coherent case for that.

In both Brenner and Allen the whole way they see, depict and understand the issue they concern themselves with is simply anachronistic. They take the ideas and assumptions of a certain sort of Trotskyism — or vulgar-Trotskyism — and apply it to the Jews under Nazism. The idea that the crucial problem is the 'crisis of leadership' is applied to the Jewish community, with the implication that 'the masses' needed only the signal to revolt. Allen interprets the events in Hungary in terms of 'the leaders' keeping secret the fact that the Nazis were planning to kill the Jews. If only they had blown the whistle... But Lucy Dawidowicz's description of the political life of the Warsaw ghetto chronicles the experience of the socialist Bund and others who *could not get themselves believed* — in that hell-hole — when they told the truth about the Nazis.

Many other examples of the same sort of vulgar-Trotskyist political fantasy read backwards into history could be culled from the play. This is not a serious way to deal with history. But of course neither Allen nor Brenner are really concerned with history. They are concerned with politics now.

I think it is a pretty vile play, and a bad one too. Writing in defence of the play in the *New Statesman*, Ken Loach and Andrew Horning describe Allen as the 'best socialist playwright of his generation'.

Perhaps the key word is generation, and even then it depends on what generation you place writers like Arnold Wesker and David Edgar in, to mention only two others. What is unique about Allen's work is that he writes usually from the viewpoint of a strain of Trotskyism. He glorifies the class struggle and direct action and working-class people involved in it. This is what makes him important and worthy of special respect. Plays like 'The Big Flame' (about a stay-in strike at Liverpool docks) are extremely good, and wonderful — though limited — revolutionary socialist propaganda.

But the basic political content of everything Allen has done (everything I know anyway) is pretty primitive, root-basic syndicalist 'Trotskyism'. Beyond that he is as good as his 'storylines'. Thus, 'Days of Hope', about the years from World War I to the defeat of the General Strike, plainly draws on the Trotskyist analysis of that period of British history, and on the memoirs of pacifist war resisters like Fenner Brockway — and it is very good indeed.

Allen's problem in 'Perdition' is precisely

his 'storyline' — derived from Brenner and the present-day public opinion on the would-be Trotskyist left, on whose fringes he has remained for the last 25 or so years. In a way Allen can be used as a symbol of that Trotskyist left. For what has happened to mainstream Trotskyism over the decades has been the loss of its own class politics and the absorption of quite alien politics, especially Third World nationalism of various sorts.

Whereas at the time of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 the Trotskyist movement did not take sides, calling on Arab and Jewish workers to unite, today the Trotskyist movement is typically Arab nationalist and bigotedly against the Jews of Palestine. Allen's best work glorifies and promotes the bedrock ideas of Trotskyism; this wretched play glorifies and promotes the anti-Jewish (and 'anti-Zionist') accretions to those politics over the years.

It is highly improbable that Jim Allen is himself hostile to Jews, but that is not the issue here. He embraces politics which by demonologising Israel are in their logic inescapably hostile to Jews, most of whom identify with Israel. The theme Allen puts forward — and disclaimers here and there in the play do not counterbalance it as he wants them to — is that Zionists, i.e. Jews, and today the dominant political current among Jews, share responsibility with the Nazis and their East European collaborators for the massacre of the Jews.

This is a vastly enlarged version of the blood-libel of Christian anti-semitism against the Jews. In the old version the Jews were accused of murdering Christian children and using them in religious ceremonies to ingratiate themselves with their God. In this version the Zionists are accused of helping to murder millions of Jews to ingratiate themselves with the Nazis and thus — mysteriously — to gain the state of Israel. Only the abandonment by the people who live in that state and their sympathisers outside of the original sin of 'Zionism' can save them; and if they do not do that, then their defeat and the 'smashing of the Zionist state' is a legitimate and a holy political cause.

Both Allen and Brenner (in 'Zionism in the Age of the Dictators') deny that they are indulging in the obscenity of blaming some of the victims of Nazism for the killing of the European Jews, for what religious Jews have named the Holocaust. But listen to Brenner himself when he recounts a controversy he was recently in. Someone in the US reported that *Izvestia*, the USSR daily, had favourably reviewed 'Zionism in the Age of the Dictators' under the headline 'Zionist collaboration: a journalist unmasks dirty deals with Nazi chiefs'. A special summary of the book was placed in libraries all over the USSR. (Remember that the thesis that Zionism is a twin of Nazism originates in the USSR, where Jews have been for decades and are still today in various ways penalised.) Brenner explains that he sent a copy of the article to the historian Lucy Dawidowicz, "remarking that I saw nothing improper about it. [The reviewer] had said, among other things, that 'during the world war, Brenner points out, Zionism showed its real meaning: for the sake of its ambitions, it sacrificed the blood of millions of Jews'. Killiko had taken the book very seriously..." ('Jews in America', p.172).

Neither the poisoned politics, nor the history, nor the drama of these 'anti-Zionists' are of any use or help to socialists who want to champion the cause of the Palestinian Arabs and to advocate their right to an independent state alongside Israel.

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