

# Editorial

Radical Philosophy has never had radical political philosophy at its centre. This stark fact, contrary to the aims and to the self-consciousness of the 'Group', requires explanation. It was as if, in the heady early days, the validity of some socialist political philosophy or other (untainted by the evils of actually existing socialism) was taken for granted while methodological instruments were pointlessly sharpened. Meanwhile, Rawls' Theory of Justice (we didn't bother to review it at the time), for all its abstract individualism and concrete conformism, was helping to break down the idiocy of purely analytical 'political philosophy' ('It's Rights this week, so it must be late November') by daring to erect a total and implicitly critical 'theory' of the just society. Despite their careerist fuelling, the outlook of American academics, disturbed about the overall character of their society, began intermittently to express itself in journals such as Philosophy and Public Affairs. At that stage Nozick's Anarchy State and Utopia seemed like the irresponsible prank of a Wunderkind. In this country, while 'political philosophy' largely potted about in its rose garden, North American influence (William Connolly's Appearance and Reality in Politics and C.B. Macpherson's work on democracy, taken up in Socialist Register, were typical) was helping to generate the rougher, more traditionally philosophical, pursuit of 'political theory', so that now it is likely to be the case that Oxford and Cambridge dons are, in their donnish, liberal way, thrashing out issues that Radical Philosophy has been ignoring. (Dunn, Lukes, Ryan, Cohen and others). In such places there are powerful, usually strangling, constraints on subversive thought, which, since these institutions are but gilded mirrors of the wider hegemony, has been the wonderful effect of concentrating the still critical mind on the rigours of argument, however confined its domain.

The collapse here of Labour and, in the US, of Democrat Welfare Statism was said by some intellectuals to provide a welcome breathing space for reconstructing socialist philosophy. But those breathing loudest seem to be the newly blessed sages of the right, whose free-marketism, elitism, racism, instinctivism, religiosity, bellicosity and sexism had hitherto been voiced by stupider spokesmen. So this issue of Radical Philosophy is a fragile and uncertain specimen of a type that we can only hope will multiply more strongly.

The articles we publish bring out to different degrees, our sense, expressed over many years, that philosophy can-

not but entail the criticism of the categories of actual thought and practice. Ruth Levitas's article, for example, presents an outline of the programmes of the New Right and raises the issue of the coherence of militaropatriotic-family conservatism and market liberalism as a political 'philosophy'. Anthony Arblaster counterposes the narcissistic self-imagery of 'liberalism' to the blood on its hands and raises the issue of the connection of philosophy to practice. Ross Poole, more 'abstractly', offers a critique of capitalist culture in terms, not only of its unstable leaning on utilitarian and deontological moralities, but of the gender-construction implicit in its public-private realms. Alec Nove has, through The Economics of Feasible Socialism (Allen and Unwin, 1983, paperback), exposed much wishful thinking underlying the characteristic hasty sketch that Marxists make of 'the socialist future'. He argued, in line with much of the philosophy and economics of Eastern European socialist criticism of Sovietism, that markets are a necessary condition of efficiency and freedom in socialist society (an issue for Poole?). This raises the question, of course, of what 'socialism' might be. Boris Frankel, in his book Beyond the State (Macmillan, 1983, paperback) directed his scepticism both at Sovietism and at ideas of the withering away, or smashing, of the state. His effort to construct a feasible and pluralistic but uncompromisingly socialist successor to capitalism included an attack on Nove's market socialism. Nove was asked to respond to Frankel's book, and Frankel to reply. Nove has sent a further reply. No mere editorial courtesy, but the urgent sense of the need for socialists to develop a valid and persuasive vision of an alternative to the present world-destructive order prompts the request for others to join and deepen this debate.

At a time when an American President has been re-elected whose accusations about Nicaragua's 'aggressive designs' are not just ludicrous but so ludicrous as not intended to be seriously believed, it is difficult not to think that we are moving beyond 'ideology' to outright fantasy-indulgence, and hence to wonder what criticism's powers can be. But we can be sure that were criticism and the development of alternative visions to give up trying to push shit uphill, the possibility of engulfment would rapidly become its certainty.

Tony Skillen



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c/o Mike Shortland, Dept. of History, Furness College,  
University of Lancaster, Lancs.